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TO IMMEDIATE FCO

TELEGRAM NUMBER 2976 OF 14 OCTOBER

INFO PRIORITY PARIS UKMIS NEW YORK

MY TELNO 2964: IRAN/IRAQ

1. ADMIRAL HOWE ASKED MINISTER TO CALL THIS MORNING TO GO OVER THE OUTLINE OF THE CONTINGENCY PLANNING THE AMERICANS WERE DOING ON THE THREAT OF ESCALATION IN THE GULF, IN PREPARATION FOR THE POLITICO-MILITARY DISCUSSIONS NEXT WEEK. RAPHEL AND SOKOLSKY WERE PRESENT.

2. HOWE WAS HIS USUAL DISCREET SELF AND NOT MUCH IN PRACTICE WAS ADDED TO WHAT WE HAVE ALREADY REPORTED (MY TELEGRAM UNDER REFERENCE AND EARLIER TELEGRAMS IN THIS SERIES). HOWE SAID THAT THE INTER-AGENCY WORK ON THIS QUESTION HAD STILL NOT BEEN COMPLETED. IT WAS BASED ON THE HYPOTHESIS THAT IRAQI ATTACKS ON IRANIAN OIL EXPORTS COULD LEAD TO THE FOLLOWING IRANIAN ESCALATORY RESPONSES:

- (I) ATTACKS ON THE IRAQI/TURKEY PIPELINE:
- (II) ATTACKS ON GULF STATE PORTS AND OIL INSTALLATIONS:
- (III) BLOCKADE OF GULF STATE OIL EXPORT TERMINALS:
- (IV) ATTACKS ON TANKERS GOING TO OR FROM GULF STATE OIL TERMINALS:
- (V) ATTEMPTED CLOSURE OF THE STRAITS OF HORMUZ, WHICH COULD INVOLVE:
  - (A) A DECLARATION THAT THE PERSIAN GULF WAS CLOSED TO SHIPPING:
  - (B) MINING OR BLOCKADE OF THE STRAIT:
  - (C) ATTACKS ON SHIPPING.

YOU WILL SEE THAT THESE SCENARIOS ARE BASICALLY THE SAME AS THOSE COVERED IN THE NON-PAPER WHICH THE US EMBASSY IN LONDON HANDED OVER IN AUGUST, BUT WITH THE ADDITION OF THE POSSIBILITY OF AN ATTACK ON THE IRAQ/TURKEY PIPELINE. THE AMERICANS DO NOT THINK THIS LIKELY BUT HAVE INCLUDED IT FOR COMPLETENESS.

3. HOWE SAID THAT THEY WERE STILL TRYING TO THINK THEIR WAY THROUGH THESE VARIOUS SCENARIOS. HE MADE IT CLEAR THAT THE EARLY POSSIBLE RESPONSES TO ANY OF THEM WERE CONFINED TO DIPLOMATIC AND PRECAUTIONARY MOVES DESIGNED TO DISCOURAGE ANY FURTHER ESCALATION. THEY WOULD BE KEEN, AT THE APPROPRIATE MOMENT, TO DISCUSS WITH OURSELVES AND WITH OTHERS WHAT MUTUALLY REINFORCING ACTION WE COULD EACH TAKE. HE SAW THE PRESENT EXERCISE IN THE UN AS FITTING INTO THIS KIND OF APPROACH. UNILATERAL OR COLLECTIVE STATEMENTS ABOUT QUOTE VITAL INTERESTS UNQUOTE MIGHT BE ANOTHER. HE REGARDED THE DEPLOYMENT OF USS RANGER TO THE INDIAN OCEAN AND THE PASSAGE OF THE INVINCIBLE TASK FORCE THROUGH THE INDIAN OCEAN AS BEING SIGNALS OF A DIFFERENT KIND BUT ALSO HELPFUL IN GIVING WARNING ABOUT THE DANGERS OF ESCALATION. THESE WERE PART OF WHAT HE DESCRIBED AS A VISIBLE BUT NOT PROVOCATIVE DISPLAY OF FORCE.

