20 June 1967

~~SECRET SAVIN~~

MEMORANDUM FOR RECORD

SUBJECT: Inquiry from House Appropriations Committee Regarding USS LIBERTY

At 1045 today Mr. Fallen told me that he had received a call from Mr. Robert Michaels, Senior Clerk of the House Appropriations Committee, who requested that someone from NSA answer some questions about the LIBERTY. When I was told about this I called Mr. Michaels to say that I was going to the Pentagon this afternoon and would be glad to stop in on the way. He readily accepted my offer and called back a few minutes later to inform us that Mr. Mahon had indicated that he wanted to be present after he heard that I was coming to the Committee offices.

I arrived at the Capitol at 1420 and Mr. Mahon, joined by Messrs. Michaels and Lipscomb, had me meet with them in a private office across the hall from the Committee's Defense Appropriations office. Mr. Mahon asked me to give him a detailed account of how the ship got into the Mediterranean and what she was doing there. I recounted our request to the JCS on 23 May that the ship be sent to the Mediterranean from the African coast on account of the developing situation in that part of the world. I told Mr. Mahon that in proposing this diversion we at NSA were trying to put the Agency in a position to serve national intelligence requirements for information on that part of the world, including that of direct support to the Commander of the Sixth Fleet if such was required because of direct involvement of American forces in the hostilities. I mentioned the JCS concurrence in that action with the assignment of the ship to the operational control of USCINCEUR on 31 May. The LIBERTY was in turn assigned by USCINCEUR to the operational control of Commander, Sixth Fleet. We discussed a map showing the positions of the ship from 2-8 June

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and I explained that her mission, consistent with a determination of safety to be made by appropriate military command authority, was to collect communications [redacted] EO 1.4.(c) [redacted] UAR usage. I specifically mentioned that all information we had received to date showed the LIBERTY always to have been in international waters.

At Mr. Mahon's request, I explained the details of the attack as I was able to reconstruct them from the reports we had received. Mr. Mahon asked specifically why the ship was so close and I explained the radio line-of-sight nature of the UHF/VHF communications intercept mission the ship was attempting. He then asked if any effort had been made to move her away from the coast and in response to that question I discussed very briefly the 080110 message to USCINCEUR for action and info to COM SIXTH FLEET and the USS LIBERTY. I chose deliberately not to go into any more details than were strictly required. Mr. Mahon asked specifically how long the message took to be delivered, when the LIBERTY got it, and how fast she would have gotten it had no errors in routing been made. I avoided assignment of blame to any one person or group and stated that the responsibility for this determination rested in the JCS committee headed by General Russ of which Admiral Fitzpatrick, J6 (JCS), was a member. In response to a question from Mr. Mahon about communications subsequent to the attack I wryly mentioned that the apology from the Israelis was received and the order to the commanding officer of the AMERICA was sent with such speed as to enable the recall of the planes which had been sent out to sink the attacking torpedo boats on the assumption they were Egyptian. This he observed was an example of very rapid communications in contrast to the 080110 which took about 15 hours to be delivered to the LIBERTY.

Mr. Mahon probed several times to discover the reason for the Israeli attack. I told him we simply did not know from either open or intelligence sources but that, by now, there probably was a fair amount of denial and cover-up by the Israelis for the sake of protecting their national position. He asked my

private opinion for the attack and I said that, for what it was worth, I believed the attack might have been ordered by some senior commander on the Sinai Peninsula who wrongly suspected that the LIBERTY was monitoring his activities. I did stress that that was a personal opinion. He asked if the Israelis were aware that it was an American ship and I told him that one of the communications that we intercepted from the control tower requested a reaffirmation that the ship was flying an American flag; this, however, occurred after an initial intercept from a plane to the tower had indicated that that particular pilot had identified the ship as Egyptian. I indicated our uncertainty, because of absence of precise time data, that all the air-ground and ground-air communications were to or from planes and that some at least may have been to helicopters which arrived after the air attack. He asked if a mistake of this sort was common or should be expected. I told him that I thought a ship the size of the LIBERTY was unlike and much larger than Egyptian ships and that an obviously cargo-type vessel should not reasonably be mistaken by competent naval forces or air pilots for an Egyptian man-of-war. At best I estimated the attacking ships and planes were guilty of gross negligence and carelessness.

The whole discussion took about 25-40 minutes. At its conclusion Mr. Mahon thanked me and said that he very much appreciated learning some of the background connected with this unfortunate incident.

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Deputy Director