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OUR TELNO 1883: IRAQ/KUWAIT: THE US DOMESTIC DIMENSION  
SUMMARY

1. MOST AMERICANS STRONGLY APPROVE OF THE PRESIDENT'S HANDLING OF THE CRISIS SO FAR, ARE PROUD OF AMERICA'S RESPONSE, AND ARE RELIEVED AT THE SCALE OF INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT. BUT THEY ARE ANXIOUS ABOUT HOW THE HOSTAGES CAN BE SAVED AND SADDAM EXPELLED FROM KUWAIT IF SANCTIONS DO NOT SOON WORK, AND SEE NO EASY OR EARLY WAY OUT OF THE CRISIS.

## DETAIL

2. MOST AMERICANS REMAIN CONFUSED AND UNCERTAIN ABOUT THEIR COUNTRY'S NEW INVOLVEMENT IN EVENTS IN THE MIDDLE EAST. THEIR APPROVAL OF THE PRESIDENT'S ACTIONS SO FAR IS TEMPERED BY ANXIETY ABOUT WHERE IT WILL ALL END. AS THE CHAIRMAN OF THE HOUSE EUROPE AND MIDDLE EAST FOREIGN AFFAIRS SUBCOMMITTEE, CONGRESSMAN LEE HAMILTON, SAID ON TELEVISION ON 19 AUGUST ABOUT HIS CONSTITUENTS:

QUOTE THE FASCINATING THING TO ME IS THEY REALLY CANNOT MAKE UP THEIR MIND. THEY WANT TO SUPPORT THE PRESIDENT. THEY DO SUPPORT THE PRESIDENT. THEY'RE UNEASY ABOUT IT. I THINK THE FUNDAMENTAL QUESTION IS THEY HAVE REAL DOUBTS IN THEIR MIND WHETHER OR NOT THEY WANT THE UNITED STATES TO BE THE SUPERPOWER, TO BE THE LEADER. THEY WANT, IN A WAY, TO BE THE LEADER. AT THE SAME TIME, THEY DON'T WANT TO ACCEPT THE BURDENS OF LEADERSHIP: SENDING YOUNG MEN AND WOMEN, TAXES, AND ALL THE REST UNQUOTE.

3. ON THE POSITIVE SIDE, AMERICANS SUPPORT THE PRESIDENT'S HANDLING OF THE CRISIS BY MARGINS APPROACHING 80 PER CENT. THERE HAS BEEN NO SIGNIFICANT CRITICISM OF HIS PERFORMANCE FROM ANY PUBLIC FIGURE. HIS DECISION TO DEPLOY US FORCES SWIFTLY AND IN SUCH NUMBERS HAS BEEN WIDELY PRAISED, AS A COURAGEOUS STEP WHICH MAY HAVE DETERRED FURTHER IRAQI AGGRESSION. SO TOO HAS THE SKILL



WITH WHICH THE PRESIDENT HAS MARSHALLED INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT FOR THE US ACTION, IN TERMS BOTH OF FORCES IN THE REGION AND OF VOTES AT THE UN. THERE HAS BEEN WIDESPREAD RELIEF AT THE SPREAD - IF NOT THE SCALE - OF INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT FOR THE UNITED STATES, QUALIFIED ONLY BY DOUBTS ABOUT ITS STAYING POWER AND POPULAR OPINION IN PARTS OF THE ARAB WORLD.

4. AMERICANS ARE ALSO PLEASED THAT EVENTS HAVE REMINDED THE WORLD THAT THERE REMAINS ONE SUPERPOWER, WHICH CAN BE CALLED UPON IN TIMES OF INTERNATIONAL CRISIS. AND THE PRESS AT LEAST HAVE DRAWN UNFAVOURABLE COMPARISONS WITH THE RELATIVE QUIESCENCE OF JAPAN AND GERMANY, WHILE SINGLING OUT BRITAIN AND THE PRIME MINISTER FOR SPECIAL PRAISE.

5. ONE MINOR BUT AWKWARD PROBLEM FOR THE PRESIDENT IS HOW TO RECONCILE HIS DECISION NOT TO BE HELD HOSTAGE IN THE WHITE HOUSE WITH THE PRACTICAL AND PRESENTATIONAL DIFFICULTIES OF MANAGING THE CRISIS FROM MAINE WITH OCCASIONAL FORAYS TO WASHINGTON. WHETHER, IN THE FACE OF RISING CRITICISM, HE STICKS TO HIS PLAN TO STAY ON QUOTE WORKING VACATION UNQUOTE UNTIL EARLY SEPTEMBER REMAINS TO BE SEEN.

6. ON THE ECONOMIC FRONT, MOST COMMENTATORS SEEM TO BELIEVE THAT THE NEWS IS BAD, BUT COULD BE MUCH WORSE. AFTER EARLY SCARE STORIES OF POTENTIALLY HUGE RISES IN OIL PRICES, THE MARKETS SEEM TO HAVE STABILISED AT UNCOMFORTABLE THOUGH MANAGEABLE LEVELS. AND, ALTHOUGH MANY ANALYSTS NOW EXPECT THAT AMERICA WILL BE TIPPED INTO A SHALLOW RECESSION BY THE GULF CRISIS, IT IS CLEAR THAT THE ECONOMY HAD ALL BUT STALLED EVEN BEFORE THE EVENTS OF THE PAST THREE WEEKS. THE PRESIDENT AND PRESS ARE UNITED IN EMPHASISING THAT THE CRISIS MUST NOT BE USED AS AN ALIBI FOR FAILURE TO CUT THE DEFICIT, EVEN IF THE CUT MAY BE SMALLER THAN HOPED FOR.

