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FM PARIS

TO IMMEDIATE FCO

TELNO 959

OF 201157Z AUGUST 90

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MY TELNOS 956 AND 957 AND TELECON CATON/EMERGENCY UNIT :

FOREIGN COMMUNITIES : FRENCH REACTION *ms*

SUMMARY

1. FRENCH USE TOUGHER LANGUAGE ABOUT THEIR INSTRUCTIONS TO NAVAL FORCES IN THE GULF BUT UNCLEAR WHETHER THIS REFLECTS NEW RULES OF ENGAGEMENT. QUAI ANNOUNCE THAT 27 FRENCH NATIONALS IN KUWAIT AND IRAQ HAVE BEEN TAKEN AWAY TO AN UNKNOWN DESTINATION. MITTERRAND TO HOLD ANOTHER RESTRICTED COUNCIL OF MINISTERS MEETING ON 21 AUGUST.

DETAIL

2. THE FRENCH HELD OFF SAYING ANYTHING OFFICIALLY ABOUT THE FATE OF THEIR NATIONALS IN KUWAIT AND IRAQ UNTIL THE AFTERNOON OF 19 AUGUST. BUT AT 12.30 LOCAL THEY ANNOUNCED THAT INSTRUCTIONS HAD BEEN GIVEN TO FRENCH NAVAL FORCES IN THE GULF TO 'APPLY VERIFICATION, CONTROL AND CONSTRAINT MEASURES WITH FIRMNESS' TO ENSURE THAT THE U N EMBARGO WAS RESPECTED. THE QUAI SPOKESMAN ADDED THAT NO EMBARGO MADE SENSE UNLESS IT WAS EFFICIENT BUT GAVE NO DETAILS ABOUT WHAT MEASURES WERE INVOLVED. IT IS UNCLEAR AS YET WHETHER THE INSTRUCTIONS TO FRENCH NAVAL FORCES HAVE BEEN CHANGED : THE QUAI DIRECTOR FOR THE U N IMPLIED THAT THEY HAD NOT.

3. THEN AT 13.30 LOCAL AFTER INFORMATION HAD BEGUN TO LEAK ON FRENCH TV LUNCHTIME NEWS ABOUT FRENCH PEOPLE BEING MOVED, THE QUAI ANNOUNCED THAT TWENTY-SIX FRENCH PEOPLE IN HOTELS IN BAGHDAD AND ONE FRENCHMAN IN A HOTEL IN KUWAIT HAD BEEN TAKEN AWAY BY THE IRAQI AUTHORITIES TO AN UNKNOWN DESTINATION. FRANCE HAD PROTESTED OFFICIALLY BOTH IN BAGHDAD AND KUWAIT AND HAD ASKED TO BE TOLD WHERE THEY WERE AND TO BE PUT IN CONTACT. THE QUAI SPOKESMAN ADMITTED THAT THE IRAQI AUTHORITIES HAD TOLD FRANCE ON 18 AUGUST OF THEIR INTENTION TO PUT INTO EFFECT THE MEASURES THEY HAD ANNOUNCED RECENTLY CONCERNING FOREIGNERS, ADDING THAT FRENCH EMBASSIES IN

KUWAIT AND BAGHDAD WERE IN DAILY CONTACT WITH FRENCH NATIONALS AND WERE ABLE TO OFFER ADVICE AS THE SITUATION EVOLVED.

4. THE QUAI SPOKESMAN WENT ON TO SAY THAT FRANCE REAFFIRMED ITS COMPLETE SOLIDARITY WITH THOSE COUNTRIES WHOSE COMMUNITIES IN KUWAIT AND IRAQ WERE CURRENTLY UNDER THREAT. FRANCE WAS PLAYING AND WOULD CONTINUE TO PLAY AN ACTIVE ROLE IN THE U N SECURITY COUNCIL TO FURTHER THE INTER-NATIONAL COMMUNITY'S EFFORTS TO FREE ALL FOREIGNERS HELD IN IRAQ AND KUWAIT.

5. AN ELYSEE SPOKESMAN SEPARATELY ANNOUNCED THAT THE PRESIDENT WAS CALLING A RESTRICTED COUNCIL OF MINISTERS MEETING FOR 1700 LOCAL ON 21 AUGUST. THOSE PRESENT WOULD BE THE PRIME MINISTER AND THE FOREIGN AFFAIRS, FINANCE, EDUCATION, DEFENCE, INDUSTRY AND PUBLIC SERVICE MINISTERS.

COMMENT

6. THE QUAI HAVE THROUGHOUT BEEN MORE RETICENT WITH INFORMATION ABOUT THEIR CITIZENS THAN WE HAVE. THEY WERE CAUGHT ON THE HOP OVER THE WEEKEND AND HAD TO COME CLEAN ABOUT FRENCH CITIZENS BEING MOVED. THIS HAS GIVEN RISE TO SPECULATION (EG FITCHETT IN TODAY'S HERALD TRIBUNE) - STRONGLY DENIED BY THE QUAI - THAT THEY WERE TRYING TO NEGOTIATE A SEPARATE DEAL THROUGH ARAFAT. I DO NOT SEE IT AS IN OUR INTEREST TO GIVE ANY CURRENCY TO SUCH SPECULATION. IT COULD WELL BE THAT THE FRENCH HAD SIMPLY (LIKE OTHERS) BEEN URGING ARAFAT TO USE HIS INFLUENCE WITH IRAQ ON BEHALF OF TRAPPED CITIZENS.

LLEWELLYN SMITH

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