

CONFIDENTIAL

GRS 600

CONFIDENTIAL

FM WASHINGTON 231850Z FEB 84

TO PRIORITY FCO

TELEGRAM NUMBER 618 OF 23 FEBRUARY

INFO BAGHDAD, TEHRAN, AMMAN, PARIS, UKMIS NEW YORK, UKDEL NATO
AND GULF POSTS

FCO TELNO 333: ARMS SALES TO IRAN

SUMMARY

1. LEAHY TOLD AMBASSADOR FAIRBANKS THAT UK WAS NOT A MAJOR SUPPLIER TO REGION. UK POLICY TO SUPPLY NO LETHAL WEAPONS TO EITHER SIDE, BUT IN PRACTICE HAD BEEN MORE FAVOURABLE TO IRAQ. UK WELL AWARE OF U S CONCERNS AND KEEN TO KEEP IN TOUCH. FAIRBANKS NOT DISPOSED TO PRESS THE ISSUE: APPARENTLY SUBDUED IN WAKE OF GUARDIAN LEAK.

DETAIL

2. LEAHY WENT OVER UK POLICY ON ARMS SALES TO IRAQ WITH AMBASSADOR FAIRBANKS ON 22 FEBRUARY. HE SAID THAT THE UK WISHED TO CONSULT CLOSELY ON THIS AND ALL OTHER GULF ISSUES. WE WERE IN NO SENSE A MAJOR SUPPLIER TO THE REGION. WE HAD TAKEN THE DECISION TO SELL NO LETHAL WEAPONS TO EITHER SIDE. THERE WAS NO LEGAL DEFINITION OF LETHAL IN THE UK; IN PRACTICE WE HAD INTERPRETED THE TERM MORE LIBERALLY FOR IRAQ THAN IRAN. WE HAD SUPPLIED NOTHING TO IRAN THAT WE CONSIDERED MILITARILY SIGNIFICANT: THIS WOULD CONTINUE TO BE OUR POLICY. BUT A FIRM DECISION HAD BEEN TAKEN TO LET THE SHIPS GO. IF THE AMERICANS STUDIED THE DETAILED INFORMATION ABOUT THEM (WHICH LEAHY READ OUT) THEY WOULD SEE THAT THEY WOULD NOT AFFECT THE FIGHTING BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES.

3. FAIRBANKS SAID THAT THE U S CONTINUED TO HOPE THAT NEITHER SIDE WOULD WIN A CLEAR VICTORY IN THE CONFLICT. IN THE U S VIEW, IRAN WAS THE MORE INTRANSIGENT, HENCE THE INTEREST IN ARMS SALES TO THAT COUNTRY IN PARTICULAR. HE ACKNOWLEDGED THE LIMITED NATURE OF UK SALES (AND SHOWED LITTLE INTEREST IN THE SHIPS) BUT ADDED THAT THERE WAS ALSO A PRESENTATIONAL, POLITICAL DIMENSION TO ANY SALE. U S CONCERN, HOWEVER, WAS DIRECTED PARTICULARLY AT THE ACTIVITIES OF OTHER EUROPEANS, WHO WERE SELLING ITEMS THAT WOULD ENHANCE IRAN'S ABILITY TO PROJECT ITS POWER. THE U S HOPED THAT THE UK MIGHT BE ABLE TO BRING ITS OWN INFLUENCE TO BEAR IN SUCH CASES.

4. LEAHY SAID THAT THE UK HAD NO INTENTION OF SELLING ITEMS SUCH AS MINES OR PATROL BOATS. NOR HAD WE ANY EVIDENCE OF BRITISH EXPERTS WORKING WITH THE IRANIAN ARMED FORCES; THERE WERE CERTAINLY NO SERVING BRITISH OFFICERS OR MEN INVOLVED. OUR LICENSING PROCEDURES WOULD ALSO RULE OUT ITEMS SUCH AS GUN BARRELS OR AMMUNITION. BUT IN OUR VIEW THE CASE OF AUTOMOTIVE AND ELECTRICAL SPARE PARTS FOR ARMoured VEHICLES, ABOUT WHICH WE KNEW THE AMERICANS TO BE CONCERNED, WAS MUCH LESS CLEAR CUT. A FINAL DECISION HAD NOT BEEN REACHED ON THESE. **CONFIDENTIAL**

CONFIDENTIAL

5. FAIRBANKS WELCOMED LEAHY'S ASSURANCE THAT WE WERE WELL AWARE OF U S CONCERNS AND WOULD CONTINUE TO BE CIRCUMSPECT. ON THE SPECIFIC ISSUE OF SPARE PARTS FOR ARMoured VEHICLES, HE SAID THAT THE U S WOULD BE GRATEFUL FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION BEFORE A FINAL DECISION WAS TAKEN. LEAHY AGREED.

6. FAIRBANKS AND HIS COLLEAGUES TOOK A SOMEWHAT SUBDUED LINE THROUGHOUT THIS EXCHANGE, PROBABLY AS A RESULT OF EMBARRASSMENT OVER THE GUARDIAN REPORT FROM WASHINGTON OF OFFICIAL U S ANGER AT ALLEGED BRITISH SALES. HE APOLOGISED AT LENGTH FOR THE LEAK AND AGREED THAT THE ISSUE SHOULD BE DISCUSSED PRIVATELY AND CALMLY. WHEN LEAHY TOUCHED ON IT SUBSEQUENTLY WITH KEMP (NSC), THE LATTER READILY AGREED THAT OUR SALES SHOULD BE SEEN IN THEIR PROPER PROPORTION.

WRIGHT

IRAN/IRAQ

STANDARD

MED
NENAD
NAD
UND
SOV D
ECD
MAED
ESSD

ERD
ESID
CONS D
CONS EM UNIT
DEFENCE DEPT
MR EGERTON
MR J THOMAS
CABINET OFFICE

ADDITIONAL DISTRIBUTION

IRAN/IRAQ

2
CONFIDENTIAL