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SIC

IRAQ/KUWAIT: VIEWS OF SOVIET MFA: 23 AUGUST

SUMMARY

1. FURTHER SOVIET ARGUMENTS IN FAVOUR OF SUSTAINING COLLECTIVE PRESSURE ON SADDAM HUSSEIN, THOUGH WITHOUT EVIDENCE OF A SUBSTANTIVE CHANGE IN HIS ATTITUDE YET.
2. EXPLANATION OF CLOSURE OF SOVIET EMBASSY IN KUWAIT.
3. IRAQI AGREEMENT TO ALLOW EVACUATION OF SOVIET DEPENDENTS BY AIR FROM 23 AUGUST.

DETAIL

4. WE HAD SEPARATE MEETINGS WITH ILCHEV (COUNSELLOR NEAR EASTERN DIRECTORATE, MFA) AND TARASENKO (HEAD OF PLANNING DIRECTORATE) ON 23 AUGUST. DISCUSSION OF UN ASPECTS HAS BEEN REPORTED BY SEPARATE TELEGRAM, NOT TO ALL.

HAMMADI'S VISIT TO MOSCOW AND CONTACTS WITH IRAQ

5. BOTH INTERLOCUTORS DESCRIBED THE MESSAGE DELIVERED BY HAMMADI IN TERMS WHICH CLOSELY MATCHED THE MESSAGE DELIVERED TO YOU BY ZAMAYATIN TO YOU (FCO TELNO 1464 TO MOSCOW). THEY SAID FURTHER BRIEFING ON THE OUTCOME OF THE VISIT MIGHT BE CIRCULATED TO PERMANENT MEMBERS OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL. WE WERE ASSURED THAT RYZHKOV, SHEVARDNADZE AND BELOUSOV HAD ALL DRIVEN HOME THE MESSAGE THAT THERE WAS NO GIVE IN THE SOVIET POSITION, AND THAT THE SOVIET UNION WOULD STAND FIRM ON SANCTIONS AND COLLECTIVE ACTION. SHEVARDNADZE HAD REJECTED AS WITHOUT SUBSTANCE AN ATTEMPT BY HAMMADI TO SET OUT IRAQ'S HISTORIC CASE AGAINST KUWAIT. DISCUSSION OF THE HOLDING OF THIRD COUNTRY HOSTAGES HAD BEEN PARTICULARLY SHARP. HAMMADI HAD SPOKEN FAITHFULLY

TO HIS MASTER'S VOICE. THE RUSSIANS HAD WANTED HIM TO TAKE SADDAM HUSSEIN THE MESSAGE THAT HE WAS ISOLATED INTERNATIONALLY, AND THAT SANCTIONS WOULD BE IRREVERSIBLE SO LONG AS IRAQ MAINTAINED ITS PRESENT COURSE. THE RUSSIANS HAD NOT MADE ANY NEW SUGGESTIONS TO SADDAM HUSSEIN.

6. THE MFA CONCLUDED THAT HAMMADI'S VISIT HAD BEEN A NECESSARY AND USEFUL EXERCISE. THEY HAD MAINTAINED VERY FREQUENT CONTACTS WITH THE IRAQIS SINCE THE BEGINNING OF THE CRISIS, INCLUDING A NUMBER OF MESSAGES AT THE HIGHEST LEVEL. THEY WERE TRYING TO INJECT A SENSE OF REALISM. THEY WOULD CONTINUE THIS DIALOGUE. THEY WERE SEEING LITTLE OF SADDAM HUSSEIN PERSONALLY: ILICHEV SAID THE SOVIET AMBASSADOR IN BAGHDAD HAD SEEN SADDAM ONLY ONCE, TO RECEIVE THE FIRST IRAQ REPLY TO PRESIDENT GORBACHEV. IT WAS THEREFORE HARD TO JUDGE HIS MOOD. IT WAS POSSIBLE, BUT FAR FROM CERTAIN, THAT THE SOVIET ENVOY, SYTENKO, WOULD SEE SADDAM HUSSEIN WHEN HE REACHED BAGHDAD IN A FEW DAY'S TIME.

