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AW
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PERMANENT SECRETARY

D/PUS/2/45

3 July 2002

Secretary of State

Copy to:
CDS
Policy Director
DCDS(C)
DG Op Pol

SMS

Desmond's account did, of course, reflect only Pentagon/Tampa thinking. We don't know what Powell or Rice think, and how much influence they will have on phrasing and timing of campaign against Iraq. The risk for us, if Bush goes with the hawks is that the PM's conditions will be simply sidelined.

IRAQ

ABW 3/7

I have seen Desmond Bowen's submission to you of 2 July and the draft he suggests is sent to No 10 and others. While I have no objection to it, or to the course of action proposed I think we should be under no illusions about the extent of the stakes as presented, or the need to raise our Whitehall game, politically, diplomatically, financially as well as militarily if we are to proceed further. This is not to say that I do not support the idea of engaging in planning with the Americans nor even that we should not agree to participate in an operation against Iraq if the conditions are acceptable, but the task ahead is formidable.

2. First, there is the issue of Ministerial discussions in Whitehall next week. The picture Mr Bowen paints is of a military plan being worked up in a policy vacuum, with no strategic framework which paves the way; in terms of rationale, preparation of public opinion through threat assessments, WMD risks and the like, or creation of the legal base; and no clearly defined end state, in terms of successor government and relations with the Arab world. There will, I suspect, be a natural tendency for Ministerial colleagues less exposed to these issues over the past 3 months -

- to run a mile from what may appear at first (and second) sight to be a harebrained scheme with all sorts of costs and risks attached.

3. Ministers will need to be helped over that hump. It may be that an Iraq campaign is unlikely to happen, given the problems (to which even a US president will not be immune) of military risk, international opinion and aftermath management. But we certainly cannot count

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on that or that we could avoid being linked to a US military campaign if it did happen, especially as Pentagon/CENTOM contingency planning already has use of Cyprus and Diego Garcia in mind, irrespective of any UK physical involvement on the ground. In these circumstances I do not think it is a responsible option for us to let matters run without greater active engagement designed seriously to influence US conceptual as well as operational thinking, albeit at the risk that we could end up converting an unviable plan into a credible one.

4. Secondly there is the difficulty of confronting the US Administration itself about the need to produce a credible political plan within which a military operation could fit (and without which the Prime Minister's conditions for UK participation could not be met). So far the Administration has insisted that we keep this in a purely military planning compartment and they may well prefer to leave it that way for the present. We certainly do not need another argument with them at this stage with all the other points of irritation in the bilateral relationship just now – the ICC/UN peacekeeping crisis, the differences over handling Arafat, Kyoto, steel etc. Playing this longer might be acceptable if there is still plenty of time for the wider strategy to be developed, sold to potential partners and Allies and implemented – ie for an operation which doesn't take place before Autumn 2003. But if there is a risk that the President would agree to go earlier (and if the military timetable, reported by Desmond Bowen is indicative of an operation this year) we need to move with considerably more urgency to seek to move American planning into acceptable channels and basically I would judge, to slow it down. This is particularly the case when a major element in the strategic preparation that we would want to see is concerted diplomatic effort to secure agreement to resumed WMD inspections by the UN both for its own sake and to ease the problems of public opinion and legal base. This in addition to the need for prior progress on Arab/Israel and, perhaps, getting further on the road to success in Afghanistan if not full completion of the mission there.

5. In short Mr Bowen is right that we need some early careful engagement with the US policy machine, rather than just with the Pentagon. I will be visiting Washington on 17-19 July and could carry messages but that would, of course, depend on prior Ministerial guidance.

KEVIN TEBBIT

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