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TB 17/02
30 August 2002

8. Iraq

I don't need any convincing as to where we are on this. The state of opinion, the difficulties. The problems are compounded by the fact that Bush and myself have been "outed" as having decided for war, come what may, when actually no decisions have been taken. So the arguments are all being made against any action, when we are not yet in a position to make the arguments for it. But all this can be turned round in time, with the right strategy.

My basic view on Iraq is clear and hard. The policy of containment over ten years has worked up to a point, but can't continue indefinitely; there is no doubt that, uncontained, Iraq is a threat; they are trying to acquire nuclear weapons capability; they are developing ballistic missile capability for biological and chemical weapons of a longer range; they retain substantial WMD stocks; the regime is deeply repugnant, corrupt and repressive and the likely successor to Saddam is his son, who by all accounts, is worse. The region, the world, the Iraqi people would be better off without Saddam.

Opinion against action divides into two: those always opposed and the usual anti-American lobby; and those, a large number, who ask entirely sensible questions, but who might support action if the questions were answered.

The basic strategy should be to answer these questions and, in doing so, set the whole issue of Iraq in a bigger context.

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The steps to doing so, are these:

- (i) The whole issue of WMD needs to be raised up the agenda. This is not limited to Iraq. Each country developing WMD, in particular acquiring nuclear technology in secret, needs a separate strategy, eg I believe North Korea is a real and genuine threat through its export of nuclear technology but there will be different ways of dealing with it. The front organisations for the trade in WMD need to be exposed and disrupted.
- (ii) The unique danger posed by Iraq needs to be set out – an inherently violent and unstable regime, with a track record of external aggression, unmitigated by any moderate elements unlike other WMD countries,
- (iii) The limits of the policy of containment of Iraq need to be exposed and highlighted – the long history of UN resolutions ignored, sanctions eroding, Iraqi defiance;
- (iv) The strategy should be to work towards a new UN resolution on weapons inspections, effectively becoming an ultimatum to Saddam. But it must be unconditional access and change to the way the regime operates viz its military capability. It will be clear that refusal or non-compliance will not be a subject of negotiation but of action. We need to begin the diplomatic work on this now. Russia and my visit to Putin

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in October will be crucial. Obviously – and this is the legitimate US worry – if we go the UN route, Saddam may yield, agree and then play about. We need to be very clear we won't let that happen. But it does mean that conflict is dependent on the regime response, not inevitable, though I don't think it will be long before his true intention is clear.

- (v) Meantime we build EU and Arab support for action if the UN route does not deliver, ie we say: fine, we will try the UN route; but doing nothing is not an option.
- (vi) We work strenuously to put together a new MEPP process. This is the key to Arab opinion which hates Saddam but believes we are operating double standards and ignoring the genuine Palestinian distress.
- (vii) We work on a post-Saddam Iraqi regime. The conundrum is: if it is merely changing Saddam for another military dictator, that hardly elicits support from the rest of Iraq, especially the Shia majority, and is in any event, not in line with our principles; on the other hand, if the whole nature of the regime changes, the Sunni minority in power, may be less tempted to fold and acquiesce in Saddam's removal. But there are ways through this.
- (viii) Naturally, we get detailed working on the military plan necessary to succeed.

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- (ix) We need to develop a proper media strategy. This should include real information about life under Saddam. We don't make nearly enough of the refugees pouring into Europe - 1000 a month into the UK alone; Iraqi opposition groups; people with real life experience of the regime. It is absurd for the left to end up campaigning, effectively, for the retention of Saddam. The moral case for regime change should be made.
- (x) We need to go back into the whole issue of the Muslim world and its relations with the West - this is still there in the background and needs addressing.

In all these areas, we need detailed work, internally and with the US. A small team under JS and DM should meet and coordinate.

If I go to the US in the next couple of weeks, the idea should be to agree the strategy with GWB, set it out at the TUC or shortly after and then get going.

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