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TO PRIORITY FCO

TELEGRAM NUMBER 236 OF 4 MAY, 1981

INFO ROUTINE TEHRAN UKMIS NEW YORK AMMAN STOCKHOLM
SAVING JEDDA WASHINGTON UKDEL NATO MODUK (FOR DI4) NEW DELHI

MY TEL NO 224 AND TEHRAN TELNO 152: IRAQ/IRAN

1. AT A ROUTINE MEETING OF EC REPRESENTATIVES HERE ON 2 MAY, WE COMPARED NOTES ON THE CONTRADICTIONARY REPORTS ABOUT RECENT FIGHTING IN THE CENTRAL SECTOR OF THE LAND FRONTIER. THE CONSENSUS WAS AS FOLLOWS.
2. AN IRANIAN ATTACK MOUNTED ABOUT 13 APRIL FROM ILAM PROVINCE BY REVOLUTIONARY GUARDS AND PARATROOPERS, WITH SOME AIR SUPPORT, HAD MADE INITIAL GAINS. THE IRANIAN CLAIMED CAPTURE OF A RIDGE INSIDE IRAQ CALLED THE LANOON HEIGHTS (NOT MARKED ON ANY MAPS AVAILABLE TO US). ABOUT 18 APRIL THE OFFENSIVE PETERED OUT AND THE IRAQIS REGAINED CONTROL OF AREAS INSIDE IRAQ. FIGHTING WAS BITTER AND BOTH SIDES SUSTAINED HIGHER THAN USUAL LOSSES.
3. ABOUT 25 APRIL AN IRAQI COUNTER ATTACK BEGAN IN THE SERBIL ZAHAB REGION, EAST OF QASR-I-SHIRIN ON THE KERMANSHAH ROAD, AND ALSO AT GAILAN GHARB ABOUT 10 KILOMETRES FURTHER SOUTH. ARMOUR WAS USED AND SIX IRANIAN VILLAGES CAPTURED, WITH CLAIMS OF HEAVY LOSSES BY IRAN IN MEN AND EQUIPMENT. IRANIAN DEAD WERE PUT AT 1703 OVER 6 DAYS. IRAQI CASUALTIES WERE ADMITTED TO BE 221 OVER THE SAME PERIOD, BUT THIS FIGURE SHOULD BE MULTIPLIED BY ABOUT FIVE. A SMALL NUMBER OF AIRCRAFT ON EACH SIDE WERE SHOT DOWN, AND SOME TANKS KNOCKED OUT.
4. ROCALVE (FRANCE) SAID THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS BITTER BUT LOCALISED FIGHTING WAS THAT IT MARKED THE COLLAPSE OF THE IRANIAN SPRING OFFENSIVE FOR WHICH THE IRAQIS HAD BEEN WAITING SO ANXIOUSLY IN MID-APRIL. HIS PEOPLE WHO HAD VISITED THE MINISTRY OF DEFENCE HERE DURING THE SERBIL ZAHAB COUNTER-ATTACK HAD FOUND THE IRAQIS SUPREMELY CONFIDENT ABOUT ITS OUTCOME. NOW THEY WERE WAITING FOR THE TERRAIN IN KHUZISTAN TO DRY OUT. BUT IT WAS NO (NO) LONGER EXPECTED THAT THERE WOULD BE A BIG IRAQI PUSH THERE BETWEEN MID-MAY AND MID-JUNE, WHICH MARKED THE END OF THE SPRING FIGHTING SEASON.
5. MORALE. JOHNS (DENMARK) ASKED WHAT EFFECT WAS DISCERNIBLE ON CIVILIAN MORALE IN BAGHDAD AND ELSEWHERE AS A RESULT OF THESE CLASHES. I SAID THAT THE GENERAL FEELING SEEMED TO BE CONCERN

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AT THE NUMBER OF ADMITTED IRAQI CASUALTIES. YET ANOTHER RECENT DECREE ANNOUNCING INCREASED BENEFITS IN CASH AND IN KIND FOR THE FAMILIES OF THOSE KILLED IN ACTION SHOWED THAT THE AUTHORITIES WERE AWARE OF THIS CONCERN. WHILE THE IRAQI PROPAGANDA MACHINE WAS MAKING THE MOST OF THE VICTORY AT SERBIL ZAHAB (WHICH PRESIDENT HUSSAIN IS NOW REPORTED TO HAVE VISITED, ETC.) THE INCIDENTS THERE AND AT THE LANOON HEIGHTS COULD BE SEEN AS PART OF THE PROCESS IN WHICH BOTH SIDES WEAKENED EACH OTHER, THEREBY BRINGING THE LIKELIHOOD OF A NEGOTIATED SETTLEMENT NEARER. NOBODY HAD A DATE FOR PALME'S NEXT VISIT, THOUGH THE ISLAMIC CONFERENCE AND NAM CONCILIATION EFFORTS REMAINED IN ORBIT.

6. ALL AGREED THAT IT WOULD TAKE A LITTLE LONGER FOR THE FULL SIGNIFICANCE OF THESE RECENT CLASHES TO BECOME APPARENT. WE ARE HAMPERED BY THE FACT THAT NO JOURNALISTS OR DEFENCE ATTACHES HAVE BEEN PERMITTED TO VISIT ANY OF THE FRONTS RECENTLY.

FCO PASS SAVING ADDRESSEES

EGERTON

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