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Sean Charles,

SCENARIOS FOR THE FUTURE OF IRAQ AFTER SADDAM

At last week's Ad Hoc Group on Iraq, Departments were invited to send you comments on your draft paper. On the whole, the draft seems to us to cover the ground pretty well and identify most of the key issues. It might, though, be expanded in a few areas.

2. Governance issues. It seems to me that we need to be clear what our red lines are here, and then make sure that our public position does not raise expectations that we may subsequently disappoint. On the face of it, there is a tension between saying, on the one hand, that the Iraqis must choose their own form of government (paras 35, 37), and on the other hand that democracy is not a realistic option because of Iraq's lack of experience in this respect (a chicken-and-egg point?). We perhaps also need to distinguish between your first two scenarios and the others. If we are presented with a co-operative new strongman or junta before military action is far advanced, it might plausibly be argued that it was not worth expending blood and treasure to force the creation of a more democratic regime. But if, after coalition forces have fought their way to Baghdad, the international community finds itself in a position to start with at least a partially blank piece of paper, it will surely be harder to justify setting up some kind of authoritarian regime.

3. We also need to be clear how much of the current Iraqi structure should be considered either redeemable or necessary. The paper argues against root-and-branch dismantling of a system permeated by the Ba'ath Party, but also suggests that much of the Party would collapse anyway. The key issue is surely the extent to which the existing bureaucratic structure will need to be retained (and no doubt re-educated) in order for the country to be governable in practice. And the messages we convey on this point, particularly in relation to the military and security apparatus, will surely have some bearing on the prospects for internally-driven regime change.

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4. Objectives. We are discussing objectives in parallel on the back of Desmond Bowen's draft, and I will not go over that ground here. But of course the objectives set out in your paragraph 21 will need to be consistent with the outcome of that debate.
5. Interim Government. We think the paper should distinguish between the situation following military action explicitly authorised by the UN and the situation following what for shorthand we might call US unilateral action. In the latter case, is it still safe to assume that the UN would take on the role of supervising Iraq's reconstruction?
6. You mention the role of neighbouring states in determining Iraq's future. Apart from the obvious point that they have an interest in the establishment of a non-threatening Iraq, what exactly would be their locus and their role? What about other P5 members: do we see a special role for them in reconstruction? How will we balance the political advantages of engaging the self-interest of these countries with the need to be seen to be acting in Iraq's best interests?
7. The paper might also say something about the potential for institutions besides the UN to play a role in reconstruction – EU, G8, IMF, ICRC, Arab League, GCC, etc. Perhaps also NATO, in the context of an international security force. But the issue of such a force will need more consideration. You suggest it would guarantee not only the security of the interim government, but also of any subsequent regime: for how long? Do we envisage an Iraqi regime that would be permanently incapable of defending itself? What would constitute a significant presence, and what would be its mission? Are we talking about a force that would be essentially a token of international commitment and could therefore consist of and be led by others? (In which case, we perhaps need to consider which others would be acceptable – would the Russians? The French? The Turks?) Or do we envisage a US-led force? If so, are we sure they are willing to take on that sort of long-term burden? For our part, a long-term commitment significantly over and above the forces currently in theatre, particularly following on from a warfighting campaign, would have serious consequences for our ability to respond to other contingencies, or even perhaps our ability to sustain current tasks.
8. We realise that many of these questions may not easily be answered at this stage, but we think that the paper should at least raise them. One other issue we need to address is whether and how an assumption about UK post-conflict involvement might feed back into our decision-making about our contribution to conflict (if it comes to that).
9. On handling, we have already had an expression of interest from the DoD on this subject. Simon Webb is planning to write to his opposite number, Doug Feith, enclosing a copy of the next version of this paper. In due course, we should like to stay joined-up with you as we take this subject forward.

*Yours,
David*

DAVID JOHNSON

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