

SIT402 R-2

*****SECRET*****

DATE 06/09/81

WHITE HOUSE SITUATION ROOM

PAGE 01

WHTS ASSIGNED DISTRIBUTION:

SIT: RVA NAN COL JP VP
EOB: KEMP, BEGIN, HUBERMAN
WHSR COMMENT: RED TAG

MESSAGE ANNOTATIONS:

NO MESSAGE ANNOTATIONS

MESSAGE:

IMMEDIATE
DE RUEHTV #0138/01 1601845
O 091840Z JUN 81 ZFF-4
FM AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7502

INFO WHITEHOUSE WASHDC
BT

~~SECRET~~ SECTION 01 OF 03 TEL AVIV 09138
NOOIS/NOFORN
FOR THE SECRETARY FROM AMBASSADOR LEWIS
E.O. 12065: RDS=1,3,4 6/9/81 (LEWIS, SAMUEL W.) DR-M
TAGS: RNUC, MILI, HOPS, IS, US, IZ
SUBJECT: ISRAELI STRIKE ON IRAQI NUCLEAR FACILITY;
BACKGROUND FOR THE DECISION
REF: TEL AVIV 0903

1. (X = ENTIRE TEXT)

2. AS I REFLECTED ON THE EVENTS OF THE LAST 48 HOURS, IT OCCURRED TO ME THAT WITH THE CHANGE OF ADMINISTRATIONS IN WASHINGTON THERE MAY HAVE DEVELOPED INADVERTENTLY A GAP IN OUR INSTITUTIONAL MEMORY. THE TIMING OF THE ISRAELI STRIKE ENORMOUSLY COMPLICATES MANY ASPECTS OF AMERICAN POLICY IN THIS REGION AND I AM NOT FOR A MOMENT TRYING TO DEFEND IT. BUT AS YOU CONSIDER HOW TO DEAL WITH THE FALL OUT, AND WITH BEGIN HIMSELF, IN THE DAYS IMMEDIATELY AHEAD, YOU AND THE PRESIDENT SHOULD BE THOROUGHLY BRIEFED ON THE HISTORY OF OUR VERY SENSITIVE DIALOGUE WITH BEGIN DURING THE FINAL SIX MONTHS OF THE CARTER ADMINISTRATION. THIS WAS A VERY FRUSTRATING SERIES OF EXCHANGES FOR BEGIN, AND VERY DMINOUS FOR US. IT LEFT ME WITH NO DOUBT THAT BEFORE THE

TEL AVIV 9138

0161001840Z JUN 81 PSN: 038467
TOR: 160/1906Z

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DECLASSIFIED IN PART
NLS F96-1271 41

PRESERVATION COPY

By smf, NARA, Date 2/3/05

Israel, strike on Iraq; nuclear facility (6/8/81) [OK]
EXECUTIVE SECRETARIAT, NSC
BOX 37
COOK/ETL

***** F O R T *****

DATE 06/02/81

WHITE HOUSE SITUATION ROOM

PAGE 02

MESSAGE (CONTINUED):

IRACI REACTOR BECAME OPERATIONAL, THE ISRAELI FORCES WOULD DESTROY IT.

3. I WILL SUMMARIZE HERE THE EVOLUTION OF THE DIALOGUE, THEN PROVIDE CITATIONS TO RELEVANT, HIGHLY SENSITIVE MESSAGES WHICH SOMEONE CAN REVIEW FOR YOU. PERHAPS NONE OF THEM WERE EVER BROUGHT TO YOUR ATTENTION DURING OR AFTER THE TRANSITION, THE DIALOGUE LAPPED AFTER DECEMBER AND WAS NOT SUBSEQUENTLY PRESSED EITHER BY BEGIN OR BY US. THAT FACT MAY HAVE CONTRIBUTED TO THE UNFORTUNATE DECISION TO STRIKE ON SUNDAY.

