

CONFIDENTIAL
FM WASHINGTON
TO DESKBY 050900Z FCO
TELNO 035
OF 050041Z JANUARY 91

ADVANCE CO.

INFO IMMEDIATE BAGHDAD, RIYADH, CAIRO, AMMAN, ACTOR
INFO PRIORITY OTHER GULF POSTS, EC POSTS, ANKARA, SANA' A
INFO PRIORITY UKDEL NATO, UKMIS NEW YORK, MOSCOW, MODUK

MY TELNO. 13: IRAQ/KUWAIT
SUMMARY

1. THE ADMINISTRATION IS STILL FOLLOWING THE TWIN TRACKS OF INCREASING PRESSURE ON SADDAM TO WITHDRAW AND PREPARING FOR WAR IF HE DOES NOT DO SO. BUT THE TIME WHEN A CHOICE WILL HAVE TO BE MADE IS NEARING. BUSH REMAINS DETERMINED TO USE FORCE IF HE HAS TO. THE PRESIDENT'S LATEST DIPLOMATIC INITIATIVE HAS HELPED IN HANDLING US PUBLIC OPINION AND CONGRESS. THE ADMINISTRATION WILL NEED TO CONTINUE TO WATCH CONGRESSIONAL OPINION CLOSELY, BUT EARLY ACTION TO CONSTRAIN THE PRESIDENT IS UNLIKELY.

DETAIL

2. THE IRAQI AGREEMENT TO MEET BAKER ON 9 JANUARY MAKES IT PLAIN THAT THE HANDLING OF CONTACTS WITH BAGHDAD WILL BE THE FIRST PRIORITY FOR YOUR TALKS WITH YOUR US COLLEAGUE ON 7 JANUARY. WE SHALL HAVE A GOOD OPPORTUNITY TO LOOK AT THE CONSEQUENCES OF GENEVA ON 13 JANUARY WHEN BAKER RETURNS VIA LONDON.

3. THE AMERICANS WANT TO GET OVER A SIMPLE MESSAGE: WITHDRAW, OR ELSE. BUT IF THE IRAQIS ARE NOT TOTALLY NEGATIVE ON 9 JANUARY IT MAY BE, FOR ALL AMERICAN DETERMINATION, HARD TO AVOID SOME FORM OF BARGAINING (OUR TELNO 3068 OF 18 DECEMBER) AND HENCE A MOVE TOWARDS CHAPTER 2, THE MORE SO IF THE IRAQIS PLAY THE OBVIOUS TRICK OF INVITING BAKER TO GO TO BAGHDAD TO MEET SADDAM HUSSEIN.

4. THERE HAVE BEEN CONTINUAL MEETINGS IN WASHINGTON SINCE THE DECISION ON 3 JANUARY THAT BAKER SHOULD MAKE HIS TRIP AND THAT A RENEWED ATTEMPT SHOULD BE MADE TO GET IN CONTACT WITH THE IRAQIS. POLICY IS BEING MADE, TO SOME EXTENT AT LEAST, ON THE WING, THOUGH WITHIN FAMILIAR GUIDELINES. THE ADMINISTRATION IS STILL TRYING TO FOLLOW THE TWIN TRACKS OF INCREASING THE PRESSURE ON BAGHDAD TO INDUCE SADDAM HUSSEIN WITHDRAW FROM KUWAIT AND OF PREPARING FOR WAR SHOULD HE PROVE OBDURATE. AS THE TIME IN WHICH THE PRESIDENT IS ABLE TO AVOID CHOOSING BETWEEN THESE TWO ALTERNATIVES GROWS SHORTER, HOWEVER, IT BECOMES EVER CLEARER THAT HE HAS MUCH MORE SOLID SUPPORT FOR

DIPLOMACY THAN FOR WAR. HIS DECISION TO ABANDON THE DEADLINE OF 3 JANUARY FOR TALKS WITH THE IRAQIS REFLECTS THAT FACT. IT WAS PROBABLY A MISTAKE TO HAVE SET IT IN THE FIRST PLACE: WHEN HE FIRST OFFERED CONTACTS, HE SPOKE OF MEETINGS BEFORE 15 JANUARY. IN THE MEANTIME HOWEVER THE ADMINISTRATION INCREASINGLY SPOKE OF 15 JANUARY ITSELF AS A DEADLINE, RATHER THAN A DATE AFTER WHICH ACTION MIGHT BE TAKEN. THE IRAQIS MAY WELL NOW FEEL THAT THEY HAVE CALLED THE US BLUFF.

5. THE NEWS THAT THERE WILL BE AT LEAST SOME CONTACT WILL COME AS A RELIEF TO US PUBLIC OPINION. THE PRESIDENT'S DECISION TO SHIFT HIS GROUND SLIGHTLY HAS BROUGHT TACTICAL BENEFITS IN TERMS OF HIS RELATIONSHIP WITH THE NEW CONGRESS, AS WELL AS REGAINING SOME OF THE INITIATIVE INTERNATIONALLY. THE LONGER TERM EFFECT WILL BE TO FOCUS EVEN MORE ATTENTION ON WHETHER OR NOT THE PRESIDENT MEANS WHAT HE HAS SAID ABOUT 15 JANUARY. WELL-INFORMED JOURNALISTS ARE NOW SPECULATING ON 24 JANUARY AS THE KEY DATE FOR US ACTION.

