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MY TELNO 1921 AND PARIS TELNO 1275: FOREIGN NATIONALS IN IRAQ

1. AT ITS EMERGENCY MEETING YESTERDAY THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY UNANIMOUSLY APPROVED PRESIDENT SADDAM'S PROPOSAL THAT ALL FRENCH NATIONALS SHOULD BE ALLOWED TO LEAVE IRAQ IF THEY SO WISHED.
2. ANSWERING QUESTIONS FROM ASSEMBLY MEMBERS ON THE MOTIVES THAT HAD PROMPTED SADDAM TO PUT FORWARD HIS PROPOSAL, FOREIGN MINISTER TARIQ AZIZ SAID THAT IRAQ HAD NOTICED SOME CHANGE IN THE FRENCH ATTITUDE TO THE GULF CRISIS, BOTH ON THE OFFICIAL AND THE PUBLIC LEVELS. HE SAID THAT FRANCE WAS OVERTLY AND IMPLICITLY EXERTING EFFORTS TO FIND A PEACEFUL SOLUTION TO THE CRISIS. HE ADDED: '' WE HAVE HEARD CONFIRMATION THAT FRANCE WOULD NOT USE MILITARY FORCE AGAINST IRAQ''. TARIQ AZIZ ALSO SAID: '' WE CANNOT SAY THAT THE FRENCH STAND IS IDENTICAL WITH IRAQ'S , BUT IT IS GETTING CLEARER AND MOVING TOWARDS PEACE''. THE FRENCH GOVERNMENT ALSO HAD A DIFFERENT VIEW FROM THAT OF THE REMAINDER OF THE WEST TOWARDS THE PALESTINE ISSUE. THE FOREIGN MINISTER SAID THAT GOOD INTENTIONS HAD BEEN DETECTED IN PRESIDENT MITTERRAND'S SPEECH TO THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY.
3. REVIEWING IRAQI/FRENCH RELATIONS, TARIQ AZIZ RECALLED THAT IRAQ HAD BEEN APPRECIATIVE OF THE FRENCH STAND TOWARDS IRAQ'S NATIONALISATION OF FOREIGN OIL COMPANIES IN 1972, AND THAT THE FRENCH HAD HELPED IRAQ TO BOOST ITS DEFENCE CAPABILITIES DURING THE GULF WAR: IRAQ/FRENCH TIES DURING THE WAR HAD BEEN ''THE BEST OF RELATIONS''.

COMMENT

4. AS THE BBC WORLD SERVICE COMMENTED THIS MORNING, THIS IS A CLEAR EXAMPLE OF ATTEMPTED WEDGE-DRIVING.

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5. FOREIGN JOURNALISTS WERE ALLOWED TO ATTEND THE MEETING AT THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY AND WERE QUITE SURPRISED TO DISCOVER THAT THERE WAS SOME SEMBLANCE OF DEBATE ON THE ISSUE. FOR INSTANCE FRANCE WAS CRITICISED FOR EXPELLING IRAQI STUDENTS AND IMPOSING RESTRICTIONS ON DIPLOMATS. OF COURSE, HOWEVER, NOBODY WAS PREPARED TO OPPOSE THE PRESIDENT'S RECOMMENDATION.

6. THE FRENCH CHARGE WAS CALLED TO THE MFA AT 2030 YESTERDAY TO BE INFORMED OFFICIALLY OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY'S DECISION, AND HOPES TO CALL AT THE MFA AGAIN TODAY TO DISCUSS THE MODALITIES OF THE EVACUATION OF THE FRENCH NATIONALS.

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