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From: H <hrod17@clintonemail.com>
Sent: Tuesday, May 22, 2012 10:00 AM
To: 'Russorv@state.gov'
Subject: Fw: FYI

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From: Ebeling, Betsy [redacted]
Sent: Tuesday, May 22, 2012 09:57 AM
To: H; Abedin, Huma <AbedinH@state.gov>; Huma Abedin
Subject: FYI

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NATO's Winners and losers: Who comes out of the summit looking good?

May 22, 2012

By Paul Merrion

After months of much trepidation, the NATO summit has come and gone in a flash — proving what?

That Chicago is a world-class city? We knew that.

That 61 heads of state could be housed and transported securely in the downtown area? No problem.

That Chicagoans would, more or less, take the summit and all its inconveniences in stride? There was room for doubt on that one, but not any longer.

While the city itself was the biggest winner overall, hosting a global event with ease, some players came away from the weekend looking exceptionally good. Others, not so much. Here's our scorecard:

Winners

Mayor Rahm Emanuel: He wanted it. He got it. And he delivered a showcase for the city whose biggest dividend is a new self-confidence. Chicago knows now that it can pull off this or any other kind of event.

Chicago Police Superintendent Garry McCarthy struck a tough, Ditka-esque pose at the front lines when protests turned violent, earning new respect from the rank and file. And he turned the kudos back on his troops.

Chicago NATO Host Committee: A talented team of former Olympics bid organizers, led by events guru Lori Healey, handled zillions of behind-the-scenes details, from insurance coverage to goodie bags for journalists.

Hillard Heintze: The host committee's security consulting firm got a lot of exposure with its e-mail and text alerts that kept downtown businesses informed every time protesters turned a corner.

Social media: Real-time reports on Twitter and live video streams uploaded by independent journalists like Tim Pool were the best way to keep tabs on the action in the streets.

Gary Comer Youth Center: First lady Michelle Obama shined a spotlight on this South Side after-school facility when she visited along with a contingent of NATO spouses.

Reverse commuters: With no traffic from closed streets downtown, getting to the airport or the suburbs was unbelievably easy.

Losers

President Barack Obama: NATO's hometown host got lots of nice photo ops and a pre-arranged agreement to exit Afghanistan a few months earlier than planned in 2014, despite worries that Afghans will revert to civil war after NATO departs. But he couldn't talk France out of its even-faster timetable for departure, and Pakistan still refuses to open roads for departing convoys.

Downtown restaurants and retailers:

Demonstrations — or the fear of demonstrations — kept many customers away, and many shops and restaurants closed early or didn't open at all. "It's almost tumbleweeds" outside RL Restaurant at Chicago and Michigan avenues, said assistant general manager Flavia Debortoli, where business was down by "half, if not more."

Protesters, despite capturing all the headlines, had no real message, no real impact and nowhere near the crowd size some had predicted. Early on in the planning, Chicago had been bracing for 10,000 to 50,000 demonstrators to show up. A few rabble-rousers bent on confrontation marred it for the peaceful majority. (Check out our [slideshow of street scenes](#) from around the summit.)

Chicago's party crowd: NATO's afterhours events were ultra-exclusive, often limited to top city officials and executives whose [firms coughed up \\$36.5 million to put on this shindig](#).

Commuter trains: [Most workers stayed home](#), which meant few delays but a significant revenue hit. Only 983 passengers rode Metra's South Shore Line on Monday, about 22% of normal, prompting seven midday trains to be canceled.

Foreign journalists: Never have so many traveled so far for so little news.