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*John file pm 1287/7*

From: David Manning

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PRIME MINISTER

cc: Jonathan Powell

IRAQ

It was clear from your meeting yesterday that we (and I suspect the Americans) have only a hazy idea of Saddam's retaliatory capabilities if and when we attack Iraq. CDS was unable to say whether we should expect to fight in a CBW environment. The answer has a crucial bearing on the plausibility and viability of US military plans. (It was also not entirely clear from yesterday's meeting that Mike Walker, Chief of the General Staff, is not yet persuaded that the American planning is militarily credible.)

I have therefore asked John Scarlett to review all the intelligence on Saddam's military capabilities and intentions, including:

- What military equipment do we think Saddam possesses, and in what state of effectiveness?
- In particular, does he have chemical and biological agents; and if so, can he weaponise them?
- If he can weaponise them, do we believe he can deliver them by missile or aircraft?

I have asked John to look at these questions against Saddam's performance in the Gulf War. On that occasion, he launched missiles at Israel but did not put chemical or biological agents into the warheads. Was this because he chose not to (for political reasons), or was it technically beyond the Iraqis at the time? If we conclude that the latter is the case, it gives us little comfort about what Saddam may do in the future. I am anyway left very uneasy by Mike Boyce's suggestion that the Americans believe that Saddam would only use CBW as a last resort. If this is the American assessment, it strikes me as alarmingly complacent. Saddam will know that once the US launches an attack, the game is up. From his point of view, it will be last resort time from the moment the first

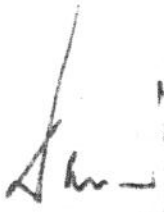
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Marines hit the beach. And with all the wisdom of the armchair strategist, it seems to me that the temptation then to let fly at the Kuwait bottleneck, with everything in his armoury, could be very strong indeed.

I have also asked John to do more work on regime cohesion. This is a very difficult area: people in fear of their lives won't speak honestly about those who terrorise them. Nevertheless, we need to find out all we can about Saddam's power structure, the tensions within it, and the loyalties, or lack of them, in the elite. We also need to get the best fix we can on the attitudes of the Shias and the Kurds. Again, I think there is a risk of American wishful thinking. Perhaps the Saddam tyranny will collapse like a pack of cards as they hope. But we should not count on it. We need as much intelligence as we can get on the popular mood, and the attitude of Saddam's entourage, before making assumptions that determine military planning.

From what John tells me, have only the sketchiest answers to these questions. I shall try to explore them with Condi when I am in Washington next week.



DAVID MANNING

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