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FM WASHINGTON
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TELNO 2179
OF 072250Z SEPTEMBER 90
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GULF CRISIS: US/ISRAELI CONTACTS

SUMMARY

1. ISRAELIS ASSURE ADMINISTRATION THAT THEY WILL MAINTAIN LOW PROFILE, BUT SEEK INCREASED US ASSISTANCE ON INTELLIGENCE AND ARMS SUPPLIES. INCONCLUSIVE DISCUSSION ON ISRAEL/IRAQ RED LINES.

DETAIL

2. KURTZER BRIEFED US TODAY (7 SEPTEMBER) ON THE ADMINISTRATION'S CONTACTS WITH ISRAEL OVER IRAQ AND THE GULF CRISIS. HE SAID THAT THE DETAILS WERE BEING CLOSELY HELD WITHIN THE ADMINISTRATION AND ASKED THAT THEY BE SIMILARLY TREATED BY US.

3. KURTZER SAID THAT, IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING IRAQ'S INVASION OF KUWAIT, THE ISRAELIS HAD - FOR OBVIOUS REASONS - SOUGHT TO OPEN A HIGH-LEVEL DIALOGUE WITH THE ADMINISTRATION. THE INITIAL ADMINISTRATION RESPONSE WAS TO KEEP THEM AT ARM'S LENGTH. THEY URGED THE ISRAELIS TO LIE LOW - NOT TO FLY RECONNAISSANCE MISSIONS, NOT TO MOBILISE OR GIVE ANY OTHER PRETEXT FOR IRAQI ACTION - BUT REFUSED ALL SUGGESTIONS FOR HIGH-LEVEL MEETINGS. AFTER TWO WEEKS, AND WITH ISRAELI NERVOUSNESS STILL HIGH, BAKER AND CHENEY DECIDED THAT IT MIGHT BE BETTER TO ENGAGE THE ISRAELIS QUIETLY. THEIR MAIN PURPOSE WAS TO FIND OUT WHETHER THE ISRAELIS WERE CONTEMPLATING ANY ACTION WHICH WOULD JEOPARDISE THE GULF OPERATION, BUT THEY ALSO WANTED TO BRIEF THEM ON THE PROPOSED ARMS SALES TO SAUDI ARABIA AND HEAR THE ISRAELI ASSESSMENT OF THEIR ADDITIONAL MILITARY EQUIPMENT NEEDS. IT WAS DECIDED TO INVITE THE DIRECTOR GENERAL OF THE ISRAELI DEFENCE MINISTRY, DAVID IVRY, TO WASHINGTON FOR TALKS LAST WEEK. THE CHOICE OF IVRY WAS PARTLY TO KEEP THE CONSULTATION BELOW THE POLITICAL LEVEL AND PARTLY TO MAKE IT CREDIBLE TO PASS OFF HIS PRESENCE - SHOULD IT BECOME KNOWN - AS A ROUTINE CONSULTATION ON US MILITARY ASSISTANCE.

4. KURTZER SAID THAT THE MEETINGS HAD GONE WELL. IVRY HAD ASSURED THE ADMINISTRATION THAT ISRAEL UNDERSTOOD THAT IT WAS

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IN HER INTEREST TO LIE LOW AND LET THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY DEAL WITH IRAQ. (INDEED, IVRY HAD SAID THAT IT WOULD BE PREFERABLE IF THIS COULD BE DONE WITHOUT FORCE SO THAT THE WESTERN/ARAB CONSENSUS COULD BE MAINTAINED - KURTZER WAS NOT SURE HOW FAR THIS VIEW WAS SHARED WITHIN THE ISRAELI GOVERNMENT.)

