

FM PARIS 151815Z OCT 80

*Read in full*

TO PRIORITY FCO

TELEGRAM NUMBER 857 OF 15 OCTOBER 1980

INFO ROUTINE WASHINGTON, UKMIS NEW YORK, BONN, TEL AVIV, AMMAN, BAGHDAD, KUWAIT, JEDDA, ABU DHABI, DUBAI, DOHA AND BAHRAIN  
INFO SAVING UKDEL NATO, MOSCOW, LUXEMBOURG, CAIRO AND DAMASCUS

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IRAN/IRAQ: FRENCH POLICY

1. ALTHOUGH I HAVE REPORTED ASPECTS OF FRENCH POLICY IN A NUMBER OF RECENT TELEGRAMS (EG NOS 838, 847 AND 852), IT MAY BE USEFUL AT THIS STAGE IF I TRY TO DRAW TOGETHER THE THREADS (BEARING IN MIND THAT SOME ASPECTS OF THE PICTURE, EG, CONTACTS BETWEEN NAVIES, ARE NOT KNOWN IN DETAIL TO US IN PARIS). THE GAME WHICH THE FRENCH FIND THEMSELVES PLAYING IS VERY COMPLEX AND DIFFICULT.

2. THE FRENCH ARE HEAVILY COMMITTED TO IRAQ. THEIR PAST INVESTMENT, BOTH POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC, HAS BEEN AIMED PRIMARILY AT INCREASING THE SECURITY OF FRENCH OIL SUPPLIES AND SELLING ARMS AND HIGH TECHNOLOGY TO IRAQ IN ORDER TO OFFSET A VERY LARGE BILL FOR OIL. IT IS NOT EASY FOR THE FRENCH GOVERNMENT TO DO OTHER THAN MAINTAIN SOME PUBLIC BIAS IN FAVOUR OF IRAQ, AT ANY RATE AS LONG AS IRAQ LOOKS AS IF IT IS WINNING. THE WAY THE WAR IS GOING MUST BE GRADUALLY UNDERMINING CONFIDENCE HERE THAT THE FLOW OF IRAQI OIL COULD REVERT TO FORMER LEVELS AT AN EARLY DATE OR THAT ARMS AND OTHER EXPORTS TO IRAQ (EG NUCLEAR TECHNOLOGY) CAN CONTINUE TO FLOW WITHOUT CAUSING EMBARRASSMENT FOR FRANCE ELSEWHERE. THE FRENCH ARE FOR THE MOMENT HOLDING ON TO THEIR PROFITABLE BILATERAL RELATIONSHIP WITH IRAQ, BUT A GOOD DEAL LESS IS BEING HEARD ABOUT ITS 'PRIVILEGED' NATURE.

3. IRAN HAS TURNUED SOUR FOR FRANCE AS FOR OTHER WESTERN COUNTRIES IN SPITE OF THE HELP GIVEN TO KHOMEINI IN THE PAST. FOR THE MOMENT FRANCE OWES IRAN NOTHING BUT FOR LONG-TERM REASONS IS ANXIOUS NOT TO BE IDENTIFIED BY IRAN AS UNFRIENDLY.

4. FRANCE IS VERY CONSCIOUS OF THE DANGER THAT THE SOVIET UNION MAY BE ABLE TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE IRAN/IRAQ WAR, WITHOUT BEING SURE WHETHER THE SOVIET UNION MIGHT DO THIS BY HELPING IRAN OR BY HELPING IRAQ. THE FRENCH GOVERNMENT WILL CERTAINLY WISH TO AVOID FOR AS LONG AS POSSIBLE TAKING SIDES IN A WAY WHICH MIGHT LINE HER UP CLEARLY ON THE WRONG SIDE AGAINST THE SOVIET UNION.

