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C O N F I D E N T I A L TEL AVIV 07506

E.O. 12356: DECL: OADR

TEXT

TAGS: PREL, SHUM, AU, IS
SUBJECT: ISRAELI VIEWS ON THE WALDHEIM CASE

REF: TEL AVIV 5505

1. CONFIDENTIAL - ENTIRE TEXT.

2. SUMMARY

ISRAELI REACTION TO THE AUSTRIAN PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION PEAKED WHEN THE HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL DAY (MAY 6) FOCUSED ISRAELI ATTENTION ON THE NAZI EXTERMINATION OF THE JEWS. WHILE ANTI-WALDHEIM FEELING IS WIDESPREAD, THE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS IS SEARCHING FOR A WAY TO SATISFY THE PUBLIC'S ANGER WITHOUT IRREPARABLY DAMAGING AUSTRIAN-ISRAELI RELATIONS. THE MINISTRY OF JUSTICE HAS BEGUN ITS EXAMINATION OF THE WALDHEIM FILE. MINISTRY OFFICIALS TOLD US AFTER A PRELIMINARY

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EXAMINATION THAT THE DOCUMENTS SEEM TO IMPLICATE WALDHEIM IN "AIDING AND ABETTING" WAR TIME ATROCITIES. THEY SAY THAT IF FURTHER STUDIES CONFIRM THIS ASSESSMENT, THEY WILL RECOMMEND STRONG DIPLOMATIC AND LEGAL STEPS. THE FINAL DECISION WILL BE FOR THE CABINET. END SUMMARY.

3. THE PUBLIC REACTION

PUBLIC CONDEMNATIONS OF **KURT WALDHEIM**, WHICH REACHED A PEAK SHORTLY AFTER THE MAY 4 FIRST ROUND OF VOTING HAVE NOW RECEDED SOMEWHAT. THE HARSH PUBLIC REACTION, CROSSED PARTY, IDEOLOGICAL AND ETHNIC BOUNDS, AND WAS STOKED BY THE FACT THAT HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL DAY FELL ON MAY 6 AND FOCUSED NATIONAL ATTENTION ON NAZI CRIMES AGAINST THE JEWS. COLUMNISTS OF ALL POLITICAL PERSUASIONS REJECTED THE ARGUMENT THAT THE WALDHEIM AFFAIR WAS AN INTERNAL AUSTRIAN MATTER AND CALLED FOR A STRONG ISRAELI REACTION IF WALDHEIM IS ELECTED ON JUNE 8.

4. THE POLITICIANS REACT

FOREIGN MINISTER SHAMIR TOLD ISRAEL RADIO ON MAY 6 THAT ISRAEL CANNOT "AS A MATTER OF PRINCIPLE" ACCEPT THE POLITICAL REHABILITATION OF FORMER NAZIS OR "REMAIN INDIFFERENT WHEN NAZIS OR NAZISM ARE INVOLVED." AT THE SAME TIME MEMBERS OF KNESSET SHEVAH WEISS (LABOR PARTY) AND DOV SHILANSKY (LIKUD), BOTH HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS, SENT AN OPEN LETTER TO THE AUSTRIAN EMBASSY IN TEL AVIV SAYING THAT IF WALDHEIM IS ELECTED ISRAEL WILL BE FORCED TO CONSIDER BREAKING DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS WITH AUSTRIA. PRIME MINISTER PERES HAS ALSO EXPRESSED "CONCERN" OVER THE POSSIBILITY OF WALDHEIM'S ELECTION AND HAS CALLED ON THE ISRAELI MINISTRY OF JUSTICE TO INVESTIGATE THE CHARGES AGAINST WALDHEIM AND PREPARE A LEGAL OPINION AS TO THEIR VALIDITY.

5. THE FOREIGN MINISTRY LOOKS FOR A WAY OUT

WORKING LEVEL OFFICIALS OF THE FOREIGN MINISTRY ARE CONCERNED THAT ISRAEL'S REACTION, SHOULD WALDHEIM BE THE VICTOR ON JUNE 8, NOT BE SUCH AS TO DAMAGE ISRAEL'S RELATIONS WITH AUSTRIA AND COMPLICATE RELATIONS WITH THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF GERMANY. ACCORDING TO ISRAEL RADIO, MICHAEL ELITZUR, ISRAEL'S AMBASSADOR TO AUSTRIA HAS ADVISED THE FOREIGN MINISTRY THAT ISRAEL SHOULD CEASE ITS ATTACKS ON WALDHEIM AS THEY ARE DAMAGING AUSTRIAN-ISRAELI RELATIONS AND ENHANCING WALDHEIM'S POPULARITY. SIMILARLY, OFFICIALS FROM MFA'S DIVISION OF EUROPEAN AFFAIRS HAVE TRIED TO DISTANCE THEMSELVES FROM SHAMIR'S COMMENTS AND HAVE TOLD US THAT THEY WOULD

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STRONGLY OPPOSE A BREAK IN RELATIONS WITH AUSTRIA. A
COMPLICATING FACTOR IS THE FACT THAT AMBASSADOR
ELITZUR IS DUE TO LEAVE VIENNA THIS SUMMER. EVEN THE
EUROPEAN DIVISION ADMITS THAT IT IS INCONCEIVABLE
THAT AN ISRAELI AMBASSADOR WOULD PRESENT HIS
CREDENTIALS TO WALDHEIM.
C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 02 OF 02 TEL AVIV 07506

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6. THE MINISTRY OF JUSTICE BEGINS ITS INVESTIGATION

MINISTRY OF JUSTICE OFFICIALS HAVE BEGUN THEIR
EXAMINATION OF WALDHEIM'S FILE. AFTER EXAMINATION OF
THE DOCUMENTS THEY WILL TRY TO LOCATE WITNESSES AND
SEARCH FOR CORROBORATING EVIDENCE. BASED ON A
PRELIMINARY EVALUATION OF THE DOCUMENTS ON HAND,
MINISTRY INVESTIGATORS TOLD US THAT THEY ARE OF THE
OPINION THAT WALDHEIM IS "IMPLICATED" IN ATROCITIES
COMMITTED BY ARMY GROUP E IN GREECE AND YUGOSLAVIA.
THEY CAUTIONED THAT WALDHEIM'S INVOLVEMENT WAS
LIMITED TO "AIDING AND ABETTING", AND KNOWLEDGE OF
WAR CRIMES AGAINST CIVILIANS, BOTH JEWISH AND
NON-JEWISH. IF THESE FINDINGS ARE CONFIRMED BY THE
SUBSEQUENT INVESTIGATION, SOURCES AT THE JUSTICE
MINISTRY TELL US THE MINISTRY WILL ADVISE THAT ISRAEL
TAKE STRONG LEGAL AND DIPLOMATIC ACTION AGAINST
WALDHEIM. JUSTICE MINISTRY PERSONNEL RUEFULLY ADMIT
THAT DIPLOMATIC OR ECONOMIC CONSIDERATIONS MIGHT
PREVENT THE CABINET FROM ACCEPTING THEIR
RECOMMENDATIONS. PICKERING
END OF MESSAGE

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