4. DURING JUNE AND JULY OF 1980, THERE WAS A SUDDEN DELUGE OF STORIES IN THE ISRAELI AND INTERNATIONAL PRESS FOCUSING ON CONCERN THE EVOLVING IRACI NUCLEAR PROGRAM WOULD PRESENT FOR ISRAEL. BEGIN SPENT ABOUT TEN DAYS IN THE HOSPITAL IN EARLY JULY. HE ASKED ME TO SEE HIM AT HOME ON JULY 17 FOR OUR FIRST MEETING DURING HIS CONVALESCENCE. THE ENTIRE MEETING WAS DEVOTED TO HIS FEARS THAT IRAQ WOULD SOON POSSESS NUCLEAR WEAPONS. HE ASKED ME TO TRANSMIT AN EMOTIONAL PERSONAL MESSAGE TO PRESIDENT CARTER (TEL AVIV 13606-11880). IN ESSENCE THE APPEAL WAS THAT HE DO EVERYTHING POSSIBLE TO STOP FURTHER ENRICHED URANIUM SHIPMENTS TO IRAQ BEFORE IT WAS "TOO LATE." I COMMENTED IN REPORTING THAT APPEAL "UNLESS WE CAN SOMEHOW CHANGE THE COURSE OF FRENCH POLICY AND REASSURE THE ISRAELIS, WE MUST ANTICIPATE THAT THEY WILL FEEL COMPELLED IN THE NOT TOO DISTANT FUTURE TO TAKE SOME KIND OF UNILATERAL ACTION TO THWART THE IRACI NUCLEAR PLANS WELL BEFORE THE IRAQIS ACTUALLY POSSESS A WEAPON. AND BY THE 'VERY NEAR FUTURE,' I MEAN WITHIN THE NEXT SIX MONTHS." WE COULD NOT AND SHOULD NOT RULE OUT ANY POSSIBILITIES; PARAMILITARY OR EVEN PRE-EMPTIVE STRIKES WITH CONVENTIONAL WEAPONS AGAINST THE IRACI NUCLEAR FACILITIES

5. [REDACTED] STATE OFFICIALS LABORED TO PRODUCE A REASSURING RESPONSE WHICH I WAS FINALLY ABLE TO GIVE TO BEGIN ON AUGUST 22 (TEL AVIV 18691)

FOIA(b) (1)

AND AMBASSADOR BYRON WAS GIVEN A PARTIAL INTERIM REPLY BY THEN ASSISTANT SECRETARY SAUNDERS. BEGIN WAS NOT REASSURED; HE WAS "MOST SUSPICIOUS OF FRENCH MOTIVES." HE CONCLUDED THAT DISCUSSION BY SAYING: "ISRAEL DOES NOT INTEND TO RELY ON PROMISES."

FOIA(b) (1)

TEL AVIV #138

DTG: 001848Z JUN 81 FBN: 030407 TOR: 100/1900Z

***** F O R T *****

del. STILLE OR
VAG
NUCLEAR FACILITY
08/18/81
EXECUTIVE SECRET
COUNTRY ETC

~~*****SECRET*****~~

DATE 06/09/01

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MESSAGE (CONTINUED):

[REDACTED] IN THE SUBSEQUENT WEEKS, DURING LATE AUGUST AND SEPTEMBER BEGIN ASKED ME SEVERAL TIMES WHETHER WE HAD ANYTHING MORE TO TELL HIM, AND I COULD ONLY STALL.

FOIA(b) (1)

5. ON SEPTEMBER 29, WE REPORTED THAT WE WERE PICKING UP A NUMBER OF THINLY VEILED STRAWS IN THE WIND SUGGESTING THAT ISRAEL WAS SORELY TEMPTED TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE COVER PROVIDED BY THE IRAN-IRAQ WAR TO CARRY OUT AN AIR STRIKE AGAINST THE IRAQI NUCLEAR FACILITIES (TEL AVIV 17085).

FOIA(b) (1)

[REDACTED] WE CONCLUDED THAT THERE WAS A 20 TO 40 PERCENT POSSIBILITY OF A STRIKE TAKING PLACE WITHIN THE NEXT FEW

TEL AVIV 0135

DTG: 091640Z JUN 01 PSN: 038407
TOR: 16R/1900Z

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DATE 05/09/81

WHITE HOUSE SITUATION ROOM

PAGE 01

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MESSAGE:

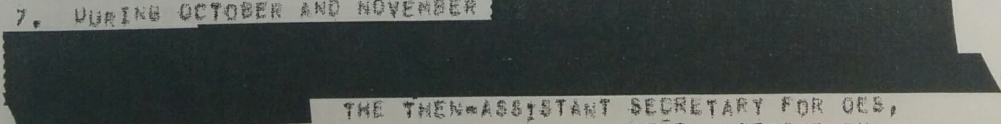
IMMEDIATE
DE RUEWTV #0130/02 1001054
O 001840Z JUN 81 ZFF-4
FM AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7003

