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SIC

JEDDA FOR SECRETARY OF STATE'S PARTY

IRAQ/KUWAIT: SOVIET ROUND-UP 2/3 SEPTEMBER

SUMMARY

1. NO SOVIET COMMENT YET ON GORBACHEV/BUSH SUMMIT ANNOUNCEMENT.
2. GORBACHEV DECLINES TO CRITICISE AMERICAN MILITARY BUILD-UP. HE AGAIN STRESSES THE NEED FOR A POLITICAL SETTLEMENT, AND THE ARAB FACTOR, BUT SAYS THAT THE JOINT APPROACH WITH THE US AND OTHER POWERS IS HOLDING THUS FAR.
3. SHEVARDNADZE DISCUSSES IRAQ WITH CHINESE FOREIGN MINISTER AND EMPHASISES NEED FOR PEACEFUL SETTLEMENT.
4. SOVIET PRESS COMMENTATORS REMAIN FIRM IN THEIR BASIC OPPOSITION TO IRAQ, BUT OFFER RANGE OF VIEWS WHICH INCLUDES SOME CONCERN ABOUT AMERICAN MOTIVES (AND ALSO SOME CALLS FOR A STRONGER SOVIET LINE).
4. 941 SOVIET NATIONALS NOW EVACUATED BY AIR FROM IRAQ.

DETAIL

HELSINKI SUMMIT

5. THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF GORBACHEV'S HELSINKI MEETING WITH BUSH WAS CARRIED WITHOUT COMMENT IN THE PRESS ON 2 SEPTEMBER. THE ONLY FURTHER INFORMATION SO FAR OFFERED TO SOVIET LEADERS HAS BEEN IN PRESS ACCOUNTS OF PRESIDENT BUSH'S COMMENTS AND OF THE REACTIONS FROM SOME OTHER COUNTRIES, INCLUDING THE PRIME MINISTER'S WELCOME FOR THE MEETING. THESE APPEAR IN PRAVDA ON 3 SEPTEMBER.

GORBACHEV'S PRESS CONFERENCE, 31 AUGUST

6. THE TRANSCRIPT OF GORBACHEV'S PRESS CONFERENCE WAS PRINTED ON 2 SEPTEMBER. HE ANSWERED TWO QUESTIONS ON IRAQ, AND GAVE LITTLE HINT OF THE SUBSEQUENT SUMMIT ANNOUNCEMENT.

7. GORBACHEV'S MAIN POINTS WERE AS FOLLOWS:

(A) AS A MATTER OF PRINCIPLE, THE SOVIET UNION CONDEMNED THE BEHAVIOUR OF IRAQ AND OF PRESIDENT HUSSEIN'S REGIME, WHICH CONTRADICTED ACCEPTED NORMS AND HAD CREATED A DANGEROUS SITUATION. THE SOVIET UNION HAD MADE THIS CONDEMNATION CLEAR FROM THE OUTSET, AND UNITED ITS EFFORTS WITH THOSE OF OTHER COUNTRIES. GORBACHEV REFERRED TO INTENSE DIPLOMATIC ACTIVITY, INCLUDING PERSONAL MESSAGES AND TELEPHONE CALLS, ACTION AT THE UN AND EXCHANGES WITH SADDAM HUSSEIN.

(B) EVERYTHING SHOULD BE DONE TO PREVENT THE CONFLICT FROM ENTERING ANOTHER AND MORE DANGEROUS PHASE. IT SHOULD BE POSSIBLE TO RESOLVE IT BY POLITICAL MEANS. THE SOVIET UNION WAS SEEKING A POLITICAL SOLUTION IN ITS COOPERATION WITH ALL PARTNERS. GORBACHEV HAD SPOKEN TO THIS EFFECT TO AMERICAN AND OTHER LEADERS, WITH WHOM THE SOVIET UNION WAS IN CONSTANT TOUCH. INTENSIVE CONSULTATIONS WERE TAKING PLACE AND GORBACHEV DID NOT EXCLUDE ANY STEPS DESIGNED TO BRING SUCCESS TO THESE CONSULTATIONS.

