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FM WASHINGTON

TO DESKBY 300930Z FCO

TELNO 1127

OF 300100Z APRIL 86

INFO DESKBY 300500Z MOSCOW

INFO PRIORITY HELSINKI, STOCKHOLM, OSLO, COPENHAGEN, BONN

INFO PRIORITY WARSAW, UKMIS VIENNA, UKDEL NATO

ACCIDENT AT NUCLEAR POWER STATION AT CHERNOBYL

1. THE SITUATION REMAINS CONFUSED, BUT THE ADMINISTRATION HAVE TOLD US THAT, FROM INFORMATION CURRENTLY AVAILABLE TO THEM, THEY BELIEVE THAT SEVERE STRUCTURAL DAMAGE HAS OCCURRED TO THE WALLS AND ROOF OF A BUILDING AT THE SITE OF THE NUCLEAR POWER STATION AT CHERNOBYL, PROBABLY FOLLOWING AN EXPLOSION. A DISCHARGE CLOUD HAS BEEN OBSERVED OVER THE SAME BUILDING. THE ADJACENT TOWN OF PRIPYAT HAS DEFINITELY BEEN EVACUATED. OTHER ADJACENT AREAS MAY HAVE BEEN.

2. OFFICIALS HERE BELIEVE THAT A POSSIBLE CAUSE WAS AN ACCIDENTAL LOSS OF COOLANT CAUSING A PARTIAL CORE MELT. A RESULTING INTERACTION OF ZIRCONIUM GRAPHITE AND WATER MAY HAVE PRODUCED EITHER HYDROGEN OR METHANE GAS, WHICH EXPLODED. THE GRAPHITE MODERATOR SURROUNDING THE CORE IS ASSUMED TO HAVE BEEN IGNITED AND BELIEVED TO BE STILL BURNING. THE US DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY NOW ESTIMATE THAT THE ACCIDENT OCCURRED ON FRIDAY 25 APRIL, ALTHOUGH OTHER OFFICIALS BELIEVE 26 APRIL MORE LIKELY. THE STATE DEPARTMENT HAVE SAID THAT CHANGING METEOROLOGICAL CONDITIONS MAY NOW DIRECT RADIOACTIVE DISCHARGES IN A MORE EASTERLY DIRECTION THAN HITHERTO.

3. THERE ARE CONFLICTING AND UNCONFIRMED REPORTS HERE ABOUT CASUALTIES. A SOVIET RESCUE WORKER IS REPORTED TO HAVE SAID THAT 80 PEOPLE WERE KILLED AT THE TIME OF THE ACCIDENT, WITH 2,000 DYING IN THE IMMEDIATE AFTERMATH.

ON THE OTHER HAND, A SENIOR SOVIET CIVIL AVIATION OFFICIAL WHO ARRIVED IN WASHINGTON TODAY FROM THE SOVIET UNION SAID HE UNDERSTOOD THERE WERE LESS THAN 100 INJURED.

4. THE SOVIET CHARGE WAS TOLD BY THE STATE DEPARTMENT (RIDGWAY) THIS MORNING THAT THE ADMINISTRATION WERE PREPARED TO MAKE AVAILABLE HUMANITARIAN AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE IN DEALING WITH THE ACCIDENT. RIDGWAY ALSO ASKED FOR FURTHER INFORMATION ABOUT THE ACCIDENT. THERE HAS BEEN NO SOVIET RESPONSE SO FAR.

5. THE STATE DEPARTMENT SPOKESMAN HAS SAID THAT THE ADMINISTRATION HAVE OFFERED ASSISTANCE, ARE SEEKING ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ON THE ACCIDENT, AND ARE LOOKING FOR THE CLOSEST POSSIBLE CO-ORDINATION AMONG ALL CONCERNED COUNTRIES.

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ADDED THAT THE ADMINISTRATION HOPED THE SOVIET UNION WOULD PROVIDE INFORMATION ABOUT THE ACCIDENT IN A TIMELY MANNER.

6. THE STATE DEPARTMENT HAVE THIS EVENING ISSUED A TRAVELLERS ADVISORY NOTING THE SOVIET GOVERNMENT STATEMENT THAT TRAVEL TO THE KIEV AREA MAY BE DANGEROUS AND ADVISING THAT TRAVEL TO QUOTE KIEV AND ADJACENT AREAS UNQUOTE IS NOT RECOMMENDED UNTIL FURTHER NOTICE. THE ADVISORY WILL BE CARRIED BY VOICE OF AMERICA AND RADIO FREE EUROPE AND THE STATE DEPARTMENT HAVE ASKED WHETHER THE BBC MIGHT BROADCAST SOMETHING SIMILAR.

7. THE STATE DEPARTMENT SAY THAT THEY ARE NOT AWARE OF ANY GROUPS OF US NATIONALS EG STUDENTS RESIDENT IN THE KIEV AREA. WE UNDERSTAND THAT THE US EMBASSY IN MOSCOW IS ATTEMPTING TO ESTABLISH CONTACT, THROUGH INTOURIST AND DIRECT, WITH ANY US TOURISTS VISITING THE KIEV AREA. THERE IS AT PRESENT NO PLAN EXPLICITLY TO ADVISE SUCH TOURISTS TO LEAVE THOUGH THIS IMPLICATION IS PERHAPS CONTAINED IN THE TRAVELLERS ADVISORY. WE UNDERSTAND THAT THE US EMBASSY ARE MAKING CLEAR TO THE SOVIET AUTHORITIES THAT THEY ARE RELYING ON THEM TO EVACUATE AND OTHERWISE ASSIST ANY US NATIONALS IN THE AREA WHO MAY NEED HELP.

8. NO THOUGHT IS AT THIS STAGE BEING GIVEN TO THE EVACUATION OF US NATIONALS IN MOSCOW, WHO ARE NOT AT PRESENT REGARDED AS BEING IN ANY DANGER. BUT CHANGING METEOROLOGICAL PATTERNS ARE BEING WATCHED CAREFULLY.

WRIGHT

SOVIET NUCLEAR ACCIDENT

LIMITED

NED
SOVIET DEPT
WED
EED
MAED
CONSULAR DEPT
NEWS DEPT

PS
PS/MR RENTON
PS/PUS
MR DEREK THOMAS
MR GOODALL
MR DAUNT
MR RATFORD

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