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FM WASHINGTON 150100Z JUL 82  
TO IMMEDIATE FCO  
TELEGRAM NUMBER 2433 OF 14 JULY

MY TELEGRAM NO 1314:  
IRAN/IRAQ: US CONTINGENCY PLANNING

1. THE IRANIAN ATTACK THIS MORNING HAS BEEN FOLLOWED BY A FLURRY OF ACTIVITY HERE.
2. ADMIRAL HOWE ( DIRECTOR FOR POLITICO/MILITARY AFFAIRS IN THE STATE DEPARTMENT) ASKED MINISTER TO CALL TO DISCUSS SOME OF THE IMPLICATIONS. HOWE SAID THAT AT PRESENT THE AMERICANS HAD NO MORE IDEA THAN ANYONE ELSE HOW FAR THE IRANIANS WERE INTENDING TO GO. THE US ASSESSMENT OAT PRESENT WAS THAT THEY CERTAINLY HAD AMPLE RESOURCES TO TAKE BASRA BUT IT WAS BY NO MEANS CLEAR WHAT THEY MIGHT DO THEN.
3. HOWE SAID THAT THE AMERICANS HAD BEEN DOING SOME CONTINGENCY PLANNING OVER THE LAST MONTH OR SO FOR THIS EVENTUALITY. THEY STILL HAD A CARRIER BATTLE GROUP IN THE INDIAN OCEAN AND WOULD BE KEEPING THIS WITHIN REACH. THEY HAD NO INTENTION AT PRESENT OF

3. HOWE SAID THAT THE AMERICANS HAD BEEN DOING SOME CONTINGENCY PLANNING OVER THE LAST MONTH OR SO FOR THIS EVENTUALITY. THEY STILL HAD A CARRIER BATTLE GROUP IN THE INDIAN OCEAN AND WOULD BE KEEPING THIS WITHIN REACH. THEY HAD NO INTENTION AT PRESENT OF MOVING EITHER OF THE TWO CARRIER BATTLE GROUPS IN THE MEDITERRANEAN. BUT THERE WERE A NUMBER OF OTHER THINGS THEY COULD DO TO TRY TO PROVIDE SOME REASSURANCE FOR THE GULF STATES. FOR EXAMPLE, THE AMERICANS WERE AT PRESENT DISCUSSING WITH THE OMANIS THE POSSIBILITY OF A JOINT NAVAL EXERCISE INVOLVING THE INDIAN OCEAN CARRIER BATTLE GROUP. THE AMERICANS WERE ALSO PLANNING TO EXPLORE VARIOUS KINDS OF CONFIDENCE-BUILDING MEASURES SUCH AS PURSUING THE IDEA OF A CONTINGENCY PLANNING GROUP WITH THE SAUDIS. IN THE PAST, THE SAUDIS HAD NOT SHOWN MUCH INTEREST BUT THE AMERICANS THOUGHT THEY MIGHT NOW SHOW MORE. THE PENTAGON HAD A GROUP OF ABOUT HALF A DOZEN COLONELS READY TO GO TO JEDDA AT ANY MOMENT FOR SUCH TALKS IF THE SAUDIS WANTED THEM. IT WAS ALSO POSSIBLE THAT THEY MIGHT SEND SOMEONE AT HIGHER LEVEL, SUCH AS GENERAL KINGSTON, IF THE SAUDIS SHOWED AN INTEREST.

4. A FURTHER POSSIBILITY THEY WERE CONSIDERING WAS A BILATERAL AIR DEFENCE EXERCISE WITH THE SAUDIS. THE AMERICANS WOULD BE PREPARED TO SEND OVER A SQUADRON OR SO OF F15S, WITH THE NECESSARY SUPPORT FACILITIES, FOR THIS PURPOSE. HOWE HINTED THAT THESE AIRCRAFT MIGHT STAY THERE FOR A WHILE, IF THE SAUDIS WISHED. HE RECALLED ALSO THE AMERICAN AWACS AIRCRAFT WHICH WERE STILL IN SAUDI ARABIA AND WOULD REMAIN THERE. ( HOWE SEEMED TO THINK, ON THE BASIS OF A REPORT FROM THE U.S. EMBASSY IN LONDON THAT WE ARE PLANNING TO DO SOMETHING TO HELP THE KUWAITIS WITH AIR DEFENCE AND HE WARMLY WELCOMED THIS.)

