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From: Peter Ricketts
Date: 15 February 2003

cc: PUS
Simon MacDonald

Sir T Greenock (by fax)

Secretary of State

SUBJECT: IRAQ: RETHINKING STRATEGY

1. I know you want to cogitate over the weekend about how we adjust strategy in the aftermath of 14 February. Here is a contribution to that.
2. The team here have been doing their own thinking about how we might rally opinion in the Council through some version of an ultimatum and more time to give it effect. I attach minutes from Edward Chaplin and Stephen Pattison which set out some ways in which we could make specific demands of Iraq, either in a resolution to be adopted soon, or as the basis for adopting a resolution on eg. 14 March. Each variant has pros and cons. The main difficulty could well be to bring the Americans to accept any specific ultimatum given the scope it would leave for Iraq to gain more time through minor concessions.
3. David Manning and I therefore discussed this morning another approach, which he has begun to sketch out to Condi Rice (his letter of 14 February attached). We thought that we might turn the French proposal of a 14 March date against them by setting this as the date on which the Council would require Blix and El Baradei to state whether in their view Iraq was in full and active co-operation. They would no doubt wriggle but would be unable to confirm that Iraq was in full co-operation. We would then have to take that as the basis for a resolution, having spent the previous month building up support for it. We could build into this a Blix demand that Iraq destroy its prohibited rocket motors by the same deadline.
4. As you will see, Condi's initial reaction was maybe, but the deadline should be 28 February. David and I think this is too soon and won't give us any prospect of rallying middle ground opinion. But 14 March should still fit with other time lines and demonstrate that we are listening to those who call for more time.
5. It is not a brilliant strategy but might be a way forward avoiding signals of weakness. If we do go for something on these lines, we should probably delay the travelling by the Ministers of State to the E10 until we have a more worked-up proposal.
6. This is not in the European Council briefs because you and the Prime Minister will want to reflect on it.

Peter R.

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