



Authority E.O. 12958

By KJ NARA Date 4/11/18

WHITE HOUSE  
STATE DEPARTMENT

Department of State

TELEGRAM

'74 JUN 21 AM 7:10

1974-6-20, Assad, Jews, Shihabi

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C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 1237

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F.O. 11652 GDS  
TARS: PINS SY  
SUBJECT: SYRIAN JEWS

REF: STATE 131267

1. I CALLED THIS MORNING (JUNE 20) ON GENERAL HIKMAT SHIBAHMI (PLEASE PROTECT) ON ANOTHER MATTER BUT DURING THE CONVERSATION I RAISED THE QUESTION OF THE TRIAL OF THE SYRIAN JEWS AND SPECIFICALLY THE INFORMATION PROVIDED REFTEL. AFTER MAKING SEVERAL TELEPHONE CALLS, GENERAL SHIHABI TOLD ME THAT THE TRIAL OF THE "TWO SYRIAN MUSLIMS AND THE TWO SYRIAN JEWS" BEGAN YESTERDAY (JUNE 19). THE TRIAL WILL INVOLVE MURDER AS WELL AS SMUGGLING OF PEOPLE OUTSIDE SYRIA. HE CONTINUED THAT IT WILL BE UP TO THE COURT TO DECIDE WHICH OF THE MEN WILL BE CHARGED WITH MURDER AND WHICH WILL BE CHARGED WITH SMUGGLING. IN ANY EVENT THE TRIAL WILL BE OPEN AND OBSERVERS WILL BE PERMITTED TO ATTEND. IN THIS CONNECTION A CERTAIN MARIO STATSI WHOM SHIHABI DESCRIBED AS A FRENCH JEWISH LAWYER AND MEMBER OF THE COMMITTEE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS IS NOW IN DAMASCUS AND HAS BEEN GIVEN PERMISSION TO ATTEND THE TRIAL AS AN OBSERVER. THE ACCUSED ARE BEING REPRESENTED BY DR HANI BITAR (THE LAWYER IN THE BATES CASE) AND MR ABD AL-RAHMAN GHAFIR.

2. GENERAL SHIHABI EMPHASIZED THAT THE CASE IS BEING HANDLED

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AS A CRIMINAL CASE AND THE SYRIAN GOVERNMENT INTENDS TO SEE THAT JUSTICE WILL BE DONE IN STRICT CONFORMITY WITH SYRIAN LAW. HE NOTED HOWEVER THAT BASED ON PRE-TRIAL INVESTIGATION THE TWO MUSLIMS AND THE TWO JEWS HAD BEEN INVOLVED IN SMUGGLING GOODS FROM LEBANON INTO SYRIA OVER A LONG PERIOD OF TIME. HE CONTINUED THAT THE JEWS KNEW THAT THEIR MUSLIM PARTNERS HAD ALREADY MURDERED TWO OTHERS (UNIDENTIFIED TO ME BY GEN SHIHABI) BEFORE THE MURDER OF THE GIRLS BUT THAT THE JEWS HAD PERMITTED THE GIRLS TO GO WITH THESE MEN IN SPITE OF THIS FOREKNOWLEDGE. THE GENERAL ADDED THAT THE TWO JEWS HAD HOWEVER TAKEN THE MONEY BEFORE THEY LEFT AND IT APPEARS THAT IT WAS THIS REASON THAT THE MUSLIM SMUGGLERS KILLED THE GIRLS WHEN THEY DISCOVERED THE GIRLS HAD NO MONEY ON THEM. GEN SHIHABI CONCLUDED THAT ALL THE FACTS WILL BE BROUGHT OUT IN THE TRIAL AND THAT THE "GUILTY WILL BE FOUND GUILTY AND THE INNOCENT FOUND INNOCENT".

COMMENT: SEVERAL TIMES IN THE PAST GENERAL SHIHABI AND I HAVE DISCUSSED THE SITUATIONS OF JEWS IN SYRIA ON AN INFORMAL PERSONAL BASIS. HE FULLY APPRECIATED THE FACT THAT THE SYRIAN GOVERNMENT'S HANDLING OF THIS PROBLEM HAS INTER-NATIONAL REPERCUSSIONS. AT THE SAME TIME HOWEVER HE IS CONVINCED THAT THE SITUATION OF SYRIAN JEWS IS BEING EXPLAINED BY THE ISRAELIS. NONETHELESS I BELIEVE THAT I HAVE ESTABLISHED A GOOD RAPPORT WITH HIM AND CAN IN THE FUTURE WITH THE DEPARTMENT GO TO HIM FOR INFORMATION. I AM SURE THAT THE DEPARTMENT AND AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV WILL AGREE HOWEVER THAT WE SHOULD NOT OVERUSE THIS CHANNEL OF COMMUNICATIONS. MOREOVER IT IS ABSOLUTELY IMPERATIVE THAT MY CONTACTS WITH SHIHABI ON THIS MATTER NEVER BE CITED AS THE SOURCE OF THE INFORMATION I OBTAIN. THE INFORMATION CAN OF COURSE BE USED BY THE DEPARTMENT AS APPROPRIATE AND BY AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV AS NEED BE. AS WE HAVE IN THE PAST, WE WILL HAVE TO WEIGH CAREFULLY THE ELEMENTS OF COMPASSION AS OPPOSED TO THE ELEMENTS OF WHAT THE SYRIANS BELIEVE TO BE UNWARRANTED INTERFERENCES IN THEIR INTERNAL AFFAIRS BEFORE PROCEEDING TO TAKE ACTION.

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