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INCOMING TELEGRAM

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INFO AMBASSADORES AMAN
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AMBASSADORES PRETORIA IMMEDIATE
USLDS RIVON
AMBASSADORES ROME
USMISSION SIRAI
AMBASSADORES STOCKHOLM
AMBASSADORES TURIN
USMISSION USN NEW YORK
AMBASSADORES VIENNA

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EXODUS
E.O. 12065: DDS 1 2/21/68 (BROWN, WILLIAM A.) OR-M
TAGS: MNUC 15 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 "GRASS 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
VISAA, BUT THIS IS UNLIKELY. THE GPO ALSO FILED A VIGOR-
OUS 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"REVELATIONS", LIFTED FROM A STILL UNPUBLISHED BOOK BY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 WEIZMANN THE
NEXT DAY DISMISSED THE REPORT AS "ABSOLUTE NONSENSE,"
BUT HAS NOT MORE SPECIFICALLY REVEAL THE INSTITUTION OF
ANY FURTHER STEPS SUCH AS CANCELLATION OF RAVIV'S
VISAA, BUT THIS IS UNLIKELY. THE GPO ALSO FILED A VIGOR-
OUS PROTEST TO THE CBS BUREAU CHIEF IN TEL AVIV AND THE
HEAD OF CBS NEWS IN NEW YORK.

4. THE REACTION OF MOST ISRAELIS HAS BEEN "SO WHAT ELSE
IS NEW?". ALLEGATIONS ABOUT ISRAEL'S POSSESSION OF

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 CYCLICAL. MA'ARIV,
IN PARTICULAR, SEE THE STORY AS SOMEHOW TIED IN WITH US
EFFORTS TO PUT PRESSURE ON ISRAEL, ALLEGING THAT IN
JANUARY 1975 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 THE HONOR OF PART
OF THE CAMPAIGN OF ARRESTING SUSPICIONS AGAINST ISRAEL...
WHILE THE CARTER ADMINISTRATION PRODUCES US ON THE
PALESTINE AND ARMS-FOR-EGYPT QUEST.

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

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FM AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6954

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY ANKARA

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CHIEF WAS ON ASSIGNMENT IN RHODESIA, RAVIV LEFT FOR ROME
SUDDENLY WITHOUT INFORMING THE ACTING BUREAU CHIEF OF THE
AMEMBASSY 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 PIERPONT'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, ADVENTUROUS 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
ISRAELI OFFICIALS 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