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CABINET OFFICE D I O

CONFIDENTIAL

DESKBY FCO 151600Z

DESKBY MOD 151600Z

FROM KUWAIT 151420Z MAY 84

TO IMMEDIATE FCO

TELNO 191 OF 15 MAY

AND TO IMMEDIATE MOD UK (FOR D14C AND D117)

FOR INFORMATION IMMEDIATE GULF POSTS, TEHRAN, BAGHDAD,
WASHINGTON, PARIS, STOCKHOLM, UKMIS NEW YORK, UKDEL NATO, UKDEL
OECD AND UKREP BRUSSELS.

FCO TELNO 317 TO BAGHDAD: ATTACKS ON SHIPPING IN THE GULF.

1. THERE IS STILL NO OFFICIAL KUWAITI RESPONSE TO THE ATTACKS ON UMM CASBAH AND THE BAHRA, THOUGH SOMETHING MAY COME SOON, WITH AN UNSCHEDULED CABINET MEETING TODAY AND THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY HAVING GONE INTO CLOSED SESSION. GENERAL OPINION HERE IS FAIRLY EVENLY DIVIDED ABOUT RESPONSIBILITY, THOUGH THE PRESS ARE STILL LINKING THE ATTACKS TO PRESIDENT KHAME'NI'S WARNING TO SHIPPING IN THE GULF OF 11 MAY. KOTC FIRMLY BELIEVE IRAN IS TO BLAME AND REPORT THE BULGARIAN CREW ON THE BAHRA TO HAVE SPOTTED IRANIAN MARKINGS ON THE PLANES.

2. I THINK KOTC IS RIGHT. THE METHOD OF ATTACK IS MARKEDLY DIFFERENT FROM PREVIOUS IRAQI ATTACKS AND THE IRANIANS HAVE A MUCH STRONGER MOTIVE TO THREATEN THE NORMAL UPLIFTING OF OIL FROM KUWAITI PORTS THAN THE IRAQIS.

DIFFERENT FROM PREVIOUS IRAQI ATTACKS AND THE IRANIANS HAVE A MUCH STRONGER MOTIVE TO THREATEN THE NORMAL UPLIFTING OF OIL FROM KUWAITI PORTS THAN THE IRACIS.

3. IF THIS REPRESENTS THE START OF REGULAR ATTACKS ON SHIPPING INTO KUWAIT, THE KUWAITIS HAVE A MAJOR PROBLEM ON THEIR BACKS. IT IS ESSENTIAL FOR KUWAIT THAT THE FREE MOVEMENT OF SHIPS SHOULD CONTINUE, BUT THERE IS LITTLE THEY CAN DO ABOUT THEIR OWN PROTECTION. KUWAIT HAS NO WARSHIPS TO PROTECT TANKERS AND ITS SMALL AIR SPACE PRECLUDES PROTECTION BY THE KUWAIT AIR FORCE. THE CHAIRMAN OF KOTC HAS SAID PRIVATELY THAT HE WOULD LIKE TO ARM HIS SHIPS, POSSIBLY WITH STINGER MISSILES, BUT WE DO NOT TAKE THIS TOO SERIOUSLY. MEASURES ALREADY TAKEN BY KOTC HAVE BEEN TO ORDER MASTERS TO SAIL FULL STEAM AHEAD (22 KNOTS) FROM AHMADI TO RASTANDURA AND TO SAIL AT NIGHT. IN THE SHORT TERM THIS MAY PREVENT ATTACKS, BOTH OF WHICH SO FAR HAVE TAKEN THE FORM OF A SPOTTER AIRCRAFT FINDING THE SHIP AND THEN BEING FOLLOWED IN BY TWO FIGHTERS, BUT SUCH MEASURES WOULD NOT PREVENT A DETERMINED CAMPAIGN.
4. GIVEN THEIR INABILITY TO DEFEND THEIR SHIPPING, THE KUWAITIS WILL BE LOOKING FOR OTHER WAYS TO ENSURE PROTECTION, PERHAPS INCLUDING AN APPEAL FOR ASSISTANCE EITHER FROM WITHIN THE GCC OR FROM OTHER FRIENDLY COUNTRIES. EFFECTIVE GCC ACTION WOULD REQUIRE A GREATER DEGREE OF INTELLIGENCE COOPERATION BETWEEN, IN PARTICULAR, KUWAIT, SAUDI ARABIA AND OMAN THAN TAKES PLACE AT PRESENT. IT MIGHT BE ENVISAGE SHIPS MOVING IN CONVOY (WITH THE IRACIS GIVEN DETAILS TO REDUCE THE RISK OF ATTACK FROM THAT QUARTER). A MORE LIKELY VARIATION COULD BE BILATERAL COOPERATION WITH SAUDI ARABIA, IN PARTICULAR THE USE OF INTELLIGENCE FROM THEIR AWACS, IF THE SAUDIS ARE PREPARED TO ALLOW THIS. THE MATTER WILL PRESUMABLY BE HIGH ON THE ACENDA OF DISCUSSIONS BETWEEN THE KUWAITIS AND THE SAUDI DEFENCE MINISTER, PRINCE SULTAN, WHO ARRIVED IN KUWAIT TODAY ON A PREVIOUSLY ARRANGED OFFICIAL VISIT. ALTERNATIVELY, THE KUWAITIS MIGHT APPEAL TO OTHER FRIENDLY COUNTRIES TO PROVIDE NAVAL SUPPORT FOR CONVOYS. I ASSUME THEY WOULD TURN TO THE US FIRST, FOR PRACTICAL REASONS (MY TELNO 189, NOT TO ALL).
5. THE PICTURE MAY BECOME CLEARER AFTER TODAY'S CABINET MEETING. ON PAST FORM THE KUWAITIS ARE UNLIKELY TO NAME NAMES. NOR DO I THINK THAT, EVEN IF THEY ARE SURE IN PRIVATE THAT THE IRANIANS ARE RESPONSIBLE, THEY WILL ENVISAGE PRE-EMPTIVE MILITARY ACTION. THE MOST LIKELY OUTCOME IS THAT, IF THERE ARE MORE ATTACKS ON THEIR SHIPS, THE KUWAITIS WILL CONTINUE TO FILL AND DESPATCH THEIR TANKERS BUT WILL REACT DEFENSIVELY AND MORE VIGOROUSLY.
6. ON A POINT OF DETAIL WE HAVE BEEN TOLD THAT THE PAS AL ZOUR (PARA 2 (D) OF TUR) HAS NOT BEEN ATTACKED AND IS PROCEEDING ON COURSE.

MELHUSH

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