INFO WHITEHOUSE WASHDC
BT

~~SECRET~~ SECTION 02 OF 03 TEL AVIV 00130
DAYS AND DESCRIBED HOW HE THOUGHT IT WOULD BE CARRIED OUT.
IN THE EVENT, THERE WAS A STRIKE BY TWO F-415 THE FOLLOWING
DAY, SEPTEMBER 30. IT TURNED OUT TO BE AN IRANIAN OPERA-
TION WHOSE ONLY "SUCCESS" WAS TO SCARE AWAY THE FRENCH AND
ITALIAN TECHNICIANS AT THE FACILITY FOR SEVERAL MONTHS.
WHEN I SAW SESIN OCTOBER 5, HE VOLUNTEERED THAT IT WAS NOT
ISRAEL WHICH HAD ATTACKED THE BAGHDAD FACILITY. HE THEN
REMINDS US THAT HE HAD BEEN ASKING US TO DO EVERYTHING
POSSIBLE TO STOP FRENCH AND ITALIAN ASSISTANCE TO THE IRAQ
PROGRAM (TEL AVIV 10108). IN RETROSPECT, I AM EVEN MORE
CONVINCED THAT THE ISRAELIS HAD INDEED PLANNED A STRIKE
BUT CALLED IT OFF WHEN THE IRANIANS GOT THERE FIRST. SINCE
THE TECHNICIANS IMMEDIATELY LEFT THE SITE FOR A PROLONGED
PERIOD, THEY PUT THEIR PLANS ON ICE UNTIL THE THREAT THEY
PERCEIVED OF THE REACTOR'S BECOMING OPERATIONAL WAS AGAIN
RENEKED AFTER THE RETURN OF TECHNICIANS EARLIER THIS YEAR.

7. DURING OCTOBER AND NOVEMBER



FOIA(b) (1)

THE THEN-ASSISTANT SECRETARY FOR OES,
AMBASSADOR TOM PICKERING, WAS THE CHIEF ACTION OFFICER IN

TEL AVIV 0130

DTG:001840Z JUN 81 PSN: 030019
TOR: 100/1900Z

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DATE 06/09/81

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PAGE 02

MESSAGE (CONTINUED):

THE DEPARTMENT ON THIS PROBLEM.

FOIA(b) (1)

[REDACTED] HE PLANNED TO VISIT ISRAEL IN LATE NOVEMBER TO BRIEF BEGIN IN DETAIL ON THE PROGRESS OF OUR EFFORTS. HIS TRIP WAS CANCELLED BUT I WAS EVENTUALLY AUTHORIZED BY DEPUTY SECRETARY CHRISTOPHER TO CARRY OUT THE BRIEFING FROM INSTRUCTIONS POUCHED TO ME BY PICKERING.

FOIA(b) (1)

[REDACTED] I WAS INSTRUCTED TO MAKE THE PRESENTATION BUT TO REPORT ON THE MEETING ONLY BY LETTER TO TOM PICKERING.

B. I MET WITH BEGIN FINALLY DECEMBER 17 (AND REPORTED BY LETTER ON DECEMBER 24 IN DETAIL). AT THAT MEETING INTER ALIA, I WENT THROUGH THE TALKING POINTS PROVIDED ME WHICH INCLUDED SOME OF THE FOLLOWING:

A. THE UNITED STATES SHARES ISRAEL'S SERIOUS CONCERN ABOUT IRAQ'S NUCLEAR DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM.

B. ALTHOUGH WE HAVE NO HARD EVIDENCE THAT IRAQ INTENDS TO BUILD NUCLEAR WEAPONS, THE PACE AND SCOPE OF THE PROGRAM SECRET

. . . EXCEEDS IRAQ'S APPARENT NEEDS AND, WE BELIEVE, ARE INTENDED TO GIVE THAT COUNTRY'S GOVERNMENT THE OPTION OF DEVELOPING NUCLEAR EXPLOSIVES IN THE FUTURE.

C. THE IRAQI MILITARY HAS TAKEN CONTROL OF THE NUCLEAR SITE. THOSE FRENCH TECHNICIANS WHO REMAIN IN THE BAGHDAD AREA DO NOT HAVE ACCESS TO IT AT PRESENT, ALTHOUGH IT IS THEIR OPINION THAT THE HIGHLY ENRICHED URANIUM HAS NOT BEEN TAMPERED WITH.

