

June 11, 1981

**Telegram from Washington Embassy to the Ministry
of Foreign Affairs, 'Evron-the President'**

Citation:

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Summary:

The Israelis were concerned and disappointed by the administration's initial response to the raid, which consisted of a freeze on the shipment of F-16 jets to Israel until a legal review was conducted. The Israeli ambassador to Washington conveyed this sentiment to President Reagan in a meeting on 11 June 1980 in this telegram.

Original Language:

Hebrew

Contents:

Original Scan
Translation - English

[Translator's note: all words in double quotes "" are words used in English in the original Hebrew document]

Ministry of Foreign Affairs- Communications Division

Top Secret

Date: 110681 [June 11th 1981]

Topic: Evron-the President

Top Secret/ Urgent for morning

For the recipients alone.

The Ambassador's meeting with the President. Others present: The Vice President, Meese, Baker, Allen, Stoessel, Veliotis, Tanter and myself [Ben-Zur].

After exchanging pleasantries, the Ambassador said that he was asked by the Prime Minister to express to the President, if in a very friendly manner, our deep disappointment from the unprecedented decision of the President to suspend the transfer of the F-16 jets to Israel.

The Ambassador requested to give a short review of the background leading to the bombing of the Iraqi reactor.

The Ambassador noted that Iraq is a hostile state- also not friendly to the US- cruel and devoid of restraint. Her leaders have stated time and again that Iraq's ambition is the destruction of Israel. For years Iraq has worked to minimize US and Western influences in the region, acted against President Sadat's peace initiative, supported global terror while Iraqi diplomats themselves have been involved in acts of terror, and made no secret of the goal of the nuclear reactor they built. The Ambassador added that for years we have been attempting to prevent the supply of Iraq with enriched uranium. The US administration, believing the Iraqi reactor potentially enabled them to create a nuclear bomb, turned to the governments of France and Italy in an attempt to dissuade them from supplying Iraq with the necessary nuclear fuel, but to no avail. Production at the reactor continued until it reached a point where, unless we acted immediately, we would no longer be able to act to prevent the reactor from going critical. Israel is aware of the severity of the action, but it was an action taken out of self-defense, an action meant to protect the citizens of Israel and the future of the State of Israel. Moreover- and we know the President just met with a group of Arab ambassadors who said whatever they said- it is clear to us that many Arab states did not shed a tear over Iraq's loss of its nuclear potential. The action taken in Iraq strengthens the process of peace, especially in the face of those who maintain that they have a military option of contending with Israel. This showed them that their glory will not come through means such as that. This move also strengthens the position of the US insofar as it stabilizes the region by removing a potential danger to the peace process, since an Israel which is seen as vulnerable to destruction and potential annihilation is an asset to none, other than those that want to prevent regional stability and peace. We acted as we acted and that helped- in the long term- to strengthen the influence of the moderates in the region who can now argue against those who support terror and the destruction of Israel that their ways will achieve nothing. The ambassador noted that just as the Foreign Minister previously said to the President, Israel is interested in vigorously continuing peace negotiations. Iraqi influence has been weakened in the Arab world and the chance for continued negotiations has improved, and so it would be sad and disappointing if the Arab states were to think that the President of the US is acting to weaken Israel or to lessen the ties of friendship between the two states. We know that is not the intent of the President, but others may come to see and interpret it that way. As the US chose

to suspend the supply of fighter jets to Israel, many other states may see that as proof that the US intends to weaken Israel. Therefore, the Ambassador added, even if the choice was made and what was done till this point cannot be undone, he asked the president to reconsider his decision and allow the transfer of the jets to Israel promptly.

The President said that the US did the minimum to which it is obligated under US law. Congress is currently checking if there was a breach of the agreement regarding the use of US arms. The President asserted that the administration is not reevaluating its relations with Israel ("we do not reevaluate"), and is not even considering such a reevaluation. The President added that he and his administration were taken by surprise by Israel's operation and alternative courses of action should have been discussed. Had the US known ahead of time of the danger posed by the reactor, it would have assisted us by turning to France with a request not to supply Iraq with enriched fuel. The President added that they are very worried. The answer to the situation is peace. The region is saturated with suspicion, belligerency and fear which increase the need for a peaceful resolution. The US wants to advance Habib's mission in Lebanon, and promote what was started at Camp David, and in order to do that- you must understand- we need the trust of the Arab states. The US made headway by incorporating the Saudis in the issue of Lebanon, and the Saudis made an impression ("seemingly eager") that they are ready and willing to help advance the issue. In order to bring piece, the US needs also turn to the other side. The US has not gone back on its commitment to Israel ("we do not retreat"), and will not allow for an upset in the balance of power to develop ("to grow").

The Ambassador requested to convey his thanks to the president for his remarks which reaffirm his commitment to Israel, which will no doubt please the Israeli government. Yet the suspension remains in force and the subject still awaits the decision of congress which will be affected by the president's chosen position expressed by the administration's position. The Ambassador reiterated the fact that the Israeli air force acted in self-defense. Israel did not act against Saudia Arabia and Jordan who could potentially (though no overt signs yet exist) reach a peace agreement with Israel, but only against Iraq who is a Soviet tool, who invaded Iran, attacked Sadat for his initiative and more. There for the fact that it is us specifically who are "called to order" creates a strange situation and we fully hope that the President will find a way to correct the situation soon, in order to avoid the formation of the impression that nuclear weapons in the hands of the Iraqis is acceptable while acts of legitimate Israeli self-defense are not.

The President responded that goal of the US is to influence other states regarding the efforts towards peace. The Ambassador noted that we cooperated with Habib. We complied with the President and Haig's request to avoid action and we didn't even set a deadline for Habib's mission. The President: right. We appreciate that.

The Ambassador added that Israel did not go "out of its mind", and that when things calm down those who condemned us will realize we acted correctly. The Ambassador added that he finds it strange to be at odds with the president and his administration as he recalls conversations they had both before the [US] election, and after it. The Ambassador expressed hoped that the situation will be corrected and the supply pipes will reopen soon.

The President remarked that we can depend on his fundamental position. Noted that he received the Prime Minister's missive and allowed the Prime Minister's sensitivity and worry regarding the situation as expressed in the letter, to affect his own [the President's] position.

The meeting lasted twenty minutes.

Ben-Zur