

## MEMORANDUM

From: Richard B. Parker *WBP*

Subject: The Attack on the Liberty: Israeli Commentary

Date: June 1, 1997

I participated in two conferences commemorating the June War in Israel during the week of May 25-31. The first, hosted by the Yitzhak Rabin Center at Tel Aviv University, was held May 26 - 28. The second, hosted by the Harry S. Truman Institute at Hebrew University in Jerusalem took place on May 29.

At both conferences I spoke on the US view of the crisis. In both places I concluded with remarks about the Liberty, saying that Lyndon Johnson, Secretary Rusk and Richard Helms, the CIA director, had all believed the attack was deliberate and I was the only Gentile in Washington who thought it was accidental. If it was accidental, the Israelis should do a serious study of the incident and come up with a serious explanation that would hold water. The explanations they had offered to date did not. Under the thirty-year rule for declassification of Israeli archives, perhaps the truth could now come out.

After I spoke in Tel Aviv, an Israeli named Dr. Giora Ram Furman came up to me and said he had been a Mirage pilot at the time and had seen the attack. He had been returning from Egypt after dropping his bombs and had seen other aircraft at a lower altitude strafing the ship. Afterwards, one of the pilots had reported on the radio, which everyone must have heard, that the ship was American. The flag had not been visible when that pilot started firing and the damage had been done by the time he saw it.

In Jerusalem, I was approached by Dan Schueftan, of Haifa University, after our panel (we were both on it), who said that he had been an officer in the air force control center at the time. He had heard the pilot say the ship was American. He said they had noted the ship's presence on their plotting board during the morning, but the board had been swept clear at noon and for some reason the ship was not put back in place. They thought it had left the area. In any event, not a great deal was made at first of the fact that an American ship had been hit, but it was not hit again. Meanwhile, the navy, which was not very efficient, was responding to reports that El Arish had been shelled. The "shelling" was

the result of the Israelis having hit an ammunition train which exploded and sent armament in all directions at once. Since there were no Egyptian troops in a position to shell El Arish at the time, someone concluded that it must be a ship, and the navy had set out to find it. They were unaware of the pilot's report earlier in the day that the ship was American, communciations between the two services being terrible and there was great confusion. It was only when the navy saw the life raft (?) with "USS Liberty" on it that they realized it was American.

I asked if the Israelis had asked the American Embassy whether the ship was American and he Schueftan said he did not know. That would have been done at a level far above his.

Both my respondents assured me the attacks were accidental. Both said they would be glad to talk about it further with someone investigating the incident.

The conversations reported above were necessarily brief and I have written them up several days later. They may not be 100 percent accurate as to details, but I think the general tenor is correct. This is the first time I have heard anything sensible from the Israelis and it seems to me that if we want to get to the bottom of this matter someone, perhaps John Borne, who has written the latest book on the case, and Jim Ennes, should go to Israel and talk to these gentlemen and others. Their addresses are as follows:

Dr. Giora Ram Furman

ADDRESS REDACTED

Israel

Dr. Dan Schueftan

ADDRESS REDACTED

Israel

My belief that the attack was accidental is based on my inability to see any possible motive for the Israelis to have attacked the ship deliberately, given their dependence on the United States for material and political support. To have jeopardized that support would have been very irresponsible on their part. As Ephraim Evron said at our 1992 conference on the June War, "We may be crazy but we aren't stupid."

The most plausible motive advanced by those who think the attack was deliberate is that it was designed to prevent us from listening to Israeli traffic regarding their pending assault on the Golan Heights. When told this, Israelis maintain that they would not have cared if we listened to such traffic, and they would have known that we could have done so from Beirut or Tel Aviv as well or better than from the Liberty in any event.

I had read it before but had never focused on the fact, brought out in the discussion among Israeli generals on the third day of the Tel Aviv conference, that the decision to attack the Golan was taken by Defense Minister Moshe Dayan in the small hours of the 9th of June, well after the attack on the Liberty. Prime Minister Eshkol, representatives of the settlers and others had urged him the previous evening to make such an attack, but he had refused. Then, in characteristic fashion, he had changed his mind in the middle of the night and had called the commander of the northern sector, "Dado" Elazar, at 5:00 a.m. (according to the generals) on the ninth and told him to attack, without informing the Chief of Staff, General Rabin. Donald Neff, in Warriors for Jerusalem, seems to think that this decision was affected by the fact that the Liberty had been put out of commission. He cites a CIA report that the attack on the Liberty was ordered by Dayan. I would like to see that report. In the meantime, I am very skeptical of it (speaking from long experience with CIA reports) and the Golan theory. Everything is possible, but some things are more possible than others.

RBP:rbp