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VISIT OF THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR DEFENCE, 15 OCTOBER:
IRAQ/KUWAIT

SUMMARY

1. DESPITE THEIR FRUSTRATIONS THE AMERICANS SEEM BOUND TO TRY TO MAKE SANCTIONS WORK AT LEAST FOR THE NEXT SEVERAL WEEKS, UNTIL THEIR BUILD UP IS COMPLETE. THEY ARE UNLIKELY TO FACE DOMESTIC PRESSURE FOR EARLY ACTION AND THE DOMESTIC TEMPER IS FATALISTIC RATHER THAN BELLICOSE. TROUBLE IN JERUSALEM HAS SHIFTED THE PLATES SOMEWHAT. THE AMERICANS WILL WISH TO PRESERVE INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT FOR THEIR POLICIES. THE TALK IS STILL MOSTLY OF THE NEED FOR PATIENCE. BUT THERE ARE CROSS CURRENTS WHICH MAKE LONGER TERM PREDICTION CHANCY.

DETAIL

2. MR KING WILL FIND AT HIS TALKS WITH CHENEY ON 15 OCTOBER THAT THE AMERICANS ARE FACING VERY MUCH THE SAME DILEMMAS AS AT HIS LAST MEETING WITH THE US DEFENCE SECRETARY ON 20 SEPTEMBER EXCEPT IN SO FAR AS THE SYSTEMATIC IRAQI DISMANTLING OF KUWAIT HAS INCREASED THE AMERICAN SENSE OF FRUSTRATION. THE PRESIDENT SAID AT A PRESS CONFERENCE ON 9 OCTOBER THAT HIS PATIENCE WAS WEARING QUOTE VERY THIN ON THAT ACCOUNT UNQUOTE.

3. FOR ALL THEIR FEARS OF WHAT IS HAPPENING IN KUWAIT ITSELF AND THE EVIDENCE OF SADDAM HUSSEIN'S CONTINUED INTRANSIGENCE THE AMERICANS SEEM NONETHELESS BOUND TO TRY TO MAKE SANCTIONS WORK FOR AT LEAST THE NEXT SEVERAL WEEKS, IF ONLY BECAUSE IT MAY NOT NOW BE UNTIL THE MIDDLE OF NOVEMBER AT THE EARLIEST BEFORE THE US BUILD UP REACHES AN ADEQUATE LEVEL FOR SERIOUS CONSIDERATION TO BE GIVEN TO EXERCISING THE MILITARY OPTION. SOME OF THE DIFFICULTIES OVER LOGISTICS WHICH HAVE ARISEN RAISE QUESTIONS AS TO THE TIME OVER WHICH INTENSIVE US OPERATIONS COULD EVEN THEN BE SUSTAINED.

4. IN THE ABSENCE OF FRESH TROUBLES OR FURTHER IRAQI

PROVOCATIONS, THE ADMINISTRATION SEEMS AT PRESENT UNLIKELY TO COME UNDER DOMESTIC PRESSURE IN THE MEANTIME TO TAKE EARLY ACTION AGAINST SADDAM HUSSEIN. NOTHING SIGNIFICANT HAS BEEN DONE TO PREPARE THE US PUBLIC FOR THE POSSIBILITY OF A US OFFENSIVE. THE PRESIDENT AND CONGRESS ARE PREOCCUPIED BY BUDGETARY PROBLEMS (MY TELSNOs. 2452 AND 2473). IT IS NOT YET ENTIRELY CLEAR HOW MUCH LONG TERM DAMAGE BUSH'S HESITATIONS OVER THE BUDGET WILL HAVE DONE HIS POLITICAL AUTHORITY, THOUGH THE EFFECT CAN ONLY BE HARMFUL. THERE IS A RISK OF A READ ACROSS TO HIS ROOM FOR MANOEUVRE ON THE GULF. BUT I WOULD NOT FOR NOW WANT TO PUT IT HIGHER THAN THAT. SUPPORT FOR HIS POLICIES TOWARDS IRAQ REMAINS WIDESPREAD. THE AMERICAN PUBLIC WOULD NO DOUBT BACK HIM IN TAKING EVENTUAL MILITARY ACTION IF THAT TURNED OUT TO BE BOTH EFFECTIVE AND COMPARATIVELY CHEAP IN US LIVES, AND IF GOOD PROXIMATE COST COULD BE SHOWN. BUT THE PRESENT MOOD IS FATALISTIC RATHER THAN BELLICOSE. THE AMERICAN PUBLIC'S APPETITE FOR A LONGER AND MORE BLOODY CONFLICT IS AT BEST QUESTIONABLE.

