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DRAFTED BY AF/T:LRMACFARLAND:SAH
APPROVED BY AF:WEDMONDSON
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TO AMBASSADY PRETORIA IMMEDIATE

S C R E T STATE 199098

NODIS
FOR THE AMBASSADOR

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PARM, SF

SUBJECT: POSSIBLE SOUTH AFRICAN NUCLEAR PROGRAM: PRESS COVERAGE

REF: PRETORIA 4239 (PARA 3.C)

1. WE HAVE CHECKED WITH AF/P AND S/PRS AND ASCERTAINED THAT DEPARTMENT SPOKESMAN HAS TO DATE MADE NO STATEMENT AT DEPARTMENT NOON BREIFING ON SUBJECT, NOR HAS QUESTION THUS FAR BEEN RAISED DURING BRIEFINGS. DEPARTMENT SPOKESMEN HAVE IN RECE;T DAYS RESPONDED TO A NUMBER OF INDIVIDUAL PRESS QUERIES AND HAVE LIMITED THEMSELVES TO GENERAL GUIDANCE (DATED 8/18) TEXT SENT YOU SEPTEL. IN ADDITION, PRESS DUTY OFFICER ON SATURDAY DID CONFIRM THAT WE HAD TAKEN ISSUE UP WITH SAG BUT THAT TO DATE NO RESPONSE HAD BEEN RECEIVED.

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2. YOU SHOULD ALSO BE AWARE OF ITEM WHICH RAN ON ABC EVENING NEWS AUGUST 19. WHICH, AS YOU WILL NOTE, GOES BEYOND DEPARTMENT GUIDANCE. TEXT FOLLOWS: REASONER IN INTRODUCTION: QUOTE ABC HAS LEARNED THAT SOUTH AFRICA MAY HAVE A NUCLEAR WEAPON UNQUOTE. BARRIE DUNSMORE (ABOUT HALF WAY THROUGH PROGRAM): QUOTETHE SOVIET UNION RECENTLY
ALLEGED THAT SOUTH AFRICA IS DEVELOPING ITS OWN NUCLEAR WEAPONS. AS A RESULT, THE US HAS RECENTLY UNDERTAKEN ITS OWN INVESTIGATION. U.S. OFFICIALS HAVE TOLD ABC THAT SOUTH AFRICA HAS OR MAY BE DEVELOPING A NUCLEAR CAPABILITY.

THE U.S. DOES NOT HAVE FIRST HAND KNOWLEDGE, BUT U.S. OFFICIALS SAY THERE IS SUFFICIENT EVIDENCE TO BE VERY CONCERNED.

IN THE LAST FEW DAYS, THE U.S. HAS ASKED THE SOUTH AFRICANS TO RESPOND TO A SERIES OF SPECIFIC QUESTIONS. IT IS NOW AWAITING A RESPONSE. U.S. OFFICIALS SAY THAT IF SOUTH AFRICA DOES HAVE NUCLEAR WEAPONS, IT WOULD BE A VERY SERIOUS DEVELOPMENT.

IT WOULD ESCALATE THE CONFLICT IN THAT AREA. UNQUOTE.

3. FOLLOWING BRIEF ITEM ALSO RAN IN SUNDAY WASHINGTON POST: QUOTE THE UNITED STATES HAS ASKED SOUTH AFRICA WHETHER THERE IS TRUTH TO SOVIET REPORTS IT PLANS TO TEST A NUCLEAR BOMB, THE STATE DEPARTMENT SAID. A SPOKESMAN SAID THE INQUIRY WAS ACCOMPANIED BY A WARNING THAT ANY NUCLEAR TESTS BY SOUTH AFRICA WOULD CARRY SERIOUS IMPLICATIONS UNQUOTE. BOTH POST AND ABC ACCOUNTS GO BEYOND AUTHORIZED GUIDANCE, AND SHOULD BE ATTRIBUTED TO UNAUTHORIZED LEAKS RATHER THAN SECRET.

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TO ANY OFFICIAL USG STATEMENT ON SUBJECT. NEW YORK SUNDAY TIMES RAN BRIEF UPI ITEM WHICH QUOTES DEPARTMENT SPOKESMAN JOHN MEDEIROS BY NAME BUT DOES NOT GO BEYOND LANGUAGE OF AUGUST 18 GUIDANCE.

4. DEPARTMENT UNAWARE OF ANY INSTANCE IN WHICH REFERENCE TO KALAHARI SITE HAS APPEARED IN PUBLIC DOMAIN. WE ARE OF COURSE WATCHING CLOSELY FOR THIS ASPECT TO SURFACE AND WILL REPORT FURTHER DEVELOPMENTS ASAP.

5. ASSUME YOU WILL REPEAT TO US TEXTS OF SIGNIFICANT ITEMS ON THIS SUBJECT WHICH APPEAR IN SOUTH AFRICAN PRESS. CHRISTOPHER

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FOLLOWING REPEAT STATE 199098 SENT ACTION PRETORIA 21 AUG 77

QUOTE SECRET STATE 199098

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FOR THE AMBASSADOR

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UNQUOTE CHRISTOPHER