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British Embassy
Via XX Settembre 80A 00187 Rome
Telex 61049 Telephone 4755.441

WRJOSI/2
RECEIVED IN THE OFFICE NO. 13
He made a fairly convincing case based essentially on the private testimony of the aircraft
per [unclear] of the aircraft
24/10

David Herbert Esq
WED
FCO

Your reference
Our reference
Date 21 October 1985

Dear David,

THE ACHILLE LAURO AFFAIR

1 I enclose English translations of two key statements made last week by Craxi about the Achille Lauro hijacking, one being a newspaper account of Craxi's report to the Council of Ministers on 14 October, and the other, the text of Craxi's statement to Parliament on 17 October (our telno.874). We shall naturally be writing to you with a considered view of the whole affair. Meanwhile the enclosed are required reading!

Yours ever
S M J Lampert

High jacking of the "Achille Lauro"

UNOFFICIAL TRANSLATION

From La Repubblica - Tuesday 15 October 1985

The Palazzo Chigi version

ROME - Abu Abbas stayed on board the Egyptian Boeing all the time before getting onto the Yugoslav aircraft. Craxi confirmed this yesterday in his report to the Cabinet council. The Cabinet council adjourned the meeting after a "first examination of the vicissitudes of the high-jacking", and "awaiting further verification by the President of the Council".

In his report Craxi, first of all, recollected the telephone conversations with Reagan during the night of 10 October which concerned the request for permission for the "Egypt Air" aeroplane (which carried apart from the Egyptian citizens (10 of whom were armed) the four hijackers of the 'Achille Lauro', and two senior members of the OLP - one of whom was Abu Abbas) to land at Sigonella airport. Craxi specified that as the aircraft was on official duty and as such covered by diplomatic immunity and to be considered 'extraterritorial' both in the air and on land. He also disclosed that Abu Abbas was the owner of an Iraqi diplomatic passport.

The President of the Council then said "Whilst I was having my first conversation with President Reagan at about midnight on 10-11 October, the presence of aircraft appeared on Sigonella's radar screen. On the ground at that particular moment there was no evidence of any possibility of a diversion. One of the aircraft was an Egyptian Boeing 707 which appeared to be accompanied by 2 American transport C 141 aircraft and which requested permission to land. Permission in the first instance was denied but was then granted with regard to the state of emergency declared by the pilot. At the same moment landing permission granted by the Ministry of Defence for the Boeing and the two C 141s was received at Sigonella.

On landing at 00.16 hours the Egyptian Boeing was put under the control of 50 Italian soldiers. About 50 American soldiers from one of the American C 141s, which had in the meantime both landed, surrounded the Boeing. The Commander of this group of American militia declared that he was under order to take command of the Palestinians aboard the Boeing. After another consultation with President Reagan in which I had denied his request to transfer the four high-jackers and the two Palestinians to the United States and after having informed him of my promise to bring the high-jackers to trial and to acquire information as to the part played by the two Palestinian officials, the American soldiers boarded their aircraft.

There was no tension between the American and Italian soldiers. The latter left in the two C 141s at 06.00 am. At about the same time the four Palestinian hi-jackers left the aeroplane. The two Palestinian officials who had refused the invitation to leave the plane in the role of guests cum witnesses stayed on board until they boarded the Yugoslav airline plane on Saturday afternoon.

"Next morning" continued Craxi "the Public Prosecutor of Siracusa, in connection with the extraterritorial status of the aircraft, asked the Egyptian officials onboard that the aeroplane should not leave before an exact identification of the four "Achille Lauro" high-jackers had been made. At the same time the Egyptian authorities were insisting on the immediate return of the aircraft with all its' passengers excluding the four high-jackers and maintaining that the detention of the plane was illegal. The "Achille Lauro" was in the same way blocked by the Egyptian government and the crew was not allowed to leave the ship.

