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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

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INFORMATION MEMORANDUM

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EXCISE

TO : The Secretary
FROM : NEA - Nicholas A. Veliotis
SUBJECT: Lebanon: How to Force the Pace

It is now a month since the President decided to force the pace of Lebanese negotiations by sending Phil Habib to the area with an American draft agreement, yet the Israeli and Lebanese negotiating teams have not yet even agreed on an agenda. Our primary policy objective of bringing about the prompt withdrawal of all external forces from Lebanon with security arrangements in the south to protect northern Israel remains far from being reached. We once again are in danger of appearing to be unable to shape the course of events in the Middle East in order to implement our declared policies. At a time when Hussein is seeking support for his entry into the peace process based largely on our ability to deliver on our stated objectives, this is a posture which we must seek to avoid.

The Problem.

The continued slow pace of events in Lebanon is the result of several factors:

-- The format of the negotiations is extremely complex. We are after the withdrawal of Israeli forces on the one hand and PLO and Syrian forces on the other. Both sides are understandably uneasy to commit themselves to withdraw in the absence of a clear commitment from the other, and yet they do not sit at a common table. While negotiating a broad range of issues with the Israelis, the Lebanese are, on separate tracks, discussing withdrawal separately with the PLO and the Syrians.

-- Israeli and Lebanese negotiating objectives are in conflict. The Lebanese place priority on the withdrawal of foreign forces. The Israelis, in part for reasons of domestic politics, are not only insistent upon adequate security arrangements in the south but are also determined to extract political concessions which go well beyond their legitimate

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security requirements. They show no willingness to withdraw, and may even be unwilling to discuss withdrawal seriously, until their political desires are met. In the absence of a clear indication of Syrian readiness to withdraw, the Israelis have an excuse to avoid discussing the withdrawal of their own forces.

-- Syrian intentions remain a mystery. We have received completely conflicting signals from Damascus, [REDACTED] which leave us in doubt as to under exactly what conditions the Syrians will be prepared to agree to withdraw. (The PLO does seem prepared to withdraw, but there is no incentive for them to do so in the absence of a clear Syrian decision.)

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-- The Lebanese political dynamic requires a consensus among the top leadership to sustain Lebanese positions on key issues. We have already had one example of the Lebanese delegation attempting to be accommodating, achieving Israeli agreement, and then having to withdraw their own formulation when the Prime Minister threatened to resign.

-- Israel's ultimate objective remains unclear. Beyond the Israeli desire for adequate security arrangements and a new relationship with Lebanon, there is the understanding that protracted negotiations on Lebanon could doom the President's September initiative to which Israel remains opposed. There is thus no inherent reason for the Israelis to push the Lebanese negotiations forward at a rapid pace.

Dealing with The Problem.

It is our conclusion that we will have to become much more active than we have thus far been if we are to achieve the withdrawal of external forces from Lebanon in the near term. Realistically, our actions will have to be focussed on two distinct elements of the situation -- The PLO/Syrian withdrawal and the negotiations between Israel and Lebanon.

The PLO and Syria.

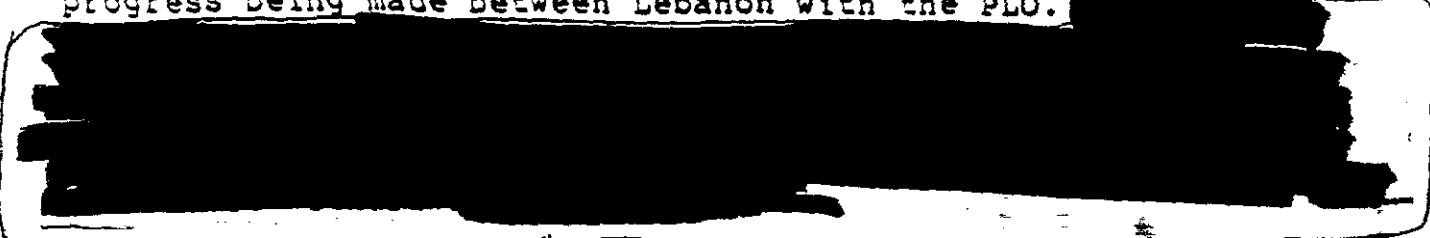
We inevitably have less influence on the Syrians than on either the Lebanese or the Israelis, and we have even less on the PLO. The Lebanese have established their own channel with the PLO leadership in Tunis and have asked that we make Ambassador Cutler available to be in contact with the Lebanese negotiators there. We are prepared to send Chris Ross to Tunis to support Cutler when the talks reach a level of detail requiring on-site expertise. Ross has been working closely with Phil and Morrie Draper in the negotiations thus far and speaks both French and Arabic fluently. He would provide Phil

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and Morrie as well as Washington an indispensable window on the progress being made between Lebanon with the PLO.



Israel-Lebanon Negotiations.

It is apparent that we will soon have to put into play an American draft agreement similar to that which Phil took out with him last month. The Israelis and Lebanese, through the secret channel, had arrived at a strikingly similar document, with the major difference that their "working paper" lacked a schedule for the withdrawal of external forces, which ours contained. More importantly, the status of the "working paper" has remained in dispute since it first surfaced; the use of our own draft would thus avoid another procedural dispute and would provide us greater control over events. The Lebanese should also find it easier to accept some aspects of normalization if presented in the context of a U.S. package proposal. We have attached our previous draft at Tab A. We are in the process of revising it with a view toward incorporating certain elements of the Lebanese-Israeli "working paper" in order to maximize its utility as a forcing mechanism.

Timing.

The Israelis and Lebanese may still be able to agree on an agenda before the week is out. If not, we will want to end this procedural dispute as quickly as possible. If they do agree on an agenda, they should at least be allowed to begin their discussion of substantive issues in order to create the context in which the tabling of our draft would be most effective. In either case, early next week is probably the appropriate point at which to bring Phil Habib into play once again. He could go out with our draft, carrying messages from the President to Begin, Gemayel and other leaders as appropriate. Before tabling a draft, Habib proposes to discuss it thoroughly with the Israelis, reach an agreed version if possible and then take it to Gemayel. To the extent that an agreed draft is achieved, the task of the plenary negotiating sessions will be simplified and the time-frame shortened. If this formula does not produce results within two weeks we would need to give careful thought to whether a public address by the Secretary would be appropriate to lay the domestic political groundwork for what could be a rough period, especially with the Israelis.

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Even while we are waiting for the Israeli-Lebanese negotiation to reach the point where our draft can be tabled, we will be doing what we can to prod the Lebanese-PLO discussions in Tunis and to continue working on the Syrians through the Saudis. Indeed, to the extent that we can make headway with the Syrians and the PLO, our subsequent task with the Israelis and Lebanese will be that much easier.

Attachment:

Tab A - Previous Draft

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Cleared: NEA/IAI:MPendleton
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