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Dear David,

Iraq: US benchmarks discussed at Hillsborough

You requested advice on how we could feed into the US exercise on benchmarks discussed at Hillsborough. The Prime Minister and President Bush also wanted officials to consider how we might publicise the vandalism of Iraq's infrastructure by the regime.

The benchmarks exercise was envisaged as consisting of two parts: compiling a picture of how dreadful life for ordinary Iraqis was under Saddam and setting realistic targets that would demonstrate the positive changes following the regime's removal. Enclosed are a series of human development indicators, which show that in Baghdad-controlled Iraq, life has been getting much worse over the past decade. In what should be a prosperous middle income country several of the indicators, such as those for child and maternal mortality, are similar to those for the poorest countries in Africa. In contrast, during the same period, life has improved in Northern Iraq, despite the fact that it is subject to the same sanctions.

These figures, which we have already passed to the US Administration at official level, clearly illustrate just how bad life has been for most Iraqis under Saddam. Showing a statistical improvement against most of these figures would, though, take several years, and the figures themselves are by necessity estimates, because open objective assessment was not possible under the regime. There are likely, however, to be many anecdotal examples of life improving in the areas listed below, as humanitarian assistance starts to flow into the country in sufficient amounts.

It would be possible to set targets for the restoration of physical infrastructure (e.g. schools and health care centres) or for supplies (e.g. basic drugs, assistance to malnourished children), but we do not think these would be helpful at this stage. Without being able to assess the situation professionally on the ground, it is impossible to judge what the needs and priorities are and to set realistic targets. Setting targets now might also tie us into providing assistance in areas that do not turn out to be priorities in future.

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We have been in touch with the US administration, via our Embassy in Washington, about how best to plug into their work on benchmarks. US officials share our view on targets and they have slightly altered their plans. They plan now to focus on setting out statistics, similar to those attached, to show what life under Saddam has been like for Iraqis. They may also feature developments in one small area, probably Saddam City, which is a particularly poor area of Baghdad, to try to show improvements in living standards in the short term.

Our current information suggests that there has been little, if any, deliberate vandalism of the infrastructure by the regime during the conflict. There has, however, been systematic neglect of essential systems such as those for power, water and sanitation over many years. This seems to be the area to concentrate on. The Coalition Information Centre have asked our armed forces on the ground to look out for examples of systematic neglect. They will feed pieces on this into the media in the next few days.

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

Yours ever,

Jonathan

(Jonathan Sinclair)
Private Secretary

Sir David Manning KCMG
10 Downing Street

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With its educated population and large oil reserves, Iraq should be a prosperous middle-income country, but in Saddam controlled Iraq poverty reached disastrous levels. Today it is estimated that:

- 4 million people live in absolute poverty on less than a dollar a day;
- There were already 1 million displaced people in Iraq before the conflict began;
- Over half of all children are malnourished, a quarter severely;
- More than one in ten children die before their fifth birthday; worse than in Mozambique and the Democratic Republic of Congo; more than 70% of these deaths are easily preventable;
- Under five mortality has increased by 160% since 1990 (the fastest in the world; ten times faster even than in HIV affected African countries);
- The number of women dying as a result of pregnancy and birth has more than doubled in the past ten years;
- Half of people in rural areas do not have access to safe drinking water and water quality everywhere has deteriorated dramatically during the last decade;
- The number of health care centres has halved during the past ten years;
- 50% of schools are physically unsafe for teaching and learning;
- 32% of 6 year olds have no opportunity to receive a basic education;
- Adult literacy had fallen to 57% in 1997 and continues to decline.

In contrast, in the North, which was outside Saddam's control, human development indices are markedly better and improving. Although still poor, the worst extremes of child malnutrition have disappeared, and access to safe drinking water and health and education services has improved. Child and maternal mortality rates are also declining.

Under Saddam, the essential infrastructure in Iraq was severely neglected, despite the fact that he could have used the OFF programme to pay for repairs. He spent billions every year on non-essential goods such as cigarettes, whisky and statues whilst essential services declined. This has meant that although Iraq has sophisticated and extensive power, water and sanitation systems, many have fallen into disrepair and others are in a precarious state. This means they malfunction and break down frequently, resulting in power cuts, unsafe drinking water and inadequate sanitation, which in turn result in disease.

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