

GEORGE CHRISTIAN

January 5, 1978

Mr. James M. Ennes, Jr.
6413 Kenhowe Drive
Bethesda, Maryland 20034

Dear Mr. Ennes:

In regard to your letter of December 21, I can give you the following information.

When the President first learned that USS LIBERTY had been attacked, he feared the act had been committed by Russian planes and submarines. Obviously, he was relieved when he learned an hour or so later that the Israelis were the ones involved.

When the Israeli government apologized, the initial reaction in the White House was to take the apology at face value.

Nevertheless, the President asked Clark Clifford, who was then on the Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board, to head an immediate investigation into the matter. It was on the basis of this report that the President concluded there was no evidence that the attack was intentional, and he so reported in his memoirs after he left office (without referring to the Clifford investigation).

Frankly, there was considerable skepticism in the White House that the attack was accidental, even though tragic mistakes are rather common during warfare. It must be remembered that the major consideration facing the President at the time was whether the war could be stopped before a confrontation was precipitated with the Soviet Union. It was imperative that the United States maintain enough leverage with Israel to bring about a cease-fire. The attack on USS LIBERTY was extremely serious, but not of the crisis proportions of the threats made by the Soviet Union a few days later to intervene militarily.

In later years when there was renewed speculation in various publications about the attack, together with the eyewitness accounts of some of the men on USS LIBERTY, I became convinced that an accident of this magnitude was too much to swallow. If it were a deliberate attack the question remains, of course, of whether it was a tactical decision on the part of elements of the Israeli military or whether it was ordered by high officials. Even in 1967 there was a strong

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feeling in the White House that the Israeli government had nothing to gain and much to lose in ordering the attack on USS LIBERTY. Consequently, it was felt that if the attack were indeed deliberate, it was not a premeditated move by high authorities. I still accept this premise but not the notion that the attack itself was an accident.

Sincerely,


George Christian

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