5. NOR DO THE MID-TERM ELECTIONS APPEAR TO BE A MAJOR FACTOR IN THE ADMINISTRATION'S APPROACH TO IRAQ/KUWAIT. THE REPUBLICANS SEEM UNLIKELY SIGNIFICANTLY TO INCREASE THEIR STRENGTH ON 6 NOVEMBER. THEY MAY EVEN LOSE GROUND. AN ATTEMPT TO WRAP THEMSELVES IN THE FLAG THROUGH DIRECT ACTION AGAINST SADDAM HUSSEIN WOULD BE A VERY RISKY GAMBLE IN ELECTORAL TERMS. MY OVERALL CONCLUSION IS THAT BUSH'S DOMESTIC POLITICAL POSITION WILL PROBABLY NOT THEREFORE BE STRONGER AFTER 6 NOVEMBER, AS HE COMES TO FACE MORE CLEARLY THE CHOICE BETWEEN TAKING DIRECT MILITARY ACTION AND PERSISTING WITH THE EFFORT TO SQUEEZE SADDAM HUSSEIN OUT OF KUWAIT THROUGH SANCTIONS.

6. THE AMERICANS ARE OF COURSE CONCERNED THAT SADDAM HUSSEIN IS CONTINUING TO CREATE FACTS, ESPECIALLY IN KUWAIT, DESPITE THE PRESSURES ON HIM AND WHILE THE MILITARY OPTION APPARENTLY REMAINS CLOSED TO THEM. THEIR EVIDENCE SUGGESTS THAT SANCTIONS ARE HAVING SOME EFFECT. THEY BELIEVE SADDAM HUSSEIN OUGHT TO BE COUNTING THE COST. BUT THEY SEE NO REASON TO THINK HE MAY BE ABOUT TO CHANGE HIS POLICIES, AND TAKE FOR EXAMPLE PRIMAKOV'S HEAVILY QUALIFIED GLIMMERS OF HOPE WITH A LARGE PINCH OF SALT.

7. THE LATEST TROUBLE IN JERUSALEM HAS ALSO SHIFTED THE PLATES SOMEWHAT, AROUSING CONCERN AT THE TOP OF THE ADMINISTRATION ABOUT THE POTENTIAL EFFECTS ON THE AMERICAN RELATIONSHIP WITH THEIR PRINCIPAL ARAB PARTNERS. IT REMAINS OF THE HIGHEST IMPORTANCE TO THE AMERICANS THAT THEY SHOULD SUSTAIN THEIR ALLIANCE WITH THE SAUDIS, EGYPTIANS AND SYRIANS, NOT JUST FOR ITS OBVIOUS POLITICAL VALUE, BUT ALSO BECAUSE, IF IT CAME TO A

CONFLICT, THE ARAB MILITARY CONTRIBUTION COULD WELL MAKE A CONSIDERABLE DIFFERENCE ON THE GROUND. THE ADMINISTRATION HAVE NEVERTHELESS TO WATCH THEIR DOMESTIC BACKS IN CASE THEIR NEW LINKS TO THE ARAB WORLD PUT TOO MUCH STRAIN ON THE US-ISRAELI RELATIONSHIP. THEY SEEM NO NEARER TO SEEING HOW TO APPROACH AN ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN SETTLEMENT ONCE THE KUWAIT CRISIS IS UNDER CONTROL, HOWEVER MUCH THEY AGREE THAT IS NOW EVEN MORE DESIRABLE THAN EVER.

