

Middle East
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FM FCO 261900Z MAR 81
TO IMMEDIATE WASHINGTON
TELEGRAM NUMBER 498 OF 26 MARCH.

YOUR TELNO 987 OF 24 MARCH : CALL ON HAIG : MIDDLE EAST

1. HAIG'S REFERENCE TO 'THE HEAVY HAND OF ARAFAT IN EL SALVADOR' ECHOES WHAT CASEY HAD TO SAY WHEN HE MET THE LORD PRIVY SEAL ON 19 FEBRUARY WHEN HE REFERRED TO 'AN ARAFAT MISSION IN EL SALVADOR' AND TO THE PLO TRAINING 200 PEOPLE. WE WERE SCEPTICAL, AND THROUGH OTHER CHANNELS ASKED FOR FURTHER INFORMATION FROM THE CIA. FOR YOUR OWN INFORMATION THE CIA COMMENTED THAT THEY HAD RECEIVED A REPORT THAT SOME PLO ADVISERS WERE SERVING WITH SALVADORIAN INSURGENTS BUT THAT THEY REGARDED THE REPORT AS UNCONFIRMED AS THEY HAD NO OTHER EVIDENCE OF SUCH ASSISTANCE. THE CIA DID, HOWEVER, SAY THAT THEY HAD A SUBSTANTIAL AMOUNT OF EVIDENCE INDICATING THAT THE PLO HAVE FOR SOME TIME TRAINED SALVADORIANS AT CAMPS IN THE MIDDLE EAST. NO MENTION WAS, HOWEVER, MADE OF THE FIGURE OF 200.

2. IT SEEMS TO US POSSIBLE THAT ARAFAT HAS HAD LINKS WITH EL SALVADORIAN REBELS (AS WITH SOME OTHER CENTRAL AND SOUTH AMERICANS) AND THAT SOME MAY HAVE BEEN TRAINED EITHER IN LEBANON OR SYRIA. WE HAVE SEEN A REPORT OF A VISIT BY THE EL SALVADORIAN COMMUNIST LEADER SHAFIQ MANDAL TO DAMASCUS, INCLUDING PUBLIC CONTACT WITH THE PALESTINE NATIONAL COUNCIL. BUT INFORMATION WE HAVE SEEN DOES NOT BACK UP THE SORT OF CLAIM BEING MADE BY CASEY NOR DO WE CONSIDER ON THE EVIDENCE AVAILABLE TO US THAT THE IMPORTANCE HAIG APPEARS TO ATTACH TO PLO INVOLVEMENT IN EL SALVADOR IS JUSTIFIED.

3. THIS IS OBVIOUSLY VERY DELICATE BUT WE SHOULD BE GRATEFUL IF YOU COULD FOLLOW UP HAIG'S COMMENT IN WHATEVER WAY YOU FEEL APPROPRIATE, WITHOUT OF COURSE REFERRING TO THE CIA COMMENT ABOVE. WE SHOULD LIKE TO KNOW WHETHER THE AMERICANS HAVE ANY FURTHER EVIDENCE NOT

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S E C R E T

S E C R E T

3619 - 1

AVAILABLE TO US FOR THE STATEMENTS SUGGESTING LARGE SCALE PLO SUPPORT FOR THE EL SALVADOR REBELS. IT WOULD ALSO BE INTERESTING TO KNOW WHAT THE AMERICANS' SOURCES ARE. COULD THEY POSSIBLY BE ISRAELI ?

4. WE SEEM TO HAVE HAD SOME SUCCESS IN PERSUADING THE PLO TO DROP ANY CONNECTION WITH THE IRA, AND THEY NOW PUBLICLY TAKE THE LINE THAT THEIR STRUGGLE RELATES ONLY TO PALESTINE. WOULD THE AMERICANS LIKE US TO TAKE UP WITH THEM THEIR ALLEGED MEDDLING IN EL SALVADOR?

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