

ADVANCE COPIES

MIDDLE EAST

PS

PS/MR RENTON

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MR DEREK THOMAS

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MR EGBERTON

HD/WENAD

HD/MED

NO. 10 DOWNING STREET

CABINET OFFICE DIO

PUSD (2)

NEWS DEPT

RESIDENT CLERK

1.10.85

PP MODLN
FM TUNIS TO FCOLN
011605Z OCT
GRS 550

CONFIDENTIAL

FM TUNIS
TO FLASH FCO
TELNO 245
OF 011605Z OCTOBER 85
INFO FLASH UKMIS NEW YORK
INFO PRIORITY ALGIERS CAIRO PARIS RABAT TEL AVIV WASHINGTON
AMMAN DAMASCUS AND MODUK (DI4 ROW(1E)).

ADVANCE
IMMEDIATE

MY TELNO 244 (NOT TO ALL): ISRAELI ATTACK ON PLO SETTLEMENT IN
TUNISIA.

SUMMARY

1. MESTIRI (TUNISIAN MFA MINISTER OF STATE) SUMMONED ME THIS
AFTERNOON TO GIVE DETAILS OF THE ISRAELI ATTACK AND TO SEEK THE
HELP OF BRITAIN, AS A FRIEND OF TUNISIA, IN CONVOKING THE
SECURITY COUNCIL AND SECURING AN ITEM ON THE AGENDA AND SEEKING
AN UNEQUIVOCAL CONDEMNATION OF (AND COMPENSATION FROM) ISRAEL.

DETAILS

2. MESTIRI SAID THIS GRATUITOUS AGGRESSION BY ISRAEL (WHICH
ACCORDING TO BBC HAS ACCEPTED RESPONSIBILITY) OCCURED AT 10.30
AM TUNIS TIME INVOLVING 6-8 AIRCRAFT. THESE DROPPED AT LEAST
THREE BOMBS KILLING (DETAILS WERE NOT YET COMPLETE) TENS OF
CIVILIANS (TUNISIAN AND PALESTINIANS), WOUNDING MORE THAT 100
AND CAUSING CONSIDERABLE DAMAGE.

3. MESTIRI SAID THE ISRAELIS MUST HAVE KNOWN THAT THERE WERE NO
PALESTINIAN MILITARY AND THAT THE PALESTINIANS IN THE AREA LIVED
SIDE BY SIDE WITH TUNISIANS. THIS ACTION AGAINST A NON-MILITARY
TARGET WAS AN EASY AND COWARDLY ONE AND DEEPLY EMBARRASSING TO
TUNISIA, A CLOSE FRIEND OF THE WEST (AT A TIME WHEN, FOR REASONS
CONNECTED WITH HER PRO-WESTERN POLICIES, SHE ALSO FACED LIBYAN
AGGRESSION). UNLESS TUNISIA'S OLD FRIENDS HELPED HER IN THE
SECURITY COUNCIL THERE WAS A DANGER THAT NORTH AFRICA COULD BE
ALIENATED FROM THE WEST. MESTIRI SAID THAT PRESIDENT BOURGUIBA
HAD PARTICULARLY APPEALED TO THE BRITISH TO ACT IN THE SECURITY

SECURITY COUNCIL THERE WAS A DANGER THAT NORTH AFRICA COULD BE ALIENATED FROM THE WEST. MESTIRI SAID THAT PRESIDENT BOURGUIBA HAD PARTICULARLY APPEALED TO THE BRITISH TO ACT IN THE SECURITY COUNCIL AS OUTLINED IN PARAGRAPH 1 ABOVE AND HELP TUNISIA WIN HER CASE. (AS SOON AS FULL DETAILS OF THE LOSSES WERE CONFIRMED LATER THIS AFTERNOON, THE TUNISIAN DELEGATION IN NEW YORK WOULD HAVE A TEXT READY).

4. MESTIRI ALSO EARNESTLY HOPED THAT THERE WOULD BE NO FURTHER ISRAELI ACT OF AGGRESSION AND THAT TUNISIA WOULD HENCEFORTH BE REGARDED AS OUTSIDE THE ZONE OF ISRAELI MILITARY ACTION.

COMMENT

5. AS SEEN FROM HERE, I NATURALLY HOPE WE CAN GIVE MAXIMUM AND URGENT HELP TO TUNISIA IN NEW YORK IN THE TERMS REQUESTED IN PARAGRAPH 1 ABOVE. IN SUPPORT OF THE UK AND WESTERN POSITION IN THIS STRATEGICALLY IMPORTANT COUNTRY IT DOES INDEED APPEAR VITAL NOT TO ALLOW THE EASTERN BLOC AND THE ARABS TO MAKE THE RUNNING AND NOT TO SPARE ISRAEL A CLEAR CONDEMNATION. AS EVENTS MIGHT MOVE FAST IN NEW YORK, I WOULD ADD THAT A SITUATION IN WHICH FOR EXAMPLE FRANCE CONDEMNED ISRAEL AND BRITAIN JOINED THE USA IN ABSTAINING ON A RESOLUTION CONDEMNING ISRAEL MIGHT WELL CONCENTRATE TUNISIAN RESENTMENT ON US RATHER THAN THE AMERICANS SINCE AMERICAN AID IS SO IMPORTANT TO TUNISIA.

6. FINALLY , THOUGHT IT IS NOT FOR ME TO ANALYSE THE ISRAELI ACTION, EVEN THOSE WHO MAY BE SCEPTICAL ABOUT THE VALIDITY OF MAINSTREAM PLO DENIALS (YOUR TELNO 147) OF COMPLICITY IN THE LARNACA MURDERS (THE OSTENSIBLE ISRAELI EXCUSE) MUST SURELY AGREE THAT THE FACTS SURROUNDING THE ATROCITY REMAIN OBSCURE. AT THE LEAST THEREFORE, ISRAELI RETALIATORY ACTION WAS PREMATURE. MOREOVER WHATEVEN THE OUTCOME OF ANY INVESTIGATION IN TO THE MURDERS, ISRAEL HAS ACTED IN THE KNOWLEDGE THAT THE LIVES AND PROPERTY OF INNOCENT TUNISIAN CIVILIANS WERE AT RISK AND HAS GRAVELY EMBARRASSED ONE OF THE MOST MODERATE AND INOFFENSIVE OF ARAB GOVERNMENTS.

CCN PARA 6.. LINE 7.. WHATEVER...

ADAMS

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TKLNA 0103

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SENT AT 1637ZRM