8. THE AMERICANS HAVE DONE WELL IN THE UNITED NATIONS SO FAR. THERE MAY BE RISKS TO THEM IN THE ARGUMENT THAT UN ACTION ON ISRAEL SHOULD BE PURSUED AS VIGOROUSLY AS SECURITY COUNCIL RESOLUTIONS AGAINST IRAQ, BUT THEIR PRESENT ASSESSMENT IS THESE CAN BE CONTAINED - PROVIDED AT LEAST THEY ARE NOT FORCED INTO A VETO IN THE CURRENT DRAFTING EXERCISE. WHEN IT COMES TO DECIDING ON POSSIBLE MILITARY ACTION AGAINST IRAQ, HOWEVER, THEY WILL HAVE TO TAKE INTO ACCOUNT THE FACT THAT SOME OF THEIR INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT IS DEPENDENT ON THE WAY THEY HAVE CHANNLED THEIR EFFORTS THROUGH THE UN. THE AMERICANS ARE, IN BRIEF, BOUND TO A DEGREE BY THEIR SUCCESS IN BUILDING UP AN INTERNATIONAL COALITION AGAINST SADDAM HUSSEIN, SIGNIFICANT ELEMENTS OF WHICH COULD BE LIABLE TO FALL AWAY IF IT CAME TO MILITARY ACTION.

9. THE AMERICANS WILL ALSO NEED SOON TO DECIDE, IN CONSIDERING WHETHER OR NOT TO INITIATE DIRECT ACTION AGAINST IRAQ, WHOM THEY SHOULD CONSULT IN ADVANCE AND FOR HOW LONG BEFOREHAND. THIS, AND A CONTINUING DEBATE OVER WHETHER OR NOT FORCE WILL IN THE AND HAVE TO BE USED, LIES BEHIND THE QUESTION OF WHAT FURTHER UN COVER SHOULD BE SOUGHT BY WASHINGTON. ON THE ONE HAND THEIR CHANCES OF A QUICK MILITARY SUCCESS WOULD BE INCREASED IF THEY COULD ACHIEVE SURPRISE. EVEN SECURING CONTINGENT UN COVER, IF FEASIBLE, WOULD JEOPARDISE THAT. UNILATERAL ACTION, ON THE OTHER HAND, WOULD RISK COMPROMISING THE INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT THEY NOW ENJOY, AND THEIR CHANCES OF ACHIEVING A STABLE OUTCOME FOLLOWING THE DEFEAT OF SADDAM HUSSEIN. IT COULD ALSO BE MORE DIFFICULT TO EXPLAIN TO THE US PUBLIC THAN ACTION SANCTIONED BY THE UN, ESPECIALLY IN THE ABSENCE OF A FRESH IRAQI CHALLENGE AND/OR A CONCERTED EFFORT TO EXPLAIN AND JUSTIFY THE NECESSITY OF MILITARY ACTION BEFOREHAND.

10. THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR DEFENCE WILL, IN DISCUSSING CONTINGENCY PLANNING WITH CHENEY, BE ABLE TO GET A SENSE OF HOW THE AMERICANS NOW ASSESS THE POSSIBLE COSTS OF MILITARY ACTION. PART AT LEAST OF THE QUESTION MARKS OVER THE TIME BY WHICH US FORCES WOULD BE READY FOR ACTION CAN BE ACCOUNTED FOR BY THEIR HUGE TRANSPORTATION PROBLEMS. ESTIMATES FOR US CASUALTIES IF IT

CAME TO WAR SEEM TO BE HIGHER NOW THAN THEY WERE SOME WEEKS AGO. THE MILITARY OPTION IS NO LESS LOGICAL THAN BEFORE, BUT THERE IS AN INCREASINGLY SOBER AWARENESS OF THE ATTENDANT RISKS. THE NATURAL CONCLUSION IS THAT US ACTION IS UNLIKELY AT ANY RATE OVER THE NEXT FEW WEEKS, AND QUITE POSSIBLY FOR LONGER. THE TALK IS STILL MOSTLY OF THE NEED FOR TIME FOR PRESENT POLICIES TO WORK. BUT EVEN THE SHORT-TERM BET MUST BE HEDGED AND THERE ARE CROSS CURRENTS WHICH MAKE LONGER TERM PREDICTION CHANCY AT BEST.

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