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Commonwealth
Office

15 February 2002

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Dear Peter,

IRAQ

1. Thank you for your letter of 14 February about Iraq. You may find it helpful to have a copy of William Patey's minute of 12 February to PS.
2. The reality is that there is deep scepticism in the US that any UN process can deal seriously with Iraq's WMD. They are reluctant to get into clarification of 1284 because they see it as a slippery slope which offers Iraq a way out of sanctions without adequately addressing Iraqi WMD. The Iraqis have shown little interest in 1284/suspension, believing it to be a way of extending sanctions indefinitely. But if we are to offer an alternative to military action both we and the French are convinced that this will need to involve a tough inspection regime based on strict implementation of existing resolutions. Events since 11 September have increased the chances of reuniting the Security Council around such a proposition. Faced with a regime threatening alternative, and Security Council unity there is a slight chance Iraq would allow unconditional inspections. This would make it difficult for the hawks in Washington to go ahead with military action. If the Iraqis persist in their refusal then the moral and legal basis for action would be improved. Either way we are in a better position. Naturally we stress one consideration in Washington, the other in Paris. You must also given us credit for painting a bleaker picture for Felix-Paganon's benefit to increase the chances that the French stay committed to a tough UN posture rather than reverting to type in offering incentives for Iraq co-operation.
3. We certainly need a clearer assessment of what the Americans are up to. But it is obvious that there are some in Washington who would not accept yes for an answer. Disillusionment with containment is widespread in Washington and the status quo is no longer an option. ✓

Yours sincerely,

Alan

Alan Goulty
Director Middle East and North AfricaCONFIDENTIAL
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cc: Peter Ricketts
Sebastian Wood, Washington
Simon Fraser, Paris
Carne Ross, New York
William Patey, MED

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