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MIPT: AUDIENCE WITH KING HUSSEIN

SUMMARY

1. KING HUSSEIN DESCRIBES HIS LATEST MEETING WITH SADDAM. BELIEVES SADDAM WILL NOT WITHDRAW WITHOUT SOME FACE-SAVER. KING LIKELY TO REMAIN INVOLVED IN SEARCH FOR A POLITICAL SOLUTION.

DETAIL

2. I ASKED THE KING ABOUT HIS RECENT MEETING IN BAGHDAD WITH SADDAM, THE YEMENI VICE PRESIDENT, AND ARAFAT.

3. THE KING SAID THAT THE MEETING HAD BEEN USEFUL IN ENABLING HIM TO GAUGE SADDAM'S MOOD AFTER A RELATIVELY LONG INTERVAL. HE FOUND THAT LITTLE HAD CHANGED. SADDAM REMAINED CONFIDENT, CALM, AND COOL. HE HAD EMPHASISED THAT HE FAVOURED A PEACEFUL SETTLEMENT BUT WAS NEVERTHELESS PREPARED FOR WAR. THE KING SAID THAT SINCE HIS RETURN, HE HAD IMPRESSED ON THE AMERICANS (THROUGH THE US AMBASSADOR) THAT THEY SHOULD NOT INTERPRET THE RELEASE OF THE HOSTAGES AS REFLECTING WEAKNESS OR FEAR ON SADDAM'S PART: NOR SHOULD THEY USE THEIR DIALOGUE WITH HIM TO DELIVER AN ULTIMATUM. HE WAS VERY PLEASED ABOUT SADDAM'S DECISION OVER THE HOSTAGES: HE HAD BEEN URGING HIM STRONGLY TO SPEED UP THEIR RELEASE AND HAD RECEIVED GOOD SUPPORT ON THIS FROM YEMEN AT THE BAGHDAD MEETING. I SAID (ON INSTRUCTIONS FROM THE DEPARTMENT) THAT I KNEW THAT WHAT HE HAD TOLD ME ABOUT HIS EFFORTS OVER THE HOSTAGES WOULD BE WELL RECEIVED IN LONDON. THE KING WENT ON TO SAY THAT SADDAM HAD HAD SOME RESERVATIONS ABOUT RELEASING THEM, THOUGH NO LONGER, IT SEEMED, ON MILITARY GROUNDS. HE HAD COMMENTED THAT AT LEAST AS LONG AS THE HOSTAGES WERE PRESENT, HE HAD BEEN ABLE TO CONTINUE A DIALOGUE WITH SOME KEY COUNTRIES. IN THE CASE OF THE FRENCH, FOR EXAMPLE, HE HAD NOTED THAT AS SOON AS THE LAST HOSTAGE HAD BEEN FREED, THE FRENCH AUTHORITIES HAD CEASED TO HAVE ANY DEALINGS WITH HIM.

4. SADDAM HAD GONE OVER THE ORIGINS OF THE CONFLICT IN GREAT

DETAIL. HE HAD EMPHASISED THE INCREASING CONCERN HE HAD FELT AT THE ECONOMIC WAR BEING WAGED AGAINST HIM BY KUWAIT AND THE UAE, AND HE SUSPECTED THAT THE SAUDIS HAD ALSO BEEN INVOLVED IN THIS (HERE HE REFERRED TO THEIR ALLEGED SECRET DIALOGUE WITH THE IRANIANS). IT HAD BEEN HIS INTENTION TO WITHDRAW BUT THE ARRIVAL OF US TROOPS IN SAUDI ARABIA HAD FORCED HIM TO REMAIN IN PLACE. SINCE HE COULD NOT FIGHT ON TWO FRONTS, HE HAD HAD TO MAKE FAR MORE CONCESSIONS TO IRAN THAN THEY WOULD OTHERWISE HAVE GOT. SADDAM HAD EMPHASISED HIS INTEREST IN A REGIONAL PEACE AND HAD ASKED THE OTHERS WHETHER, IF HE WITHDREW FROM KUWAIT, THEY COULD GIVE HIM ANY GUARANTEE THAT THE PALESTINIAN PROBLEM WOULD BE TACKLED. IF SO, HE WAS WILLING TO MAKE SACRIFICES. HE WOULD DESTROY HIS WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION IF OTHERS IN THE REGION DID LIKEWISE. WHAT HE COULD NOT DO WAS TELL HIS SOLDIERS TO WITHDRAW FROM KUWAIT WHEN HE HAD NOTHING TO SHOW THEM IN RETURN. THEY WOULD BE COMPLETELY DEMORALISED, AND WHAT WOULD HIS PEOPLE SAY?

5. HAVING REMINDED THE KING THAT SADDAM HAD NOT EVEN MENTIONED PALESTINE UNTIL 12 AUGUST, I ASKED HIM, FIRST, WHETHER SADDAM HAD CLEARLY SPELT OUT THE NATURE OF THE LINKAGE HE WAS SEEKING ON PALESTINE: AND SECONDLY, WHETHER HE HAD REFERRED TO ANY SIMILAR LINKAGE OVER KUWAIT ITSELF IE INSISTANCE ON RETAINING THE DISPUTED AREAS. THE KING SAID THAT SADDAM WAS NOT INSISTING ON A SIMULTANEOUS SOLUTION TO THE PALESTINIAN QUESTION BUT BEYOND THAT HE DID NOT KNOW PRECISELY WHAT SADDAM'S POSITION WAS, EITHER ON PALESTINE OR KUWAIT. BUT ON THE LATTER, ALL PRESENT AT THE BAGHDAD MEETING HAD ONCE AGAIN URGED HIM TO WITHDRAW.

6. ON THE NEXT STEPS, THE KING MENTIONED THAT THERE WAS STRONG SUPPORT AT THE BAGHDAD MEETING FOR AN ARAB-ARAB DIALOGUE. THE PRESIDENT OF ALGERIA WOULD PROBABLY BE VISITING AMMAN, BAGHDAD AND POSSIBLY RIYADH, BEGINNING ON 11 DECEMBER. THERE HAD BEEN PLANS TO HOLD AN ARAB FOREIGN MINISTERS' MEETING BUT THESE HAD NOW BEEN SHELVED IN THE LIGHT OF THE US/ARAB DIALOGUE. THE KING REMAINED UNSURE WHETHER THE SAUDIS WERE SERIOUSLY INTERESTED IN DIRECT DISCUSSIONS WITH SADDAM.

7. FOR COMMENTS ON THIS AND MIPT, SEE MIPT.

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