In the meantime the Italian Government had been able to acquire declarations from Abu Abbas concerning the high jacking episode and the subsequent release of the "Achille Lauro". At 20.15 of the same day, having concluded the identification procedure of the four high-jackers, the Public Prosecutor of Siracusa declared that the magistrates findings were complete. At that point there was no further motive for holding the aircraft and its' passengers, with the exception of course of the high-jackers who were already in the care of Italian justice.

"The Italian Government however - the report continues - asked the Egyptian Ambassador his permission for the Egyptian aircraft to move from Sigonella to Ciampino airport in Rome for further investigation to be carried out. It appeared that whilst at this airport the two Palestinian officials remained aboard all the time, under diplomatic immunity and under the military control of the Egyptians.

Late at night the American Ambassador in Rome approached the Italian government requesting the provisional arrest of Abu Abbas with a view to extradition and in compliance with the treaty between Italy and the United States. This provisional arrest request, though formally correct, did not contain, in the opinion of the Ministry of Justice adequate elements to meet the criteria laid down in the Italian regulations governing the requirements for such an arrest.

"During the morning of Saturday (12), the Minister for Justice confirmed that the request for provisional arrest could not be granted. On the other hand, the Italian Magistrature, informed of all the facts supplied by the Americans to the government, had not asked for the detention of either the aircraft or any one of its' passengers. Therefore at 15.00 hours of the same day the American Embassy was informed that there was no valid motive for holding the aircraft and its' passengers any further. In the meantime the Egyptian Ambassador informed the Italian government that Abbas and the person accompanying him, for security reasons, would leave Italian territory aboard an aeroplane belonging to the Yugoslav airlines. It was, in fact, President Mubark himself who had expressed fear of a further interception of the Egyptair aeroplane should the two Palestinian personalities be on board. After the departure from Fiumicino of the Egyptian plane the Italian ship "Achille Lauro" was granted permission to leave Egypt.

Honourable President,

Honourable Colleagues,

Before announcing the decisions which I retain necessary and right to make, due to the serious political situation which has come to pass in the Government coalition, I felt the obligation to expound to the Chamber, in absolute respect for the truth, the sequence of events concerning the Achille Lauro affair which the country has lived through with trepidation during these days and which the government right from the beginning has faced with a line of conduct always inspired by the primary objective of preventing a tragedy and acting in such a way that our decisions were never such as to prejudice the dignity of the nation and sovereignty of the country.

These are the facts.

On Monday 7 October an SOS radio message was intercepted in Goteborg coming from an Italian cruise liner offshore in the tract of sea between Alexandria and Port Said.

The Italian authorities, informed of the SOS, immediately began verifications through the Egyptian government. In the evening of Monday it became clear that the cruise liner Achille Lauro had effectively been sequestered by a terrorist group.

On request of the Italian government, an emergency plan was put into action in Egypt. An operational centre was set up in Port Said, under the direct responsibility of Prime Minister Lufti and under the command of the same President Mubarak.

The Italian government immediately took care of defining the necessary political and diplomatic initiatives, making all the contacts useful for identifying the authors of the hijacking, their intentions, for ascertaining the exact position of the ship, as well as the identity and the nationality of the persons who were on board at the time of the sequestration of the ship.

On board the Lauro, there were 344 crew members, including 215 Italians and 78 Portuguese, 201 passengers comprising 52 Swiss, 29 Austrians, 28 Italians, 16 Americans and 11 Germans.

Thus the governments of all the countries able to help were urged to do so. In particular, besides Egypt, contacts were made with the United States, Jordan, Syria, Israel, and Tunisia as well as the PLO, to better direct diplomatic efforts towards a solution without bloodshed of an extremely dramatic situation. First of all the request was verified, attributed to the leader of the command on board who stated he was Palestinian, to free 50 Palestinians held in Israel, in exchange for the release of the Achille Lauro and the persons on board.