6. ALL THE EVIDENCE WE HAVE HERE CONFIRMS THAT THE PRESIDENT REMAINS DETERMINED TO SECURE COMPLETE IRAQI WITHDRAWAL FROM KUWAIT AND THAT HE IS PREPARED, AND PERHAPS EXPECTS, TO USE FORCE SOON AFTER 15 JANUARY IN ORDER TO ACHIEVE THIS. THE POLITICAL PRESSURES ON HIM TO MOVE SOONER RATHER THAN LATER ARE CLEAR. HE HAS IN EFFECT PUT HIS PRESIDENCY ON THE LINE. IF THE IRAQIS PROVE OBDUKATE AND HE DOES NOT ACT SOON, THE CREDIBILITY OF THE DEADLINE WILL FALL QUICKLY AWAY. ON THE OTHER HAND, IT WILL BE IMPORTANT TO HIM BOTH INTERNATIONALLY AND ABOVE ALL DOMESTICALLY TO BE SEEN TO BE JUSTIFIED IN ORDERING ANY OFFENSIVE. APPARENT IRAQI WILLINGNESS TO MAKE CONCESSIONS WOULD UNDERMINE THAT. IF HE ORDERED AN EARLY OFFENSIVE HE WOULD BE PINNING HIS HOPES ON A QUICK RESULT. HE HAS THE OPTION OF A PROLONGED AERIAL CAMPAIGN BEFORE US GROUND TROOPS ARE COMMITTED, BUT THAT WOULD EAT INTO INTERNATIONAL AND PROBABLY DOMESTIC SUPPORT. IF HE COMMITTED GROUND FORCES THIS MONTH AND THERE WERE NO QUICK SUCCESS, HE WOULD BE LIABLE TO THE ACCUSATION THAT HE HAD MOVED BEFORE THE COMMANDERS ON THE SPOT WERE READY. AND THE LONGER A CONFLICT CONTINUED THE GREATER THE PRESIDENT'S LIKELY DIFFICULTIES WOULD BECOME WITH THE CONGRESS, NOT LEAST BECAUSE THE PRESENT ARGUMENT OVER WHO HAS THE POWER TO DECLARE WAR WOULD RETURN WITH RENEWED VIGOUR ONCE THE INITIAL IMPULSE TO RALLY ROUND THE FLAG HAD FADED. BUT THESE ARE FUTURE FEARS RATHER THAN PRESENT CONSTRAINTS.

7. THE PRESIDENT'S DISCUSSIONS ON 3 JANUARY WITH THE CONGRESSIONAL LEADERSHIP DID LITTLE TO ALTER FAMILIAR POSITIONS

ON BOTH SIDES. THERE REMAINS WIDESPREAD CONCERN IN CONGRESS THAT THE ADMINISTRATION IS MOVING TOO QUICKLY TO THE MILITARY OPTION. A LARGE BODY OF OPINION, ESPECIALLY AMONG THE DEMOCRATS, SUPPORTS FURTHER DIPLOMATIC EFFORTS TO RESOLVE THE CRISIS AND TIME TO ALLOW SANCTIONS MORE OF A CHANCE TO HAVE THEIR EFFECT. DEMOCRATIC CONGRESSMEN CLAIM THAT CONSTITUENCY MAIL REFLECTS THIS CONCERN TO AVOID RUSHING INTO A WAR. A POLL RELEASED ON 3 JANUARY ON THE OTHER HAND REPORTS THAT 82 PERCENT OF THOSE INTERVIEWED THOUGHT THE US SHOULD MOVE QUICKLY, WITHIN A MONTH, IF SADDAM DID NOT WITHDRAW BY 15 JANUARY. THE POLL ALSO FOUND THAT 70 PER CENT THOUGHT CONGRESS SHOULD BE GIVING THE PRESIDENT MORE SUPPORT.

8. THE POSSIBILITY OF A BAKER/TARIQ AZIZ MEETING WAS GENERALLY WELL RECEIVED BY CONGRESS, THOUGH SOME HAVE QUESTIONED THE VALUE OF A MEETING WITH ANYONE BUT THE TOP MAN AT THIS STAGE. ASPIN, CHAIRMAN OF THE HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE, HAS SAID THAT IT WOULD BE BETTER FOR BAKER TO MEET SADDAM HUSSEIN ON 12 JANUARY THAN TARIQ AZIZ ON 8 OR 9 JANUARY.

9. IT REMAINS UNLIKELY THAT CONGRESS WILL TAKE EARLY ACTION TO COMPLICATE LIFE FOR THE PRESIDENT. THE NEW CONGRESS CONVENED ON 3 JANUARY AND HAS GONE INTO PRO FORMA SESSION UNTIL 22 JANUARY. THAT MEANS THAT IT COULD RECONVENE QUICKLY, BUT IS BETTER FROM THE ADMINISTRATION'S POINT OF VIEW THAN REMAINING IN FULL SESSION, AS SOME HAD WANTED. IN THE SENATE, MAJORITY LEADER MITCHELL HAS PROPOSED THAT THERE SHOULD BE NO DEBATE UNTIL AFTER THE BAKER/TARIQ AZIZ MEETING. TWO DEMOCRATIC SENATORS TRIED UNSUCCESSFULLY ON 3 JANUARY TO FORCE AN EARLY DEBATE ON WHETHER THE PRESIDENT HAD THE AUTHORITY TO MAKE WAR WITHOUT CONGRESSIONAL APPROVAL. THE SENATE HAS BEEN MEETING AGAIN ON 4 JANUARY TO RESOLVE THIS DISPUTE, BUT THE EXPECTATION IS THAT, ALTHOUGH THERE ARE VARIOUS DRAFTS IN PREPARATION (BOTH HELPFUL AND UNHELPFUL TO THE PRESIDENT) NO RESOLUTION WILL SOON SURFACE. THE POSITION IS THEREFORE CONTAINED. BUT THE WHITE HOUSE WILL NONETHELESS BE CONSCIOUS OF A CONTINUING NEED TO KEEP A CLOSE WATCH ON HOW THINGS MOVE ON THE HILL

WOOD

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