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TELEGRAM NUMBER 599 OF 17 MAY

INFO PRIORITY BAGHDAD, BIS TEHRAN, WASHINGTON, UKMIS NEW YORK,
UKDEL NATO, GULF POSTS, MODUK. mfYOUR TELNO 123 TO KUWAIT: **ATTACKS ON SHIPPING IN THE GULF****SUMMARY**

1. **CONSIDERABLE CONCERN IN PARIS ABOUT THE SITUATION BUT THE FRENCH SEE LITTLE THAT THEY CAN DO. RELUCTANCE TO APPEAR TO BE CONCERTING CLOSELY WITH THE US AND BRITAIN.**

DETAIL

2. THE QUAI ISSUED A STATEMENT YESTERDAY WHICH CONFINED ITSELF TO EXPRESSING THE FRENCH GOVERNMENT'S DEEP CONCERN AND APPEALING TO ALL PARTIES CONCERNED TO DO EVERYTHING POSSIBLE TO IMPLEMENT SCR 540 AND RE-ESTABLISH PEACE IN THE GULF. NO REFERENCE WAS MADE TO CONTACTS WITH ALLIES. WHEN WE SOUGHT THE QUAI'S ANALYSIS OF THE PRESENT SITUATION, PIETTON (DESK OFFICER FOR IRAQ) TOLD US THAT **THE FCO SPOKESMAN'S REFERENCE TO "CONSULTATIONS" WITH EC PARTNERS HAD CAUSED RAISED EYEBROWS AT THE QUAI.** ON THE BASIS OF RETRACT NUMBER 023 WE SAID THAT ACCORDING TO OUR INFORMATION THE SPOKESMAN HAD SPOKEN ONLY OF HMG BEING IN CLOSE TOUCH.

3. PIETTON SAID THAT THE FRENCH WERE GENUINELY WORRIED. THEY FEARED THAT THE IRANIAN AIR FORCE, WHILE LESS THAN FULLY EFFECTIVE, WAS STILL POTENT AND CAPABLE OF HITTING MANY MORE TANKERS. THE FRENCH HAD HAD REPORTS OF IRANIAN OVERFLIGHTS OF THE UAE, AS WELL AS OF IRANIAN NAVAL VESSELS ENTERING THE TERRITORIAL WATERS OF DUBAI AND MILITARY REINFORCEMENT OF THE GULF ISLANDS. HOWEVER THE QUAI DID NOT CONSIDER IT LIKELY THAT THE IRANIANS WOULD TRY TO BLOCK THE STRAITS OF HORMUZ. AS TO IRAQI INTENTIONS, PIETTON THOUGHT THAT THE IRAQIS WERE ESCALATING THE SITUATION AS A MEANS OF PUTTING PRESSURE ON THE GULF ARABS TO PUT PRESSURE IN TURN ON THE US TO OBTAIN THE NECESSARY ASSURANCES FROM ISRAEL FOR THE SECURITY OF THE PIPELINE ACROSS JORDAN. (CF. PARA 2 OF BAGHDAD TELNO 317). PIETTON INTERPRETED SADDAM'S RECENT INTERVIEW IN THE US PRESS IN THIS CONTEXT. AS TO ACTION BY FRANCE, PIETTON SAID THAT THE FRENCH WERE WAITING TO SEE THE OUTCOME OF TODAY'S GULF COOPERATION COUNCIL MEETING. WHAT, HE WONDERED, WOULD THE GULF ARABS ASK OF THE AMERICANS, THE FRENCH AND OTHERS? HE THOUGHT IT WOULD BE VERY DIFFICULT FOR FRANCE TO INTERVENE WITH IRAQ, WHICH AFTER ALL UNLIKE IRAN COULD NOT SHIP ANY OF ITS OIL THROUGH THE GULF AND WAS ONLY TOO READY FOR A COMPLETE CEASE-FIRE: AND IT WAS POINTLESS FOR THE FRENCH TO TRY TO INTERVENE IN TEHRAN.

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4. MEANWHILE THE FRENCH MEDIA HAVE REPORTED COPIOUSLY AND DRAMATICALLY THE LATEST EVENTS. THE TENDENCY IS TO REGARD POSSIBLE WESTERN INTERVENTION WITH ALARM.

COMMENT

5. THE RAISED EYEBROWS (PARA 2 ABOVE) ARE AN INDICATION OF THE CONTINUING SENSITIVITY OF THE FRENCH TO THE REMOTEST SUGGESTION OF FORMAL CONCERTATION WITH THE US OR BRITAIN IN THE GULF. AS ALWAYS, THEY DO NOT WANT TO SEEM TO HAVE THEIR HANDS TIED IN ANY WAY, EVEN IF, AS GUTMANN AGREED WITH THE PUS, THEY ARE PREPARED FOR MORE AD HOC CONTACTS WITHOUT PUBLICITY.

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