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To: Emergency Unit - All Staff
From: EMERGENCY UNIT
Subject: FW: INFO: OO MOSCO/FCOLN 089: IRAQ: RUSSIAN REACTIONS
Sent: 18 March 2003 14:40:15 GMT

From: Swift Incoming Telegrams (Machine 1)
Sent: Tuesday, March 18, 2003 2:40:15 PM
To: EMERGENCY UNIT
Subject: INFO: OO MOSCO/FCOLN 089: IRAQ: RUSSIAN REACTIONS
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INFO IMMEDIATE , CABINET OFFICE, CANBERRA, EU POSTS
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SUBJECT: IRAQ: RUSSIAN REACTIONS

SUMMARY

1. Relatively low key official, Duma and media reactions to latest developments.

DETAIL

2. In response to the Azores summit, and the UK/US/Spanish statements in New York, Foreign Minister Ivanov published a statement late on 17 March, claiming that Iraq "no longer presents a threat to international peace and security" and that "under these conditions, the use of force against Iraq, particularly with references to the previous UNSC resolutions, has absolutely no grounds, including legal." Ivanov stressed that "resolution 1441 gives no one the right to an automatic use of force" and said that Russia wanted to ensure that the UNSC would retain control of the situation. criticised prospective US military action, describing this as "a false goal" in terms of the struggle against terrorism. But the same source noted that Russia would like to maintain good relations with the US.

Chirac/Putin

3. On 17 March Chirac telephoned Putin to discuss Iraq. The Russian presidential press service said that they had "underscored

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the necessity to continue political and diplomatic efforts in the UN, despite the current aggravation of the situation."

Russian Embassy in Baghdad

4. Russian new agency Tass reported today that the staff of the Russian Embassy in Baghdad will be cut to 15, with a decision expected in the next forty-eight hours on whether to close the mission temporarily or continue to work with a skeleton staff. Tass's source said that the last Russian charter flight would leave Baghdad on 19 March.

Media reaction

5. The Russian press response to the Azores summit has so far been low key. Only Izvestiya (liberal daily) gave the story top billing, commenting that the real problem for the US, UK and Spanish was not the Franco-Russian threat of veto, but the lack of majority support in the UNSC. Sir J Greenstock's statement at the UN, and President Bush's speech both came after the Russian newspapers went to print.

Duma reaction

6. Duma comment has also been restrained. Thus far, only Seleznyev (ex-Communist Duma Speaker) criticised Bush's speech. Speaking during a parliamentary visit to Prague, Seleznyev called the prospect of US-led military action "ludicrous", and said that "the USA will just destroy Iraq under the pretext of removing Saddam Hussein from power."

SORT ratification

7. One immediate consequence has been the postponement of Duma debate on the ratification of the Russia-US Strategic Offensive Reductions (SOR) Treaty. (Casey's teletype of 18 March to Walker, Sec Pol (not to all)).

8. (Contact for this telegram: _____ on Firecrest or Moscow extn _____)

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MAIN	13	
IRAQ/KUWAIT		13
MENAD	0	
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PROTOCOL D//PALACE		0
EASTERN D	0	

ADDITIONAL	1	
IRAQ/KUWAIT		0
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