D. [REDACTED]

FOIA(b) (1)

E. IT IS OUR STRONG BELIEF THAT PRECIPITATE ACTION AGAINST IRAQ'S NUCLEAR INSTALLATIONS WOULD BE A SEVERE SET BACK TO THE PROSPECTS FOR MIDDLE EAST PEACE.

F. THE UNITED STATES IS UNDER NO ILLUSIONS ABOUT THE SERIOUSNESS OF THE DANGER THAT IRAQ'S POSSESSION OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS WOULD POSE. WE WILL CONTINUE TO DEVOTE SIGNIFICANT EFFORT TO MONITORING IRAQI NUCLEAR DEVELOPMENTS AND WILL WELCOME VIEWS AND INFORMATION THAT YOU MAY WISH TO SHARE WITH US.

IN THAT CONVERSATION I ALSO NOTED FOR BEGIN THAT THE ASSESSMENTS OF THE SITUATION MADE BY OUR RESPECTIVE EXPERTS WERE

TEL AVIV 9138

DTB:001840Z JUN 81 RBN: 050319
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PAGE 03

MESSAGE (CONTINUED):

IN BASIC AGREEMENT. THERE WAS NO DISAGREEMENT ABOUT WHERE IRAQ'S STATE OF THE ART WAS AT THAT TIME, OR ABOUT THE GRAVE DANGERS INHERENT IN ANY IRAQI ACQUISITION OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS. THERE WERE SMALL DIFFERENCES IN OUR JUDGMENTS REGARDING THE DATE AFTER WHICH IRAQ COULD EXPLODE A NUCLEAR DEVICE. IN RESPONSE BEGIN THANKED US FOR WHAT HE WERE DOING IN PARIS AND ROME BUT MADE CLEAR THAT HE WAS STILL DEEPLY WORRIED THAT THE DIPLOMATIC TRACK WAS NOT SUCCEEDING. I CONCLUDED MY REPORT ON THIS MEETING WITH THE FOLLOWING WORDS: "THIS SESSION WILL SATISFY THE NEED HERE FOR A TIME. I SHOULD BE GIVEN THE INFORMATION AND AUTHORITY TO UPDATE BEGIN AT TWO-THREE MONTH INTERVALS IN ORDER TO MAINTAIN CREDIBILITY. GENERAL EITAN WILL CONTINUE TO PRESS BEGIN HARD; HE RAISED THE SUBJECT YESTERDAY WITH GENERAL JONES,

TEL AVIV 0138

DTG:091840Z JUN 61 P01: 030319
TOR: 160/1900Z

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Israel Strike on Iraq, Nuclear Power Plant, Executive Secretariat

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*****SECRET*****

DATE 06/09/81

WHITE HOUSE SITUATION ROOM

PAGE 01

WHIS ANNOTATED DISTRIBUTION:

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MESSAGE:

IMMEDIATE
DE RUEHTV #0136/80 160100Z
O 091800Z JUN 81 ZFP#4
FM AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7504

INFO WHITEHOUSE WASHDC
BT

~~SECRET~~ SECTION 03 OF 03 TEL AVIV 09136
CHARACTERIZING IT AS THE MOST SERIOUS THREAT ISRAEL FACES
ANYWHERE. TO MAINTAIN ANY KIND OF INFLUENCE OVER THE VERY
DANGEROUS POSSIBILITIES FOR DIRECT ISRAELI MILITARY PRE-
VENTIVE MOVES, IT IS VITAL THAT WE CONTINUE TO CARRY ON A
FRANK DIALOGUE WITH BEGIN OR HIS SUCCESSOR. AT SOME POINT,
THE NEW ADMINISTRATION SHOULD BE CAREFULLY BRIEFED, WITH
THIS POINT UNDERSCORED."

9. THAT WAS THE LAST OF SUCH EXCHANGES BETWEEN BEGIN AND
ME. HE HAS NOT PRESSED FOR FURTHER MEETINGS ON THIS SUB-
JECT, AND WE HAVE NOT INITIATED THEM.