5. THE FRENCH GOVERNMENT UNDERSTANDS WITHOUT DIFFICULTY THAT THE US ALONE ARE LIKELY TO BE ABLE TO BRING ENOUGH WEIGHT TO BEAR TO COUNTER-BALANCE UNTOWARD DEVELOPMENTS IN THE GULF, BUT IT REMAINS A CENTRAL POINT OF FRENCH POLICY THAT FRANCE CANNOT BE SEEN TO DEFER TO US LEADERSHIP EITHER IN NATO OR, A FORTIORE, OUTSIDE. IRONICALLY THE FRENCH WISH TO HAVE THE REALITY OF THE US PRESENCE AND PERHAPS OF US ACTION IN THE GULF AREA WITHOUT THE APPEARANCE, AND THE APPEARANCE OF FRENCH PRESENCE AND ACTION WITHOUT THE REALITY.

6. THE FRENCH NAVAL PRESENCE IN THE INDIAN OCEAN, WHILE NOT ORIGINALLY DESIGNED TO COPE WITH THE SITUATION IN THE GULF, IS SOMETHING OF A WINDFALL FOR FRENCH POLICY THERE AT THE PRESENT TIME. WITH A COUPLE OF LARGE FRIGATES AND FOUR CORVETTE-SIZED SHIPS PLUS SUPPORTING ELEMENTS, THE FRENCH CAN TALK OF HAVING A LITTLE FLEET IN THE AREA. THANKS TO THEIR BASE FACILITIES AT JIBUTI THEY CAN CHOOSE FROM DAY TO DAY WHETHER TO SAY THE SHIPS ARE ON NORMAL STATION OR PRESENT IN THE VICINITY OF THE CRISIS. GIVEN THAT FRENCH APPEARANCES ARE ADMIRABLY LOOKED AFTER IN THIS WAY, ALL THAT REMAINS FOR THEM TO DO IS TO ENSURE THAT THEY ARE FIRMLY IN TOUCH WITH THE REALITY OF THE AMERICAN PRESENCE. FOR THIS NOTHING MORE THAN BILATERAL CONTACTS WITH WASHINGTON IS NECESSARY.

7. THESE VARIOUS CONSIDERATIONS SEEM TO DETERMINE THE FRENCH ATTITUDE TO PROPOSALS FOR PRACTICAL COLLABORATION ON A 3 OR 4 POWER BASIS IN RELATION TO EVENTS IN THE GULF. THE FRENCH ATTITUDE IS LIKELY TO DEVELOP IN THE DIRECTION WHICH YOU WISH ONLY IF EVENTS ON THE GROUND BEGIN TO LOOK MORE DANGEROUS AND FRANCE'S ATTITUDE OF WATCHING AND WAITING BEGINS TO LOOK LIKE NON-PARTICIPATION AND BEING LEFT ASIDE.

8. FOR THE MOMENT THE FRENCH ARE KEEPING WELL IN WITH THE ARABS BY THEIR ATTITUDE TOWARDS ISRAEL AND BY VAGUE ASSURANCES OF READINESS TO BE HELPFUL TO THE GULF STATES. MAINTENANCE OF THE FLOW OF OIL TO FRANCE REMAINS A DOMINANT FRENCH PRIORITY. 72% OF FRANCE'S OIL IMPORTS HAVE BEEN COMING FROM GULF STATES. PRESIDENT GISCARD IS SAID TO HAVE USED HIS STOP-OVER IN ABU DHABI ON 14 OCTOBER TO SECURE ASSURANCES FOR INCREASED OIL FROM THE UAE. THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE 14 BILLION FRANC NAVAL ORDER FROM SAUDI ARABIA IS A SURE SIGN THAT FRANCE HAS EVERY INTEREST SIMPLY IN HOPING THAT NOTHING GOES MORE WRONG THAN IT HAS ALREADY. IT MAY BE NOTED IN PASSING THAT THE LITTLE FRENCH FLEET IN THE INDIAN OCEAN HAS SERVED A VERY IMPORTANT AIM FOR FRANCE BY ACTING AS A SORT OF DISPLAY PLATFORM TO HELP SELL FRENCH NAVAL EQUIPMENT TO SAUDI ARABIA AND ELSEWHERE IN THE GULF.

FCO PLEASE PASS TO SAVING ADDRESSEES

HIBBERT.

[REPEATED AS REQUESTED]

STANDARD

ADDITIONAL DESK.

MEM

MEM

IRAQ/IRAN

MEMAD

MEM

MEM

CABINET OFFICE

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