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IRAQ/KUWAIT: CHENEY AND POWELL BEFORE THE SENATE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE (SASC)

SUMMARY

1. CHENEY AND POWELL TESTIFY BEFORE THE SASC. NO SURPRISES, AND LITTLE HARD INFORMATION. CLEAR SENATORIAL SENSE OF GRIEVANCE AGAINST JAPAN/GERMANY. BUT UNANIMOUS SUPPORT FOR DOD HANDLING SO FAR.

DETAIL

2. ON 11 SEPTEMBER, CHENEY AND POWELL TESTIFIED IN FRONT OF THE SENATE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE (SASC) ON IRAQ/KUWAIT (TRANSCRIPT BY BAG TO EMERGENCY UNIT). ALTHOUGH SENATORS PRESSED THEM ON ALL OF THE PERTINENT (AND SO FAR UNANSWERED) QUESTIONS BOTH CHENEY AND POWELL GAVE LITTLE AWAY. CONSEQUENTLY THE PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS TO CONGRESS THAT EVENING (MY TELNO 2205) GARNERED ALL OF THE HEADLINES ON 12 SEPTEMBER.

3. THE SENATORIAL PREOCCUPATIONS WERE MUCH AS EXPECTED. NUNN IDENTIFIED A NUMBER OF KEY ISSUES, INCLUDING SUSTAINABILITY AND ROTATION, WAYS OF INCREASING ALLIED CONTRIBUTIONS ON THE GROUND (PARTICULARLY HEAVY ARMOUR), BURDEN-SHARING AND FINANCING, CO-ORDINATION OF COMMAND AND CONTROL AND DEFICIENCIES SO FAR HIGHLIGHTED BY THE OPERATION (NOTABLY SEALIFT AND LIGHT MOBILE FIREPOWER). COHEN AND MCCAIN LED THE ASSAULT ON THE GERMANS AND JAPANESE, WITH THE FORMER CHARACTERISING THE GERMAN CONTRIBUTION AS QUOTE LITTLE MORE THAN POCKET CHANGE UNQUOTE AND THE LATTER CALLING FOR DOLLARS 8BN FROM THE JAPANESE. WARNER PROBED ON BURDEN-SHARING AND FINANCING MORE GENERALLY AND KENNEDY SPOTLIGHTED THE REFUGEE PROBLEM. OTHER SENATORS PUSHED THEIR PARTICULAR HOBBY HORSES (INCLUDING SR-71, B-2, SDI AND DOMESTIC BASE CLOSURES). BUT THE GENERAL TONE WAS SUPPORTIVE AND CONSTRUCTIVE.

4. CHENEY AND POWELL DID THEIR BEST TO AVOID GETTING INTO DETAIL. BUT THEY DID SHED SOME LIGHT ON A NUMBER OF ISSUES:

- I) CHENEY CONFIRMED EARLIER PRESS REPORTS THAT THE ADMINISTRATION WOULD SEEK AN ADDITIONAL DOLLARS 15BN IN FY 91 FOR OPERATION DESERT SHIELD. HE ESTIMATED THAT UP TO 50 PERCENT MIGHT BE OFFSET BY ALLIED CONTRIBUTIONS. AS FOR THE CURRENT FINANCIAL YEAR (FY90), OMB WOULD SHORTLY BE SUBMITTING A SUPPLEMENTARY REQUEST FOR UNDER DOLLARS 2BN:
- II) POWELL SAID THAT THE US PRESENCE HAD GROWN FROM 10,000 (ON SHIPS) IN THE EARLY DAYS TO MORE THAN 100,000 NOW (ALTHOUGH HE REFUSED TO BREAK THIS DOWN BETWEEN THOSE IN SAUDIA ARABIA AND THOSE STILL ABOARD SHIPS). THE US HAD AIRLIFTED 65,000 TONS OF MATERIEL AND SEALIFTED 180,000 TONS AND 55 SHIPS WERE EITHER UNLOADING OR ENROUTE:
- III) NEITHER POWELL NOR CHENEY WOULD COMMIT THEMSELVES TO A TIME LIMIT FOR DEPLOYMENTS, WITH CHENEY SAYING THAT THE BUILD-UP WOULD CONTINUE UNTIL SUCH TIME AS THE US HAD SUFFICIENT FORCES QUOTE TO DEAL WITH ANY CONTINGENCY UNQUOTE. ON ROTATION, CHENEY SAID THAT SIX MONTHS WAS THE NORM FOR TEMPORARY DUTY, BUT WOULDN'T COMMIT HIMSELF TO A FIGURE FOR THIS OPERATION. ROTATION WOULD, HOWEVER, PROBABLY INCLUDE US FORCES IN EUROPE (AND WOULD VARY FROM SERVICE TO SERVICE). RESERVISTS CALLED UP FOR 90 DAYS MIGHT WELL HAVE THAT CALL-UP EXTENDED (ON PRACTICAL AND COST GROUNDS):
- IV) CHENEY REFUSED TO RISE TO THE BAIT ON SOVIET ADVISERS, SAYING THAT THEY WERE NOT OPERATING WITH UNITS, AND CHARACTERISING THE RUSSIAN PERFORMANCE AS QUOTE ADMIRABLE UNQUOTE. NOR WOULD HE ADMIT TO BEING CONSTRAINED BY THE PRESENCE OF SUCH ADVISERS IN IRAQ IN THE EVENT OF OFFENSIVE ACTION:
- V) ON AIR INTERDICTION, CHENEY SAID THAT HE HAD QUOTE NO AUTHORITY OR REQUEST OR DIRECTION TO DO ANYTHING UNQUOTE,
- VI) THE COMMAND CHAIN RAN FROM THE PRESIDENT DOWN TO SCHWARZKOPF. THIS CHAIN WAS QUOTE SENSITIVE TO SAUDI SOVEREIGNTY UNQUOTE AND CHENEY WAS EMPHATIC IN AFFIRMING THAT OFFENSIVE OPERATIONS WOULD NOT BE CONDUCTED FROM SAUDI TERRITORY WITHOUT QUOTE A LOT OF CONSULTATION WITH THEM IN ADVANCE UNQUOTE:

