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From: Simon Fraser

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IRAQ FUTURES

1. I had lunch with ~~Charles Tripp~~, the SOAS academic who has written extensively on Iraq and will be one of the group briefing the Prime Minister on 19 November. Here are some points of interest:

- He was convinced that ~~sanctions had strengthened Saddam's control~~. They had legitimised already existing means of internal economic discrimination. Rations had given the regime an additional lever over the man in the street. Sanctions had also closed down gaps for manoeuvre higher up the economic chain.
- The role of Saddam's immediate family was now more powerful than say 10 years ago. The Revolutionary Command Council was largely for show. The

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sons and half-brothers of the Al-Majid and Sultan clans were now in the ascendant.

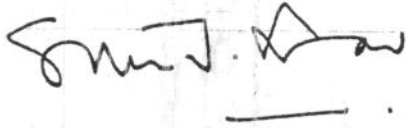
- There remained a chance of assassination of Saddam. But the chances were still slim. The risk might be greater if Saddam was obliged to deploy forces to prepare for war – eg if he brought the Republican Guard into Baghdad. Not all the Republican Guard were absolute loyalists.
- Ordinary Iraqis were fairly passive towards the regime. It depended partly where in Iraq they were. Some among the Shia still considered Saddam to be the creature of America – “without the Americans he would not be there now”. They would be cautious in welcoming any incoming army until they were convinced that Saddam really was on the way out.
- We had to bear in mind that many Kurds were spread throughout the country. The single biggest Kurdish community was in Baghdad.
Analysts who tried to divide Iraq into three distinct ethnic/religious groups were being over simplistic.
- None of the neighbours had a strong interest in breaking Iraq's territorial integrity.
So maintaining territorial integrity was a realistic objective in a military scenario.
- On regional government, the regime had strengthened the role of tribes in recent years. There were effective but informal systems of regional representation in the regime. This use of the tribes included some Shia tribes who were close to the system. Again, this highlighted the over simplicity talking about the Kurds and Shia as if they were single, coherent entities. In the regions, the most important individuals were generally the Governors who were now increasingly military. But it all depended in the end on the network of links developed by senior regime members across the country.
- Federalism was not an option for Iraq. It might work for the Kurds provided they kept their federalism to their own region and did not seek to link it to more power in Baghdad. But it was unlikely to work for the other parts of the country and could lead to polarisation between the North and the South with a weak middle between.
- On future systems of government, it depended whether you were in it for the long haul or not. Establishing a representative government based on democratic principles would be costly both in political investment, money and military effort. There was no evidence that the US had either the stamina or the knowledge to carry this through. Many of those in Washington who were

talking about democracy in Iraq knew nothing about the country. A long-term international presence – whether US or UN-led – would be extremely vulnerable to Iraqi opposition movements, as well as to other elements such as Al-Qaeda who would want to see it fail. There were plenty of ways in which spanners could be put in the works – and if they were, we would end up probably resorting to strong central control on the time honoured Iraqi model. If this scenario was too daunting, then the best thing might to go for a short-term fix involving one or more military strong men. But of course this would be much more difficult (impossible?) to sell domestically and in the region.

- Islamism was an underlying force in Iraq. It would inevitably be an element to be dealt with in a post-Saddam scenario. There were two centres of Islamist activity: one amongst the Shia the other amongst the Kurds. They were distinct, and both to some extent represented internal opposition to developments within their own communities. In Sunni parts of Iraq the Muslim Brotherhood was still present and the regime had promoted some forms of Sunni Islamic political organisation through Sufi movements. If it came to a post-Saddam Iraq we would need to have thought through in advance how to respond to an Islamist element which might be a possible unifying factor and base for a new Iraqi nationalism.
- If the Inspectors went in Tripp thought that one way or another they would find something (ie the Iraqis would let them). His assumption was that in those circumstances it would be very difficult to unify the international community in favour of further military action. So if the Americans decided it was a casus belli they – and more particularly we – would probably be exposed.
- He could not think of an obvious Iraqi figurehead to emerge to lead a new regime. He thought that such a figure would probably need to emerge from international technocratic circles. The regime had been in power so long that almost anybody of any stature internally would be tainted to some extent. Anybody taking up this role would be very brave or foolhardy. Most of the successful middle class Iraqis of the diaspora had no desire to go back: they had been out for too long and many felt that Iraq and Iraqi society had changed beyond recognition.
- Finally, he thought that if we ended up with an American-backed government in Iraq the Syrians would feel the squeeze, with Turkey to the north, Israel to

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the south and a US proxy to the East. This could be quite destabilising for Damascus.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Simon Fraser', with a horizontal line underneath it.

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