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FROM: P F Ricketts  
Political Director

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cc: PUS

Secretary of State

**IRAQ: ADVICE FOR THE PRIME MINISTER**

1. You invited thoughts for your personal note to the Prime Minister covering the official advice (we have put up a draft minute separately). Here are mine.
2. By sharing Bush's broad objective, the Prime Minister can help shape how it is defined, and the approach to achieving it. In the process, he can bring home to Bush some of the realities which will be less evident from Washington. He can help Bush make good decisions by telling him things his own machine probably isn't.
3. But broad support for the objective brings two real problems which need discussing.
4. First, the **threat**. The truth is that what has changed is not the pace of Saddam Hussein's WMD programmes, but our tolerance of them post-11 September. This is not something we need to be defensive about, but attempts to claim otherwise publicly will increase scepticism about our case. I am relieved that you decided to postpone publication of the unclassified document. My meeting yesterday showed that there is more work to do to ensure that the figures are accurate, and consistent with those of the US. But even the best survey of Iraq's WMD programmes will not show much advance in recent years on the nuclear, missile or CW/BW fronts: the programmes are extremely worrying but have not, as far as we know, been stepped up.
5. US scrambling to establish a link between Iraq and Al Qaida is so far frankly unconvincing. To get public and Parliamentary support for military operations, we have to be convincing that:
  - the threat is so serious/imminent that it is worth sending our troops to die for;
  - it is qualitatively different from the threat posed by other proliferators who are closer to achieving nuclear capability (including Iran).

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We can make the case on qualitative difference (only Iraq has attacked a neighbour, used CW and fired missiles against Israel). The overall strategy needs to include re-doubled efforts to tackle other proliferators, including Iran, in other ways (the UK/French ideas on greater IAEA activity are helpful here). But we are still left with a problem of bringing public opinion to accept the imminence of a threat from Iraq. This is something the Prime Minister and President need to have a frank discussion about.

6. The second problem is the **end state**. Military operations need clear and compelling military objectives. For Kosovo, it was: Serbs out, Kosovars back, peace-keepers in. For Afghanistan, destroying the Taleban and Al Qaida military capability. For Iraq, "régime change" does not stack up. It sounds like a grudge match between Bush and Saddam. Much better, as you have suggested, to make the objective ending the threat to the international community from Iraqi WMD before Saddam uses it or gives it to terrorists. That is at once easier to justify in terms of international law, but also more demanding. Régime change which produced another Sunni General still in charge of an active Iraqi WMD programme would be a bad outcome (not least because it would be almost impossible to maintain UN sanctions on a new leader who came in promising a fresh start). As with the fight against UBL, Bush would do well to de-personalise the objective, focus on elimination of WMD, and show that he is serious about UN Inspectors as the first choice means of achieving that (it is win/win for him: either Saddam against all the odds allows Inspectors to operate freely, in which case we can further hobble his WMD programmes, or he blocks/hinders, and we are on stronger ground for switching to other methods).

7. Defining the end state in this way, and working through the UN, will of course also help maintain a degree of support among the Europeans, and therefore fits with another major message which the Prime Minister will want to get across: the importance of positioning Iraq as a problem for the international community as a whole, not just for the US.

**Peter Ricketts**

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