From a name which filtered about the identity of the Palestinians for whom liberation was requested, it was considered probable that the group responsible for the sequestration belonged to a formation called Palestine Liberation Front, in turn divided into three distinct and opposing factions.

In the meantime, the PLO in Tunis declared its total

extraneousness and dissociated itself from the hijacking, condemning it as an act of sabotage to peace efforts.

In their turn, the American authorities, on the night of Monday 7 October, expressly asked the Italian government to request Arafat to issue a public statement affirming that he had no responsibility for the terrorist undertaking.

During that same night an emergency meeting was convened at the Presidency of the Council to also organize the military measures necessary for the liberation of the passengers and the ship, if by any ill chance they should be needed. The selfsame night, on the orders of Minister Spadolini, military units of specialists left Italy directed towards the zone of operations.

In the early hours of the morning of Tuesday 8, Yasser Arafat confirmed his condemnation of the sequestration of the Achille Lauro and stated his complete willingness to work towards achieving a bloodless solution, that is safeguarding the physical safety of all the hostages.

Again in the early hours of the morning of Tuesday 8 October, liaisons with the government of Cairo and with the United States authorities were intensified, in order to establish the exact position of the ship and its route, to check the possibility of a liaison with the hijackers. The ship did not reply to calls. We asked the US government if it was willing for a simple contact with the hijackers, expressing a position of extreme caution with regards to a chance of

negotiation, so much more so because the terms understood from radio messages launched by the hijackers concerned Palestinians held in Israel.

During those hours the hijackers interrupted their radio signals, rendering the situation even more dramatic, there still being difficulty in pinpointing the ship and its route.

At noon on that day, Ambassador Rabb expressed to us his government's great anxiety about the developments of the affair and confirmed the total solidarity of the US, whose government declared it was "ready to supply all the assistance which should be requested by Italy".

This great anxiety had arisen in relation to the hijackers' intentions, transmitted via radio before the interruption of connections, to first of all kill the passengers of American nationality should their requests not be accepted.

At 1 p.m., while we had a meeting in progress in Palazzo Chigi, attended by the Ministers of Foreign Affairs and Defence, the news arrived that reconnaissance planes had glimpsed the ship which was proceeding eastwards, presumably towards Syria.

Subsequently we learnt that the hijackers were asking the Syrian authorities if they could enter the port of Tartous. The government of Damascus held back on any decision about the request until they had learnt if Italy and the United States were willing to enter into negotiations with the hijackers.

In agreement with Washington we decided not to accept and to ask the Syrian government to refuse entry.

At the same time, the government set up new contacts to encourage the condemnation of the criminal act by Palestinian groups in Syria. In this we had the full cooperation of the Syrian government, later personally confirmed to Minister Andreotti by the same President Assad.

At little after this, the agencies broadcast the harsh censure of the Syrian government and also of some groups and factions of the Palestinian dissent. Considering the analogous condemnation expressed by the Arab countries, the government had thus obtained the first goal it had fixed itself in the sphere of its diplomatic action, and that is the absolute political isolation of the terrorists.

In the meantime, however, serious even though unverified news had been broadcast about the killing of two American nationals. We were informed that an emergency meeting had been called for 1 p.m. local Washington time in the White House with the request to fix for that time a new agreement at the highest political level with our country. I therefore convened a new meeting at the Presidency of the Council, attended by Vice President Forlani as well as Ministers Andreotti and Spadolini.

While this meeting was in progress, Ambassador Rabb asked to be received with urgency. The American diplomat spoke on instructions from President Reagan; he first of all expressed

the American government's great appreciation for the efficient coordination which was being achieved between the two countries.

He then tackled the question of military measures; he stated that the situation, in the opinion of his government, was untenable. He said that Washington considered that the news about the killing of the two American nationals was reliable, and that, from the radio messages intercepted, it would seem that the hijackers intend to kill, from tomorrow on, one American citizen an hour and to continue until their requests were accepted. He confirmed Washington's absolute unwillingness to start up negotiations: and he informed me about the decision to take military action, for which the Americans had fixed a starting date on Wednesday night, telling me that their preparations would be finished at that time. They ask to carry it out alone should there be differences of opinion on its necessity.

