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TELNO 2519

OF 030015Z OCTOBER 86

INFO PRIORITY PRETORIA

INFO ROUTINE UKMIS NEW YORK LUSAKA HARARE LUANDA GABORONE
NASERU MBABANE LILONGWE MAPUTO

MY TELNO 2494: US/SOUTH AFRICA

SUMMARY

1. SENATE OVERRIDES PRESIDENT'S VETO. SANCTIONS BILL NOW US
LAW.

DETAIL

2. ON 2 OCTOBER THE SENATE VOTED 78-21 TO OVERRIDE THE PRESIDENT'S
VETO OF THE SANCTIONS BILL, THUS EASILY EXCEEDING THE REQUIRED
TWO-THIRDS MAJORITY. SINCE THE HOUSE HAD ALREADY VOTED
OVERWHELMINGLY FOR THE OVERRIDE (MY TELNO 2480) THE SANCTIONS
BILL NOW BECOMES LAW, DESPITE THE PRESIDENT'S VETO.

3. THE OUTCOME HAD NEVER BEEN SERIOUSLY IN DOUBT
SINCE THE 26 SEPTEMBER DECISION THAT THE VETO SHOULD NOT BE
COUPLED WITH AN IMMEDIATE EXECUTIVE ORDER (MY TEL NO 2465). BUT
THE MARGIN OF DEFEAT IN THE SENATE (13 VOTES SHORT OF THE 34
NEEDED TO SUSTAIN A VETO) WAS WIDER THAN EXPECTED. ONE FACTOR
WHICH PROBABLY INFLUENCED THE VOTE IN AN UNHELPFUL WAY FROM
ADMINISTRATION'S POINT OF VIEW WAS PIK BOTHA'S TELEPHONE CALLS
PRETORIA TELNO 345). SENATORS OBJECTED STRONGLY TO THE IMPLIED
THREAT IN BOTHA'S MESSAGE. ONE SENATOR TO WHOM BOTHA SPOKE
DESCRIBED IT AS TANTAMOUNT TO BLACKMAIL.

4. THE PRESIDENT HAD LOBBIED PERSONALLY, THOUGH RATHER LATE IN
THE DAY, AGAINST THE OVERRIDE, AND THIS DEFEAT AT THE HANDS OF
CONGRESS (THE FIRST VETO OVERRIDE OF THIS ADMINISTRATION ON A MAJOR
FOREIGN POLICY MATTER - THOUGH THERE HAVE BEEN SEVERAL OTHERS ON
LESS IMPORTANT ISSUES) IS A SIGNIFICANT SETBACK FOR HIM.
NEVERTHELESS, PERHAPS BECAUSE HE WAS ALL ALONG CONSCIOUS OF THE
PROBABILITY OF DEFEAT ON AN ISSUE ON WHICH CONGRESS HAD CAPTURED

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THE HIGH MORAL GROUND, HE NEVER SEEMED TO ENGAGE HIS FULL PRESTIGE IN THE SANCTIONS BATTLE (AS HE DID, FOR EXAMPLE, IN THE CONTRA AID BATTLE, WHICH HE WON). THE DEFEAT IS CORRESPONDINGLY LESS DAMAGING; AND BECAUSE IT WAS LARGELY DISCOUNTED, AND COMES ALMOST AT THE END OF THE SESSION, WILL HAVE LITTLE IMMEDIATE EFFECT ON THE PRESIDENT'S DEALINGS WITH CONGRESS ON OTHER ISSUES.

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