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IRAQ/KUWAIT

SUMMARY

1. CHENEY AND POWELL VISIT SAUDI ARABIA TO EVALUATE PREPAREDNESS AND OPTIONS WITH US MILITARY. CHENEY SEEKS TO REASSURE SAUDIS THAT US WILL NOT COMPROMISE. CROWN PRINCE ABDULLAH CONCERNED ABOUT AMERICAN RESOLVE. SULTAN WELCOMES US TRAINING, PRE-POSITIONING AND SALES POST-CRISIS.

DETAIL

2. DEFENCE SECRETARY CHENEY AND CHIEF OF STAFF POWELL SPENT 4 DAYS IN SAUDI ARABIA FROM 19 - 22 DECEMBER. THE US EMBASSY HAVE GIVEN US AN ACCOUNT OF CHENEY AND POWELL'S DISCUSSIONS WITH THE SAUDIS. THE VISITORS' MAIN PURPOSE HOWEVER SEEMS TO HAVE BEEN TO DISCUSS THE MILITARY POSITION WITH GENERAL SCHWARZKOPF AND THE US COMMAND. IN MEDIA TERMS CHENEY'S THUNDER WAS STOLEN BY GENERAL WALLER'S GAFFE IN SAYING THAT US LAND FORCES WOULD NOT BE READY FOR ACTION UNTIL FEBRUARY.

3. ON THE SAUDI SIDE CHENEY WAS RECEIVED BY CROWN PRINCE ABDULLAH AND PRINCE SULTAN. HE DID NOT SEE THE KING. THE LATTER WAS IN MEDINA FOR MOST OF THE VISIT, AND THE AMERICANS WERE TOLD THAT A MEETING COULD NOT BE FITTED IN (COMMENT: THE KING'S REASON FOR VISITING MEDINA WAS TO REVIEW THE PROPHET'S MOSQUE EXPANSION PROJECT, AND THE PUBLIC EMPHASIS OF THE VISIT WAS HEAVILY ISLAMIC).

4. ACCORDING TO THE US EMBASSY, CHENEY'S MAIN PURPOSE WITH ABDULLAH AND SULTAN WAS TO DISPEL SAUDI DOUBTS ABOUT THE AMERICAN COMMITMENT ENGENDERED BY CONGRESSIONAL GRUMBLINGS AND BY THE US OFFER OF DIALOGUE WITH TARIQ AZIZ. CROWN PRINCE ABDULLAH CROSS-

EXAMINED CHENEY CLOSELY ON THIS. HE DOUBTED WHETHER SADDAM BELIEVED THAT THE US WAS PREPARED TO ATTACK. HE RAISED THE SPECTRE OF A PARTIAL IRAQI WITHDRAWAL AND ASKED HOW THE US WOULD REACT. CHENEY SAID THAT THERE WERE NO MILITARY SIGNS TO SUGGEST THAT SADDAM PLANNED TO WITHDRAW. IF HE DID, CHENEY'S UNDERSTANDING WAS THAT THE AMERICANS WOULD SETTLE FOR NOTHING LESS THAN COMPLETE AND UNCONDITIONAL WITHDRAWAL FROM KUWAIT. HE HAD COME TO DISCUSS THE NEXT STEPS WITH GENERAL SCHWARZKOPF. THE FINAL DECISION RESTED WITH THE PRESIDENT AND KING FAHD. BUT THE SAUDIS SHOULD NOT MISREAD THE INTERNAL DEBATE IN THE US. THE PRESIDENT HAD THE AUTHORITY TO GO ON TO THE OFFENSIVE.

5. THE US EMBASSY SAY ABDULLAH TOOK A FIRM LINE ON THE NEED TO REVERSE THE OCCUPATION OF KUWAIT, BUT RETURNED REPEATEDLY TO THIS QUESTION OF AMERICAN WILL. SULTAN ON THE OTHER HAND SEEMED MORE COMFORTABLE WITH AMERICAN INTENTIONS. HE DESCRIBED HIS TOUR OF GCC STATES, ON WHOM HE HAD URGED EXPANSION OF THE PENINSULA SHIELD FORCE. CHENEY ONLY RAISED LONG TERM SECURITY ARRANGEMENTS IN GENERAL TERMS. HE MENTIONED TRAINING, PRE-POSITIONING OF US EQUIPMENT AND US EQUIPMENT SALES, AND SULTAN WE ARE TOLD WELCOMED ALL THESE IDEAS, THOUGH NEITHER HE NOR CHENEY WENT INTO ANY DETAIL. CHENEY SAID US TROOPS WOULD LEAVE WHEN THEIR JOB WAS DONE. SULTAN SAID THAT THAT JORDAN, SUDAN, TUNISIA AND THE PLO WOULD SUFFER AS A RESULT OF THEIR SUPPORT FOR IRAQ.

COMMENT

6. WE WILL REPORT FURTHER IF WE LEARN MORE ABOUT BILATERAL BUSINESS TRANSACTED DURING THIS VISIT. THE US ACCOUNT SUGGESTS NO DIMINUTION IN THE RESOLVE OF ABDULLAH AND SULTAN BUT DOUBTS ON THE PART OF THE FORMER AS TO AMERICAN DETERMINATION. AT ABDULLAH'S LUNCH FOR THE PRINCE OF WALES YESTERDAY, I FOUND HIM FIRM ON THE MILITARY OPTION AND HOSTILE TO A GRACE PERIOD AFTER 15 JANUARY (SEE MY SEPARATE TEL OF TODAY'S DATE FOR FULLER ACCOUNT). SULTAN, WHO WAS ALSO PRESENT, SEEMED TO THINK MILITARY ACTION INCREASINGLY LIKELY. AGAINST THAT, THE VIEW AMONG MOST OF OUR NON-AL SAUD OFFICIAL CONTACTS, IS THAT SADDAM IS LIKELY TO WITHDRAW EITHER IN WHOLE OR IN PART AROUND 15 JANUARY, AND THAT WAR IS THEREFORE UNLIKELY. THEY ARGUE THAT IT IS INCONCEIVABLE THAT SADDAM IS UNAWARE OF THE STRENGTH OF THE FORCES RANGED AGAINST HIM OR THE INADEQUACY OF HIS OWN RESOURCES (AT THE CROWN PRINCE'S LUNCH THE OIL MINISTER SAID THAT HE WAS CONVINCED THAT IRAQ'S PRODUCTION OF AVIATION FUEL AND KEROSENE WERE INADEQUATE FOR WAR). IN PART PERHAPS THIS EXPECTATION REFLECTS

UNWILLINGNESS TO FACE UP TO FACTS. MAYBE THE OLDER GENERATION OF THE AL SAUD ARE MADE OF STERNER STUFF. THE COMMERCE MINISTER ALSO SAID (IN CONTRAST TO PRINCE ABDULLAH) THAT HE ASSUMED PARTIAL WITHDRAWAL WOULD BE DEALT WITH BY CONTINUED SANCTIONS RATHER THAN MILITARY ACTION: BUT HE POSITED THIS ON LACK OF US, RATHER THAN ARAB, RESOLVE. GENERAL WALLER'S COMMENTS WILL NOT HAVE HELPED.

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