I observed that the ship is an Italian ship and I informed him that the Italian government had from the very first considered the possibility of a military intervention in case of absolute necessity and that it had already prepared men and means for this aim.

I however informed Rabb that we did not have the same information as he did about the course of events. I considered that one should still seek a bloodless outcome. I therefore advised caution, confirming however that in my opinion the

Italian government was prepared to use the military option, also a combined one, stating that in this extreme case I would have submitted the problem to a government decision. Nothing however should occur without close consultation and concerted action. I therefore suggested that the Ambassador transmit a message advocating caution to Washington, bearing in mind the high risk coefficient in terms of human lives which a military action could cause.

We thus agreed to adjourn the appraisals to the following morning in order to grasp in what direction events had moved and to define the behaviour to assume.

In the government meeting we decided to consider the modalities and conditions which would best guarantee the greatest prospects of the success of a military action with the lowest possible level of risk.

But even in this context, we thought that the need remained to initiate a dialogue with the hijackers as soon as possible, also to gain time and to lead the ship, if possible, into a safe position. We thus received with relief the news given to us by the Egyptian Foreign Minister Meguid about a possible return of the Achille Lauro to the waters outside of Port Said. At the same time we were asked what our attitude would be on starting up possible contacts with the hijackers for release of the passengers. The Egyptian government, which was prepared to authorize the Achille Lauro to enter harbour despite the

Americans' opposition, contrary however to giving refuge to the hijackers, confirmed to us its greatest willingness to exercise any useful and possible influence, animated by the proposal to prevent loss of human lives. On our part we immediately expressed Italy's deepest appreciation to the Egyptian government, agreeing on a pragmatic line of approach with the hijackers which would avoid useless tragedies.

We were comforted by the awareness of the political isolation in which the hijackers now found themselves; as well as the possibility of agreeing with the Egyptians on discreet encirclement formulas as soon as the Achille Lauro had entered free waters close to Egypt.

At this point two factors came into play in the development of the situation: the full, sagacious collaboration of Egypt and the good offices carried out by the emissaries sent by the PLO to the operational centre of Port Said. They are two factors which were essential for the success of the political and diplomatic action. They created the foundations for achieving the goal we all so strongly hoped for: we certainly, but also other countries which, like Italy, had their own nationals on board the ship and who had asked the government to do it all it could to avert a tragedy.

We agreed with the Egyptian authorities to thus proceed with our contact strategy, keeping the United States constantly

informed. The news came from Cairo that the Achille Lauro was by now close to the territorial waters in front of Port Said from where Arafat's emissaries considered they were by now in contact with the hijackers.

A little while later a confirmation arrived directly from Yasser Arafat. With a message, the Palestinian leader informed me that - I quote - "After the attempts we made during the entire night we were able to bring back the ship to the waters in front of Egypt; I can advise you that we have great faith as regards a positive conclusion of the affair within today".

He however urged us to carry out some persuasive actions to obtain at least a symbolic gesture from Israel. He considered that this part of the message could not be accepted since there were not the conditions for initiating the relevant soundings. A little later the government was instead informed by Yasser Arafat that the release of the ship "with all the passengers safe and sound" would come about without any recompense in freeing prisoners. Finally, the news arrived from the Egyptian authorities, around 3.30 p.m. on Wednesday 9, that the ship had effectively been released, and that all the persons on board were in good health.

We had previously informed the Egyptian authorities that they could have, as far as we were concerned, a margin of flexibility to use if the circumstances rendered it necessary,

which involved the authorization to grant a safe-conduct to the hijackers on the condition that no acts of violence had been carried out on board which could be prosecuted on the basis of Italian penal law.

