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FRANCE/IRAN

SUMMARY

1. QUAI SECRETARY GENERAL SIGNALS NO NEW POINTS FOR PRIME MINISTER'S TALKS IN PARIS ON 29 JULY. DESPITE FRANCO/IRANIAN AGREEMENT ON PROTECTING POWERS, STILL EXPECTS SERIOUS DIFFICULTIES. FRENCH KEEN TO AVOID PROVOKING IRAN AND SEEK TO DE-DRAMATISE DECISION TO PLACE SMALL NAVAL TASK FORCE ON ALERT. CONCERNED ABOUT THE THREAT TO FRENCH INTERESTS IN LEBANON. ON SCR 598 BELIEVE THERE SHOULD BE NO RUSH TOWARDS ENFORCEMENT MEASURES.

DETAIL

2. I CALLED THIS EVENING ON PEROL, QUAI SECRETARY GENERAL, TO RUN OVER POINTS (EC ISSUES, DEFENCE, IRAN) TO BE DISCUSSED BETWEEN THE PRIME MINISTER AND MITTERRAND AND CHIRAC ON 29 JULY. PEROL OFFERED NO NEW POINTS BUT EXPLAINED FRANCE'S CURRENT THINKING ON IRAN AND THE GULF. HE DID NOT SUGGEST THAT CHIRAC OR MITTERRAND WOULD MAKE ANY SPECIAL REQUESTS IN THIS AREA.

3. PEROL SAID THAT AN ANNOUNCEMENT WAS IMMINENT THAT AGREEMENT HAD BEEN REACHED FOR ITALY AND PAKISTAN TO REPRESENT FRENCH AND IRANIAN INTERESTS, WITH TWO DIPLOMATS AND SUPPORTING STAFF RETAINED IN INTERESTS SECTIONS IN EACH CAPITAL. HOWEVER THE GORDJI/TORRI PROBLEM REMAINED UNSOLVED AND HE EXPECTED SERIOUS DIFFICULTIES TO CONTINUE.

4. I ASKED ABOUT REPORTS THAT A SMALL NAVAL TASK FORCE WAS BEING PUT ON 24 HOUR ALERT TO ENABLE FRANCE TO DEAL WITH ANY WORSENING OF THE CURRENT FRANCO/IRANIAN CRISIS (SEE SEPARATE TELEGRAM). PEROL SAID THAT FIRST REPORTING OF THIS DECISION HAD BEEN RATHER ALARMIST. FRANCE DID NOT WISH TO PROVOKE IRAN AND WOULD BE CAREFUL TO AVOID THIS. US ACTION IN THE GULF HAD BEEN IMPRUDENT AT TIMES.

5. PEROL SAID THAT HITHERTO THE IRANIAN AUTHORITIES THEMSELVES HAD KEPT A TIGHT CONTROL ON THE SITUATION. THEIR LINE WAS VERY HARD BUT THEY SEEMED CALM AND WANTING TO KEEP MATTERS IN HAND. THE FRENCH PRESENCE IN TEHRAN, BEYOND THEIR MISSION ITSELF, WAS VERY SMALL. THE GREATEST FRENCH FEAR WAS FOR ITS NATIONALS IN LEBANON WHERE VARIOUS RIVAL SHI'ITE GROUPS SOUGHT TO OUT-BID EACH OTHER IN FANATICISM. THE FRENCH EMBASSY (ESPECIALLY THE RESIDUAL COMPONENT IN WEST BEIRUT) WAS UNDER PARTICULAR THREAT. SO WERE FRENCH UNIFIL FORCES. PEROL SAID THAT HE COULD NOT PREDICT FRANCE'S LONG-TERM DECISION ON THE UNIFIL CONTINGENT (BUT THERE IS NO SUGGESTION THAT FRANCE WILL BLOCK THIS WEEK'S MANDATE RENEWAL). THE SYRIANS, (WITH WHOM THE FRENCH HAD CONTINUING CONTACT) WERE KEEPING VERY QUIET SEEKING TO AVOID INVOLVEMENT. ON THE HOSTAGES, PEROL SAID THAT THE LATEST ISLAMIC

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JIHAD COMUNIQUE (MY TELNO 737) SEEMED MORE AUTHENTIC THAN THAT OF THE OTF (BEIRUT TELNO 526). FRANCE DID NOT WISH TO PROVOKE THE HOSTAGE-TAKERS TO ACT AGAINST THE HOSTAGES. IF SUCH ACTION WERE TAKEN, PEROL WAS OPPOSED TO ANY MILITARY REPRISAL, ON MORAL GROUNDS AND BECAUSE INNOCENTS WOULD SUFFER.

6. PEROL SAID THAT SCR 598 WAS A POSITIVE RESULT (BUT SHOWED LITTLE ENTHUSIASM: THEIR PARTICULAR OBJECTIVE HAD BEEN TO AVOID DIVISION IN THE COUNCIL WITH THE 5 PERMANENT MEMBERS ACTING SEPARATELY FROM OTHER SC MEMBERS). BUT IN THE CURRENT STATE OF TENSION (US ACTIONS IN THE GULF AND FRANCE/IRAN) IT WAS IMPORTANT NOT TO RUSH TOO FAST AND IMPAIR THE CHANCES OF PROGRESS TOWARDS ENFORCEMENT. THE AMERICANS WERE TRYING TO PUSH THINGS TOO FAST. THE PERMANENT MEMBERS' CONSENSUS WOULD BREAK DOWN BECAUSE OF SOVIET AND CHINESE DOUBTS. TIME WAS NEEDED FOR THE SECRETARY GENERAL TO CONDUCT HIS MISSION. THE RESULTS SHOULD BE CONSIDERED IN DUE COURSE BUT THERE SHOULD BE NO RUSH TOWARDS SANCTIONS.

