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Secretary of State for Defence

S-15

The short note below  
is not the official brief.  
But it is the private  
office distillation of  
where we think most of  
your key advisers -  
Chiefs etc etc (with  
possible exception of  
Simon Webb) - are  
coming from.

*HW*  
22/7



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## IRAQ: SUMMARY

### Threat

- Saddam has previously attacked his neighbours; he is developing weapons of mass destruction (WMD).
- But he is not currently threatening his neighbours and his WMD programme is less advanced than, say, Iran's or Libya's. There is no proven link between Saddam and AQ.
- Saddam is being contained. There is no objective justification for a pre-emptive attack on Iraq now or in the immediate future.

### Geo-Political Implications of Attack

- Regional states are unlikely to protest loudly (providing campaign is seen to be swift and successful); Russia will probably remain neutral  
most other EU/NATO countries will remain neutral,  
and some may be supportive (Poland?).
- But attack could be catalyst for upsurge of violence in i) West Bank/Gaza, and ii) Kashmir, as terrorist groups calculate that international community's attention is focussed elsewhere.
- International community poor at handling more than one crisis simultaneously. Attack on Iraq would provoke an additional crisis – increasing the risk that other flashpoints (Indo-Pak, Israel/Palestine) would be allowed to ignite/spin out of control.

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### US War Plans

- US plans are bold and imaginative. Superior capabilities should ensure rapid defeat of Iraqi formations.
- But success is not assured. Plans involve covering huge distances: risk of delay/becoming bogged down. To decapitate regime, US will need to invest/occupy Baghdad: risk of last ditch, guerrilla resistance. Iraqis could use CBW.
- Possibility of significant numbers of casualties cannot be excluded.

### UK Involvement

- Significant UK engagement (i.e. ground forces) could conceivably allow us to influence US plans and would earn us huge kudos in Washington – with potential pay-backs elsewhere. Refusal to provide any support (i.e. use of Diego Garcia, Cyprus) would severely damage relationship.
- In practice, US plans are more likely to be driven by internal US factors – especially if things start to go wrong. UK's standing with key Gulf states that are negative (Saudi Arabia?) or agnostic (Oman, Bahrain, Qatar) about the attack would suffer: they will see that there is no longer any discernible difference between US and UK policy.

### UK Domestic Angle

- There is widespread unease about WMD. UK involvement in a successful campaign could be immensely popular, whatever the initial misgivings.
- But there is widespread scepticism about the justification for a pre-emptive attack (Saddam is not seen as posing an imminent threat) and cynicism

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about US motives.

- Public support for UK involvement would be lukewarm and brittle. There will be fierce criticism from across the politico-social spectrum (Trade Unions, Churches, etc). This will be exploited by recalcitrant elements overseas to question the legitimacy of entire operation. There will be little or no inclination among the public or the media to accept significant numbers of British casualties.

### Conclusions

- The case for attacking Iraq now or in the immediate future is deeply flawed. The absence of a legal justification is not in itself a reason for doing nothing. But an attack could have unforeseen geo-political reverberations and is not assured of rapid, complete success. If Saddam forced the US to undertake a lengthy and destructive "siege" of Baghdad, the consequences for US (and UK) image and influence in the Middle East and elsewhere could be catastrophic: the chief beneficiaries would be AQ and other terrorist groups.
- We must try to persuade the US that they need to do a lot more work to clear the way for an attack on Iraq (e.g. addressing potential flash points; preparing public opinion). We might also try to persuade them that other aspects of the campaign against terrorism/WMD should have higher priority (e.g. concerted, aggressive measures to cut supply lines between North Korea and other providers of materials and customer states).
- If the US persist with planning for an early attack on Iraq, the UK should offer that level of support which the US might reasonably expect of a good Ally (i.e. basing in DG and Cyprus; niche capabilities). There is no objective case for offering more.

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