5. BUT IVRY SAID THAT ISRAEL'S ABILITY TO MAINTAIN A LOW PROFILE WOULD BE DEPENDENT UPON US WILLINGNESS TO ASSIST IN ASSUAGING ISRAELI ANXIETIES. SPECIFICALLY, HE ASKED FOR INCREASED INTELLIGENCE SHARING (TO MAKE UP FOR THE LACK OF RECONNAISSANCE FLIGHTS), AND PRESENTED A SHOPPING LIST OF MILITARY EQUIPMENT. ON THE FORMER, THE ADMINISTRATION SAID THEY WOULD SEE WHAT THEY COULD DO. KURTZER SAID THEY MIGHT BE ABLE TO SPEED UP DELIVERY OR PROVIDE BETTER QUALITY MATERIAL. ON MILITARY EQUIPMENT, THE ADMINISTRATION WERE READY TO BE MORE FORTHCOMING, WITHIN THE LIMITS OF RESOURCE CONSTRAINTS, IN UPGRADING ISRAEL'S DEFENSIVE CAPABILITY. DISCUSSION FOCUSED ON PROVISION OF THE PATRIOT MISSILE SYSTEM. KURTZER SAID THAT, DESPITE LEVY'S PUBLIC STATEMENT IN WASHINGTON THIS WEEK THAT THE US HAD AGREED TO SUPPLY PATRIOT, NO DECISION HAD BEEN TAKEN. THERE WERE PROBLEMS: IT WAS EXPENSIVE, NOT IMMEDIATELY AVAILABLE AND NOT YET RELEASED TO NATO. KURTZER SAID OFFICIALS WERE PUTTING TOGETHER A PACKAGE COVERING INTELLIGENCE AND DEFENCE EQUIPMENT FOR BAKER'S ATTENTION ON HIS RETURN.

6. KURTZER SAID THAT DISCUSSION WITH IVRY OF ISRAELI QUOTE RED LINES UNQUOTE HAD BEEN INCONCLUSIVE. THE ISRAELIS HAD PRESENTED THEIR THREE MAJOR CONCERNS: ACTIVITY AT MISSILE SITES IN WESTERN IRAQ, IRAQI TROOP MOVEMENTS TOWARDS OR INTO JORDAN, ATTEMPTS TO DESTABILISE THE HASHEMITE REGIME. IVRY SAID THAT THE ISRAELI GOVERNMENT HAD GOT THE MESSAGE TO KING HUSSEIN THAT THEY WERE CONCERNED FOR THE STABILITY OF HIS KINGDOM. THE ADMINISTRATION HAD ARGUED THAT PRECIPITATE ACTION WOULD NOT BE JUSTIFIED IN THE CASE OF TROOP MOVEMENTS INTO JORDAN. ANY SERIOUS BUILD-UP WOULD TAKE TIME, AND TO REACT TO AN IRAQI FEINT WOULD BE PLAYING INTO THEIR HANDS. ON MISSILE ACTIVITY, KURTZER SAID THAT HIS IMPRESSION WAS THAT, EVEN HERE, ISRAELI RED LIINES WERE MORE PINK THAN RED, GIVEN THEIR PERCEIVED SELF INTEREST IN STAYING OUT OF THINGS.

7. KURTZER SAID THAT IVRY WAS TOLD THAT THE ADMINISTRATION SHOULD BE CONSULTED BEFORE ANY ISRAELI PRE-EMPTIVE ACTION. IVRY GAVE NO COMMITMENT, BUT REQUESTED THAT ISRAEL BE TOLD BEFORE THE US TOOK ANY MILITARY ACTION IN THE GULF. AGAIN, NO COMMITMENT WAS GIVEN BUT KURTZER THOUGHT THAT, SHOULD IT COME

TO MILITARY ACTION, THE US PROBABLY WOULD INFORM ISRAEL, IF ONLY TO ENSURE THAT THERE WAS NO MIS-IDENTIFICATION.

8. KURTZER SAID THAT, ALTHOUGH THE ISRAELIS HAD BEEN ELUSIVE ON THEIR RED LINES, THE EARLIER PARTS OF THE DISCUSSION HAD CONVINCED THE ADMINISTRATION THAT THE ISRAELIS WERE SERIOUS ABOUT NOT GETTING INVOLVED AND HAD NOT FELT THE NEED TO PRESS THEM. HE ADDED THAT THE LEVY VISIT (MY TELNO 2162) HAD NOT TAKEN THE DISCUSSION ANY FURTHER. ARENS WAS THE NEXT VISITOR (DUE AT THE END OF NEXT WEEK ON A PRIVATE VISIT). ALTHOUGH HE WAS LIKELY TO ASK FOR OFFICIAL CALLS KURTZER DOUBTED WHETHER THE ADMINISTRATION WOULD BE IN A POSITION TO SAY MORE BY THEN.

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