7. THE ONLY NEW POINT OF SUBSTANCE TO EMERGE WAS THAT THE IRAQIS HAD AGREED TO ALLOW A FURTHER EVACUATION OF SOVIET DEPENDENTS FROM BAGHDAD BY AIR. THE FIRST FLIGHT WAS EXPECTED ON 23 AUGUST. ABOUT 950 WOMEN AND CHILDREN WERE DUE TO LEAVE IRAQ, EVIDENTLY BY AGREEMENT. THIS WOULD STILL LEAVE OVER 7,000 SOVIET 'SPECIALISTS' IN THE COUNTRY. THE OFFICIAL SOVIET LINE (GIVEN TO US BY ILICHEV) WAS THAT NO DECISION HAD YET BEEN TAKEN TO WITHDRAW THESE SPECIALISTS. ILICHEV SAID THAT, EXCEPT FOR THOSE DIRECTLY WORKING ON IMPORT/EXPORT OPERATIONS, IT DID NOT BREACH UN SANCTIONS FOR THEM TO REMAIN AT THEIR POSTS. TARASENKO SPOKE MORE FRANKLY. HE SAID THAT MOST OF THE SOVIET WORKERS WERE KEEPING THEIR HEADS DOWN AT HOME. THE RUSSIANS WERE TRYING TO EXTRACT THEIR PEOPLE STEP BY STEP. THEY HAD NOT ANNOUNCED A GENERAL DECISION TO WITHDRAW FOR FEAR OF PROVOKING THE IRAQIS.

SOVIET EMBASSY IN KUWAIT

8. THE SOVIET EMBASSY IN KUWAIT HAD CLOSED ON 21 AUGUST WITH THE EVACUATION OF ITS FINAL STAFF. BOTH INTERLOCUTORS GAVE AN IDENTICAL EXPLANATION. THE RUSSIANS WOULD HAVE LIKED TO LEAVE TWO OR THREE PEOPLE, BUT THEY KNEW FROM PAST EXPERIENCE THAT THE IRAQIS WOULD HAVE CUT OFF WATER AND ELECTRICITY. IT WOULD HAVE BEEN IMPOSSIBLE FOR THE STAFF TO OPERATE. AND THEIR SAFETY WOULD HAVE BEEN AT RISK. THIS WAS A PURELY PRACTICAL DECISION.

FURTHER STEPS

9. BOTH INTERLOCUTORS ARGUED THAT SANCTIONS WERE LIKELY TO HAVE A CONSIDERABLE EFFECT, BUT THAT IT WAS STILL TOO SOON FOR SADDAM

HUSSEIN TO HAVE FELT THE DISCOMFORT. IT WAS ESSENTIAL THAT WE SHOULD ALLOW TIME FOR POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC PRESSURE TO WORK, AND NOT RUSH OUR FENCES. WE SHOULD ANALYSE THE IMPLEMENTATION AND EFFECT OF SANCTIONS CLOSELY, AND IT WAS VITAL TO SUSTAIN THE SECURITY COUNCIL CONSENSUS. IRAQ COULD BE EXPECTED TO TRY ALL MANNER OF TRICKS TO DRIVE WEDGES WITHIN THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY. TARASENKO (WHO IS CLOSE TO SHEVARDNADZE) SAID IT WOULD BE A MIRACLE IF SADDAM HUSSEIN CHOSE TO DISGORGE WHAT HE HAD SWALLOWED, BUT WAS OPTIMISTIC THAT SANCTIONS WOULD EVENTUALLY WORK. SADDAM HUSSEIN HAD BEEN DRIVEN INTO A CORNER AND WAS VULNERABLE. THIS SHOULD EVENTUALLY LEAD TO A DENOUEMENT. HE MIGHT CONCEIVABLY BE REMOVED FROM WITHIN. OR, TO JUDGE FROM HIS SETTLEMENT WITH IRAN, HE MIGHT EVENTUALLY SHIFT HIS GROUND. HE HAD SO FAR BEEN EXTREMELY RIGID, BUT WAS A VERY 'IMAGINATIVE' PERSON WHO MUST BY NOW UNDERSTAND THAT HE COULD NOT GET AWAY WITH KUWAIT.

