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FM WASHINGTON 081935Z JUNE 81

TO IMMEDIATE FCO

TELEGRAM NUMBER 1758 OF 8 JUNE

INFO IMMEDIATE BAGHDAD, TEL AVIV, ROUTINE UKMIS NEW YORK, PARIS, ROME, BONN, UKDEL NATO, AMMAN, DAMASCUS.

YOUR TELEGRAM NO 97 TO TEL AVIV: ISRAELI ATTACK ON IRAQ

1. BURT, DIRECTOR OF THE POLITICAL/MILITARY BUREAU OF STATE DEPARTMENT, REFERRED TO THE ISRAELI RAID DURING THE OPENING MEETING OF THE BILATERAL TALKS WITH GILLMORE THIS MORNING. HE SAID THAT THE ISRAELIS WOULD MAKE AN ANNOUNCEMENT AFTER THE IRAQIS HAD RELEASED INFORMATION ABOUT THE RAID. THE U.S. WOULD FOLLOW WITH AN ANNOUNCEMENT OF THEIR OWN INDICATING THE SERIOUS VIEW THEY TOOK OF THE INCIDENT.

2. BURT THOUGHT THAT THE ISRAELIS HAD CHOSEN THIS MOMENT BECAUSE THE REACTOR WOULD SHORTLY QUOTE GO HOT UNQUOTE AND THERE WOULD SUBSEQUENTLY HAVE BEEN A MUCH GREATER RISK OF RADIOACTIVE CONTAMINATION. THE IRAQIS WERE ALSO CLOSE TO COMPLETING THE DEFENSIVE EARTH-WALL WHICH WOULD HAVE MADE AN ATTACK MORE DIFFICULT. THIS WAS THEREFORE A WINDOW OF OPPORTUNITY FOR THE ISRAELIS. U.S. EQUIPMENT HAD BEEN USED, BUT THE BOMBS WERE STANDARD TYPE, NOT PRECISION-GUIDED.

3. IN RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS BURT SAID THAT THE JORDANIANS AND SAUDIS WOULD BE UNHAPPY AT THE ATTACK AND AT THE OVERFLIGHT OF THEIR TERRITORY, BUT THE STATE DEPARTMENT EXPECTED THE PLANNED MEETING BETWEEN HABIB AND PRINCE SAUD TO GO AHEAD TODAY IN GENEVA.

4. SPEAKING IN CONFIDENCE ON THE U.S. REACTION, BURT RECALLED THAT THERE HAD BEEN A GENERAL FEELING LAST YEAR THAT IT WAS A PITY THAT THE IRANIAN ATTACK ON THE NUCLEAR FACILITY HAD NOT SUCCEEDED. THE IRANIAN ATTACK HAD BEEN VIEWED AS COMPREHENSIBLE IN THE EXISTING STATE OF WAR BETWEEN IRAN AND IRAQ. ISRAEL AND IRAQ WERE ALSO FORMALLY STILL IN A STATE OF WAR. THERE WAS STRONG FEELING ON THE HILL ABOUT THE IRAQI NUCLEAR PROGRAMME AND ABOUT THE ROLE OF FRANCE AND ITALY WHO HAD UNDERCUT NUCLEAR SUPPLY GROUP GUIDELINES IN ORDER TO HELP THE IRAQIS. HOWEVER BURT FORESAW A DEBATE IN CONGRESS ON THE USE OF U.S. WEAPONS AND ON WHETHER THE ISRAELI ATTACK COULD PROPERLY BE CONSIDERED DEFENSIVE.

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5. BURT'S MAIN IMMEDIATE CONCERN WAS ON THE POSSIBLE EFFECT OF THE ATTACK ON THE SAUDIS' DECISION ON AWACS (THE SUPPLY OF WHICH WAS LINKED TO OTHER DEFENCE-RELATED UNDERSTANDINGS OF IMPORTANCE TO U.S. STRATEGIC PLANNING). HE THOUGHT IT IMPORTANT THAT THE SAUDIS SHOULD NOT BE GIVEN AN EASY LET-OUT EG BY THE OFFER OF NIMROD FROM THE U.K. HE ALSO CONSIDERED IT UNFORTUNATE THAT THE ATTACK FOLLOWED SO CLOSELY ON BEGIN'S MEETING WITH SADAT BUT THOUGHT THAT ON BALANCE IT WAS UNLIKELY THAT SADAT HAD BEEN INFORMED IN ADVANCE.

6. THESE WERE ONLY PRELIMINARY OFF-THE-CUFF REACTIONS.

HENDERSON

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PS/LPS

PS/MR HURD

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