7. THE OVERALL SENSE IS THUS THAT A COMBINATION OF ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL SELF-INTEREST LEFT THE PRESIDENT LITTLE OPTION BUT TO REACT AS HE DID: AND THAT, AS INTERVIEWS WITH GENERALS AND GIS HAVE SHOWN, AMERICA'S ARMED FORCES ARE GOING ABOUT THEIR DUTY IN A WAY IN WHICH THE NATION CAN TAKE QUIET PRIDE.

8. BUT THAT IS JUST PART OF THE STORY. ONLY IN THE PAST FEW DAYS - WITH BASES EMPTYING, LINES OF LORRIES HEADING FOR THE PORTS, AND THE CALL-UP OF RESERVISTS AND THE RESERVE AIR AND SEA TRANSPORT FLEETS - HAS THE SCALE OF THE MILITARY COMMITMENT BEGUN TO SINK IN. THE PUBLIC HERE NOW SEEMS TO BE COMING TO BELIEVE THAT, IF WAR BREAKS OUT, IT MAY BE ON A SCALE COMPARABLE TO KOREA OR VIETNAM: AND THAT, IF IT DOES NOT, THE DEPARTURE OF SADDAM OFFERS THE ONLY REALISTIC WAY OUT OF THE CRISIS.

9. BY BREAKING THE ADMINISTRATION'S TABOO ON CALLING FOREIGNERS



HELD IN KUWAIT AND IRAQ HOSTAGES (MY TELNO 1981, NOT TO ALL), THE PRESIDENT WILL HAVE DRAWN ATTENTION TO THE QUESTION UNDERLYING MUCH OF THE ANXIETY HERE: WHAT IF SADDAM SIMPLY SITS TIGHT, AND THE US AND OTHER FORCES ARE STUCK IN THE SAND, FOR MONTHS OR EVEN YEARS? FOR HOW LONG WILL THE ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL PRICE OF WHAT ONE CALIFORNIA NEWSPAPER CALLED SITZKRIEG BE SUSTAINABLE? 10. ALREADY THERE HAVE BEEN ISOLATED CALLS FOR EARLY MILITARY ACTION TO RESOLVE SUCH A STALEMATE. BUT MOST AMERICANS DO NOT YET SEEM TO SHARE KISSINGER'S VIEW - SET OUT IN A WIDELY SYNDICATED ARTICLE ON 19 AUGUST - THAT QUOTE SURGICAL AND PROGRESSIVE DESTRUCTION OF IRAQ'S MILITARY ASSETS ... (IS) ... THE ONLY POLICY THAT CAN NOW SUCCEED UNQUOTE. THERE ARE, HOWEVER, SIGNS THAT MOST AMERICANS WOULD STRONGLY SUPPORT VIGOROUS MILITARY ACTION IF THE HOSTAGES WERE HARMED, OR THERE SEEMED NO OTHER WAY OF SAVING AT LEAST SOME OF THEM: AND THAT, AT LEAST AT PRESENT AND WITHOUT BEING FACED WITH A REAL CHOICE, THE AMERICAN PUBLIC IS MORE PREPARED TO SUBORDINATE THE WELFARE OF THE HOSTAGES TO WIDER NATIONAL INTERESTS THAN IT WAS WITH IRAN IN 1979-80. IN THE LONGER TERM, IF THE CHOICE SEEMED TO BE BETWEEN A HUMILIATING WITHDRAWAL OF MOST US FORCES FROM ARABIA WITH SADDAM STILL IN CONTROL OF IRAQ AND KUWAIT OR DIRECT MILITARY ACTION AGAINST IRAQ AND/OR KUWAIT, PUBLIC OPINION HERE WOULD PROBABLY FAVOUR THE LATTER, WHILE PERHAPS BLAMING THE PRESIDENT FOR LANDING THE UNITED STATES IN SUCH A DILEMMA. MUCH WOULD DEPEND ON HOW THE COSTS OF THE VARIOUS OPTIONS WERE PRESENTED TO THE PUBLIC AT THE TIME.

11. THAT IS, HOWEVER, STILL SOME WAY DOWN THE ROAD. FOR NOW, MOST AMERICANS ARE STILL TRYING TO GET TO GRIPS WITH THE SCALE OF THE CRISIS, AND THE FUNDAMENTAL CHANGES IN US POLICY IMPLIED BY THE DEPLOYMENT IN ARABIA. WITH THE FIRST OBJECTIVE - OF DETERRING AN ATTACK ON SAUDI ARABIA - APPARENTLY FULFILLED, THE PUBLIC HERE IS LOOKING FOR GUIDANCE ON HOW THE NEXT TWO ARE TO BE FULFILLED, AND AT WHAT COST: SAVING THE HOSTAGES, AND EXPELLING SADDAM FROM KUWAIT. WITH A FORTNIGHT TO GO BEFORE CONGRESS REASSEMBLES, THE PRESIDENT WILL NEED TO WORK HARD TO EXPLAIN HOW HE EXPECTS TO ACHIEVE THOSE GOALS, AND HEAD OFF WHAT MANY COMMENTATORS HERE REGARD AS AN ALMOST INEVITABLE EROSION OF POLITICAL SUPPORT FOR A COSTLY OVERSEAS MILITARY COMMITMENT WHICH, BARRING AN UNEXPECTED DEVELOPMENT IN IRAQ, THE UNITED STATES SEEMS TO HAVE NO OBVIOUS OR EARLY MEANS OF ENDING.

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