FOIA(b) (1)

SEVERAL MONTHS
PASSED. THEN THE STRIKE OCCURRED AT A MOMENT WHEN IT COULD
SCARCELY HAVE BEEN MORE DAMAGING TO OUR DIPLOMATIC EFFORTS
IN THE REGION. BEGIN SAID PUBLICLY YESTERDAY THAT "THE
DECISION TO ATTACK IRAQ'S NUCLEAR REACTOR WAS ADOPTED MANY
MONTHS AGO. BUT THERE WERE HINDRANCES, AND THERE WERE ALSO
VARIOUS CONSIDERATIONS AND A NUMBER OF DELAYS. WE THEN
ARRIVED AT A SITUATION WHERE IT WAS CLEAR TO US THAT IF WE
DID NOT ACT NOW WE WOULD MISS THE PROPITIOUS TIME." I HAVE
NO DOUBT THAT THROUGHOUT THE MONTHS SINCE DECEMBER, GENERAL
EITAN AND ARIK SHARON IN PARTICULAR HAVE CONTINUED TO PRESS

TEL AVIV 0136

DTG:091800Z JUN 81 PSN: 030327
TOR: 160/1915Z

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rael strike on Iraq nuclear facility 6/8/81 [] of []
EXECUTIVE SECRETARIAT, NSC
DOX

***** S E C R E T *****

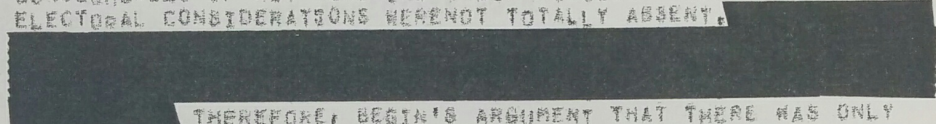
DATE 06/09/81

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PAGE 02

MESSAGE (CONTINUED):

BEGIN WITH THE ARGUMENTS THAT THE DIPLOMATIC EFFORT WAS INEFFECTUAL AND THE OPPORTUNITY TO ELIMINATE THE REACTOR WOULD BE LOST ONCE IT BECAME OPERATIONAL, BECAUSE OF THE DANGER OF RADIOACTIVE FALL OUT AFTER A STRIKE ON A "HOT REACTOR." THE PRECISE DECISION TO MAKE THE STRIKE THIS PAST WEEKEND COULD WELL HAVE REFLECTED THE OTHER CONSIDERATIONS WE OUTLINED SUNDAY NIGHT IN TEL AVIV 9865, ESPECIALLY THE DESIRE TO GIVE A CLEAR MESSAGE TO THE SYRIANS ABOUT THE CONSEQUENCES OF NOT REMOVING THEIR MISSILES PEACEFULLY. ELECTORAL CONSIDERATIONS WERE NOT TOTALLY ABSENT.



FOIA(b)(1)

THEREFORE, BEGIN'S ARGUMENT THAT THERE WAS ONLY A VERY NARROW WINDOW WHEN THE STRIKE COULD BE LAUNCHED HAS CREDIBILITY; ONCE YOU ACCEPT HIS PREMISE--THAT A NUCLEAR WEAPONS CAPABILITY IN IRAQ WOULD WITHIN ONE, TWO OR THREE YEARS PRESENT AN UNACCEPTABLE RISK TO THE STATE OF ISRAEL, AND THAT CERTAINLY HAS BEEN BEGIN'S CLEARLY ARTICULATED PREMISE FROM THE MOMENT OF OUR FIRST CONVERSATION LAST JULY.

10. RELEVANT MESSAGES IN THIS SERIES OF EXCHANGES ARE LISTED AS FOLLOWS:

- 1980 STATE 190154 ✓ 1980 TEL AVIV 13285 ✓
- 1980 STATE 190084 ✓ 1980 TEL AVIV 13390 ✓
- 1980 STATE 197208 ✓ 1980 TEL AVIV 13503 ✓
- 1980 STATE 202274 ✓ 1980 TEL AVIV 16591 ✓
- 1980 STATE 214871 ✓ 1980 TEL AVIV 17588 ✓
- 1980 STATE 215253 ✓ 1980 TEL AVIV 18108 ✓
- 1980 STATE 209888 ✓ 1980 TEL AVIV 18504 ✓
- 1980 STATE 226917 ✓ 1980 TEL AVIV 22546 ✓
- 1980 STATE 226034 ✓ OFFICIAL INFORMAL LETTER DATED
- 1980 STATE 245762 ✓ DECEMBER 24, 1980, TO ASSISTANT

SECRETARY PICKERING

LEWIS

TEL AVIV 9138

010:00:040Z JUN 81 PBN: 036327
TOR: 166/1915Z

***** S E C R E T *****

41 STRIKE ON IRAQ
NUCLEAR FACILITY
EXECUTIVE SECRETARY