DATE: 8/8/81
WHITE HOUSE SITUATION ROOM
PAGE B1

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MESSAGE ANNOTATIONS:

NO MESSAGE ANNOTATIONS

MESSAGE:

IMMEDIATE
DE: WASHINGTON WSC June 81 Z/P 4
FR: AMBASSADOR TEL AVIV
TO: SECRETARY WASHOC IMMEDIATE 7562
INFO WHITELINE WASHOC BT

SECRET

SECTION A1 OF 81 TEL AVIV 88138

FROM: WASHINGTON WSC June 81 Z/P 4
TO: AMBASSADOR TEL AVIV

SUBJECT: ISRAELI STRIKE ON IRAQI NUCLEAR FACILITY:

BACKGROUND FOR THE DECISION

REFERENCE: TEL AVIV 88138

1. ( ) ENTIRE TEXT

2. AS I REFLECTED ON THE EVENTS OF THE LAST 48 HOURS, IT OCCURRED TO ME THAT WITH THE CHANGE OF ADMINISTRATION IN WASHINGTON THERE MAY HAVE DEVELOPED INADEQUATELY A GAP IN OUR INSTITUTIONAL MEMORY. THE TIMING OF THE ISRAELI STRIKE ENORMOUSLY COMPLICATES MANY ASPECTS OF AMERICAN POLICY IN THIS REGION AND I AM NOT FOR A MOMENT TRYING TO DEFEND IT. BUT AS YOU CONSIDER HOW TO DEAL WITH THE FALL OUT, AND WITH BEGIN HIMSELF, IN THE DAYS IMMEDIATELY AHEAD, YOU AND THE PRESIDENT SHOULD BE THOROUGHLY BRIEFED ON THE HISTORY OF OUR VERY SENSITIVE DIALOGUE WITH BEGIN DURING THE FINAL SIX MONTHS OF THE CARTER ADMINISTRATION. THIS WAS A VERY FRUSTRATING SERIES OF EXCHANGES FOR BEGIN, AND VERY DANGEROUS FOR US, IT LEFT ME WITH NO DOUBT THAT BEFORE THE

TEL AVIV 88138
0761441849 81 JUN 81 PSN: RS5407
TO: 166/18802

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NLS F96-12/7/41
By: ___, NARA, Date: 8/8/65

PRESERVATION COPY
DATE 9/18/81

MESSAGE (CONTINUED):

3. I will summarize here the evolution of the dialogue, then provide citations to relevant, highly sensitive messages which someone can review for you. Perhaps none of them were ever brought to your attention during or after the transition. The dialogue lapsed after December and was not subsequently pressed either at the end or by us. That fact may have contributed to the unfortunate decision to strike on Sunday.

4. During June and July of 1982, there was a sudden deluge of stories in the Israeli and international press focusing on dangers the evolving Iraqi nuclear program would present for Israel. Begin spent about ten days in the hospital in early July. He asked me to see him at home on July 17 for our first meeting during his convalescence. The entire meeting was devoted to his fears that Iraq would soon possess nuclear weapons. He asked me to transmit an emotional personal message to President Carter [Tel Aviv 13256=1982].

In essence the appeal was that he do everything possible to stop further enriched uranium shipments to Iraq before it was "too late." I commented in reporting that appeal: "Unless we can somehow change the course of French policy and reassure the Israelis, we must anticipate that they will feel compelled in the not too distant future to take some kind of unilateral action to thwart the Iraqi nuclear plans well before the Iraqis actually possess a weapon, and by the very near future. I mean within the next six months." We could not and should not rule out any possibility, paramilitary or even pre-emptive strikes with conventional weapons against the Iraqi nuclear facilities.

5. State officials labored to produce a reassuring response which I was finally able to give to Begin on August 22 [Tel Aviv 18691].

And Ambassador Eron has given a partial interim reply by then Assistant Secretary Saunders. Begin was not reassured; he was "most suspicious of French motives." He concluded the discussion by saying: "Israel does not intend to relax on promises."
WASHINGTON, D.C.

DATE 06/06/81

WHITE HOUSE SITUATION ROOM

MESSAGE (CONTINUED):

IN THE SUBSEQUENT WEEKS, DURING LATE AUGUST AND SEPTEMBER BEGIN ASKED ME SEVERAL TIMES WHETHER WE HAD ANYTHING MORE TO TELL HIM, AND I COULD ONLY STALL.

6. ON SEPTEMBER 29, WE REPORTED THAT WE WERE PICKING UP A NUMBER OF THINLY VEILED STRAWS IN THE WIND SUGGESTING THAT ISRAEL WAS SORRY TEMPTED TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE COVER PROVIDED BY THE IRAN-Iraq WAR TO CARRY OUT AN AIR STRIKE AGAINST THE IRAQI NUCLEAR FACILITIES (TEL AVIV 17060).