7. PEROL SAID THAT THE AIR AFRIQUE HIJACKING SEEMED TO HAVE BEEN AN ISOLATED INCIDENT. THERE WAS ONLY ONE HIJACKER AND PREPARATIONS HAD BEEN AMATEURISH, BUT THERE WERE TROUBLING ASPECTS: HIS CLAIM TO BE IN RADIO COMMUNICATION WITH BEIRUT AND THE EASE OF HIS BOARDING THE AIRCRAFT IN BANGUI. THE FRENCH WERE REINFORCING SECURITY MEASURES FOR AVIATION AND AT THEIR EMBASSIES ABROAD, BUT THERE WERE LIMITS TO WHAT COULD BE DONE.

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FRANCE/IRAN : FRENCH NAVAL TASK FORCE PREPARATIONS

SUMMARY

1. BECAUSE OF IRAN CRISIS FRENCH PLACE SMALL TASK FORCE, INCLUDING AIRCRAFT CARRIER, ON 24 ALERT. UNCLEAR WHETHER OBJECTIVE WOULD BE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN (4 DAYS AWAY) OR GULF (12-14 DAYS), PROBABLY THE LATTER, BUT FRENCH KEEN TO AVOID PROVOCATION.

DETAIL

2. THE FRENCH MOD ANNOUNCED ON 26 JULY THAT A SMALL NAVAL/FLEET AIR ARM TASK FORCE COMPRISING ONE AIRCRAFT CARRIER (CLEMENCEAU), TWO GUIDED MISSILE AIR DEFENCE DESTROYERS (SUFFREN/DUQUESNE) AND A REPLENISHMENT TANKER (MEUSE) HAD BEEN PUT ON 24 HOUR ALERT AT TOULON 'TO ENABLE FRANCE TO BE READY TO FACE UP TO ANY WORSENING OF THE CURRENT FRANCO IRANIAN CRISIS'.

3. NEITHER THE PRESS NOR MY DEFENCE SECTION HAVE SO FAR BEEN ABLE TO PENETRATE THE DELIBERATE UNCERTAINTY SURROUNDING THE ROLE, RULES OF ENGAGEMENT AND POSSIBLE DESTINATION OF THE FORCE. THE CDS'S CHEF DE CABINET HAS TOLD US THAT GIRAUD MAY MAKE AN ANNOUNCEMENT LATER TODAY BUT WILL PROBABLY SAY NOTHING NEW. HE ADDED THAT THE EARLIEST THE CLEMENCEAU COULD SAIL WOULD BE WEDNESDAY 29 JULY.

4. AT 15 KNOTS THE GROUP WOULD TAKE NEARLY 4 DAYS TO REACH THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN AND 12-14 DAYS TO REACH THE GULF, (BORNE OUT BY THE 4/5 DAYS TAKEN BY THE MODERN ASW CORVETTE GEORGES LEYGUES TO CLEAR THE SUEZ CANAL EN ROUTE TO THE GULF). IN THE GULF, THE FRENCH NAVY CURRENTLY HAS 2 FRIGATES (VICTOR SCHLEUCHER/PROTET) AND A REPLENISHMENT OILER (MARNE). A THIRD FRIGATE (COMMANDANT BURY) IS CLOSE BY.

5. CLEMENCEAU COULD EMBARK 40 AIRCRAFT INCLUDING 20 EXOCET ARMED SUPER ETENDARD (MAXIMUM WORTHWHILE RADIUS OF ACTION 600 NAUTICAL MILES) AND SHE RECENTLY REFITTED WITH INTER ALIA CROTALE SAMS, MODERN COMMUNICATIONS AND ELECTRONICS. THE EXOCET ARMED DESTROYERS ARE NOT VERY MODERN SHIPS ALTHOUGH DUQUESNE REFITTED IN 1984 AND IS EQUIPPED WITH SATCOM. THE GULF FRIGATES ARE OLD, AND THE VICTOR SCHLEUCHER IS DUE TO PAY OFF THIS YEAR.

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6. COMMENT. AFTER SEVERAL WEEKS OF STALEMATE OVER GORDJI AND GROWING TENSIONS, THE IRANIAN ATTACK ON A FRENCH CONTAINER SHIP IN THE GULF, HIZBOLLAH MENACES AGAINST THE FRENCH IN LEBANON AND NEW THREATS TO THE HOSTAGES, AND THE MURDER OF A FRENCHMAN DURING THE HIJACK OF AN AIR AFRIQUE FLIGHT TO PARIS ON 24 JULY, THE GOVERNMENT IS NATURALLY KEEN TO BE SEEN DOING SOMETHING POSITIVE. THEY WILL HAVE SOUGHT TO WEIGH THE RISKS OF PROVOKING NEW ESCALATION AGAINST THE DANGERS OF APPEARING POWERLESS. PEROL (QUAI SECRETARY-GENERAL) TOLD ME THIS EVENING THAT THE FRENCH WERE ANXIOUS TO AVOID PROVOCATION, PARTICULARLY OF LEBANESE SHI'ITES (SEE SEPARATE TELEGRAM). IT SOUNDS AS IF ORDERS TO SAIL HAVE NOT YET BEEN GIVEN, THAT THE GULF AREA WILL BE THE EVENTUAL OBJECTIVE WHEN THEY ARE, BUT THAT THE FRENCH WILL BE WARY OF SENDING THE FORCE INTO THE GULF ITSELF.

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MR RATFORD

MR KERR

MR SLATER

( Repetition to BEIRUT.  
referred for departmental decision,  
repeated as requested to other posts. )

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