(C) THE 'ARAB FACTOR' WAS ONE OF THE KEYS TO A PEACEFUL SOLUTION. EVERYTHING SHOULD BE DONE TO ACTIVATE THE ARAB FACTOR. IN THE FINAL ACCOUNT 'ONLY PEOPLE WHO DEFY LOGIC CAN DENY THIS PERSPECTIVE. AND I ALSO INCLUDE THE PRESIDENT OF IRAQ'.

(D) EVERYTHING SHOULD BE DONE TO ENSURE THAT NONE OF THE PARTIES EXPLOIT SOME POLITICAL MISTAKE OF WHATEVER KIND FOR PROVOCATIVE ENDS. UP TO NOW THERE WAS MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING ON THE WAY TO ACT, ALTHOUGH SOME VOICES CALLING FOR DIFFERENT METHODS WERE BEING HEARD. COOPERATION WAS CONTINUING APACE. UP TO NOW (IN REPLY TO THE QUESTION WHETHER THERE WERE DISAGREEMENTS) EVERYTHING WAS BEING CONDUCTED ON AN AGREED BASIS.

(E) (ASKED DIRECTLY WHETHER HE ENDORSED DEPUTY MINISTER BELONOGOV'S CONCERN REPORTED IN MOSCOW TELNO 1626, AND HAD DOUBTS ABOUT US DEPLOYMENT OF ARMED FORCES) GORBACHEV SAID HIS UNDERSTANDING WAS THAT THE US GOVERNMENT HAD TAKEN ITS POSITION IN A CONCRETE SITUATION AND RESPONDING TO SAUDI ARABIA'S REQUEST. THIS CORRESPONDS TO THE UN CHARTER. HE WENT ON TO SAY THAT A GROWING MILITARY CONFRONTATION WAS ALWAYS FRAUGHT WITH UNFORESEEN CIRCUMSTANCES. EVERYONE SHOULD THEREFORE BE EXTREMELY RESPONSIBLE IN ORDER TO ENSURE THAT A LARGE SCALE MILITARY CONFLICT DID NOT DEVELOP. THIS WAS A COMMON TASK. FAR FROM THERE BEING A DIVERGENCE OF POLICY, THERE WAS COOPERATION.

IN CALLING FOR A SETTLEMENT BY POLITICAL MEANS, THE RUSSIANS HOPED THE CONDITIONS FOR A RETURN TO THE STATUS QUO ANTE. GORBACHEV DID NOT THINK THAT THE AMERICANS WOULD MAINTAIN THEIR MILITARY PRESENCE IN THE REGION AFTER A POLITICAL SETTLEMENT. WHEN A SOLUTION WAS FOUND, A GUARANTEE OF THE SOLUTION WOULD ALSO BE FOUND. THE SOONER THAT A MILITARY DETENTE COULD TAKE PLACE THEREAFTER, THE HAPPIER WE WOULD ALL FEEL.

SHEVARDNADZE

8. THE GULF WAS AMONG THE SUBJECTS DISCUSSED BETWEEN THE SOVIET AND CHINESE FOREIGN MINISTERS IN HARBIN ON 1 SEPTEMBER. SHEVARDNADZE AFTERWARDS COMMENTED TO THE PRESS THAT THE TWO MINISTERS HAD EXPRESSED MUTUAL AGREEMENT ON THE NEED FOR A PEACEFUL SETTLEMENT TO THE CONFLICT AND WOULD REMAIN IN CLOSE TOUCH TO THAT END. HE WAS CONVINCED THAT THE RIGHT APPROACH HAD BEEN ADOPTED THIS FAR, FOR ALL THE DIFFICULTIES WHICH IT ENTAILED.