At 4.20 p.m. the Ministry of Foreign Affairs finally managed to establish a radio telephone contact with Captain De Rosa, who confirmed that he had recovered full control of the ship which was at anchorage 15 miles from Port Said, and that all the passengers and crew members were well, except for a slightly-wounded sailor.

Only afterwards, and precisely at 6.10 p.m. of the same day and on my direct initiative, having learnt it from a direct radio-telephone contact with the captain of the Achille Lauro, was there the news of the disappearance on board the ship of an American national with the name of Leon Klinghoffer. The captain did not give me absolute certainty, but from the indications he transmitted, the fact emerged clearly that the American national had been dramatically murdered and thrown overboard. I immediately sent President Reagan the Italian government's and my personal condolences for the death of the American national. This news filled us with profound sadness precisely at the moment in which our spirits had been raised for a tragedy averted for all of us, all of those who had lived through this dramatic adventure and for their families. On my part I immediately provided for announcing Italy's

intention to ask Egypt for the extradition of the four hijackers so that they could undergo a proper trial in Italy. In the doubt that the hijackers could have in the meantime been transferred to the PLO's custody, I sent Yasser Arafat the request for their handing over to Italy. I expressly communicated these intentions of the Italian government to the President of the United States Reagan, ensuring him that no stone would be left unturned, always in the sphere of Italy's concrete possibilities, in order to single out and punish the guilty.

I will now give the facts of the affair of the hijacking of the Boeing 737 of EgyptAir on Italian soil.

Around midnight, Italian time, on Thursday 10, I receive a telephone call from the White House in which I am informed that American military planes had intercepted an Egyptian civil airliner, on board which the American government was reasonably certain there were the four Palestinians responsible for the hijacking of the Achille Lauro. The President of the United States asked the Italian government for its consent for the civil airplane and the American military planes to land at Sigonella.

In consideration of the particularly exceptional situation and, that is, having to pursue the main objective of a probable capture of those responsible for the very serious episode of the last days and the serious crimes, including the more or less

certain assassination of a passenger on board the Achille Lauro, I decided to consent to the landing of the planes in question at the Sigonella base: the Egyptian Boeing 737 and the American planes which then turned out to be two C 141 transport carriers and not the interceptor fighters. As soon as the Egyptian Boeing landed it was placed under the control of 50 Italian soldiers who surrounded it. Fifty American battle-equipped soldiers got out of the C 141s and in their turn surrounded the Italian soldiers. They were members of the Delta Force and were commanded by a general in radio-liaison with Washington; a command was ready to intervene to seize the Boeing's passengers. The order coming directly from the White House was to "seize the terrorists".

In the meantime other telephone calls crossed each other. Secretary of State Shultz got into contact with the Minister of Foreign Affairs Andreotti, while Defense Secretary Weinberger contacted the Minister of Defence Spadolini.

President Reagan himself again telephoned me putting forward Washington's desire to be able to transfer those responsible for Leon Klinghoffer's murder to American territory so that they could undergo a regular trial. I in turn presented our position in law and that is that the crimes had been committed in international waters, on an Italian ship, and therefore they must be taken as criminal acts perpetrated in Italian territory. I added that the Italian government

could not remove, with its own decision, those responsible for the hijacking of the Achille Lauro and the acts of violence committed on board from the jurisdiction of the Italian courts.

President Reagan took note of my position, announcing the United States Government's intention to ask for the extradition of the four terrorists on the basis of the treaty in force on the matter between the United States and Italy. To President Reagan's subsequent request to also arrest the two Palestinian executives reported to be on board the same plane, I said that in this case we could make enquiries.

Immediately after I gave orders for the four hijackers to be taken into custody while the two Palestinian executives should only be held as witnesses, so as to be able to acquire useful elements for the judicial proceedings on the hijacking of the Achille Lauro.

