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C O N F I D E N T I A L PRETORIA 10020

NDDIS

E.O. 12065: RDS-3 11/05/85 (EDMONDSON, W.B.) OR-M
TAGS: MNUC, PARM, TECH, SF
SUBJECT: (C) SUSPECTED NUCLEAR EVENT: RENEWED GUIDANCE
NEEDED

REF: STATE 287219

1. C - ENTIRE TEXT.

2. APPRECIATE COPIES OF N.Y. TIMES AND W. POST ARTICLES SENT PER REFTEL WHICH GAVE MORE INFO THAN LOCAL PRESS REPORTS BASED ON THEM. IRONY IS THAT THEY PROVIDE MORE (IF TRUE) THAN WHAT WE HAVE DRAWN FROM OFFICIAL SOURCES TO GIVE TO P.W. BOTH (E.G. OITUOLE'S ASSERTION THAT VELA SYSTEM WAS AGING AND THAT "SENSORS ON THE SATELLITE THAT WOULD HAVE DETECTED A RELEASE OF NEUTRONS, GAMMA RAYS, AND X-RAYS APPARENTLY HAD BEEN TURNED OFF TO SAVE POWER" AND PROLONG SATELLITE'S LIFE).

3. WHETHER OR NOT I GET TO SEE P.W., THE INFORMATION I INTENDED TO GIVE HIM ASIDE FROM DISCUSSION OF POLITICAL ASPECTS, APPEARS TO BE LESS THAN BY NOW HAS BEEN PUBLISHED IN THE MEDIA. WHILE IT WOULD HELP FOR PURPOSE OF DISCUSSION TO BE ABLE TO GIVE HIM SOMETHING MORE EXCLUSIVE, THIS MAY NOT BE POSSIBLE.

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4. ON BASIS OF CASUAL CONVERSATIONS WITH SAG OFFICIALS, IT SEEMS LIKELY ONE QUESTION P.W. AND OTHERS MAY DEMAND STRAIGHT ANSWER TO IS WHY USG DID NOT CONSULT SAG IN CONFIDENCE RIGHT AFTER SEPTEMBER 22 EVENT. ANSWER, UNFORTUNATELY, IS FAIRLY OBVIOUS, I.E. THAT SAG IS ITSELF A PRIME SUSPECT, BUT I SUPPOSE IT IS BEST TO CONTINUE TO TAKE THE LINE HOLDING CARTER DID ON OCTOBER 26 (STATE 279879) THAT WE WISHED FIRST TO ASSESS WHETHER A NUCLEAR EVENT HAD TAKEN PLACE AND WHETHER THE EVIDENCE WE HAD (FROM A SENSITIVE SYSTEM) WARRANTED SEEKING THEIR HELP IN IDENTIFYING IT.

5. PROBLEM WE HAVE NOW IS TO MOVE SAG TOWARD MAKING MORE AUTHORITATIVE DENIAL OF ANY NUCLEAR EXPLOSIVE ACTIVITY ON ITS PART AND A REAFFIRMATION THAT IT HAS NO NUCLEAR EXPLOSIVE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM AND NO INTENTION TO DEVELOP OR TEST ANY NUCLEAR EXPLOSIVES IN THE FUTURE. (IT IS WORTH NOTING, HOWEVER, THAT MOST MEDIA TREATMENT IS ALREADY ASSUMING A SAG DENIAL OF THE SEPTEMBER 22 EVENT.) REVIEWING THE MATTER AT THIS STAGE, I THINK THE BEST THING TO DO IS TO PREPARE A WRITTEN COMMUNICATION TO P.W. BOTHA AND RUN THROUGH IT ORALLY WITH PIK BOTHA AND BRAND FOURIE WHEN ASKING THEM TO DELIVER IT TO THE PRIME MINISTER.

6. FIRST STEP, UPON RECEIPT OF APPOINTMENT WITH PIK AND BRAND FOURIE, WOULD BE TO ASK THEM TO FORWARD MESSAGE TO P.W., INFORMING THEM THAT WHILE I WOULD STILL APPRECIATE OPPORTUNITY TO DISCUSS ISSUE WITH HIM, OUR ORIGINAL PURPOSE OF GIVING HIM PROMPT BRIEFING BASED ON ADVANCE PRIVILEGED INFORMATION HAS OBVIOUSLY BEEN OVERTAKEN BY EVENTS. SOME OF THE INFORMATION IS NO LONGER NEW, AND IN ANY EVENT IT SEEMS, UNFORTUNATELY, THAT THE PRIME MINISTER

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IS NOT INTERESTED IN DISCUSSING THIS IMPORTANT QUESTION.

7. IN CONSIDERING CONTENT OF WRITTEN COMMUNICATION, IT MIGHT BE USEFUL TO REINFORCE SUBSTANCE OF TALKING POINT (1) BY STATING THAT PUBLIC AND PRESS ATTENTION WERE NOT OF OUR MAKING BUT NEVERTHELESS CREATED A NEW SITUATION TO WHICH NEITHER A POLICY OF SILENCE NOR ONE OF "KEEPING PEOPLE GUESSING" IS AN EFFECTIVE RESPONSE.

8. IN POINT (L), IT MIGHT BE USEFUL TO ADD, "IN WHATEVER WAY YOU CONSIDER MOST APPROPRIATE," TO THE REQUEST FOR A CLEAR AUTHORITATIVE STATEMENT THAT SOUTH AFRICA HAS NO KNOWLEDGE OF THE (SEPTEMBER 22) EVENT. ALSO, FOLLOWING POINTS (L) AND (M), CONSIDERATION MIGHT BE GIVEN TO ADDING A PARAGRAPH AS FOLLOWS: "THE VENUE OR CONTEXT OF ANY STATEMENT ABOUT THE PHENOMENON OF SEPTEMBER 22, AND OF ANY CONFIRMATION OF U.S. UNDERSTANDING OF SOUTH AFRICA'S POLICY AND INTENTIONS, ARE LESS IMPORTANT THAN THAT WHATEVER IS SAID BE AUTHORITATIVE, UNEQUIVOCAL, AND IN SOME FORM TO WHICH PUBLIC REFERENCE COULD BE MADE BY THE USG. WE ARE NOT APPROACHING SOUTH AFRICA IN AN ACCUSATORY MANNER AND ARE NOT SEEKING TO EMBARRASS SOUTH AFRICA IN ANY WAY, BUT SIMPLY BELIEVE THAT THE RECORD MUST BE ABSOLUTELY CLEAR."
EDMONDSON

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