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DAVID MANNING

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INSPECTIONS IN IRAQ - THE USE OF INTERVIEWS

1. In preparation for the Prime Minister's discussions with Blix you asked for a brief on the subject of interviews by UN inspectors in Iraq. I have co-ordinated this with the FCO, SIS, DIS and ODSec.

History of Interviews

2. UNSCOM conducted interviews with all ranks and grades of staff from Ministers, Generals and senior diplomats to cleaners. Military, technical, scientific, and administrative staff were called for interview. These formal interviews usually involved 4-6 inspectors and were conducted in the presence of two Iraqi representatives. Iraq deployed many subterfuges to interfere with the interview process. The Iraqis said that individuals requested for interview were dead, pregnant or out of the country to avoid producing them. Coaching and the use of stooges was also encountered. But despite these efforts, UNSCOM found interviews an extremely important tool, particularly on the biological warfare programme, where the availability of other types of information was limited.

Terms of UNSCR 1441

3. Under UNSCR 1441 Iraq is obligated to provide:

- UNMOVIC and the IAEA...immediate, unimpeded, unrestricted, and private access to all officials and other persons whom UNMOVIC and the IAEA wish to interview in the mode or location of UNMOVIC or the IAEA's choice pursuant to any aspect of their mandate;
- UNMOVIC and the IAEA may at their discretion conduct interviews inside or outside Iraq, may facilitate the travel of those interviewed and family members outside of Iraq, and that, at the sole discretion of UNMOVIC and the IAEA, such interviews may occur without the presence of observers from the Iraqi Government.

Iraqi response to interviews

4. that the Iraqis are particularly concerned about interviews, both inside and outside Iraq, and are taking a number of measures to ensure that such a process does not succeed in uncovering prohibited activity. Measures taken include:
- identifying key personnel and placing them under the supervision of the security and intelligence organisations. These personnel have been coached in answering inspectors' questions. Some personnel have reportedly been moved to unrelated organisations to avoid the inspectors. Intelligence officers may also masquerade as scientists;

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- personnel and their families have been threatened with execution if they do not follow the guidelines given. The security and intelligence organisations are seeking to ensure that all interviews are monitored, either by a minder or by electronic surveillance;
- all personnel have been told to refuse to be interviewed outside Iraq, after Blix and el-Baradei reportedly told Iraq that they would not force anyone to submit to questioning outside Iraq;
- providing inadequate lists of scientists to UNMOVIC and the IAEA and delaying the provision of more comprehensive lists.

5. Iraq has already begun complaining to the UN about the manner in which informal interviews are conducted during site visits.

UNMOVIC and IAEA readiness to conduct interviews

6.

The UK is in the process of providing a short list of "priority" candidates for interview, and has offered advice on interview techniques.

7. Only the IAEA Iraq Action Team has so far conducted two formal interviews. Both took place in Iraq and the individuals asked for Iraqi officials to be present.

8. there have been internal differences within UNMOVIC on how to carry out interviews, particularly the use of inspectors rather than analysts based in New York. Some within UNMOVIC argue that inspectors in country, who are on short-term contracts, lack the in-depth knowledge of the analysts in New York. They also lack the knowledge of previous UNSCOM inspectors or experts from individual nations, such as the UK. New York has reported that Blix has now agreed with using analysts based in New York. We believe the main stumbling block is

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10. We believe that interviews offer opportunities both to uncover instances of non-compliance and to identify areas where inconsistencies in responses indicate illegal activity may be occurring.

. UNMOVIC intend to vary their approach to the presence of "minders", accepting their presence in some cases and not in others. In doing so UNMOVIC hope to obscure from the Iraqis which interviews are of most interest.

11. As well as exploring Blix's view on overseas interviews, there could be advantage in suggesting additional approaches to interviews:

- pursue the possibility of interviews with key figures without Iraqi "minders" present, in an attempt to elicit information on continuing work in breach of UNSCRs. These interviews could take place within Iraq with the important proviso that the interview facilities must be secure; and
- a programme of targeted simultaneous interviews, conducted by technical experts, of groups of Iraqis working in the same area. This approach would enable inspectors to uncover the inconsistencies and gaps in cover stories through interviews held inside Iraq, and without forcing interviewees to diverge from their cover stories and expose themselves to reprisals from the regime.

US attitude

12. The FCO believe that the US may have begun to give more weight to the practical difficulties associated with interviewing individuals outside Iraq,

. They may be re-focussing their efforts on encouraging inspectors to insist on interviews without Iraqi "minders" present, although the IAEA's experience suggests that this, too, may be difficult to achieve in practice.

13.

Conclusion

14. Interviews have the potential, if conducted effectively, to uncover gaps in Iraq's cover story. Iraq is clearly worried about this prospect.

. Informal discussions suggest they are trying to delay a serious programme of interviews because of the difficulties involved. These difficulties particularly apply if interviewees, given the pressure placed upon them by the Iraqi authorities, insist on having a "minder" present and are unwilling to leave the country.

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15. The Prime Minister may wish to press Blix on the continuing need for effective interviews. He could set out the outlines of the approach above, with the promise of a more detailed explanation at the subsequent dinner with officials. The MOD would be willing to provide experts with the required level of technical knowledge to assist in this approach.

16. I am copying this note to William Ehrman and Tim Dowse, , Tony
Cragg and Bryan Wells, Desmond Bowen and Julian Miller.


JOHN SCARLETT

16 January 2003

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