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US/IRAQI TALKS

SUMMARY

1. IMPORTANCE OF THE AMERICANS KEEPING OPEN THE POSSIBILITY OF A DIRECT TALK WITH SADDAM, AND OF NOT AGAIN ALLOWING THEMSELVES TO BE BOXED IN BY OVER-ATTACHMENT TO PARTICULAR DATES.

DETAIL

2. EXPERIENCE SUGGESTS THAT IN SWITZERLAND TARIQ AZIZ WILL BE WORKING TO A TIGHT BRIEF, WITH LITTLE IF ANY DISCRETION TO GO OUTSIDE IT. ON TOP OF THAT, IT IS INCONCEIVABLE TO ME THAT IF THE US SIDE DECLINES TO DISCUSS ANYTHING OTHER THAN FULL IMPLEMENTATION OF THE UNSCRS (PLUS A GUARANTEE THAT IF THEY ARE IMPLEMENTED THE US WILL NOT ATTACK IRAQ) TARIQ WILL HAVE THE AUTHORITY SIMPLY TO AGREE THAT IRAQ WILL IMPLEMENT THE UNSCRS AND NOT EXPECT ANYTHING IN RETURN. IF THEREFORE THE AMERICANS STICK RIGIDLY IN THE TALKS TO THE ALLIANCE'S PUBLIC POSTURE THE DISCUSSION WILL SOON BE OVER. TARIQ WILL TELL THE AMERICANS THAT THEIR POSITION IS NOT ACCEPTABLE: THE US DELEGATION WILL ACCORDINGLY CONCLUDE THAT THERE IS NO GIVE IN THE IRAQI POSITION AND WILL BRIEF PRESIDENT BUSH THAT ARMED ACTION IS NOW THE ONLY OPTION: AND TARIQ FOR HIS PART WILL RETURN TO BAGHDAD, TO A LEADER IN WHOM SOME HAVE DETECTED A 'MESSIANIC' COMPLEX, TO REPORT THAT SADDAM'S CHOICE REALLY IS SIMPLE - FULL WITHDRAWAL OR WAR. IN THAT CASE IT IS JUST CONCEIVABLE THAT SADDAM WOULD MAKE A U-TURN. BUT IT WOULD BE VERY DIFFICULT FOR HIM. HE MIGHT PREFER TO GO DOWN AS AN ARAB HERO. MOREOVER, ANY PROSPECT OF A DECISION TO WITHDRAW WOULD BE COMPLICATED BY THE FACT THAT HOWEVER HE MIGHT TRY TO CLOAK HIS MOVE IN PROPAGANDA FOR THE IRAQI PUBLIC, HE WOULD KNOW THAT TARIQ AND THE OTHERS CLOSE TO HIM WOULD BE AWARE THAT, ON THE BASIS OF A MESSAGE CONVEYED BY TARIQ, HE WAS IN FACT HOLDING OUT THE WHITE FLAG. THIS WOULD BE A HARD THING FOR ANY LEADER TO SWALLOW, LET ALONE A LEADER AS FULL OF SELF-ESTEEM AS SADDAM. FACE WOULD BE HEAVILY INVOLVED: EVEN IF THE DECISION WAS ONE THAT SADDAM COULD TAKE AS THE OUTCOME OF DISCUSSIONS IN BAGHDAD IN WHICH HE AND HIS COLLABORATORS HAD JOINTLY

BEEN INVOLVED, IT WOULD BE NEAR IMPOSSIBLE FOR HIM TO TAKE IT AS THE RESULT ONLY OF A MESSAGE CONVEYED TO HIM BY ONE OF THOSE COLLABORATORS.

3. IF THEREFORE WE WANT, AS I ASSUME WE DO, TO GO ALL THE LENGTH OF THAT EXTRA MILE FOR PEACE, THE ASSUMPTION SHOULD BE THAT THE DISCUSSIONS WITH TARIQ AZIZ WILL BE FOLLOWED BY TALKS WITH THE ONE MAN WHO RULES IRAQ, SADDAM HUSSEIN. I WAS CONCERNED TO HEAR ON THE BBC WORLD SERVICE THIS MORNING (IF I HEARD IT RIGHT) THAT PRESIDENT BUSH HAD STATED THAT THE DISCUSSIONS IN SWITZERLAND WERE A SUBSTITUTE BOTH FOR THE TALKS IT HAD EARLIER BEEN SUGGESTED BAKER SHOULD CONDUCT IN WASHINGTON AND FOR THE TALKS IN BAGHDAD THAT HAD BEEN EXPECTED TO FOLLOW. IF YOU WANT TO OBTAIN A DIFFICULT DECISION OF THE FIRST IMPORTANCE FROM THE IRAQI REGIME YOU ARE NOT DOING YOUR BEST IF YOU DO NOT CONFRONT DIRECT THE MAN WHO ALONE CAN TAKE SUCH DECISIONS.

