

CONFIDENTIAL
FM WASHINGTON
TO IMMEDIATE FCO
TELNO 2546
OF 192323Z OCTOBER 90

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SIC

MY TELNO 2480 (NOT TO ALL): IRAQ/KUWAIT: THE MOOD IN WASHINGTON
SUMMARY

1. ADMINISTRATION REMAIN UNCOMPROMISING OVER THE NEED FOR FULL
IMPLEMENTATION OF THE UN RESOLUTIONS. BUT NO SUGGESTION THAT
THIS REQUIRES AN EARLY DECISION ON THE MILITARY OPTION IN THE
ABSENCE OF A PROVOCATION. NO PUBLIC PRESSURE FOR EARLY ACTION.
CONGRESS ANXIOUS TO ENSURE THEY ARE CONSULTED BEFORE ANY DECISION
TO USE FORCE.

DETAIL

2. OUR CONTACTS WITH POLICY MAKERS IN THE ADMINISTRATION OVER
THE LAST WEEK HAVE REVEALED NO MAJOR SHIFTS SINCE TUR. THE
EMPHASIS REMAINS ON THE LONG HAUL, ON THE NEED TO MAKE SANCTIONS
WORK AND ON THE IMPORTANCE OF QUICKLY RETURNING THE
INTERNATIONAL FOCUS FROM JERUSALEM TO KUWAIT.

3. SECRETARY BAKER, IN HIS PUBLIC STATEMENTS THIS WEEK, HAS
EMPHASISED THE NEED TO TIGHTEN THE SCREW ON SADDAM HUSSEIN
THROUGH DIPLOMATIC ISOLATION AND ECONOMIC SANCTIONS. HE HAS
UNDERLINED THE ADMINISTRATION'S DETERMINATION THAT SADDAM
HUSSEIN SHOULD NOT APPEAR TO PROFIT FROM HIS AGGRESSION,
RULING OUT ANY SUGGESTION THAT THE ADMINISTRATION MIGHT BE
PREPARED TO CONSIDER ANY OF THE COMPROMISE SOLUTIONS CURRENTLY
BEING BANDIED ABOUT. HE HAS ALSO NOTED THE IMPORTANCE OF THE
MILITARY BUILD UP IN UNDERPINNING THE MESSAGE TO SADDAM, BUT
HAS NOT SUGGESTED THAT MILITARY ACTION IS IMMINENT OR
INEVITABLE. RATHER, HE HAS STRESSED THE CONTINUING NEED FOR
PATIENCE AS THE GRIP OF SANCTIONS TIGHTENS.

4. OUR CONTACTS ACCEPT THAT, ONCE THE MILITARY BUILD UP IS
COMPLETE (AROUND MID-NOVEMBER), WE WILL ENTER A PERIOD IN
WHICH DECISIONS MAY HAVE TO BE MADE. BUT WITH THE COMPLEXITY
AND RISKS OF MILITARY ACTION BECOMING EVER CLEARER, THERE
SEEMS TO BE NO INCLINATION TO RUSH THIS PROCESS. THE ONLY
SUGGESTION THAT THE ADMINISTRATION MIGHT BE PREPARING THE
GROUND FOR POSSIBLE EARLY ACTION HAVE BEEN THE CONTINUING

REFERENCES TO THE QUOTE RAPE OF KUWAIT UNQUOTE (BAKER) AND IRAQI WAR CRIMES (THE PRESIDENT). BUT OUR JUDGEMENT IS THAT THESE WERE PRIMARILY INTENDED TO SHIFT PUBLIC ATTENTION AWAY FROM EVENTS IN JERUSALEM AND BACK TO THE GULF CRISIS. WE ARE NOT YET SEEING ANYTHING IN THE PUBLIC COMMENTS OF THE PRESIDENT OR OTHERS WHICH CLEARLY SUGGESTS THAT THE ADMINISTRATION ARE BEGINNING TO PREPARE THE PUBLIC FOR WAR, ALTHOUGH THEY HAVE MADE IT CLEAR FOR SOME TIME THAT THEY WOULD RESPOND FIRMLY TO A PROVOCATION.

5. WITH THE EMPHASIS ON THE LONG HAUL, THE ADMINISTRATION CONTINUE TO STRESS IN PUBLIC AND PRIVATE THE IMPORTANCE OF HOLDING TOGETHER THE INTERNATIONAL ALLIANCE. THE EVENTS IN JERUSALEM, AND THE SUBSEQUENT SECURITY COUNCIL DEBATE, HAVE BEEN THE GREATEST TEST TO ITS COHESION SO FAR. THE AVOIDANCE OF A US VETO HAS LIMITED THE DAMAGE. BUT THE ISSUE HAS NOT GONE AWAY, AND ITS POTENTIAL FOR SERIOUS HARM REMAINS.

6. DOMESTIC OPINION ON THE ADMINISTRATION'S POLICY SHOWS SOME EVOLUTION SINCE OUR TUR. WRANGLING OVER THE BUDGET CONTINUES TO TAKE THE HEADLINES. OPINION POLLS SHOW A MARKED DECLINE IN THE PRESIDENT'S APPROVAL RATING, WITH A PARALLEL DECLINE IN PUBLIC APPROVAL FOR HIS HANDLING OF THE GULF CRISIS (DOWN SOME 15 POINTS TO JUST OVER 60 PER CENT). BUT THIS SHIFT IS NOT NECESSARILY PERMANENT. IT MAY MAKE FOR CONTINUED CAUTION IN HANDLING THE GULF CRISIS BUT THERE ARE NO SIGNS OF IT LEADING TO ANY FUNDAMENTAL REAPPRAISAL OF US STRATEGY.

7. CONGRESS, MEANWHILE, HAS STILL NOT SERIOUSLY QUESTIONED THE ADMINISTRATION'S POLICY, WHILE MAKING IT CLEAR THE ADMINISTRATION DOES NOT, SO FAR AS THE HILL IS CONCERNED, HAVE CARTE BLANCHE. THE CONGRESS CONTINUES TO ARGUE THAT THE PRESIDENT REQUIRES ITS AUTHORITY TO INITIATE MILITARY ACTION, AND IS SEEKING TO PUT IN PLACE ARRANGEMENTS TO ENABLE CONGRESS TO PARTICIPATE IN ANY ADMINISTRATION DECISION TO TAKE ACTION DURING THE CONGRESSIONAL RECESS FOR THE MID-TERM ELECTIONS (THE RECESS IS DUE TO BEGIN ON 27 OCTOBER). THE ADMINISTRATION HAVE RESPONDED WITH PROMISES OF CONSULTATION BUT NO MORE AND WITH REFERENCES TO OPERATIONAL SECURITY. THESE EXCHANGES, IN OUR VIEW, REFLECT LONGSTANDING DIVISION OVER THE VALIDITY OF THE WAR POWERS ACT, RATHER THAN ANY PRESENT SENSE IN CONGRESS THAT THE PRESIDENT MIGHT TAKE THE COUNTRY PRECIPITOUSLY INTO A WAR.

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