



DEFENSE INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
WASHINGTON, D. C. 20301

Footnote 2 Six 332

TAB 1

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TS-SI-0185/AP-5

13 June 1967

MEMORANDUM FOR THE CHAIRMAN OF THE JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF

SUBJECT: Israeli Attack on U.S.S. Liberty (AGTR-5)

1. The Liberty reported that she was reconnoitred by aircraft shortly before 0900 local time on the 8th of June. Since Israel had control of the air, it is assumed these aircraft were Israeli. It is reasonable to assume that the ship was firmly identified as American, since no attack took place and since our defense attache in Tel Aviv has been told by a reliable source that air-to-ground transmissions on the morning of the 8th indicated at least one element of the Israeli Defense Force (IDF) was aware of the Liberty's nationality and location. (See Tab 2)

2. At 1405 local time on the 8th, the U.S.S. Liberty came under attack by Israeli aircraft. At this time she was only about 30 miles due west of her 0900 local position. Thirty minutes after the strafing runs, three Israeli torpedo boats attacked.

3. The Israeli explanation for the incident includes the following points: (See Tab 3)

- a. The ship was sighted and recognized as a naval ship 13 miles from the coast.
- b. Presence in a fighting area is against international custom.
- c. The area is not a common passage for ships.
- d. The Liberty resembles the Egyptian supply ship El Quseir.
- e. The ship was not flying a flag when sighted.
- f. The ship was proceeding at high speed westerly towards the enemy coast.

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3. The Israeli Navy earlier had received reports of bombardment of El-Arish from the sea.

4. A number of these points are either tendentious or puzzling. For example, the Liberty reports she was showing her colors and was making only five knots. It is true, however, that she was proceeding in the direction of Port Said. Still, under normal circumstances the Israeli should not have mistaken the Liberty for the Egyptian supply ship El Quceir, the latter being about one-fourth the displacement of the Liberty, roughly half the beam, 180 feet shorter, and differently configured. The unusual antenna array and hull markings of the Liberty should also have been visible to low flying aircraft and torpedo boats. Hull markings on the Liberty should have been seen by Israeli torpedo boats approaching within what the Liberty estimated was less than 2,000 yards. In the heat of battle the Liberty was able to identify one of the attacking PTs as Israeli and to give its hull number, so trained Israeli naval personnel should have been able to identify the Liberty. (See Tabs 4 and 5)

portion quoted in footnote SIX 1332

5. There is no available information which would conclusively show that Israelis made a premeditated attack on a ship known to be American. In fact the best interpretation we can make of available facts is that Israeli command and control in this instance was defective. One element of the IDF quite likely knew the location and identification of the Liberty at around 0900 and did not launch an attack. It is possible that approximately five hours later a different element made the decision to attack a vessel which unfortunately was on a westerly course off Sinai and apparently heading towards Port Said. The DAO in Tel Aviv believes that Israeli aircraft returning from Egypt expended unused ordnance on what they thought was a target of opportunity and that nearby PTs closed to join in the action. If it is accepted that the attack was made in the confusion of full-scale fighting, there is still no explanation for failure of the Israeli high command to inform all subordinate echelons of the very important fact that a United States ship was in the area. (See Tab 6)

6. An analysis of incomplete COMINT indicates that after the torpedo attack, doubts quickly began to arise in the minds of the Israelis and efforts were intensified to verify the ship's identity. At 10 minutes after the torpedo attack an Israeli ground controller apparently still believed it to be Egyptian, but twenty-one minutes later messages began to appear in COMINT which would suggest that serious doubts had arisen. Forty-two

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minutes after the torpedo attack the Israeli ground controller was obviously aware that the personnel recovery attempts which were then underway could result in picking up English-speaking personnel and not Egyptian. Identification attempts continued and 45 minutes after the torpedo attack, helicopters were checking the masts, flag and bow number of the Liberty. At this time there appears to be no question in the Israeli minds as to what had happened. (See Tab 7)

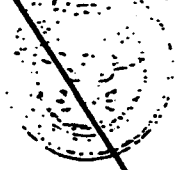
7. Efforts continue to obtain additional information on the circumstances surrounding the attack on the Liberty. NSA advises that additional COMINT bearing on this subject will become available. Meanwhile the weight of evidence is that the attacking force originally believed their target was Egyptian. While we cannot conclusively disprove the theory that higher echelons were aware of the true identity of the Liberty and that an attack was taking place, there is no evidence to support this. Attempts will continue to fully clarify this subject.