As regards the particular status of the Egyptian airliner, which was on special mission of the Egyptian government and which therefore enjoyed extraterritoriality, we advised the Egyptian authorities on board of Italy's intention to take the four hijackers into custody for judicial aims.

This request was accepted. We also communicated that the two Palestinian executives reported on board would be asked to leave the plane and treated by the Italian government as guests needed to bear witness. We were then told that the two Palestinian executives, who were in Italy against their

wishes, refused to leave the plane and that in these circumstances the Egyptian authorities did not consider they could accept our request. It was suggested to us that we agree with them on a procedure in order to make it possible for a representative of the government to speak with the aforesaid Palestinian personalities.

In particular, the Egyptian Ambassador in Rome formally communicated to us that the two Palestinians on board the plane hijacked on Italian territory should be considered as guests of the Egyptian government which, on these grounds, retained it was responsible for their safety.

The morning of the following day, Friday 11, the government then learnt of the Public Prosecutor of Siracusa's need to proceed to the exact identification of the four hijackers of the Achille Lauro. The request was forwarded at the same time at which the Egyptian government took an official step for the immediate release of the airplane with all its passengers, excluding those responsible for the hijack. The competent Egyptian diplomatic authorities, showing comprehension for the Italian magistracy's legitimate requirement, consented to the Boeing 737 being held for the time strictly necessary to complete the identification procedures according to the methods considered appropriate by the Italian magistrature.

I must however point out that the Achille Lauro was still blocked in Port Said by the Egyptian government. In the meantime,

while waiting for the Public Prosecutor of Siracusa to proceed to the exact identification of the hijackers, the Italian government prepared, with the Egyptian diplomatic authorities in Rome, the procedure for acquiring some statements from Abu Abbas about the hijacking affair and the subsequent release of the Achille Lauro.

Thus it was possible for an Italian diplomat, encharged by me, to have a conversation with Abu Abbas on board the Egyptian airliner during its stop in Sigonella. During this conversation a testimony was gathered which can be made available.

At 8.15 p.m. on Friday, the procedure for identifying the hijackers having been concluded, the Public Prosecutor of Siracusa considered that the needs of the magistrature were satisfied and stated that the plane was free to leave Sigonella. From that moment there was no longer the necessary legal basis for further holding the Egypt Air plane and its passengers, with the exception naturally of the terrorists already in Italian custody.

However the Italian government asked the Egyptian Ambassador if the Boeing 737 could be moved from the Sigonella base to Ciampino airport in Rome in order to be able to explore the possibilities of carrying out further verifications. This constituted an attitude of the government which responded to the commitment I had assumed with Reagan to concede the necessary time for us to obtain elements or evidence which

could demonstrate, as assumed, the involvement of the two Palestinian executives in the affair of the Achille Lauro hijack.

At 10.01 p.m. on 11 October the Egypt Air Boeing took off from Sigonella for Ciampino.

At the same time four of our fighters left from Gioia del Colle to guarantee its protection during the flight.

At 10.04 an American military plane left from Sigonella without authorization and followed the Egyptian Boeing. The pilot did not respond to the demands for identification put forward by our fighters; he even asked them to move away. The pilots of our fighters retain that it was a F 14. Forty km from Ciampino the American plane disappeared from the radar flying very low.

At about 11 p.m. the Boeing 737 landed at Ciampino and a few moments later a US military T 39 plane landed a few metres away, declaring an emergency situation. The Italian government is preparing an inquiry into these episodes and a protest was immediately addressed to Washington.

At 5.30 a.m. on the morning of Saturday 12, the American Ambassador Rabb presented a formal request both to the Minister of Justice and to Palazzo Chigi for the temporary arrest of Abu Abbas for extradition, in application of the treaty in force on the matter between Italy and the United States.

The prescribed examination was immediately begun by the Italians, which did not give a positive outcome. The request

for temporary arrest, in fact, although formally correct, did not present, in the opinion of the competent Ministry of Justice, the merits and substance to fit the criteria imposed by Italian legislation on the matter of acquisition and presentation of proofs for the aim of the arrest itself.

