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CABINET OFFICE FOR MANNING, POWELL, CAMPBELL AND MORGAN

SUBJECT: NOSEC: PM'S VISIT TO CAMP DAVID: IRAQ

SUMMARY

1. Bush's decision to go the UN route and to consult widely, at home and abroad, is welcome. It leaves a raft of questions unanswered. To do Iraq right is more important than doing it fast. There will be pressures on Bush to elide the distinction. He wants Saddam's head.

DETAIL

2. Politics have forced Bush to agree to a Congressional resolution authorising any military action. This Administration will never abandon the mantra that if they have to go it alone in Iraq, they will. But their risk/ benefit analysis tells even the hawks that a military invasion, and its aftermath, will be less perilous in company. That is why Bush is 'phoning Paris, Moscow and Beijing today; has invited the Prime Minister to Camp David tomorrow; and will unveil an Iraq strategy at the UN next week (so long as he and his advisers can agree one).

3. Bush's initiative has got him off the defensive. For the last few weeks he has been damaged by policy drift. Warring Administration factions and grand figures from the past have rushed to fill the vacuum. Iraq, not the economy, or other parts of the domestic agenda, is now likely to dominate Washington politics until Congress adjourns for the mid-term elections in early November. Democrats fear that this will hurt them. But such are the uncertainties surrounding Iraq that no-one yet knows how the

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political cards may fall.

4. The big question is: has Bush already decided that, come what may, he will remove Saddam by force before the next Presidential elections? Many signs point in this direction. Bush repeated in Kentucky yesterday what he said at his press conference with the Prime Minister in Crawford last April: that the policy of his Government is the removal of Saddam. Disarmament as a policy objective has been left to lesser spokesmen to articulate.

5. On this and other matters Bush's instincts are those of the hawks: Saddam has had his chance, he will never change, and the elimination of Iraqi WMD is inseparable from the elimination of Saddam himself; inspections are a discredited instrument, whether in UNSCOM or UNMOVIC form; the UN as a whole is not to be trusted.

6. The Prime Minister is likely therefore to find a President with his heart and his head in conflict. If Bush could follow his instincts, he would, like Cheney, move to attack Iraq as soon as possible. But now that he has launched a process of consultation at home and abroad, he will to a degree be bound by its dynamic. It will have to be seen to be genuine if it is to deliver the desired outcome: Congressional, P5 and some wider international support for the strategy promised for next week. That means the US not having full control over the timetable. The challenge for Bush will not be to convince Congress and the American people that Saddam is evil; but why it is urgent to be rid of him. History teaches that where there is strong and well-articulated leadership, Congress and people will usually follow.

7. My telno 1130 of yesterday's date (not to all) set out a gameplan which Principals will discuss before Mr Blair's arrival in Camp David. It looks to me highly optimistic in its assumptions for passage of Congressional and UN Resolutions by early October. The story this morning, after briefings on the Hill yesterday by Administration heavyweights, is that Congress may want to hold hearings on Iraq that could last through October. There is huge debate inside the Administration about the content of Security Council Resolution(s): light and short or heavy and 'coercive'. I am told that even the principle of a SCR remains under challenge. I am reluctant to predict how this will be decided by Principals before the Prime Minister arrives.

8. Schroeder asked in yesterday's New York Times what incentive there was for Saddam to accept inspections if he thought he would be whacked anyway. The dilemma for Bush over inspections is sharp. Many Americans want to set the bar so high that if Saddam were to accept, it would be tantamount to regime change. I assume this is unsaleable in New York. For others, especially the neo-cons, the nightmare is that Saddam will say "yes" and avoid attack. I think that it is far from a given, including with Bush himself, that the UN process should be exhausted, as we would understand it, before military action is contemplated. The UK could find itself in an awkward two-way stretch between the Americans and others in the Security Council.

9. The White House hope that Bush's UN approach will square the circle of divisions within the Administration. It may do. But it is as likely to reopen the fault-line between Powell and the neo-cons and, by extension, between the two sides of

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the Atlantic.

10. The pre-conditions for military action are a focal point for Camp David. So are post-war Iraq and the MEPP, which have been Bush/ Rice blindspots. The President seems to have bought the neo-con notion that with the overthrow of Saddam, all will be sweetness and light in Iraq, with automatic benefits in the rest of the Middle East (which partly explains his inactivity on the latter). In reality, it will probably make pacifying Afghanistan look like child's play. The US is probably in greater need of coalition and UN support for what is likely to be a very protracted post-war phase, than for the attack itself. Afghanistan has shown that the US is not good at consolidating politically what it has achieved militarily.

11. The Prime Minister will have very clear ideas how he wants to play Iraq with Bush. I would say only that it is more important to get it right than do it fast. Bush's head will agree. But his heart is impatient, he fears being labelled a wimp like his father, and his emotions will be stirred by the approach of the 9/11 anniversary.

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