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SS-SI-0211/AP-5

28 June 1967

ADDENDUM TO MEMORANDUM FOR THE CHAIRMAN OF THE JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF

SUBJECT: Israeli Attack on USS Liberty (AGTR-5)

1. Further information has been received concerning the Liberty incident which clarifies the sequence of events surrounding the attack, and the official Israeli position regarding it. This evidence fails to show that the Israelis made a premeditated attack on a known American ship. Therefore, while the added information clarifies the issue, it does not alter the interpretation of the incident as stated in the memorandum dated 13 June (Tab 1). Additional information follows.

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2. Tab 7 now offers a completed NSA translation and analysis of the intercept of transmissions between Israeli ground control and helicopters near the Liberty after the attack. This complete translation tends to bear out the analysis offered on pages 2 and 3 of the initial memorandum.

3. Israel continues to assert that the attack was an error and offers the following additional information as proof of this:

a. General Geva, Israeli Military Attache, in a conversation with Colonel Alba of the Joint Staff on 13 June 1967, stated that no information other than a general idea of the location of the US Sixth Fleet was provided to the Israelis by the US Naval Attache, Tel Aviv. He states no information was given concerning the Liberty. This assertion is countered by Embassy and Attache reports of 16 June from Israel stating that no request for information on U. S. ships operating off Sinai was made until after the Liberty incident, and had such an inquiry been received, it would have been forwarded to CNO immediately.

b. An Israeli MTB officer has reported to an Embassy official that the Liberty was mistaken for the EL QUSEIR in the heat of battle and was attacked. He also states that upon receiving the A-A challenge from Israeli vessels, the Liberty responded not with her identity, but with the A-A sign. This was interpreted by the MTB officers as an evasion, and a contributory cause for the attack. (Tab 9) This office has not, as yet, received further information on the "A-A" signal incident. No reporting has been received from the Liberty on this question, however, further inquiries are being made.

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4. Additional useful information is in Tabs as follows:

a. A chronology of events surrounding the attack on the Liberty as they were observed and recorded by the U. S. Naval Attache, CDR E. C. Castle. (Tab 10)

b. A synopsis of the findings of the Israeli Court of Inquiry into the Liberty incident. The findings were that the incident was "an innocent mistake" and there was no criminal negligence. ALUSNA Tel Aviv comments on several contradictions in these findings. (Tab 11) In paragraph 2, page 5 of 6 of Tab 11, LTC Efrat, who was dictating the Israeli report, referred to US government communications stating the Liberty had been identified first "one hour" and then "six hours" before the attack. These communications were as follows: On the evening of 10 June 1967, a formal protest of the attack on the Liberty, signed by Secretary Rusk, was delivered to the Israeli Ambassador in Washington. The text of this protest included a statement that the Liberty was identified by Israeli aircraft one hour before the attack. This note was hastily drawn up, and the one hour figure was given as a result of confusion between local time and Greenwich Mean Time. This error was recognized by the State Department shortly after the note was delivered. It is unknown at this time when or by what means the Israelis were informed that identification of the Liberty was made six hours prior to the attack. The State Department and DIA both hold the identification of the Liberty took place five and one quarter hours before the attack. This office continues to research the problem.

c. The establishment of an Israeli Preliminary Judicial Inquiry to conduct further investigation of the Liberty incident. (Tab 12)

5. Transmissions from the Liberty indicate the following chain of events surrounding the attack:

a. Liberty was orbited by fighter aircraft at 0650Z on 8 June (Tab 13).

b. The attacks on the Liberty occurred at 1205Z and 1225Z (Tab 14). This office feels that the time on line 6, paragraph 1 should read either 1227Z or 1247Z to be consistent with other times in the same message, as well as other reports.

c. Tab 15 summarizes the attack sequence as it was transmitted to USS America by USS Liberty.

6. This office continues to research the circumstances surrounding the attack on the Liberty. A final assessment of the incident awaits the findings of the Israeli Judicial Inquiry, the U. S. Navy Board of Inquiry and the Presidential Investigation being conducted by Mr. Clark Clifford, with support from DIA.

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7. An initial addendum to this book was dated 26 June 1967. It was modified and the modified portions are marked in red on this addendum, dated 28 June 1967.

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