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SECRETARY OF STATE

MO 6/17/15/H

20 March 2002

Policy Director

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Special Adviser

AXIS OF EVIL

1. The Secretary the State was grateful for your minute (D/Policy Director/6/2/2) of 27 February which he discussed with you, CDI and others yesterday.

2. The Secretary of State agrees that we should encourage the US to mount a 'road show' to improve understanding of why Iraq, Iran, Libya and North Korea pose (increasing) risks to international stability. In further discussion, the following points emerged:

- In capability terms, Iran was the most advanced of the countries of concern. The key discriminator between Iran and Iraq was timescale.
- There was no evidence of a 'step change' in Iraq's capability over the last year. But there was no doubt about Saddam's intention to reconstitute his WMD capability. The US believed that he could be back in business within a few months; our assessment was in the order of 12 to 18 months.
- Were Saddam to re-admit the inspectors, they would have a reasonable sense of where to look. The US had in any case made clear that it would require a more intrusive inspection régime than the previous one.

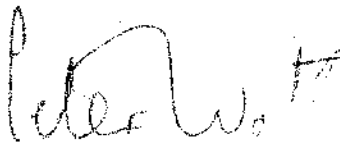
3. Turning to the options for military action, a number of key political issues had to be taken into account (e.g. the attitude of Saudi Arabia; Iran's

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aspirations in South East Iraq; and ' Were a UK contribution to be sought, this might be "division minus", ie the largest of the options foreseen in the DUK. A key issue would be the size of any continuing military presence required to sustain a post-Saddam regime. The Secretary of State thought that it would be useful to have an indication of the likely resilience of Iraqi resistance to a ground operation (e.g. what holds the Iraqi forces together? Would they lose confidence, as in 1991, when faced with a significant presence on the ground?). It would also be helpful to have an indication of what US forces were already in place in the region.

4. US military planning was being conducted on an extremely close hold. Were the US to pursue a military option and to seek UK involvement, it would clearly be undesirable to find ourselves facing a plan about which we had reservations. Therefore it would be advantageous to seek representation in the US planning process (e.g. by one military planner and one pol/mil expert). Mr Hoon said that he would like to minute the Prime Minister suggesting that he should raise this possibility with the President at Crawford. You agreed to provide a draft for this weekend's box. I should be grateful for the advice on the cohesion of the Iraqi forces and current US military dispositions in slightly slower time, say by Tuesday 26th March.



P D WATKINS
PS/Secretary of State

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