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RIYADH TELNO 1110: SYRIAN POSITION

SUMMARY

1. US AWARE OF ASSAD'S VIEWS BUT UNWILLING TO IMPROVE RELATIONS WITH SYRIA UNTIL DAMASCUS SEVERES LINKS WITH INTERNATIONAL TERRORISM.

DETAIL

2. WE ASKED STATE FOR THEIR REACTION TO THE SYRIAN POSITION REPORTED IN PARAS 4 AND 5 OF TUR. STATE'S SYRIA DESK CONFIRMED THE LINE TAKEN BY BUSBY ON 25 OCTOBER (OUR TELNO 2595). SYRIA WAS DOING THE RIGHT THING OVER THE GULF AND THEIR PRESENCE IN THE MULTI-NATIONAL FORCE WAS A USEFUL SYMBOLIC COMMITMENT. BUT THEIR ACTIONS HAD BEEN DICTATED BY SYRIAN SELF-INTEREST. IRAQ WAS A TRADITIONAL RIVAL. SYRIA HAD IN ANY CASE BEEN ADEQUATELY REWARDED FOR ITS DEPLOYMENTS IN FINANCIAL AND OTHER TERMS.

3. ASSAD'S MAIN OBJECTIVE WAS TO CURRY FAVOUR WITH THE WEST. THE US HAD NO INTENTION OF AFFORDING HIM THE RESPECTABILITY HE CRAVED UNTIL DAMASCUS DEMONSTRATED THAT IT HAD SEVERED ITS LINKS TO INTERNATIONAL TERRORISM. THIS INCLUDED THE EXPULSION OF TERRORIST GROUPS - PFLP(GC), ISLAMIC JIHAD, ABU NIDAL - AND GREATER SYRIAN COOPERATION OVER PAN AM 103. WITHOUT SUBSTANTIVE MOVEMENT IN THIS AREA - FOR WHICH THERE WAS AS YET NO EVIDENCE - THE US WOULD REMAIN VERY CAUTIOUS ABOUT THEIR RELATIONSHIP WITH SYRIA. THEY WERE UNABLE IN LAW AND UNWILLING IN ETHNICS TO DO OTHERWISE.

4. STATE SAID THAT AFTER BAKER'S MEETINGS WITH ASSAD AND THE SYRIAN FOREIGN MINISTER, AND HIS FURTHER MESSAGE ABOUT TERRORISM (TUR), DAMASCUS WERE FULLY AWARE OF THE US POSITION. THE SYRIANS HAD NOT YET REPLIED TO BAKER'S MESSAGE. UNTIL THEY WERE SUFFICIENTLY CONSTRUCTIVE, ASSAD'S VIEWS AND SYRIAN PRESS COMMENT - WHICH WAS PARTLY FOR DOMESTIC CONSUMPTION ANYWAY - WOULD NOT INFLUENCE THE US POSITION. THE SAUDIS AMONG OTHERS

WERE AWARE OF THIS.

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