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Telephone:  
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Sir Michael Jay KCMG  
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From the Ambassador  
Sir Derek Plumbly KCMG

*Dear Michael*

#### IRAQ

1. I am not surprised at the injunction in Peter Ricketts' telno 32 to Cairo about follow up to John Sawers' teletype of 21 March. I understand the conflicting pressures. I hope you will not mind if I take up Peter's half-invitation and offer at least a couple of comments which go beyond the input we have already provided on the Saudi position.
2. First, John suggests that we nail our colours to the mast on regime change. In fact we have always said that we want to see regime change. There is no harm in saying it now - more insistently perhaps, given that the Bush Administration have raised the issue to the top of the international agenda. But to date we have presented regime change as an aspiration, not an objective which we believe we (or the US) can deliver. If we cross that bridge definitively, it will be difficult to pull back later.
3. The questions John suggests we ask of the Americans ("what is the plan?" etc) seem to me broadly right. I agree that concerns about practicality, the reaction of Arab governments etc are likely to weigh more heavily in Washington than arguments about the legal base. But I believe John is wrong to imply that we can ignore the Arab street. Our hosts in the region will not do so, however undemocratic their systems may be; in 1991 there was a domestic constituency, here at least, for action against Iraq; that is not the case now. Post 11 September I really do not see how we can disregard the depth of anger in our Middle Eastern back yard. We live with the consequences of it every time we board a plane. Regimes may not fall in this part of the world, but instability can manifest itself in different ways.
4. I take issue too with John's caricature of "conventional advice" in FCO. I recognise the need to frame our arguments within the US universe of facts. But we should not kid ourselves. UNSCOM ground to a halt because the Security Council was terminally divided over Iraq and gave Saddam an opportunity; because we failed - until 1284, and then only

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obscurely - to suggest that cooperation would bring him benefits;

Having UNMOVIC inspectors on the ground would be less risky than a US/UK regime change campaign. How many inspectors did we lose or have taken hostage during UNSCOM's 7 years in Iraq? Saddam knows his limitations these days.

5. My main point is that I do not think we should sign up for a proactive regime change policy until we have satisfactory answers to questions such as those John is posing. We should not give the Americans a blank cheque. Even in their post 11 September mode the Americans need us on Iraq, and when they look more closely into the abyss they may pause. In any event my sense from talking to American colleagues here is that the need for a UN process is recognised in Washington. We should allow that to play through, and talk through

And we should promote the thought that a more balanced and determined US approach on Palestine would be a necessary (but not a sufficient) condition for moving forward on regime change. Containment has worked for eleven years. We should not abandon it lightly.

*Yours ever  
Derek*

Derek Plumbly

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