5. HOWE CONTINUED THAT THE AMERICANS WOULD LIKE TO BE ABLE TO STRENGTHEN THEIR NAVAL PRESENCE IN THE REGION BUT IT WAS NOT AT PRESENT CLEAR HOW THEY COULD DO THIS. THINKING ALOUD, HOWE WONDERED WHETHER THE UK MIGHT BE IN A POSITION TO MOVE A SHIP INTO THE AREA, FOR INSTANCE FROM THE KENYA COAST WHERE HE BELIEVED WE HAD SOMETHING. HE STRESSED THAT THIS WAS NOT A FORMAL SUGGESTION BUT AN ILLUSTRATION OF THE SORT OF THING THAT MIGHT BE WORTH DISCUSSING. WE HAD HAD USEFUL DISCUSSIONS OF THIS KIND IN 1980 AND SIMILAR DISCUSSIONS COULD BE USEFUL AGAIN NOW. THE THREAT WAS DIFFERENT, BUT THE PRINCIPLES WERE THE SAME. BUT HOWE MADE CLEAR THAT THERE WERE NO PLANS AT PRESENT TO ACTIVATE THE R.D.F.

6. WE DO NOT BELIEVE THE AMERICANS HAVE YET REACHED ANY FIRM DECISIONS ON DEPLOYMENTS IN THE MEETINGS HELD THIS AFTERNOON IN THE STATE DEPARTMENT AND THE PENTAGON. THE SAUDIS HAVE BEEN

6. WE DO NOT BELIEVE THE AMERICANS HAVE YET REACHED ANY FIRM DECISIONS ON DEPLOYMENTS IN THE MEETINGS HELD THIS AFTERNOON IN THE STATE DEPARTMENT AND THE PENTAGON. THE SAUDIS HAVE BEEN EXPRESSING CONCERN TO THEM ABOUT THEIR AIR DEFENCE; IT REMAINS TO BE SEEN, HOWEVER, WHETHER THE SAUDIS WILL WISH TO HAVE ANY VISIBLE US MILITARY PRESENCE IN SAUDI ARABIA IN THIS PERIOD. US INTENTIONS WITH REGARD TO THE DESPATCH OF A SQUADRON OF F15S WILL THEREFORE DEPEND ON WHETHER ANY REQUEST FROM THE SAUDIS IS FORTHCOMING. IT IS LIKELY, HOWEVER, THAT THE AMERICANS WILL TAKE SOME ACTION TO STRENGTHEN THEIR NAVAL DEPLOYMENTS IN THE INDIAN OCEAN. TWINAM (DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY IN THE STATE DEPARTMENT) SAID THAT THE AMERICANS WERE CONSIDERING SOME REINFORCEMENT OF THEIR NAVAL PRESENCE IN THE ARABIAN SEA (BUT NOT TO THE GULF ITSELF), PROBABLY FROM UNITS ELSEWHERE IN THE INDIAN OCEAN).

7. THOMAS MADE CLEAR TO ADMIRAL HOWE THAT HE COULD NOT SAY WHAT, IF ANYTHING, WE MIGHT THINK IT RIGHT TO DO IN THAT REGARD, PARTICULARLY IN VIEW OF OUR COMMITMENTS ELSEWHERE. BUT WE WELCOMED THE KIND OF CONSULTATION THE AMERICANS WERE SEEKING. WE SHOULD MAKE AN EARLY RESPONSE TO HIS APPROACH.

HENDERSON

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