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29 JUL 1988

Washington, D.C. 20505

OCA 2523-88

The Honorable William Cohen
Vice Chairman
Select Committee on Intelligence
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Mr. Chairman:

This is in response to your letter of 12 July requesting the Agency provide contemporaneous documentation that the Canadian Government conditioned its cooperation in the 1980 exfiltration of six Americans from the Canadian Mission in Tehran on Congress not being notified in advance of the operation.

A search of our records has revealed no contemporaneous documentation that Canada requested Congress not be informed of the operation. This is not surprising. Given the extreme sensitivity of the Canadian support to our exfiltration effort, several aspects of the operation were not committed to paper.

We have discussed Canada's support to this operation with Agency officers, some of whom are now retired, who recounted the events surrounding the exfiltration of the six Americans. These officers recall that a Canadian official informed senior Agency officials on 16 November 1979 that six Embassy employees had made their way to the Canadian Mission. This was critical intelligence as the Agency was desperately seeking information on the location of the hostages during the preceding two weeks. The Canadian official stated that Canada would help in the exfiltration of the Americans. The official insisted, however, that the knowledge of the Americans presence in the Mission and Canada's assistance in their exfiltration had to be extremely limited. Two officers from the Directorate of Operations recall that the Canadians requested "that information must not go beyond this room." Given the almost certain violent retaliation that would occur against Canadian

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officials in Tehran if the Iranians became aware of the Canadian assistance, the Agency agreed to honor this request. The Canadian official did agree to the necessity of briefing the President, but re-emphasized his country's requirement that no one beyond the President should be briefed.

Precise recollections vary, eight years after the fact, on whether the Canadian specifically requested that Congress not be informed about the operation. Two Directorate of Operations officers recall that the Canadian official stipulated that Congress not be informed; two other officers present at the same meeting do not recall a specific statement to this effect. Based upon subsequent discussions, these Agency officers believed that there was an implied agreement with Canada that Congress not be informed of the operation.

While I can understand your interest in having an accurate historical record on this matter, I believe that the crucial point to keep in mind is the distinct possibility that in the future a country will condition its cooperation with the Agency on Congress not being notified until the extraordinary sensitive part of the covert action operation is completed. Without the flexibility to delay Congressional notice in such situations, the Agency may not be able to carry out a covert action designed to save innocent American lives. This possibility must be seriously considered in determining the wisdom of mandating Congressional notice within 48 hours. A copy of this letter is being provided to Chairman Boren and Chairman Stokes and Ranking Minority Member Hyde of the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence.

Sincerely yours,

/s/ William H. Webster

William H. Webster
Director of Central Intelligence