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INCOMING
TELEGRAM

S/AS

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ACTION SS-30

6982

TEL AV 03811 01 OF 02 261744Z

INFO OCT-01 AOS-00 SSO-00 /031 W
-----001539 261747Z /44

O 261725Z FEB 80
FM AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6953
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
AMEMBASSY ANKARA
AMEMBASSY ATHENS
USINT BAGHDAD
AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
AMEMBASSY BERN
AMEMBASSY BONN
AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY LISBON
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY MADRID
AMEMBASSY OSLO
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY PRETORIA IMMEDIATE
USLO RIYADH
AMEMBASSY ROME
USMISSION SINAI
AMEMBASSY STOCKHOLM
AMEMBASSY TUNIS
USMISSION USUN NEW YORK
AMEMBASSY VIENNA

NUCLEAR WEAPONS HAVE BEEN AROUND IN ONE FORM OR ANOTHER FOR MORE THAN A DECADE, AND ISRAELIS HAVE LONG SINCE GOTTEN USED TO IT. THE STANDARD ASSUMPTION AMONG WELL-INFORMED ISRAELIS IS THAT:

- A. ISRAEL ALMOST CERTAINLY POSSESSES THE TECHNICAL KNOWHOW -- AND POSSIBLY THE MATERIALS -- TO BUILD ITS OWN BOMB, BUT
- B. ISRAEL HAS NOT, IN FACT, BUILT A BOMB AND WILL NOT DO SO UNLESS AN ARAB COUNTRY DOES SO FIRST OR IS CLEARLY ABOUT TO DO SO.

5. PRESS REACTION HAS BEEN GENERALLY CYNICAL. MA'ARIV, IN PARTICULAR, SEES THE STORY AS SOMEHOW TIED IN WITH US EFFORTS TO PUT PRESSURE ON ISRAEL. ALLEGING THAT IN JANUARY 1979 WHEN ISRAEL WAS IN A SHARP DISPUTE WITH THE US OVER THE PEACE TREATY WITH EGYPT, THE CIA INTENTIONALLY LEAKED DOCUMENTS THAT PROVED THAT A MISSING QUANTITY OF US URANIUM HAD FOUND ITS WAY TO ISRAEL, MA'ARIV SPECULATES THAT THE LATEST STORY WOULD NOT HAVE RECEIVED SUCH HIGH-LEVEL COVERAGE IN THE US "IF THERE HAD NOT BEEN A CERTAIN SOMEONE IN WASHINGTON WHO GAVE IT HIS BLESSING AS PART OF THE CAMPAIGN OF AROUSING SUSPICIONS AGAINST ISRAEL ... WHILE THE CARTER ADMINISTRATION PRESSURES US ON THE PALESTINE AND ARMS-FOR-EGYPT ISSUES".

6. THE PEOPLE IN ISRAEL PROBABLY MOST UPSET BY THE RAVIV STORY ARE THE CBS BUREAU IN TEL AVIV. OFFICIALS OF THE BUREAU (STRICTLY PROTECT) TOLD US THAT WHILE THE BUREAU

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TEL AVIV 03811

EXDIS

E.O. 12065: RDS-1 2/26/90 (BROWN, WILLIAM A.) OR-M

TAGS: MNUC, IS, SF

SUBJECT: ISRAELI REACTION TO CBS STORY ON ISRAELI
"NUCLEAR TEST"