In these circumstances there was no longer the judicial basis for the government to assess the political and diplomatic/ ^{situation} regarding an action aiming at further holding Abu Abbas, bearing in mind that at that moment he was on board an airplane which enjoyed the status of extraterritoriality and which was moreover protected by the diplomatic immunity extended to it by the Republic of Iraq.

I must also point out the firm intention communicated to us by the Egyptians of defending, if necessary, the inviolability of the plane with arms.

In this regard the presence of 10 armed Egyptian guards on the plane was reported, a presence which was directly verified.

In the morning of Saturday 12, the Minister of Justice thus confirmed the non acceptability of the request for temporary arrest. On the other hand, the Italian magistrature, which was aware of all the elements which had been supplied to the government by the United States, did not consider it could ask for either the plane or some of its passengers to be held. This state of things took up the entire day so that Abu Abbas

could only leave Italian territory at 7.02 p.m. Before that, at 3.00 p.m. of the same day, the Ambassadors of Egypt and the United States had been notified that there was no reason to further detain the airplane and its passengers.

The Egyptian Ambassador subsequently informed the Italian government that the two Palestinian executives, for reasons of security, would leave Italian territory on board a Yugoslav airline plane.

After the departure of the Egyptian plane from Fiumicino, the Italian ship Achille Lauro was given permission to leave Egypt. Yesterday evening it returned home safe and sound.

Before the decision which was communicated to the two Ambassadors at 3.00 p.m. was adopted, I was careful to consult with the ministers who represent the coalition forces in the government, to whom I explained the situation in which we found ourselves and the decisions proposed.

Minister Altissimo took note, confirming at the same time his dissatisfaction at an insufficient collective management of the entire affair.

Minister Nicolazzi took note, expressing in turn reservations and criticisms about the conduct followed.

Minister Spadolini told me that he agreed on one condition. The condition was that before allowing the plane to depart, the identity of the four terrorists should be ascertained, also by means of a recognition carried out by the passengers

of the Achille Laura sent specially to Siracusa for this end.

Immediately afterwards I informed Minister Andreotti of the results of my consultations and the condition imposed by Minister Spadolini. Minister Andreotti told me that he would immediately deal with it.

Honourable President, Honourable Colleagues,

These are the facts. Facts known in their general outline, which brought us thanks from the states who had their citizens on board the Achille Lauro, for the prudence and I think also the sagacity with which we moved, in order to safeguard so many human lives.

The polemical tone of the American government's first reactions could not but arouse the greatest and regretful surprise and also a feeling of bitterness for the lack of appreciation on the part of a friendly government for everything which the Italian government had done to successfully resolve a particularly critical and difficult situation, and for the results which were achieved. Words have been uttered which I have to consider only derive from an incomplete evaluation of the facts and circumstances among which the line of conduct of the Italian government moved. I thus wish, also in this regard, to offer some concluding reflections.

1. The hijacking of a ship, the first of its kind by a group of terrorists armed also with explosives, was resolved

in less than forty-eight hours with the surrender of the hijackers and the liberation and rescue, without striking a blow, of the passengers and crew. A positive result which would have been a true success were it not unfortunately shadowed by the ascertainment that an American citizen had lost his life during the terrorist undertaking.

However the bloodless conclusion of the affair, without the further bloodshed which could have been feared, was a great result, due to the initiatives and urgings put into action by the Italian government and to all the collaboration it was able to obtain.

2. The American authorities were informed that, should the political and diplomatic action put into motion have failed, and in an extreme case, Italy was already prepared, only a few hours after the hijack, for a military intervention to free the ship, which it could have carried out by itself or in collaboration with allied and involved governments. It was made perfectly clear that, in case of absolute necessity, Italy was ready to risk the life of its soldiers to save the ship's passengers and above all those who appeared most directly threatened and that is the American citizens.

