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Foreign &
Commonwealth
Office

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File
Faxed JND 25/2
25 February 2003

Dear Matthew,

Iraq: Political and Military Questions

Your letter of 20 February asked a series of questions about Iraq. This letter provides the FCO replies to Questions (5)-(7). In the time available we have not been able formally to clear answers with other Government Departments, though our replies reflect discussion with them.

(5) How do we prevent the Shias rising up to take over from the Sunnis?

The fear is a repeat of the 1991 rising by the Shia of southern Iraq, and possibly a similar rising by the Kurds in the north. There are in fact fewer reasons to be apprehensive about a Shia-run or dominated state in Iraq than there were in 1991. The Iraqi Shia do not, by and large, feel any close affinity to their Iranian co-religionists. Shia aspirations are also more nuanced now than they were in 1991: most would probably hope to see a secular government in which the Shia were fairly represented, and which guaranteed their rights.

A rising before or during military action is unlikely. The notion of a Sunni/Shia polarisation is more a fabrication of Saddam's regime and of surrounding states than a reflection of reality. Many tribes bridge the sectarian divide; in 1991 many Sunnis took part in the uprising; and the Sunni and Shia populations mix in many regions. Circumstances now are also very different from 1991. In 1991 the Shia learned that they could not rely on the support of their western friends or even Iran, even when (in their view) it had been promised. The 1991 rising was put down with uncompromising ferocity. The Shia are likely to keep their heads down until they are certain that Saddam's regime has been removed and will not return.

The key to preventing a Shia rising after military action will be to assure the varied Shia communities that they will be fairly represented in the future Iraq. If they sense that the outcome preferred by the Coalition is the reimposition of rule by a Sunni strongman, it is conceivable that the Shia could unite with sufficient resolve to challenge the temporary administration.

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However, a number of factors would limit the chances of a rising. The Shia are themselves divided by differing visions of "fair representation". Some would like to see Iraq ruled by a cleric, though these are divided between those who would be comfortable with a cleric with Iranian associations, and those who would reject any Iranian link. A majority would probably hope to see a secular government, with a fair representation of Shia technocrats and, above all, one which guaranteed Shia rights. Much will also depend on the length of a coalition "occupation". If they see Western control becoming quasi-permanent, this too may arouse opposition, probably encouraged by neighbours like Iran.

(6) What is our plan for the successor Government in Iraq? Is it a military ruler? Or a military ruler first then a path to more democratic rule mapped out?

"We would like Iraq to become a stable, united and law abiding state, within its present borders, co-operating with the international community, no longer posing a threat to its neighbours or to international security, abiding by all its international obligations and providing effective and representative government for its own people." – Foreign Secretary's statement of policy objectives on Iraq, 7 January.

We and the US envisage a three-stage process following the conflict.

Immediately after military action, the effective ruler of Iraq will be General Mackiernan, the Coalition Land Forces Commander, reporting to General Franks in the US.

Once the country has been stabilised, the US intend to establish a civilian administration in Iraq. To do this they have created an Office for Reconstruction and Humanitarian Affairs (ORHA) under General Garner (a retired General). We think this part of the US plan is flawed. We have argued for a UN-led or UN-authorised civil administration, and we do not think having a US General in charge is sensible.

How long the Transitional Administration would operate is anyone's guess. The US argue it will be 18 months - 2 years. The US plan the wholesale reform of Iraq's institutions during this second stage. Their level of ambition is very high, and not matched by their resources. They aim to help the Iraqis rewrite their constitution and establish pluralist politics, to hold elections and to create a free market economy.

The first elections would be local. The goal of the Transitional Administration will be to create an environment in which national elections are possible. After elections, the Transitional Administration will be able to hand over to an elected national government.

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We believe that, contrary to the assumptions sometimes made, the Transitional Administration will be able to draw on a relatively competent Iraqi civil service. The Iraqi civil service has continued to function through several regime changes, and we see no reason why it should not do so again, with changes at the highest levels only.

(7) The UN role in the new Government

We believe that any Transitional Administration will require UNSC authorisation. UN involvement will be necessary to:

- legitimise the transitional government (which will otherwise have only the legal powers of an occupying power – so no mandate to reform or restructure Iraq)
- secure international and regional support for the transitional government. This will unlock funding, and help ensure a permissive environment for the transitional government: if the Arab world is critical of a Coalition occupation (almost inevitable if there is no UN authorisation and little UN involvement), the likelihood of resistance and terrorism is greater
- bring in the IMF and World Bank, and other necessary expertise, and to coordinate the international effort
- adapt the Oil For Food and Sanctions Regimes
- verify findings and the destruction of WMD.

While the UN is critical for the civilian government, the Coalition will need to lead on security. UNSC authorisation will be needed for both the civilian and the security aspects.

I am copying this letter to Peter Watkins (MOD), Anna Bewes (DFID), John Scarlett and Desmond Bowen (Cabinet Office).

*Yours ever,
Jonathan*

(Jonathan Sinclair)
Private Secretary

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