SOVIET PRESS COMMENT

9. THE BBC WORLD SERVICE (AND PERHAPS OTHERS) HAVE GIVEN PROMINENCE TO A COMMENTARY BY PRAVDA'S POLITICAL OBSERVER, VASILIEV, PUBLISHED ON 2 SEPTEMBER. VASILIEV'S COLUMN DOES NOT CLAIM TO REFLECT ANY VIEW OTHER THAN HIS OWN, AND SPECIFICALLY DOES NOT REFER TO SOVIET OFFICIAL SOURCES OR VIEWS. INSTEAD, IT DRAWS HEAVILY ON, AND REACTS TO, THE AMERICAN PRESS. THE ESSENCE OF VASILIEV'S COMMENTARY IS THAT THE PRESENCE OF SUCH LARGE AMOUNTS OF MEN AND MATERIEL (HE QUOTES A NUMBER OF STATISTICS) IN THE GULF INEVITABLY CARRIES THE RISK OF A LARGE SCALE WAR. THIS WOULD FOLLOW A CERTAIN LOGIC. HE PUTS THE CHANCES OF AVOIDING SUCH A CATASTROPHE AT 50:50. THE MILITARY CONFRONTATION, HE SAYS, IS ESSENTIALLY BETWEEN IRAQ AND THE UNITED STATES. HE QUOTES THE NEW YORK TIMES AS SAYING THAT THE USA'S REAL INTERESTS WERE MAINLY TO HELP SAUDI ARABIA, BUT RELATED ABOVE ALL TO OIL, STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES AND THE EXPANSION OF THE AMERICAN PRESENCE IN THE REGION. ON THAT INTERPRETATION, SADDAM HUSSEIN'S ADVENTURISM REPRESENTED AN UNEXPECTED GIFT TO WASHINGTON. ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE COIN, VASILIEV RECORDS IN POSITIVE TERMS THE ACHIEVEMENTS OF INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION DURING THE CRISIS, AND THE VIEWS OF WESTERN OBSERVERS THAT SANCTIONS COULD BE EFFECTIVE OVER A PERIOD OF MONTHS. HOWEVER, THIS MIGHT BE TOO LONG A PERIOD FOR IMPATIENT AMERICANS. AND THERE WERE DISAGREEMENTS BETWEEN THE PRESIDENT'S ADVISERS ON WHETHER THE OBJECTIVE WAS SIMPLY IRAQ WITHDRAWAL FROM KUWAIT (SCOWCROFT) OR TO SHATTER SADDAM HUSSEIN'S MILITARY POWER (OTHER). VASILIEV CONCLUDES WITH A ROUSING CALL FOR FURTHER COLLECTIVE DIPLOMATIC ACTIVITY.

10. FOR COMMENT SEE BELOW.

EVACUATION

11. BY 1 SEPTEMBER, 941 SOVIET CITIZENS (INCLUDING 506 WOMEN AND 274 CHILDREN) HAD FLOWN FROM BAGHDAD TO MOSCOW. A FURTHER 63 SOVIET WOMEN ARE DUE IN MOSCOW ON 3 SEPTEMBER.

COMMENT

12. OVER THE PAST WEEK, WESTERN CORRESPONDENTS HERE HAVE BEEN SCOURING SOVIET PRONOUNCEMENTS FOR SIGNS OF A SPLIT WITH THE UNITED STATES. WE KNOW FROM THEIR APPROACHES TO US THAT SEVERAL OF THEM ARE UNDER PRESSURE FROM THEIR EDITORS TO WRITE UP THIS ANGLE. IT WAS REFLECTED IN THE QUESTIONS PUT TO GORBACHEV: AND GORBACHEV PLAYED A PRETTY STRAIGHT BAT IN REPLY. THE EMPHASIS GIVEN BY THE WESTERN MEDIA TO CONCERN VOICED BY COMMENTATORS SUCH AS VASILIEV IS A FURTHER REFLECTION OF THIS TREND.

