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FM AMCONSUL CAPE TOWN
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C O N F I D E N T I A L CAPE TOWN 0239

NODIS

FROM EMBASSY CAPE TOWN

E.O. 12065: RDS-2 02/04/95 (EDMONDSON, W.B.) OR-M
TAGS: PARM, MNUC, TECH, US, SF
SUBJECT: (C) GUIDANCE ON SUSPECTED NUCLEAR EVENT

REF: STATE 29416

1. C - ENTIRE TEXT.

2. IF ONE TRIES TO LOOK AT THE ISSUE AS SEEN THROUGH
SAG EYES, REFTEL SIMPLY IS NOT GOOD ENOUGH TO BE OF ANY
HELP TO EXPLAIN WHY USG CANNOT PREVENT RECURRENCE OF
"UNAUTHORIZED DISCLOSURE" WHICH LEAD TO "SELECTIVE AND
HIGH DISTORTED INTERPRETATION" OF DATA WHICH WAS DISCLOSED.

3. IT HAS BEEN PAINFULLY CLEAR THAT IMPORTANT CABINET
MINISTERS LIKE PRIME MINISTER P.W. BOTHA AND FOREIGN
MINISTER PIK BOTHA ANGRILY RESENT THE ACCUSATIONS AND
INSINUATIONS DIRECTED AGAINST SOUTH AFRICA IN CONNECTION
WITH THE UNEXPLAINED VELA PHENOMENON OF SEPTEMBER 22.
THEY ARE STRONGLY INCLINED TO BELIEVE THE U.S. ROLE WAS
PURPOSEFUL RATHER THAN ACCIDENTAL. IT MAY, IN FACT,
DO MORE HARM THAN GOOD TO TELL THEM THAT STORIES LIKE
THE ONE IN THE WASHINGTON POST DO NOT REFLECT EXECUTIVE

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BRANCH POSITIONS OR JUDGMENTS, WHEN IT APPEARS THAT SUCH STORIES FLOW FROM OFFICIAL INTELLIGENCE BRIEFINGS OF SOME KIND, WHICH ARE THEN MISUSED.

4. THE SAG CAN LEGITIMATELY ASK JUST WHAT WAS BEING SAID ABOUT S.A. NAVAL MOVEMENTS THAT COULD HAVE GIVEN THE IMPRESSION OF ANY CONNECTION WITH THE SEPTEMBER 22 PHENOMENON. IF WE WERE TO MENTION THAT CERTAIN PORT EXERCISES LED PEOPLE TO SPECULATE THAT CERTAIN SHIPS COULD HAVE BEEN AWAY LONG ENOUGH TO HAVE ENGAGED IN A NUCLEAR-RELATED EXERCISE (PRETTY FLIMSY AT BEST), THEY WOULD BE ALL THE MORE CONVINCED THAT THE USG IS REACHING WAY OUT TO POINT A FINGER AT S.A.-----ESPECIALLY WHEN WE ARE NOT EVEN CERTAIN THERE WAS A NUCLEAR EXERCISE.

5. GIVEN THE PROBLEM OF PREVIOUS DISCLOSURES, THE VAGUENESS OF UNSUBSTANTIATED THEORIES ABOUT AN UNVERIFIED EVENT, AND THE OBVIOUS ULTRA-SENSITIVE DIPLOMATIC CLIMATE, ONE CAN ASK IF IT IS RESPONSIBLE TO PROVIDE BRIEFINGS (ESPECIALLY BASED ON SUCH THIN PICKINGS AS THE NAVAL EXERCISE) WHICH CAN LEAD TO LEAKS THAT RUN THE RISK OF CREATING THE IMPRESSION THAT THE USG (OR ELEMENTS THEREOF) IS DELIBERATELY CARRYING OUT A PROPAGANDA CAMPAIGN AGAINST THE SAG ON THIS ISSUE. AT LEAST THIS IS WHAT SOUTH AFRICANS WOULD ASK IF WE SOUGHT TO DUCK RESPONSIBILITY BY CITING UNAUTHORIZED DISCLOSURES, AND MANY WOULD REMAIN CONVINCED THAT IT IS ALL PART OF PURPOSEFUL MALICE ON OUR PART. LET US BE SURE THAT ANY FURTHER BRIEFINGS OR OTHER SPECULATION IS BASED ON DATA WHICH BEARS IN A TRULY SERIOUS AND SIGNIFICANT WAY ON THE SEPTEMBER 22 SUSPECTED EVENT.

6. THAT HAVING BEEN SAID, IS SUSPECT THERE IS LITTLE
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MORE WE CAN SAY THAN REPEAT THE OFFICIAL POSITION AT THE END OF REFTEL. HOWEVER, THE DEPARTMENT SHOULD KEEP IN MIND THE LIKELY MOOD AND ATTITUDE OF THE SAG IN THIS MATTER AS IT AFFECTS OUR EFFORTS TO REACH A NUCLEAR AGREEMENT WITH THE SAG AS WELL AS OUR OVERALL RELATIONS, INCLUDING GREATER SAG SUSPICION AND SURVEILLANCE OF MISSION REPORTING ACTIVITIES.
EDMONDSON

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