7. WE CONCLUDED THAT THERE WAS A 20 TO 40 PERCENT POSSIBILITY OF A STRIKE TAKING PLACE WITHIN THE NEXT FEW
DAYS AND DESCRIBED HOW HE THOUGHT IT WOULD BE CARRIED OUT, IN THE EVENT, THERE WAS A STRIKE BY TWO P.M.'S THE FOLLOWING DAY, SEPTEMBER 30. IT TURNED OUT TO BE AN IRANIAN OPERATION WHOSE ONLY "SUCCESS" WAS TO SCARE AWAY THE FRENCH AND ITALIAN TECHNICIANS AT THE FACILITY FOR SEVERAL MONTHS.

WHEN I SAW BEGUN OCTOBER 5, HE VOLUNTEERED THAT IT WAS NOT ISRAEL WHICH HAD ATTACKED THE BAGHDAD FACILITY. HE THEN REMINDED US THAT HE HAD BEEN ASKING US TO DO EVERYTHING POSSIBLE TO STOP FRENCH AND ITALIAN ASSISTANCE TO THE IRAQ PROGRAM (TEL AVIV 18108). IN RETROSPECT, I AM EVEN MORE CONVINCED THAT THE ISRAELIS HAD INDEED PLANNED A STRIKE BUT CALLED IT OFF WHEN THE IRANIANS GOT THERE FIRST. SINCE THE TECHNICIANS IMMEDIATELY LEFT THE SITE FOR A PROLONGED PERIOD, THEY PUT THEIR PLANS ON ICE UNTIL THE THREAT THEY PERCEIVED OF THE REACTOR'S BECOMING OPERATIONAL WAS AGAIN RENEWED AFTER THE RETURN OF TECHNICIANS EARLIER THIS YEAR.

7. DURING OCTOBER AND NOVEMBER THE THEN-ASSISTANT SECRETARY FOR OES, AMBASSADOR TOM PICKERING, WAS THE CHIEF ACTION OFFICER IN

TEL AVIV 8138

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********SECRET********
DATE 06/09/91

MESSAGE (CONTINUED)

THE DEPARTMENT ON THIS PROBLEM. I PLANNED TO VISIT ISRAEL IN LATE NOVEMBER TO BRIEF BEGIN IN DETAIL ON THE PROGRESS OF OUR EFFORTS. THIS TRIP HAS CANCELLED BUT I WAS EVENTUALLY AUTHORIZED BY DEPUTY SECRETARY CHRISTOPHER TO CARRY OUT THE BRIEFING FROM INSTRUCTIONS FOCUSED TO ME BY PICKERING.

I WAS INSTRUCTED TO MAKE THE PRESENTATION BUT TO REPORT ON THE MEETING ONLY BY LETTER TO TOM PICKERING.

E. I met with Begin finally December 17 (and reported by letter on December 24 in detail). At that meeting inter alia: I went through the talking points provided me which included some of the following:

A. The United States shares Israel's serious concern about Iraq's nuclear development program.

B. Although we have no hard evidence that Iraq intends to build nuclear weapons, the pace and scope of the program exceeds Iraq's apparent needs and, we believe, are intended to give that country's government the option of developing nuclear explosives in the future.

C. The Iraqi military has taken control of the nuclear site. Those French technicians who remain in the Baghdad area do not have access to it at present, although it is their opinion that the highly enriched uranium has not been tampered with.

D. It is our strong belief that precipitate action against Iraq's nuclear installations would be a severe setback to the prospects for Middle East peace.

E. The United States is under no illusions about the seriousness of the danger that Iraq's possession of nuclear weapons would pose. We will continue to devote significant effort to monitoring Iraqi nuclear developments and will welcome views and information that you may wish to share with us.

In that conversation I also noted for Begin that the assessments of the situation made by our respective experts were...
DATE 6/28/81

WHITE HOUSE SITUATION ROOM

MESSAGE (CONTINUED):

IN BASIC AGREEMENT, THERE WAS NO DISAGREEMENT ABOUT WHERE IRAQ'S STATE OF THE ART WAS AT THAT TIME, OR ABOUT THE GRAVE DANGERS INHERENT IN ANY IRAQ ACQUISITION OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS. THERE WERE SMALL DIFFERENCES IN OUR JUDGMENTS REGARDING THE DATE AFTER WHICH IRAQ COULD EXPLODE A NUCLEAR DEVICE. IN RESPONSE BEGIN THANKED US FOR WHAT WE WERE DOING IN PARIS AND MORE BUT MADE CLEAR THAT HE WAS STILL DEEPLY WORRIED THAT THE DIPLOMATIC TRACK WAS NOT SUCCEEDING. I CONCLUDED MY REPORT ON THIS MEETING WITH THE FOLLOWING WORDS: "THIS SESSION WILL SATISFY THE NEED HERE FOR A TIME, I SHOULD BE GIVEN THE INFORMATION AND AUTHORITY TO UPDATE BEGIN AT TWO-TWO MONTH INTERVALS IN ORDER TO MAINTAIN CREDIBILITY, GENERAL ETAN WILL CONTINUE TO PRESS BEGIN HARUF HE RAISED THE SUBJECT YESTERDAY WITH GENERAL JONES, YOUR.
DATE 06/08/81

