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SANAA FOR SECRETARY OF STATE'S PARTY

SIC

ABU DHABI TELNO 355 : SECRETARY OF STATE'S VISIT TO QATAR

SUMMARY

1. AN EXCELLENT VISIT. QATARIS PREPARED TO GIVE SANCTIONS A CHANCE. USEFUL VISIT TO HMS BATTLEAXE AND A BREAKTHROUGH FOR THE PRESS.

DETAIL

2. THE SECRETARY OF STATES VISIT TO QATAR ON 31 AUGUST AND 1 SEPTEMBER WAS WELL-TIMED, WITH THE IMMEDIATE CONFUSION FOLLOWING THE INVASION OF KUWAIT HAVING SUBSIDED. THE DISCUSSIONS WITH THE AMIR AND HEIR APPARENT, REPORTED FULLY IN TUR, WERE THE CENTREPIECE OF THE VISIT. THE SURPRISING ASPECTS OF THESE TALKS WERE THE DOGS WHICH DID NOT BARK. THERE WAS NO PRESSURE FOR WESTERN FORCES TO TAKE EARLY MILITARY ACTION AGAINST IRAQ TO RECOVER KUWAIT, NOR WAS THERE ANY INSISTENCE, VOICED BY OTHER QATARIS TO ME, THAT SADDAM HUSSEIN MUST GO. RATHER, THE QATARIS WERE PREPARED TO GIVE SANCTIONS A CHANCE TO WORK AND GAVE THE IMPRESSION THAT THEY ARE PREPARED FOR A LONG HAUL. WITHOUT EXHIBITING UNDUE BRAVADO THE AMIR AND THE HEIR APPAJENT WERE INTENT ON SHOWING THAT THEY WERE NOT TO BE FRIGHTENED OFF COURSE BY SADDAM HUSSEIN'S BLOODTHIRSTY THREATS.

HMS BATTLEAXE

3. THE SECRETARY OF STATE VISITED HMS BATTLEAXE ON 31 AUGUST. HIS VISIT BROUGHT HMS BATTLEAXE'S PRESENCE TO CENTRE STAGE HERE AS A REMINDER OF THE KEY ROLE WHICH THE ROYAL NAVY IS PLAYING IN MAKING THE EMBARGO EFFECTIVE. THE CAPTAIN'S BRIEFING ALSO PROVIDED THE SECRETARY OF STATE WITH FIRST HAND KNOWLEDGE OF THE PRACTICAL PROBLEMS WHICH THE ROYAL NAVY WILL HAVE IN MAKING THE BLOCKADE EFFECTIVE, PARTICULARLY CONCERNING THE ESCAPE

ROUTE THROUGH THE GULF WHICH IRANIAN TERRITORIAL WATERS COULD PROVIDE.

EXPATRIATE COMMUNITY

4. THE SECRETARY OF STATE'S BRIEF MEETING WITH LEADERS OF THE BRITISH COMMUNITY WAS WARMLY APPRECIATED, PARTICULARLY FOR THE FRANKNESS OF HIS ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS. ADVICE TO RETURNING DEPENDANTS WAS THEIR MAIN PREOCCUPATION AND THEY WILL BE WATCHING CLOSELY TO SEE HOW OUR OFFICIAL ADVICE CHANGES IN THE COMING DAYS BEFORE THE SCHOOL YEAR STARTS.

THE PRESS

5. PRESS COVERAGE OF THE VISIT WAS COMPREHENSIVE. THERE WAS AN UNPRECEDENTED FULL SHOWING OF THE SECRETARY OF STATE'S PRESS CONFERENCE ON ENGLISH AND ARABIC TELEVISION. NEWSPAPER COVERAGE HAS BEEN UNIFORMLY WARM. IN ADDITION, WE PERSUADED THE QATARIS, WITH SOME DIFFICULTY, TO AGREE TO THE ACCOMPANYING PRESS VISITING DOHA AIRBASE. THIS VISIT WENT OFF TO THE SATISFACTION OF BOTH THE AIRFORCE COMMANDER (WITH WHOM I SPOKE TODAY) AND OF THE BRITISH PRESS. ALTHOUGH THIS PRESS "FIRST" IN QATAR WILL HARDLY HIT THE HEADLINES IN THE UK IT WAS VALUABLE FURTHER STEP IN PERSUADING THE GULF STATES TO BEAR THEIR SHARE IN THE PROPAGANDA WAR AGAINST IRAQ.

CONCLUSION

6. AS A RESULT OF THIS VISIT AND THE PRACTICAL OFFERS OF ASSISTANCE WE HAVE MADE, OUR RELATIONS WITH QATAR HAVE NEVER BEEN BETTER. THEY SEE THE UK AS THE PIVOTAL POLITICAL PLAYER, PARTICULARLY IN ENSURING THAT AMERICAN POLICIES DO NOT GET OUT OF CONTROL. THEY WARMLY WELCOME OUR DECISION TO STAGE JAGUAR THROUGH QATAR AND WOULD PROBABLY LIKE A PERMANENT BRITISH PRESENCE HERE TO BALANCE THE AMERICAN F-16S WHICH THE US ALMOST IMPOSED ON QATAR.

7. WITH THE ECONOMY STILL LARGELY PARALYSED AS A RESULT OF THE FLIGHT OF CAPITAL FROM QATAR AND A GENERAL LACK OF CONFIDENCE IN DOING BUSINESS WITH THE GULF, THERE WILL BE VERY LIMITED OPPORTUNITIES TO CASH IN THIS GOODWILL IN THE SHORT TERM. BUT I HAVE NO DOUBT THAT IN THE LONGER TERM THE UK'S STATUS IN THE GULF CRISIS AND THE DIRECT PERSONAL CONTACTS WE HAVE HAD WITH THE AMIR AND HEIR APPARENT, CULMINATING WITH THE SECRETARY OF STATE'S VISIT, WILL STAND US IN VERY GOOD STEAD. NO OTHER COUNTRY HAS COME CLOSE TO MATCHING OUR RESPONSE TO QATARI CONCERNS.

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