

SECRET

285 - 1

ZZ PARIS

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TO FLASH PARIS

TELEGRAM NUMBER 415 OF 27 OCTOBER.

INFO IMMEDIATE MODUK (AUS (D STAFF)), ACDS (OPS) DS5, DNOT),  
WASHINGTON

INFO SAVING BONN, JEDDA, BAGHDAD, MUSCAT, KUWAIT, ABU DHABI,  
DUBAI, DOHA, BAHRAIN, UKMIS NEW YORK, MOSCOW, UKDEL NATO

FOR BULLARD

WASHINGTON TELEGRAMS NOS 4390 AND 4391: DEFENCE ISSUES IN THE  
PERSIAN GULF

1. IT IS CLEAR FROM BARTHOLOMEW'S COMMENTS RECORDED IN WASHINGTON TUR THAT ALTHOUGH THERE HAS RECENTLY APPEARED TO BE A GREATER DEGREE OF MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING IN THE NAVY-TO-NAVY TALKS IN LONDON, THERE IN FACT REMAINS A WIDE GULF BETWEEN THE AMERICANS AND OURSELVES OVER CONTINGENCY PLANNING FOR THE STRAITS OF HORMUZ.
2. AS WE SEE IT, THE ROOT OF THE PROBLEM IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN US IN THE UNDERLYING CONCEPT. FOR OUR PART WE HAVE ALWAYS MAINTAINED THAT IT IS HARD TO ENVISAGE CIRCUMSTANCES IN WHICH NAVAL ACTION IN ADVANCE OF A STOPPAGE OF SHIPPING WOULD NOT PROVOKE PRECISELY THE DANGERS WHICH WE HOPE TO AVOID. INDEED, WE CONTINUE TO BE CONCERNED ABOUT THE RISK OF PRECIPITATE ACTION. WE NOTE THAT BARTHOLOMEW STATES THE FIRM US VIEW THAT ACTION SHOULD BE TAKEN TO PREVENT A STANDSTILL. WE HAVE HOWEVER YET TO VISUALISE A CIRCUMSTANCE WHICH TAKES THE RISKS SIGNIFICANTLY BEYOND THE PRESENT POSITION BUT FALLS SHORT OF ONE IN WHICH FORCE IS USED OR THREATENED, THUS EFFECTIVELY CLOSING THE STRAITS. FROM THIS DIFFERENCE SPRINGS THE GAP IN OUR OPERATIONAL CONCEPTS.
3. IN OUR VIEW SHIPPING MIGHT BE BROUGHT TO A STANDSTILL NOT ONLY BY HOSTILE (IE IRANIAN) ACTION BUT BY THREAT OF ACTION. A THREAT MIGHT TAKE THE FORM EITHER OF A DECLARATION THAT IRAN HAD QUOTE CLOSED UNQUOTE THE STRAITS AND WOULD REGARD AS HOSTILE ANY VESSEL ATTEMPTING PASSAGE, OR A STATEMENT THAT IRAN HAD MINED

1

SECRET

THE STRAITS. IN EITHER CASE WE BELIEVE THAT TO ALL INTENTS AND PURPOSES, AND ALMOST REGARDLESS OF THE CREDIBILITY OF THE THREAT, MERCHANT SHIPPING WOULD BE BROUGHT TO A STANDSTILL. THUS A THREAT WOULD HAVE MUCH THE SAME EFFECT AS AN OUT-OF-THE-BLUE ATTACK ON A MERCHANT VESSEL (EG BY AIRCRAFT OR SURFACE SHIPPING). AS WE SEE IT, THEREFORE, THE MOST IMPORTANT CONTINGENCY FOR WHICH TO PLAN IS ONE IN WHICH THE TASK WILL BE TO BRING ABOUT AN EARLY RESUMPTION OF MERCHANT TRAFFIC THROUGH THE STRAITS AFTER THEY HAVE BEEN CLOSED EITHER BY FORCE OR BY THREAT OF FORCE.