3. In the presence of such an anomalous action as that of the hijacking of an Egyptian plane by the American air force, and although aware that there would be serious reactions from a friendly nation, as is Egypt, the Italian government assumed the responsibility of aiding the positive outcome of this action,

sharing the higher aim of arriving at the capture of the terrorist groups.

4. The Italian government, for the respect due to the sovereignty of the Republic, assumed the responsibility of requesting the four terrorists who have been placed at the disposal of the Italian magistrature. An Italian court will judge those responsible for the crimes committed on board an Italian ship, except for the examination which the competent bodies will make on the request for extradition put forward by the American government.

5. It is very true that, in a contact with the President of the United States, I stated that we would have carried out investigations on the two Palestinian executives, reported on board the hijacked airplane. In that same circumstance the President of the United States advised me of a request for extradition of the four terrorists and not for others. The situation which was subsequently presented to the Italian government was that of a plane, which due to its nature of a plane encharged with a special mission by the Egyptian government, enjoyed the status of extraterritoriality; of the presence on board of ten Egyptian agents encharged with protection of the plane and its passangers; and of passangers possessing diplomatic passports.

The Italian magistrature, on its part, entrusted with an American judicial initiative, did not consider it possessed the initiative to hold the plane and arrest its passangers.

Apart from any other consideration which could have been usefully made concerning the fact that it involved moreover one of the persons who had conducted the mediation for the liberation of the ship, the Italian government could not carry out acts in violation of international legality and of the same Italian law.

6. The Italian government has always conducted the fight against terrorism with the greatest intransigence and the results achieved up to now demonstrate it. No free government in the world has been able to achieve decisive results in the fight against terrorism, without destroying the principles and rules of legal status, as the governments of the Italian republic have been able to do. There is no case of yielding or of weakness-- which can be imputed to this government in the fight against terrorism.

7. The Chamber well knows the positions and the initiatives which the Italian government has developed to open the path to a prospect of peace in the tormented Middle-East region. Only recently the Italian government had received the interest and appreciation expressed by the United States government for the role which Italy played in the region and in the sphere of its relations with the Middle East. They have always been maintained in a framework of a basic need for the recognition of the rights of the Palestinian peoples and respect of the right of the State of Israel, and they have been nourished by the hope that a season of dialogue and negotiation could take the

place of the long season of radical opposition and violence.

As far as the relations between Rome and Washington are concerned, I can only hope that the clarifications which have occurred and those which can occur will be of a nature to definitively re-establish full harmony between Italy and the United States, friendly and allied countries, for the continuity and development of a relationship of mutual responsibility and intense collaboration, in a climate of careful consideration, friendship and the respect of the dignity and national sovereignty of the respective countries.

8. I feel it proper to conclude this speech by renewing my thanks to all those who helped us during this painful affair: to all those who have collaborated, who have cooperated and who have made common cause with our efforts, solely aimed at saving hundreds of lives exposed at that moment to a very serious risk.

We acted according to our conscience, according to our policy, according to our laws. Conscience dictated the duty to attempt bloodless solutions; policy offered us the chance to utilize Italy's good relations. Our laws, the Italian laws, indicated us the path to follow.

Honourable President, Honourable Colleagues,

These are the facts, this is the truth of the facts. This does not signify that there could not have been lacks worthy of criticism and I am very disappointed that the Republican party friends could not see the way to overcoming their dissent.

Yesterday, in fact, I received the resignations of Ministers Mammi, Spadolini and Visentini following a decision of the Republican Party's Executive, which brought about a crisis in the coalition relations and therefore leads to the resignation of the government.

I inform the Chamber that I will make the consequent provisions.

I thank all the political forces who although in some cases with different motivations, or presenting under some aspects criticisms and reservations, have basically supported the efforts made by the government in a particularly difficult circumstance. *