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US/PLO DIALOGUE

SUMMARY

1. ADMINISTRATION DENOUNCE SEABORNE RAID ON ISRAEL AS TERRORIST ATTACK. US/PLO DIALOGUE UNDER SERIOUS THREAT.

DETAIL

2. ASKED ABOUT SEABORNE RAID ON ISRAEL EARLIER TODAY (30 MAY) STATE DEPARTMENT SPOKESMAN SAID THAT THE UNITED STATES WAS HORRIFIED AT THE TERRORIST ATTACK. THE ADMINISTRATION WAS PLEASED THAT ALL THE TERRORISTS WERE APPREHENDED OR KILLED IN ACTION, AND THAT NO INNOCENT VICTIMS WERE HARMED. ASKED ABOUT REPORTS THAT THE PLF ABU ABBAS FACTION (PLF/AAF) WERE RESPONSIBLE FOR THE ATTACK, SPOKESMAN SAID THAT IF THIS TURNED OUT TO BE TRUE, THE ADMINISTRATION WOULD VIEW THIS AS A VERY SERIOUS MATTER. PRESSED ON WHAT THIS WOULD MEAN FOR THE FUTURE OF THE US/PLO DIALOGUE, SHE SAID THAT THE ADMINISTRATION DID NOT RULE ANYTHING OUT AND HAD NO CONCLUSIONS TO DRAW AT THIS TIME.

3. WE HAVE SPOKEN TO THE OFFICE OF COUNTERTERRORISM AND NEA IN STATE DEPARTMENT. THEY SAY THAT THEY HAVE NOT REACHED A FINAL DETERMINATION OF RESPONSIBILITY. THE ISRAELIS HAVE TOLD THEM THAT, UNDER INITIAL INTERROGATION, THOSE APPREHENDED CONFESSED TO BEING MEMBERS OF THE PLF/AAF, AND SAID THAT THEY WERE TO ATTACK CIVILIAN TARGETS IN THE TEL AVIV AREA. THEY APPARENTLY HAD MAPS OF TEL AVIV. THE ISRAELIS HAVE PROMISED FURTHER INFORMATION AND EVIDENCE. STATE SAY THAT THE ISRAELI INFORMATION, TAKEN WITH THE CLAIM IN THE NAME OF THE PLF/AAF ISSUED IN BAGHDAD, POINTS STRONGLY IN ONE DIRECTION, BUT THEY WILL BE GOING THROUGH ALL AVAILABLE EVIDENCE BEFORE REACHING A CONCLUSION.

4. STATE SAY THAT, IF THE ABU ABBAS FACTION WERE FOUND TO BE RESPONSIBLE, PROSPECTS FOR THE US/PLO DIALOGUE WOULD BE BLEAK. THE SCALE OF THE OPERATION MEANT THAT CONSIDERABLE ORGANISATION, MONEY AND TRAINING WERE INVOLVED. IT WOULD BE DIFFICULT TO ARGUE THAT THIS WAS THE WORK OF A FEW DISSIDENT MEMBERS. GIVEN

ABU ABBAS' POSITION AS A MEMBER OF THE PLO EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE, THE ATTACK INEVITABLY CALLED INTO QUESTION THE PLO'S RENUNCIATION OF TERRORISM. THE ISRAELIS HAD ALREADY MADE A DEMARCHE TO STATE DEPARTMENT TO HALT THE US/PLO DIALOGUE.

5. STATE SAID THAT PELLETREAU WOULD BE RECEIVING INSTRUCTIONS OVERNIGHT TO SEEK THE PLO'S RESPONSE. A FORTHRIGHT DENUNCIATION OF THE ATTACK WAS THE ABSOLUTE MINIMUM REQUIRED. IF THE PLF/AAF WERE FOUND TO BE RESPONSIBLE, THE ADMINISTRATION WOULD ALSO BE LOOKING FOR ACTION BY THE PLO AGAINST THEM - PROBABLY EXPULSION. BUT IT MIGHT TAKE A FEW DAYS BEFORE THE EVIDENCE OF RESPONSIBILITY WAS SUFFICIENTLY CLEAR FOR THEM TO PRESS THE PLO ON THIS.

COMMENT

6. CLEARLY MUCH WILL DEPEND ON ARAFAT'S RESPONSE TO THIS INCIDENT. BUT EVEN IF A PLO CONDEMNATION IS FORTHCOMING, THE ADMINISTRATION WILL COME UNDER INTENSE PRESSURE FROM THE PRO-ISRAEL LOBBY IN CONGRESS, WHO HAVE OPPOSED THE DIALOGUE FROM THE START, TO BRING IT TO AN END. AS OF TODAY, STATE ARE PESSIMISTIC ABOUT THE CHANCES OF SUSTAINING THE US/PLO DIALOGUE.

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