1. (C-ENTIRE TEXT)
2. THE ISRAELI GOVERNMENT PRESS OFFICE HAS LIFTED THE PRESS CREDENTIALS OF CBS RADIO STRINGER DAN RAVIV, WHO REPORTED LAST THURSDAY ON THE ALLEGED JOINT ISRAELI-SOUTH AFRICAN NUCLEAR TEST. THE PRESS OFFICE TOOK THE STEP AT THE REQUEST OF THE CHIEF MILITARY CENSOR BECAUSE OF RAVIV'S "CRASS AND CLEAR VIOLATION" OF THE CENSORSHIP RULES BY FILING THE STORY FROM ROME TO CIRCUMVENT ISRAELI CENSORSHIP. THE ISRAELIS HAVE NOT YET DECIDED WHETHER TO TAKE ANY FURTHER STEPS SUCH AS CANCELLATION OF RAVIV'S VISA, BUT THIS IS UNLIKELY. THE GPO ALSO FILED A VIGOROUS PROTEST TO THE CBS BUREAU CHIEF IN TEL AVIV AND THE HEAD OF CBS NEWS IN NEW YORK.
3. IN GENERAL, ISRAELI REACTION TO RAVIV'S SENSATIONAL "REVELATIONS", LIFTED FROM A STILL UNPUBLISHED BOOK BY TWO ISRAELI AUTHORS NOW WITH THE MILITARY CENSOR, HAS BEEN RELATIVELY LOW KEY. DEFENSE MINISTER WEIZMAN THE NEXT DAY DISMISSED THE REPORT AS "ABSOLUTE NONSENSE," BUT HAS NOT MADE A CAUSE CELEBRE OF IT. DEPARTING FROM THEIR STANDARD PRACTICE OF MAKING NO COMMENT ON SUCH REPORT, ISRAELI DEFENSE OFFICIALS WENT OUT OF THEIR WAY TO RIDICULE RAVIV'S REPORT. IN PRIVATE, ATTENTION HAS BEEN DRAWN TO THE FACT THAT ONE OF THE AUTHORS HAD HIS COLUMN IN HA'ARETZ TERMINATED A FEW YEARS AGO FOR BEING NOTORIOUSLY UNRELIABLE.
4. THE REACTION OF MOST ISRAELIS HAS BEEN "SO WHAT ELSE IS NEW?". ALLEGATIONS ABOUT ISRAEL'S POSSESSION OF

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-----001574 261754Z /44

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FM AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
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CHIEF WAS ON ASSIGNMENT IN RHODESIA, RAVIV LEFT FOR ROME
SUDDENLY WITHOUT INFORMING THE ACTING BUREAU CHIEF OF THE
NATURE OF HIS "SCOOP". CBS NEWS IN NEW YORK, UPON RECEIVING
RAVIV'S REPORT, CALLED THE BUREAU IN TEL AVIV TO ATTEMPT
TO VERIFY IT. THE ACTING BUREAU CHIEF, A VETERAN NEWSMAN,
CHECKED THE STORY OUT AND TOLD NEW YORK THAT HE WAS CON-
VINCED IT WAS A "NON-STORY" AND THAT CBS NEWS SHOULD KILL
IT. TO THEIR CONSIDERABLE CONSTERNATION, CRONKITE DECIDED
TO GO WITH THE STORY. CBS NEWS APPEARS ALREADY TO HAVE
BACKTRACKED PARTIALLY WITH ROBERT PIERPOINT'S FRIDAY NIGHT
REPORT WHICH CAST DOUBT ON THE AUTHENTICITY OF THE REPORTED
NUCLEAR BLAST OFF SOUTH AFRICA. CBS NEWS PEOPLE HERE HAVE
TOLD US IN STRICTEST CONFIDENCE THAT THEY ARE PRESSING
FOR A FULL RETRACTION, BUT THEY ARE NOT OPTIMISTIC.
7. COMMENT: THE PRESENT CONTRETEMPS IS NOT THE FIRST
SUCH FLAP, NOR IS IT LIKELY TO BE THE LAST. GIVEN THE
NATURE OF THE THREAT TO ISRAEL AND ITS ADVANCED STATE
OF TECHNOLOGY, ADVENTURESOME AND OPPORTUNISTIC REPORTERS
WILL KEEP TRYING TO PROVE THAT ISRAEL "HAS THE BOMB",
BUT WILL CONTINUE TO ENCOUNTER GREAT DIFFICULTY IN MAKING
IT STICK. WHILE NOT IN POSSESSION OF ALL THE SCIENTIFIC
EVIDENCE, WE BELIEVE IT WOULD BE THE HEIGHT OF FOLLY FOR
ISRAEL TO INDULGE IN ANY FORM OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS TESTING,
IN PARTICULAR IN CONJUNCTION WITH SOUTH AFRICA; AND WE
BELIEVE ALL RESPONSIBLE ISRAELI OFFICIALS SHARE THIS
APPRECIATION. LEWIS

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