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CALL ON SAUDI FOREIGN MINISTER

SUMMARY

1. PRINCE SAUD WELCOMES VISITS OF THE PRINCE OF WALES AND THE PRIME MINISTER, HINTS HE MAY VISIT LONDON AFTER THE GCC SUMMIT. SAUDIS HOPE THAT EUROPEANS WILL HAVE NO TALKS WITH TARIQ AZIZ, IF AMERICANS DO NOT. KING FAHD SEEKS TO AVOID ANYTHING THAT MIGHT SUGGEST PREPAREDNESS ON HIS PART TO NEGOTIATE WITH THE IRAQIS, HENCE HIS DECISION SO FAR NOT TO RECEIVE BENJEDID. SAUD DESPAIRING OF THE JORDANIANS. COMMENTS ON GULF SECURITY. DETAIL
2. I CALLED ON PRINCE SAUD AL FAISAL ON 16 DECEMBER. PRINCE SAUD SAID THE SAUDIS VERY MUCH WELCOMED THE PLANNED VISITS OF THE PRINCE OF WALES AND THE PRIME MINISTER. HE REGRETTED THAT HE HAD NOT BEEN ABLE TO STOP OFF IN THE UK AS WELL AS ROME AND BONN BEFORE THE EUROPEAN COUNCIL. WHEN I ENCOURAGED HIM TO DO SO, HE SAID HE HOPED TO PASS THROUGH LONDON TO SEE YOU AND IF POSSIBLE THE PRIME MINISTER, AFTER THE GCC SUMMIT (IE AROUND TURN OF THE YEAR).
3. I BRIEFED PRINCE SAUD ON THE OUTCOME OF THE EUROPEAN COUNCIL, DRAWING ON ROME'S REPORTING TELEGRAMS. PRINCE SAUD WELCOMED THIS EARLY BRIEFING, AND THE FIRM TONE OF THE STATEMENT ON THE GULF. HAD THE GERMANS LACKED RESOLVE? HE SAID THAT DURING HIS VISITS TO ROME AND BONN HE HAD FOUND HIS INTERLOCUTORS GENERALLY FIRM, THOUGH CHANCELLOR KOHL - WHO SPOKE FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF A COUNTRY WHICH HAD KNOWN DEFEAT IN WAR - WAS MORE RELUCTANT TO CONTEMPLATE THE PROSPECT OF HOSTILITIES, AND STRESSED THE EFFECTIVENESS OF ECONOMIC SANCTIONS. PRINCE SAUD HAD TOLD HIM

THAT SANCTIONS MIGHT IN THE END DO MORE DAMAGE, INCLUDING TO IRAQ, THAN HOSTILITIES. I SAID HIS VISIT TO BONN MIGHT HAVE HELPED TO STEADY THINGS. PRINCE SAUD ASKED WHETHER THE TWELVE WOULD RECEIVE TARIQ AZIZ IF THE AMERICANS DID NOT. HE VERY MUCH HOPED THEY WOULD NOT. DI MICHELIS HAD TOLD HIM THAT THE PRESIDENCY WOULD ONLY MEET TARIQ AZIZ AFTER THE AMERICANS DID.

4. I ASKED SAUD ABOUT PRESIDENT BENJEDID'S TOUR (YESTERDAY'S SAUDI NEWSPAPERS CONTAINED AN EXCHANGE OF TELEGRAMS BETWEEN KING FAHD AND BENJEDID ON THE OCCASION OF THE LATTER'S AIR FLIGHT OVER THE KINGDOM, IN WHICH BOTH EMPHASISED THE STRENGTH OF BILATERAL RELATIONS BETWEEN BOTH COUNTRIES: NOTWITHSTANDING THE WARM TONE OF THESE, THE FACT OF THE EXCHANGE PUBLICLY UNDERLINES THE KING'S RELUCTANCE SO FAR TO RECEIVE THE ALGERIAN). PRINCE SAUD SAID THE SAUDIS RECOGNISED THAT THEIR POSITION WITHIN THE ALLIANCE AGAINST IRAQ WAS KEY- 'SAUDI ARABIA IS THE POLE OF THE TENT'. HENCE, THE KING WAS ANXIOUS TO AVOID ANYTHING WHICH MIGHT BE EXPLOITED TO SUGGEST HE MIGHT NEGOTIATE WITH THE IRAQIS. TOO MANY PARTIES WERE INDULGING IN DISINFORMATION. WHEN BENJEDID HAD FIRST TALKED OF HIS INITIATIVE, THE SAUDIS HAD URGED HIM TO CONCENTRATE ON IRAQ AND PRESS FOR WITHDRAWAL. INSTEAD HE HAD EMBARKED ON A REGIONAL TOUR. THE SAUDIS AS YET HAD NO ACCOUNT OF THE RESULTS. THEY WOULD WAIT AND SEE BEFORE CONSIDERING ANY MEETING BETWEEN BENJEDID AND THE KING.