4. I ASSUME OF COURSE THAT ANY DECISION ACCEPTABLE TO US WILL BE HIGHLY UNPALATABLE FOR THE REGIME, AND THE QUESTION REMAINS WHAT CAN BE DONE TO MAKE IT PALATABLE ENOUGH FOR SADDAM TO TAKE IT. THERE IS NOT A LOT - AND OF COURSE THERE SHOULD NOT BE A LOT - WE CAN OFFER, BUT THE FOLLOWING CONSIDERATIONS SHOULD BE BORNE IN MIND:

(A) THE BELIEF IS PERSISTENT (EG IN WHAT APPARENTLY KING HUSSEIN HAD TO SAY IN LONDON) THAT SADDAM STILL FEARS HE MAY BE ATTACKED EVEN IF HE WITHDRAWS FROM KUWAIT. THEREFORE THE ASSURANCE TO HIM THAT HE WILL NOT BE ATTACKED SHOULD BE CATEGORIC, EVEN IF IN HONESTY IT HAS TO BE ACCOMPANIED BY WARNINGS THAT SANCTIONS OR EMBARGOES DESIGNED TO STOP IRAQ FROM ENHANCING ITS ARSENAL OF WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION WILL HAVE TO REMAIN OR BE REINFORCED. PROPERLY HANDLED, SUCH WARNINGS COULD EVEN STRENGTHEN THE CREDIBILITY OF THE ASSURANCE OF NON-AGGRESSION.

(B) MR BAKER SHOULD NOT BE INHIBITED FROM MENTIONING OPERATIVE PARAGRAPH 3 OF UNSCR 660 (ABOUT INTENSIVE NEGOTIATIONS BETWEEN IRAQ AND KUWAIT).

(C) THE AMERICANS SHOULD EXPAND AS MUCH AS THEY CAN ON THE SORT OF LANGUAGE USED IN THE LAST PARAGRAPH OF THE PRESIDENCY STATEMENT OF 4 JANUARY, IE LANGUAGE ABOUT ACTIVE WORK TOWARDS A SETTLEMENT OF THE OTHER PROBLEMS OF THE REGION ONCE THE PRESENT CRISIS HAS BEEN SETTLED PEACEFULLY. I DO NOT KNOW HOW DIFFICULT THIS WOULD BE FOR THE AMERICANS. THEY WOULD NO DOUBT FIND SUITABLE LANGUAGE ON THE PALESTINE PROBLEM MORE DIFFICULT THAN THE TWELVE WOULD. BUT I SHOULD HAVE THOUGHT THAT THE FACTS OF GEOGRAPHY ALONE, TAKEN TOGETHER WITH THE HISTORY OF US RELATIONS WITH IRAN ON THE ONE HAND AND IRAQ ON THE OTHER, WOULD MAKE IT POSSIBLE FOR THEM TO SAY

SOMETHING ABOUT IRAQ'S ROLE IN FUTURE SECURITY ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE REGION THAT SADDAM COULD CHOOSE TO FIND ACCEPTABLE IF HE WAS SO MINDED.

(D) AS THE US USED TO BE A MAJOR IMPORTER OF IRAQI OIL IT SHOULD NOT BE DIFFICULT TO FIND ACCEPTABLE WORDS ABOUT FUTURE COOPERATION IN THAT SPHERE.

(E) IF THE TALKS ARE TO BE MOVED ON FROM SWITZERLAND TO BAGHDAD THERE WILL INEVITABLY BE FURTHER CLIFF-HANGING NEGOTIATIONS ABOUT DATES. I WILL NOT ATTEMPT TO GO INTO ALL THE POSSIBILITIES. I WILL SIMPLY POINT OUT THAT, AS HAS BEEN TOUCHED ON IN A NUMBER OF TELEGRAMS RECENTLY, SADDAM IS GOING TO HAVE TO CONCEDE A GREAT DEAL IF THERE IS TO BE A PEACEFUL SOLUTION OF THE IRAQ/KUWAIT CRISIS: IT WOULD BE REASONABLE TO SAY THAT WE SHOULD NOT BE TOO MUCH CONCERNED IF HE IS SEEN TO HAVE WON A TRIFLING VICTORY IN THE MATTER OF DATES. IT COULD EASILY BE PRESENTED ON OUR SIDE AS PART OF OUR GOING THE LAST FEW YARDS OF THE EXTRA MILE.

5. EVEN IF THE ABOVE IS INSUFFICIENT TO PERSUADE SADDAM NOT TO COMMIT HIS COUNTRY'S SUICIDE IT SHOULD AT LEAST GIVE TARIQ AZIZ ENOUGH MATERIAL WITH WHICH TO PERSUADE HIS MASTER THAT HE SHOULD NOT CLOSE THE US/IRAQI TALKS WITHOUT SEEING BAKER HIMSELF, WHICH, AS SUGGESTED ABOVE, I SHOULD REGARD IT AS INCUMBENT UPON THE ANTI-IRAQ COALITION TO AIM FOR.

WALKER

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