WHY: ARSENAL DISTRIBUTION
WHO: EORE
WHEN COMMENT:

MESSAGE ANNOTATIONS:
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MESSAGE:

IMMEDIATE
DC RUSHTY 80138/83 1621982
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PM AMBASSADOR TEL AVIV

TO SECSTATE WHSMDC IMMEDIATE 7594
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SECTION 03 OF 03 TEL AVIV 89138

CHARACTERIZING IT AS THE MOST SERIOUS THREAT ISRAEL FACES ANYWHERE, TO MAINTAIN ANY KIND OF INFLUENCE OVER THE VERY DANGEROUS POSSIBILITIES FOR DIRECT ISRAELI MILITARY PREVENTIVE MOVES; IT IS VITAL THAT WE CONTINUE TO CARRY ON A FRANK DIALOGUE WITH BEGIN OR HIS SUCCESSOR, AT SOME POINT, THE NEW ADMINISTRATION SHOULD BE CAREFULLY BRIEFED, WITH THIS POINT UNEVERDGED.

9. THAT WAS THE LAST OF SUCH EXCHANGES BETWEEN BEGIN AND ME, HE HAS NOT PRESSED FOR FURTHER MEETINGS ON THIS SUBJECT, AND WE HAVE NOT INITIATED THEM.

SEVERAL MONTHS PASSED; THEN THE STRIKE OCCURRED AT A MOMENT WHEN IT COULD SCARCELY HAVE BEEN MORE DAMAGING TO OUR DIPLOMATIC EFFORTS IN THE REGION, BEGIN SAID PUBLICLY YESTERDAY THAT "THE DECISION TO ATTACK IRAQ'S NUCLEAR REACTOR WAS ADOPTED MANY MONTHS AGO, BUT THERE WERE MINDANCES, AND THERE WERE ALSO VARIOUS CONSIDERATIONS AND A NUMBER OF DELAYS. WE THEN ARRIVED AT A SITUATION WHERE IT WAS CLEAR TO US THAT IF WE DID NOT ACT NOW WE WOULD MISS THE PROVING TIME." I HAVE NO DOUBT THAT THROUGHOUT THE MONTHS SINCE DECEMBER, GENERAL EITAN AND ARIK SHARON IN PARTICULAR HAVE CONTINUED TO PRESS

TEL AVIV 8138

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DATE 06/09/81

WHITE HOUSE SITUATION ROOM

MESSAGE (CONTINUED):

BEGIN WITH THE ARGUMENTS THAT THE DIPLOMATIC EFFORT WAS INEFFICENT AND THE OPPORTUNITY TO ELIMINATE THE REACTOR WOULD BE LOST ONCE IT BECAME OPERATIONAL, BECAUSE OF THE DANGER OF RADIOACTIVE FALL OUT AFTER A STRIKE ON A "HOT REACTOR." THE PRECISE DECISION TO MAKE THE STRIKE THIS PAST WEEKEND COULD WELL HAVE REFLECTED THE OTHER CONSIDERATIONS WE OUTLINED SUNDAY NIGHT IN TEL AVIV 9005, ESPECIALLY THE DESIRE TO GIVE A CLEAR MESSAGE TO THE SYRIANS ABOUT THE CONSEQUENCES OF NOT REMOVING THEIR MISSILES PEACEFULLY. ELECTORAL CONSIDERATIONS WERE NOT TOTALLY ABSENT.

Therefore, begin's argument that there was only a very narrow window when the strike could be launched has credibility; once you accept his premise—that a nuclear weapons capability in Iraq could within one, two or three years present an unacceptable risk to the state of Israel—and that certainly has been begin's clearly articulated premise from the moment of our first conversation last July.

16. RELEVANT MESSAGES IN THIS SERIES OF EXCHANGES ARE
   LISTED AS FOLLOWS:
   
   ** 1980 STATE 196164 1960 TEL AVIV 13905 1960 TEL AVIV 13368
   ** 1980 STATE 196684 1980 TEL AVIV 13396
   ** 1980 STATE 197269 1980 TEL AVIV 13528
   ** 1980 STATE 202274 1980 TEL AVIV 13609
   ** 1980 STATE 214571 1980 TEL AVIV 17686
   ** 1980 STATE 215253 1980 TEL AVIV 16105
   ** 1980 STATE 220669 1960 TEL AVIV 16094
   ** 1980 STATE 220617 1980 TEL AVIV 22340
   ** 1980 STATE 225854 OFFICIAL INFORMAL LETTER DATED DECEMBER 26, 1980, TO ASSISTANT SECRETARY PICKERING

LEWIS