4. IT IS NOT CLEAR WHAT IS MEANT BY BARTHOLOMEW'S STATEMENT THAT THE US BELIEVE THAT THE NAVIES SHOULD ACT TO PREVENT A STANDSTILL. IT IS PRECISELY IN ORDER TO DETER THE USE OR THE THREAT OF FORCE THAT WE HAVE POSITIONED SURFACE VESSELS IN THE GULF OF OMAN. IT IS OUR HOPE THAT THIS ACTION (WHICH, INCIDENTALLY, TAKEN TOGETHER WITH THE US NAVAL PRESENCE IN THE PERSIAN GULF AND THE US AND FRENCH PRESENCE OUTSIDE IN FACT ALREADY AMOUNT TO A ZONAL OR SECTORAL APPROACH) WILL REMAIN A SUFFICIENT DETERRENT TO PREVENT A CLOSURE. BUT IN OUR VIEW TO DO MORE IN PRESENT CIRCUMSTANCES WHEN SHIPPING IS PASSING NORMALLY THROUGH THE GULF RUNS THE RISK OF BEING REGARDED AS PROVOCATIVE.

5. FROM THIS BASIC DIFFERENCE OF VIEW OF THE SCENARIO APPEARS TO STEM THE GAP BETWEEN OUR CONCEPT AND THAT OF THE AMERICANS ABOUT ESCORTING. THE ESSENTIAL POINT IS THAT, FOLLOWING A CLOSURE OF THE STRAITS, NAVIES ON THE SPOT WILL HAVE TO TAKE WHATEVER ACTION IS REQUIRED TO RE-ESTABLISH THE CONFIDENCE OF SHIPPERS AND INSURERS. IT REMAINS OUR VIEW THAT NOTHING SHORT OF ARRANGEMENTS FOR ESCORTING GROUPS OF SHIPS, AT LEAST IN THE FIRST INSTANCE, WILL DO THIS. BARTHOLOMEW APPEARS TO RECOGNISE THIS IN HIS SUGGESTION FOR A COMPROMISE (LAST SENTENCE OF PARA 4 OF WASHINGTON TELNO 4390).

6. AS REGARDS THE FRENCH, WE ENTIRELY ACCEPT THAT THE AMERICANS ARE WORKING WITHIN WHAT THEY UNDERSTAND TO BE POLITICALLY TOLERABLE LIMITS. BUT HERE AGAIN THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN US ARISES FROM THE CIRCUMSTANCES IN WHICH WE AND THE AMERICANS ENVISAGE THE USE OF NAVAL VESSELS. WE UNDERSTAND

SECRET

285 - 1

THAT THE FRENCH HAVE SAID THEY WOULD CONSIDER JOINT OPERATIONS ONLY IN EXTREMIS. A SHIPPING STANDSTILL IN THE GULF WOULD SURELY BE A CONTINGENCY SUFFICIENTLY EXTREME TO WARRANT CO-OPERATION IN THE KIND OF COURSE OF ACTION WE ENVISAGE.

7. GRATEFUL IF BULLARD COULD MAKE THE POINTS IN PARAGRAPHS 2 TO 6 ABOVE TO HIS US INTERLOCUTOR. HE COULD ADD THAT, IF NOTHING ELSE, BARTHOLOMEW'S COMMENTS HAD REVEALED THAT, IN SPITE OF APPARENT PROGRESS IN THE NAVY-TO-NAVY TALKS, THERE WAS STILL A CONSIDERABLE DIFFERENCE, PERHAPS BECAUSE OF BASIC MISUNDERSTANDING. THIS REINFORCED OUR VIEW THAT THERE WAS AN URGENT NEED FOR WIDER CONSULTATIONS, NOT ONLY AT THE MILITARY LEVEL, BUT ALSO AT THE POLITICAL.

CARRINGTON

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3

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