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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BEIRUT 001666 SIPDIS DEPT FOR NEA/FO, NEA/ELA, PM/FO, PM FOR MORIMOTO ALSO FOR IO A/S HOOK, PDAS WARLICK P FOR HMUSTAPHA AND RRANGASWAMY USUN FOR KHALILZAD/WOLFF/GERMAIN/SCHEDLBAUER NSC FOR ABRAMS/YERGER/MCDERMOTT E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/01/2018 TAGS: PREL [External Political Relations], PGOV [Internal Governmental Affairs], PTER [Terrorists and Terrorism], PINR [Intelligence], UNSC [UN Security Council], MARR [Military and Defense Arrangements], MOPS [Military Operations], LE [Lebanon], SY [Syria] SUBJECT: LEBANON: BLOOMFIELD PROMOTES MANPADS DESTRUCTION WITH ARMY COMMANDER REF: BEIRUT 1634 Classified By: Ambassador Michele J. Sison for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d). SUMMARY ----- ¶1. (C) Ambassador Lincoln P. Bloomfield, Jr., Special Envoy for Man Portable Air Defense Systems (MANPADS), addressed the need for control of MANPAD weapons with Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) Commander **General** Kahwaji, took a tour of LAF munitions storage depots, and met with several Lebanese interlocutors during his November 11-13 visit to Beirut. On MANPADS, Bloomfield expressed appreciation to Kahwaji for the LAF's efforts to date in controlling and destroying MANPADS, and offered further support for depot modernization. Kahwaji stressed the need for urgent delivery of M60 tanks and attack helicopters. Political contacts expressed their concern about March 14's ability to maintain its majority after the spring 2009 parliamentary elections if it did not present a more unified front. End summary. ¶2. (C) During his November 11-13 visit to Beirut, Ambassador Lincoln P. Bloomfield Jr. accompanied by Special Assistant Sho Morimoto, met with General Jean Kahwaji, LAF Commander, retired Generals Adonis Nehme and **Tannous Mouawad**, Sarkis Naoum, columnist for An-Nahar newspaper, and Simon Karam, former Lebanese Ambassador to the U.S. ARMY COMMANDER URGES QUICK DELIVERY OF TANKS, ATTACK HELICOPTERS ----- ¶3. (C) Kahwaji expressed appreciation for U.S. support of the LAF's military modernization program but reiterated his need for more mobile and lethal weaponry. He told Bloomfield he cannot be patient waiting for U.S. M60 tanks and attack helicopters. He asserted that the army needs to be more mobile and have the capacity to send small units to trouble spots quickly. When Amb Bloomfield asked about Russian offers of equipment, Kahwaji replied that he prefers to work with the U.S., but U.S. offers of assistance are not coming to fruition quickly enough. LAF SUPPORT ON MANPADS CONTROL ----- ¶4. (C) Kahwaji was hesitant to discuss details of the MANPADS destruction. (Note: MANPADS destruction is a sensitive topic due to public perception that the armed forces would be giving up control of a valuable air defense weapon, a concern highlighted by daily overflights of Israeli military aircraft. The first MANPAD, a Russian made SA-7, was destroyed in October. End note.) He said he was not aware of any problems with MANPADS in the control of militias. Bloomfield noted that the U.S. had given nearly \$1 million to the LAF for munitions depot upgrades, and said he would advocate for more if the LAF continues its MANPADS destruction efforts. ¶5. (C) Bloomfield met with LAF officers at the Louazie Munitions Depot in the suburbs of Beirut. The commanding officer showed Bloomfield storage bunkers and small arms ammunition manufacturing and de-milling equipment. Most of the equipment is 30 years old and the storage bunkers date to the 1920s. There is no climate control and residential homes now surround the depot, posing a threat to civilians. Bloomfield said he would explore possibilities for additional U.S. funding for upgrades. LACK OF MARCH 14 UNITY COULD COST IT THE ELECTIONS ----- ¶6. (C) Both retired generals, Nehme and Mouawad, told Bloomfield they expected the March 8 opposition to make gains in the spring 2009 parliamentary elections, citing March 14's failure to present a unified message. Mouawad was BEIRUT 00001666 002 OF 002 pessimistic about the amount of

control Hizballah had over the political scene in Lebanon. He cited the May 2008 uprising in Beirut as an example of what Hizballah can do when it wants. He said there would be more of the same type behavior by Hizballah if the elections did not come out in its favor. Mouawad, who now is chairman of his own political polling institute, stated that from his most recent polls in October, he could not see a clear winner in the elections. In a separate meeting (Reftel), Ambassador Karam also stressed the need for increased March 14 unity. He asserted that the current Lebanese government should open talks with Israel, if even indirectly, adding that not resolving Sheba'a allowed Hizballah to use it as a pretext to maintain its arms. ¶7. Ambassador Bloomfield has not had an opportunity to clear this cable. SISON