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MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE  
WASHINGTON

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INFORMATION

NLS E96-127/1 #124

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

BY Smf, DATE 2/28/05

FROM: RICHARD V. ALLEN *Allen*

SUBJECT: Diplomatic Background to Israeli  
Raid on Iraq's Nuclear Reactor

On June 7, Israel destroyed Iraq's nuclear reactor, which was under construction in collaboration with French and Italian companies. Israel gave us no prior notification of the actual raid. You should, however, be aware that, during the last months of the Carter Administration, the State Department knew of Jerusalem's thinking on Iraq's nuclear program, including the determination to resort to force if diplomacy failed to eliminate the Iraqi nuclear threat.

Therefore, your public statements on the raid must be framed with the raid's diplomatic background in mind, lest they unduly antagonize Israel and provoke Jerusalem to issue (accurate) contradictions and to argue that the USG has no "institutional memory."

- Especially since July 1980, Begin and his colleagues repeatedly stressed to U.S. Ambassador to Israel Samuel Lewis their anxiety regarding the Iraqi nuclear program.
- In July 1980, Ambassador Lewis warned President Carter and Secretary Muskie that Israel was contemplating a preemptive strike against the Iraqi reactor should U.S. pressure on France and Italy yield no results.
- The USG pressed France and Italy not to facilitate Iraqi attainment of a nuclear weapons capability. Israel afforded the USG time for such efforts, but the pressure was not effective.
- During an August 1980 meeting in Washington on the Iraqi nuclear program, Iraqi officials reaffirmed to U.S. officials that Iraq is in a state of war with Israel, and has been so since 1948.
- In December 1980, Ambassador Lewis confirmed to Begin that the USG believes Iraq is seeking a nuclear weapons option and that the "assessments of the situation" by U.S. and Israeli experts "were in basic agreement."
- According to a report from Ambassador Lewis cabled after the raid, "we share the Israeli assessment that the reactor was essentially ready to go operational [in a matter of weeks] as soon as the additional fuel elements were shipped and installed."

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Review June 15, 1987

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