- VII) CHENEY SAID THAT THE OFFENSIVE THREAT FROM SADDAM HUSSEIN REMAINED, THE FIRST QUOTE DANGER POINT UNQUOTE HAD BEEN IN THE FIRST WEEK. THE SECOND COULD ARISE WHEN SANCTIONS BEGAN TO BITE: HUSSEIN MIGHT BE TEMPTED TO QUOTE LASH OUT UNQUOTE:
- VIII) NEITHER CHENEY NOR POWELL COULD OFFER MORE THAN PLATITUDES ON REGIONAL SECURITY ARRANGEMENTS. BUT CHENEY DID SAY THAT THE OPERATION MIGHT INVOLVE QUOTE A MORE LASTING KIND OF COMMITMENT THAN HE'D EXPECTED UNQUOTE:
- IX) CHENEY DOWNPLAYED THE PROSPECT OF SURGICAL STRIKES AGAINST IRAQ. QUOTE THE NOTION THAT WE'RE GOING TO SIMPLY WIPE OUT IRAQ IN A MATTER OF A COUPLE OF DAYS WITH AIR POWER I THINK IS SIMPLY MISTAKEN UNQUOTE:
- X) BURDENSARING WAS A KEY ELEMENT. IT WAS IMPORTANT THAT AMERICAS FRIENDS AROUND THE WORLD UNDERSTOOD THE STRONG FEELING OF THE AMERICAN PEOPLE ON THAT SCORE.

5. AS IN THE PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS TO CONGRESS, THERE WAS NO INDICATION AS TO HOW LONG THE US FORCES WOULD REMAIN IN PLACE, HOW LONG THE EMBARGO WOULD TAKE TO WORK, OR HOW LIKELY HOSTILITIES WERE. MEANWHILE THE CHENEY AND POWELL TESTIMONIES CAME ON THE SAME DAY AS THE HOUSE BEGAN ITS FLOOR DEBATE ON THE FY91 DEFENCE AUTHORISATIONS BILL. DISCUSSION OF IRAQ/KUWAIT IN THIS FIRST DAY OF THE HOUSE PROCEEDINGS WAS DOMINATED BY CRITICISMS OF JAPAN AND GERMANY, WITH REP DINGELL (D-MICH), CHAIRMAN OF THE ENERGY AND COMMERCE COMMITTEE PROMISING THE INTRODUCTION OF A BILL LEVYING A 20 PERCENT IMPORT DUTY ON GOODS FROM NATIONS QUOTE NOT PAYING THEIR FAIR SHARE. BUT AS IN THE SENATE, THE MOOD IN THE HOUSE WAS GENERALLY SUPPORTIVE OF THE PRESIDENT'S ACTIONS IN THE GULF CRISIS, WITH THE ONLY DISCORDANT NOTE BEING STRUCK BY REP JOE KENNEDY (D-MASS) WHO (CHARACTERISTICALLY) ASKED WHETHER US TROOPS SHOULD BE QUOTE MERCENARIES FOR FEUDAL GOVERNMENTS UNQUOTE.

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