5. I ASKED PRINCE SAUD ABOUT THE GCC SUMMIT, AND POST-CRISIS REGIONAL SECURITY ARRANGEMENTS. HE SAID THAT MUCH DEPENDED ON WHETHER THE CRISIS WAS RESOLVED PEACEFULLY OR NOT. (FOR WHAT IT IS WORTH, HIS PRIVATE SECRETARY TOLD ME BEFORE WE WENT IN THAT HE - SHAWWAF - WAS CERTAIN CURRENT PRESSURES WOULD COMPEL SADDAM, WHO WANTED TO SURVIVE, TO WITHDRAW BEFORE HE WAS ATTACKED. PRINCE ABDUL RAHMAN, DEPUTY DEFENCE MINISTER, ALSO TOLD MINISTER (AF) YESTERDAY THAT SADDAM MUST HAVE SOMETHING UP HIS SLEEVE HERE). SAUD SAID THE FOCUS NOW MUST BE ON STRENGTHENING THE GULF COUNTRIES' FORCES, WHETHER IN THE SHAPE OF THE PENINSULA SHIELD OR NATIONALLY. THERE WAS A FURTHER REQUIREMENT FOR MEASURES TO PROTECT KUWAIT'S NORTHERN BORDER. UNTIL THESE MILITARY ELEMENTS WERE IN PLACE, IT WAS DIFFICULT TO PERCEIVE CLEARLY THE SHAPE OF BROADER LONG TERM REGIONAL ARRANGEMENTS. I MENTIONED OUR INPUT TO GCC SECRETARIAT THINKING.

6. I TOOK THE OPPORTUNITY TO THANK PRINCE SAUD FOR HIS ASSISTANCE OVER THE RESTORATION OF UK RELATIONS WITH SYRIA. HE SAID HIS SYRIAN AND EGYPTIAN COLLEAGUES AT THE RECENT TRIPARTITE

MEETING IN CAIRO HAD BEEN APPRECIATIVE OF OUR MOVE. PRINCE SAUD RAISED LEBANON. THE STEPS CURRENTLY BEING TAKEN THERE WERE SIGNIFICANT. THE SUPPORT EXPRESSED BY THE EUROPEAN COUNCIL WAS MOST HELPFUL. IBRAHIMI WAS IN LEBANON AT THE MOMENT, AND REPORTED THAT THE MOOD WAS VERY POSITIVE.

7. I MENTIONED JORDAN AND MY RECENT EXCHANGE WITH KING FAHD, AND ASKED HOW THE SAUDIS SAW PROSPECTS IN THE LIGHT OF THE OMANI INITIATIVE (CF FCO TELNO 397 TO MUSCAT). PRINCE SAUD SAID THE SAUDIS REMAINED CONCERNED ABOUT JORDAN, AND AWARE OF THE DANGERS. THEY HAD MADE CONSTANT EFFORTS TO GET BACK ON TERMS (HE REFERRED TO PRINCE TURKI AL FAISAL'S VISIT TO AMMAN SOME TIME AGO). REGRETTABLY THERE HAD STILL BEEN NO REAL IMPROVEMENT IN THE JORDANIAN POSITION. PRINCE SAUD CITED KING HUSSEIN'S LATEST UNHELPFUL STATEMENT AT THE MILITARY GRADUATION CEREMONY. HE ALSO OBJECTED TO A PUBLIC REMARK BY CROWN PRINCE HASSAN TO THE EFFECT THAT SAUDI ARABIA WAS RESTRAINED BY AMERICAN PRESSURES FROM IMPROVING ITS RELATIONS WITH JORDAN. SO LONG AS KING HUSSEIN DEMONSTRATED POSITIVE ASPECTS IN THE ACTION SADDAM HAD TAKEN, THERE WAS UNLIKELY TO BE COMMON GROUND BETWEEN JORDAN AND SAUDI ARABIA.

COMMENT

8. THE SAUDIS CONTINUE TO RESIST ARAB ATTEMPTS TO DRAW THEM INTO CONTACT WITH SADDAM. SAUD'S REMARKS STILL LEAVE OPEN THE POSSIBILITY OF A MEETING BETWEEN BENJEDID AND THE KING. BUT FOR THE SAUDIS TO PLAY ALGERIA LONG IN THIS WAY TAKES NERVE, GIVEN ALGERIA'S WEIGHT IN THE ARAB WORLD AND THEIR COLLABORATION OVER LEBANON. ON FUTURE REGIONAL SECURITY SAUD EVIDENTLY REGARDS PREPARATION OF LONGER TERM ARRANGEMENTS AS PREMATURE BEFORE OUTCOME OF CRISIS IS CLEAR. SAUDI PRIORITY WILL BE ESTABLISHMENT OF A MILITARY DEFENSIVE SCREEN POST CRISIS (THIS TIES IN WITH WHAT PRINCE FAHD ABDULLA TOLD ME LAST WEEK). SAUD DID NOT HOWEVER CHALLENGE MY SUGGESTION OF WIDER REGIONAL ARRANGEMENTS WITHIN A UNSC FRAMEWORK. ON JORDAN I SENSE NO EARLY PROSPECT OF A FURTHER CONCILIATORY GESTURE SO LONG AS KING HUSSEIN PEDDLES NEGOTIATION.

9. SEE MY SEPARATE TELEGRAMS FOR PRINCE SAUD'S REACTION TO OUR PLANNED PHASE II CONSULAR ADVICE, AND TO MY DEMARCHE ON VISAS FOR BRITISH JOURNALISTS.

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