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December 27 1982

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TO: The Acting Secretary
FROM: NEA - Nicholas A. Veliotos
PA - John Hughes
SUBJECT: ABC Television Special Report

DEPARTMENT OF STATE
U.S. Assurances in Lebanon
 RELEASE DECLASSIFY
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 DENY IN PART

AS/EPC/CDR 9200109 Date: 6/26/96

ISSUE FOR DECISION:

FOIA exemptions _____ TS authority to
PA Exemptions _____ () CLASSIFY as () S or
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Whether John Hughes should do an on-camera interview for the ABC Special Report. The report is to be aired on January 7.

BACKGROUND

You will recall that some weeks ago we brought to your attention a request from ABC television to do an on-the-record interview with a senior U.S. official on the nature of the U.S. assurances given in Lebanon to the PLO in the context of the Habib negotiations, and on the relationship between those assurances and the subsequent refugee camp massacres and Israeli entry into West Beirut. As you know, Nick spoke on deep background with Bill Sherman of ABC on this subject. We denied an ABC request for an on-camera interview. We have since learned that the ABC show will contain much that could be damaging to the U.S. position with regard to the assurances given on our behalf to the PLO concerning the safety of civilians.

Regarding your interest in what ABC will use which would be damaging to the U.S., Steve Singer, the producer of the program for ABC, informs us it will contain interviews with -- among others -- Yassir Arafat, the French and Italian Ambassadors in Beirut, Lebanese Prime Minister Wazzan, and Muslim leader Sa'ab Salaam. He believes the overall impact of these interviews will be to strongly suggest that the U.S. did not adequately discharge its commitments under the "Habib plan" to protect the safety of Palestinian civilians.

Asked if we could obtain questions in advance, Singer said the following "define the general parameters" of the queries he expects would be addressed to our on-camera spokesman:

- What was the nature of the American guarantees of safety under the Habib plan and were they intended to apply only to the safety of PLO personnel or to that of Palestinian civilians in general?
- Why did the U.S. force leave on the 10th of September, when its mandate ran for 30 days?

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- Did the Government of Lebanon ask us to remain longer than we did?
- Why was the role of the American troops in Beirut more circumscribed than those of the French and Italians?

John's responses to these questions would be, essentially, along the following lines:

-- Nature of American guarantees of safety: The United States conveyed to the Government of Lebanon the assurance we had received from the Government of Israel that it would not interfere with implementation of the Plan, including its provision with respect to persons left behind in Beirut. We also stated that we would do our utmost to ensure that those assurances would be scrupulously observed. The U.S. also conveyed to the Government of Lebanon assurances regarding the safety of Palestinians and other inhabitants of West Beirut received from the leadership of certain Lebanese groups with which the U.S. had been in touch.

-- Extent of guarantees to Palestinian civilians: The guarantees extended to the safety of "law-abiding Palestinian non-combatants left behind in Beirut" as well as to the "safe, secure, and timely departure of the PLO leadership, offices, and combatants".

-- Sept. 10 departure of U.S. force: The U.S. force left Beirut when it did because the PLO forces had withdrawn, the Lebanese Army and Police were successfully asserting their authority, and a new Lebanese President had been elected. In general, the situation in the area was quiet at that time and did not appear to threaten the safety of civilians or otherwise warrant the continued presence of American troops.

-- Request from GOL that U.S. force remain longer: We did not receive such a request. (FYI: The Government of Lebanon indicated its preference we stay, but never made a request to that effect.)

-- "Circumscribed" role of U.S. force: It was agreed among the 3 MNF contributors and the Government of Lebanon where the forces of each could best be deployed to assure a safe and orderly departure of PLO personnel and the safety of the remaining non-combatants. The PLO departed from the port; U.S. MNF forces were deployed in the port area.

In addition to the above, John would be prepared to answer the following question as indicated:

Q. Beyond conveying guarantees, what did the U.S. do to protect the safety of Palestinian civilians, especially when we learned there was trouble in the refugee camps?

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- A. -- After the conveyance of these guarantees, as before, we were in frequent contact with the Governments of Israel and Lebanon concerning the issue of civilian safety, including that of the Palestinians. In this connection, we carefully monitored reports of possible threats to civilians.
- With the serious turn of events in Beirut on Sept. 14 -- President-elect Bashir Gemayel's assassination and the first Israeli troop movements into the city -- our Embassy undertook extraordinary measures to do everything possible to prevent any worsening of the situation. The Embassy's activities were, of course, severely constrained by renewed fighting.
- On Sept. 17, we began to receive fragmentary and conflicting indications from several quarters that something was wrong in certain Palestinian refugee camps in the Beirut area. We got in touch with Israeli authorities and Lebanese leaders who we believed might have some influence over the situation. Among other steps, one Embassy officer went to the camps to check personally on the situation there, but he was not able to get close enough to observe any unusual activity.
- The next morning -- on Sept. 18 -- an Embassy officer was finally able to enter the Shatila camp unimpeded and saw the evidence of the massacre. This was the first eyewitness confirmation by an Embassy official. This was followed by extraordinary efforts by U.S. officials to calm the situation and to ensure no repetition of or revenge for this terrible event.

Phil Habib now recommends that a senior Department official do an on-camera interview to set the record straight. Sam Lewis does not believe Israel would view our participation on-the-record as interference in its domestic affairs, despite the fact that the program would air before the conclusion of the Israeli judicial inquiry into the massacre. He concurs in Phil's recommendation that we make an on-camera statement. Bob Dillon also recommends that we go on-the-record.

John has agreed to go before ABC's cameras once he has personally reviewed the record to assure he is totally familiar with it and comfortable with the above scenario. He has gone to Florida and will not be back until January 2. He would therefore be unable to do the interview until that week.

RECOMMENDATION:

That John be authorized to appear on camera to set the

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