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TAGS: PREL, PGOV, IZ, SW

SUBJECT: SWEDISH FOREIGN MINISTER--FOCUS ON IMMIGRATION--NO IMMEDIATE PLANS FOR AN EMBASSY

Classified By: Classified by Political Counsellor Matthew H. Tueller for Reasons 1.4d/b

1. (C) SUMMARY. Swedish Foreign Minister Carl Bildt, Immigration Minister Tobias Billstrom, Ministry of Foreign Affairs Director Bjorn Lyrvall, and Swedish Ambassador to Iraq (stationed in Jordan) Niclas Trouve discussed a wide range of political issues with Ambassador Crocker and suggested Sweden would become more engaged in Iraq. Immigration seemed to be Bildt's primary concern; and while he touched on internal, bilateral and multilateral issues, he did not once mention the European Union. END SUMMARY.

Swedish Embassy in Baghdad-Lack of Funds and Return Agreement Are Impediments

2. (C) In a September 2 breakfast meeting, Ambassador Crocker, accompanied by Minister for Economic Affairs Charles Ries and Political Counselor Matthew Tueller, told Foreign Minister Bildt how pleased the GOI was with the Swedish FM,s visit. Bildt explained he was in Baghdad to demonstrate Sweden,s support for recent political progress and in particular the leaders, agreement. He emphasized that he wanted to make Sweden relevant in Iraq, but told us the GOS had no immediate plans to establish an embassy in Baghdad. Bildt blamed this on budget constraints and lack of progress on a return agreement for Iraqi refugees illegally in Sweden. (NOTE: Bildt cancelled the Kurdistan leg of his trip over this issue, much to the displeasure of KRG President Massoud Barzani. Perhaps not coincidentally, a day before Bildt,s arrival, Iraqi President Jalal Talabani cancelled his Baghdad meeting with him. However, in a pre-trip video conference with Embassy Economic and Political Counselors, Bildt confirmed that a trip to Kurdistan was still on his agenda. END NOTE) Bildt closed by saying once the GOS and the GOI conclude an agreement, the GOS will move ahead with an

Embassy in Baghdad. Ambassador Crocker offered logistical support to facilitate the operation.

Iraqi Immigrants A Major Concern For The GOS

3. (C) Foreign Minister Bildt estimated that approximately 100,000 Iraqis live in Sweden and told Ambassador Crocker that if the United States accepted Iraqi asylees and refugees at the same pace, the US would have over 500,000 Iraqi residents. He explained that the majority were Kurds who fled the former regime's persecution but stressed that since 2003, most Iraqis arriving in Sweden were Arabs. He said that in 2007, the GOS expected 20,000 asylum petitions and would approve approximately 74 percent. The 26 percent not approved were the reason Iraqi immigration had become a Swedish domestic issue and that concluding a return agreement was critically important for the GOS. Bildt observed that without a mechanism for returning illegal aliens, the immigration problem would spiral out of control in a country of only nine million inhabitants. Both the FM and Immigration Minister Tobias Billstrom said recent arrivals were more difficult to assimilate because they often arrive destitute (Billstrom estimated travel expenses alone exceed USD 20,000), poorly educated, and without professional or language skills. Bildt and Billstrom also mentioned several high profile honor killings as prompting more calls for stronger immigration policies from the Swedish public.

Kurdistan Air Incident-Probably Not A MANPAD Attack

4. (C) Bildt pressed Ambassadors Crocker and Ries for information on two alleged man-portable air defense systems (MANPAD) attacks on Swedish and Austrian airliners. Ambassador Crocker replied that the USAF had not found the incidents adequate reason to change its designation of KRG airspace, but he declined to rule out an attack because he said there were no Coalition surveillance or warning (JSTAR/AWACS) assets in the area at the time. However, after listing other factors, including MANPAD range limits and the high quality of Kurdish security, the ambassador told Bildt it was unlikely the aircraft had been attacked. Ambassador Ries added that press reports indicated the Swedish carrier had regulatory problems with the KRG Civil Aviation authority, and wondered if it was a coincidence that the flight allegedly attacked was the final one scheduled to fly the route. Ambassador Trouve confirmed the carrier's

difficulties but thought it was unlikely they would stage the incident. In an aside echoing the immigration issue, Lyrvall pointed out that the Erbil route had become among the most

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profitable for both companies.

COMMENT

5. (C) Bildt has clearly mastered the Iraq brief and appeared serious when he told us he wants a more robust Swedish presence here. His focus on immigration and the fact that he did not mention the European Union at all suggests that domestic political imperatives drove his mission. As the GOS follows up this trip (as we expect it will) with a KRG visit and other activities, Embassy Baghdad will continue to provide support. In a final example of the Embassy's substantial logistical assistance, Foreign Minister Bildt accepted Ambassador's Crocker and MNF-I's offer to use Coalition air assets to depart Baghdad after Royal Jordanian cancelled his flight.

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summary