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4. HOWE SAID THAT ON PRESENT PLANS THIS WOULD BE DISCUSSED AT A MEETING OF THE NSC NEXT WEEK. HE SEEMED AT FIRST TO BE SAYING THAT IT WOULD BE DIFFICULT FOR THE AMERICANS TO GO INTO MUCH DETAIL WITH US UNTIL THAT DISCUSSION HAD TAKEN PLACE. THOMAS ARGUED THE CASE FOR HAVING SUBSTANTIVE EVEN IF NON-COMMITTAL DISCUSSION WITH US ABOUT THE OPTIONS BEFORE RATHER THAN AFTER THE NSC DISCUSSION. HE PRESUMED THAT IT WOULD BE POSSIBLE THEN TO FACTOR BRITISH VIEWS INTO AMERICAN THINKING BEFORE FINAL DECISIONS WERE TAKEN. HOWE SEEMED TO ACCEPT THIS (RAPHEL CERTAINLY DID) AND IT WAS AGREED THAT WE SHOULD AIM NEXT WEEK AT THE MOST FRANK AND OPEN DISCUSSION POSSIBLE, ALBEIT WITHOUT COMMITMENT AT THIS STAGE ON EITHER SIDE.

5. THOMAS MADE THE POINT TO HOWE (AND RUBBED IT IN SUBSEQUENTLY IN PRIVATE DISCUSSION WITH RAPHEL) THAT IT WOULD BE VERY IMPORTANT NOT TO SPRING SURPRISES ON THE ALLIES. THE MORE THE AMERICANS COULD SHARE THEIR THOUGHTS WITH US THE BETTER. IT WAS ONLY BY THIS MEANS THAT THEY WOULD GET A SENSE OF WHERE THEY COULD LOOK TO US FOR SUPPORT AND WHERE NOT.

6. THE AMERICANS ARE IN TWO MINDS ABOUT THE IDEA OF MULTI-LATERAL DISCUSSION OF THESE QUESTIONS. THEY FEEL FOR EXAMPLE THAT TO BRING IN THE FRENCH MAY BE COUNTER-PRODUCTIVE: THEY GET A GOOD DEAL FROM THE FRENCH IN BILATERAL DISCUSSIONS BETWEEN NAVIES, BUT THE RESULTS GET PROGRESSIVELY WEAKER THE MORE THE QUAI D'ORSAY GETS DRAWN INTO IT. ON THE OTHER HAND, THEY RECOGNISE THAT IT WOULD BE DESIRABLE TO FIND SOME WAY OF MULTI-LATERALISING RESPONSES TO PARTICULAR CONTINGENCIES THAT MIGHT ARISE AND THEY RECOGNISE THE DESIRABILITY OF WORKING FOR THIS IN ADVANCE. ONE OF THE THINGS THEY WILL HOPE TO DISCUSS WITH US NEXT WEEK IS HOW THIS MIGHT BEST BE DONE.

7. RAPHEL MENTIONED THE IDEA THAT WE MIGHT BE INTERESTED IN EXPLORING THE POSSIBILITY OF SOME ARRANGEMENT BETWEEN GULF USERS. WHAT DID WE HAVE IN MIND? THE AMERICANS SAW NO LIKELIHOOD OF GETTING THE IRANIANS AND IRAQIS TOGETHER ROUND A TABLE IF THAT WAS WHAT WE WERE THINKING OF. AT THE SAME TIME RAPHEL RECOGNISED THAT IT MIGHT SEEM CONFRONTATIONAL TO HAVE A MEETING OF GULF USERS THAT EXCLUDED THE IRANIANS AND IRAQIS. THOMAS SAID THAT IF WE WERE THINKING OF SOMETHING ON THESE LINES IT WOULD NO DOUBT COME UP IN THE DISCUSSIONS NEXT WEEK.

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