SOVIET PARTICIPATION IN NAVAL ENFORCEMENT MEASURES

10. WE ASKED TARASENKO ABOUT SPECULATION THAT THE USSR MIGHT EVENTUALLY INCLUDE ITS NAVAL VESSELS IN COLLECTIVE EFFORTS IN THE GULF UNDER UN AUSPICES. WHILE HE DID NOT TOTALLY EXCLUDE THIS, HE REPLIED THAT IT HAD BEEN VERY DIFFICULT FOR THE RUSSIANS TO CARRY THEIR COOPERATION WITH THE AMERICANS THIS FAR. STRONG VOICES HAVE BEEN RAISED AGAINST THIS INTERNALLY. (HE SPOKE ENTIRELY OPENLY OF THE RELUCTANCE OF SOVIET MILITARY LEADERS TO OBEY POLITICAL DIRECTIONS IN A DEMOCRATIC MANNER.)

ROLE OF SOVIET MILITARY EXPERTS IN IRAQ

11. A COLONEL OGURTSOV TOLD A PRESS BRIEFING AT THE SOVIET MFA ON 22 AUGUST THAT THERE WERE 193 SOVIET MILITARY SPECIALISTS IN IRAQ. HE SAID THAT AN INSTRUCTION HAD BEEN ISSUED NOT TO POST FURTHER MILITARY SPECIALISTS TO IRAQ AND THE OVERALL NUMBER WOULD DIMINISH 'AS THE CONTRACT OBLIGATIONS ENDED.'

12. TARASENKO SAID EMPHATICALLY THAT OGURTSOV HAD NOT REFLECTED THE POLICY OF THE SOVIET PRESIDENT AND GOVERNMENT. RYZHKOV HAD DIRECTED ALL AGENCIES TO COMPLY WITH SANCTIONS. THERE WAS NO WAY IN WHICH THE RUSSIANS WOULD CONTINUE TO COOPERATE MILITARILY WITH THE AGGRESSOR. ALL COOPERATION HAD BEEN TERMINATED. THE MFA HAD BEEN SURPRISED AT OGURTSOV'S STATEMENT, WHICH REPRESENTED A LACK OF COORDINATION. THE MFA SPOKESMAN WOULD PROBABLY ISSUE A CLARIFICATION. CONCEIVABLY OGURTSOV MIGHT HAVE BEEN TRYING TO MISINFORM THE IRAQIS. THE RUSSIANS WERE OF COURSE CONCERNED THAT THEIR MILITARY SPECIALISTS SHOULD NOT BECOME HOSTAGES. BUT IF THIS HAD BEEN OGURTSOV'S INTENTION, HE HAD MADE A MISTAKE.

COMMENT

13. IT WAS CLEAR THAT NEITHER INTERLOCUTOR EXPECTED MUCH OF SIGNIFICANCE TO EMERGE FROM SYTENKO'S TOUR AROUND THE MIDDLE EAST. NOR, IN GENERAL, DID THEY PLACE MUCH FAITH IN EFFECTIVE ARAB ACTION. NEITHER HAD ANYTHING TO VOLUNTEER ON PRINCE BANDAR'S VISIT TO MOSCOW. TARASENKO GAVE A CONVINCING IMPRESSION THAT THE RUSSIANS WERE UNSHAKABLY FIRM IN THEIR INTENTION TO CONTINUE TO WORK CLOSELY ALONGSIDE THE AMERICANS AND THE OTHER PERMANENT MEMBERS.

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