13. IT IS IMPORTANT TO BEAR IN MIND THAT THE OLD SOVIET MONOLITHIC CONTROLS OVER PUBLIC COMMENT HAVE NOW BROKEN DOWN ALMOST ENTIRELY. VASILIEV HAS WRITTEN A COLUMN WHICH DOES NOT DIFFER GREATLY FROM COLUMNS IN MANY BRITISH AND WESTERN NEWSPAPERS: AND HIS VIEWS ARE NO MORE (OR LESS) REPRESENTATIVE OF SOVIET OFFICIAL THINKING THAN THE VIEWS OF HIS WESTERN COUNTERPARTS. HE DID NOT CITE UNATTRIBUTABLE SOVIET CONCERNS. SOME SOVIET JOURNALISTS HAVE TAKEN A VERY HAWKISH LINE, AND HAVE IMPLIED THAT THE SOVIET UNION SHOULD HAVE CONSIDERED PARTICIPATING IN MULTINATIONAL MILITARY EFFORTS. THE LATTER, SO FAR AS WE CAN JUDGE, IS A DISTINCTLY MINORITY VIEW. PRESS COMMENTATORS ARE TENDING TO REFLECT A FAIRLY WIDESPREAD VIEW THAT THE SOVIET UNION, WHILE RIGHTLY STANDING AGAINST IRAQI AGGRESSION, SHOULD NOT ALLOW ITSELF TO BE SUCKED INTO A MIDDLE EASTERN CONFLICT. THERE ARE ALSO STRONG RESERVATIONS, INCLUDING AMONG THE MILITARY AND MANY OFFICIALS, ABOUT TYING SOVIET POLICY TOO CLOSELY TO THAT OF THE UNITED STATES. THESE RESERVATIONS HAVE SURFACED, AS WE HAVE REPORTED, IN CERTAIN PUBLIC COMMENTS BY OFFICIALS.

14. AT THE HIGHER, DECISION-MAKING LEVELS, GORBACHEV AND SHEVARDNADZE STILL SEEM TO BE DOING ALL THEY CAN TO AVOID DAYLIGHT APPEARING BETWEEN THE SOVIET AND AMERICAN POSITIONS. IN HIS PRESS CONFERENCE, GORBACHEV STEADFASTLY REFUSED TO DISTANCE HIMSELF FROM THE AMERICANS. AND ON THE SAME DAY ONE OF HIS CLOSEST ADVISERS DISAVOWED (IN PRIVATE WITH US) VIEWS EXPRESSED BY THE SOVIET MILITARY. GORBACHEV WILL NO DOUBT WISH TO USE HIS MEETING WITH BUSH TO ASSURE HIMSELF THAT THE AMERICANS ARE NOT PREPARING EARLY OFFENSIVE ACTION AGAINST IRAQ. HE CAN BE EXPECTED TO ARGUE STRONGLY

THAT SANCTIONS MUST BE GIVEN TIME TO WORK, AND THAT MORE SHOULD BE DONE TO CONSOLIDATE ARAB SUPPORT FOR THE FRONT AGAINST IRAQ, AND TO CONCILIATE THOSE ARABS AT PRESENT SYMPATHIZING WITH SADDAM HUSSEIN. HE AND SHEVARDNADZE HAVE PLACED SOME EMPHASIS ON THE PALESTINIAN ASPECT, AND THE IMPORTANCE OF SHOWING READINESS TO ACCELERATE PROGRESS TOWARDS AN INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON THE ARAB/ISRAEL DISPUTE. GORBACHEV MAY HAVE TO SPELL OUT TO BUSH THE LIMITS OF THE SOVIET ABILITY TO SUSTAIN THE COMMON APPROACH. UP TO NOW, THAT LIMIT HAS BEEN SET FAIRLY CLEARLY AT THE POINT OF MILITARY CONFLICT. THE RUSSIANS HAVE SHOWN NO INCLINATION YET TO DEPLOY THEIR OWN FORCES, OR TO ENDORSE THE OPTION OF OFFENSIVE MILITARY ACTION BY OTHERS.

LOGAN

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