

DECLASSIFIED

CONFIDENTIAL

MILITARY ACTION AGAINST IRAQ: ATTITUDES OF SELECTED THIRD COUNTRIES

1. This note summarises likely attitudes of key countries to possible action to bring about regime change in Iraq. The common themes are that States are more likely to be supportive (or at least neutral or less hostile) if:

- some attempt is made to build UN legitimacy, i.e. a real effort to get the inspectors in; public presentation of the WMD evidence;
- the US are seen to be making a major effort to revive the MEPP;
- (with allies) there is genuine consultation;
- the US show that this time they are serious about getting rid of Saddam and have a plan that will work;
- the economic concerns of neighbouring states will be taken into account;
- they are convinced that the day-after questions are being addressed;
- the campaign has good prospects of being short as well as successful.

Other Members of P5

2. The French will be difficult but not impossible to bring on board. They hate the idea of military action; but if they decide the US are going to act, they will want to be on the right side of the line. The best prospect of bringing them to benevolent neutrality will be if there is a genuine effort to consult / inform them, an effort to build UN legitimacy (a push to get the inspectors back in; publicising details on Saddam's WMD), a good plan that will succeed quickly, and a thorough consideration of the day-after questions.

3. The Russians too are concerned about consultation and UN cover. But they are also looking for an economic quid pro quo (on debt and future business in Iraq) to help overcome opposition from the business community. Failure to address these concerns could leave Putin with a big internal problem. Bush / Putin contacts will be crucial in bringing the Russians on board. It would help Putin if any plan went far enough down the UN route to meet Russian concerns about legality. The US/Russia summit in May will be the crucial opportunity to start sounding Putin out and to convince him that regime change is going to happen.

CONFIDENTIAL

DECLASSIFIED

DECLASSIFIED

CONFIDENTIAL

4. China attaches a high priority to improving relations with the US and (for economic reasons) to stability in the Middle East, which may overcome its traditional opposition to interference in other countries' affairs. Key factors will be UN cover, the attitudes of other Arab states and Russia's position.

The Region

5. Military action will require active support from at least some of the countries in the region that host coalition forces – Kuwait, Turkey, Bahrain, Qatar and Saudi Arabia. In the current climate and in the absence of progress on the MEPP, Arab States would have the greatest difficulties in supporting an operation which will be perceived at a popular level as serving Israeli interests. Nevertheless, the signs are that Kuwait, Turkey and possibly Bahrain could be brought on board.

6. Only in Kuwait is there any degree of enthusiasm in private for military action against Iraq. But the leadership will be very anxious to avoid involvement in action that lacks Saudi support and risks Kuwaiti isolation in the Arab world. They will not want to face US requests for use of Kuwaiti facilities against Iraq unless or until there is a solid Security Council consensus behind military action. They will also want any action to be quick and successful.

7. The status quo suits Turkey best: its hosting of the northern NFZ has given it leverage with the US and allowed it a free hand to pursue its interests in northern Iraq. But the Turks know the US is losing patience. If military action goes ahead, they will not want to break ranks with the US. But their overwhelming concern is to avoid the break-up of Iraq leading to the emergence of an independent Kurdish state in the north: they will want to know that the US are focused on maintaining a centralised, secular Iraqi government in Baghdad after any military action. They will also want not to be the only Islamic country supporting the US (which they think will require progress on the MEPP); real consultation; economic and humanitarian reassurance; and exhaustion of the UN route.

8. The US clearly believe that they can count on Bahraini support, even to the extent of allowing Bahrain to be used for offensive operations; they do not as yet appear to have made much progress with Qatar, current Chair of the OIC. The hardest to square will be Saudi Arabia. They are unlikely to allow the US to use facilities in Saudi for operations against Iraq, nor to give any public support. They would probably not be vociferous in public criticism – that is not their style – but the message in the Arab world would be clear enough. The more they are convinced the US are serious in seeing this through the more muted the criticism.

CONFIDENTIAL

DECLASSIFIED

DECLASSIFIED

CONFIDENTIAL

9. Several governments in the region could find themselves under intense pressure if military action goes ahead. Jordan would be under the greatest pressure given its economic situation and Iraq's ability to whip up popular feeling. Their problems will be exacerbated should Israel become involved in the military action, or should Iraqi oil supplies be cut off. Hence in public the King strongly opposes military action, much though he would like to get rid of Saddam Hussein and end Jordan's humiliating economic dependence on Iraq. We assess that other regimes would be able to contain popular feeling and their survival in the short term would not be threatened.

10. The Iranians would like to see the back of Saddam Hussein. Before President Bush's "axis of evil" speech they might even have been willing to provide active, if covert, support. But they now feel vulnerable to similar treatment themselves, and fear ending up surrounded by US-dominated governments. Public criticism but private neutrality is probably the best that could be achieved. The Egyptians would love to see Saddam go but would need convincing there is a viable plan and a resumption of the MEPP. Syrian official and popular reaction will be hostile, as it was against operation Desert Fox. The degree of hostility will depend on the duration of action and number of civilian casualties; and the effect on the Syrian economy.

11. Our efforts need to be directed at keeping the Israelis out of any military action rather than bringing them in – their overt support would be counterproductive to efforts to build support/reduce hostility in Arab states. Saddam knows this and could well choose to attack Israel to provoke a reaction.

The EU

12. France (see paragraph 2) and Germany, the key EU partners, could probably be brought onside, with careful attention from Washington and depending on the degree of UN cover. Recent German statements reveal a preoccupation with maintaining the rule of law, concern over the unilateralist trend in US policy, but a reluctance to criticise the US overtly (which would be unpopular with the German public). Schroeder will want genuine consultation, a real effort to get the inspectors back in, and the company of others, particularly the UK and France.

13. Overt criticism from other EU partners, particularly Italy is more likely. Italian reaction will be negative unless the action is clearly part of the war against international terrorism. They also want any action to be short, successful and US-only – they are likely to make a fuss if the US acts in concert with other

CONFIDENTIAL

DECLASSIFIED

DECLASSIFIED

CONFIDENTIAL

Europeans, especially without prior consultation with them. Spain does not want an open breach with the US. Their reaction will depend on the level of support in the region, US efforts to revive the MEPP, and how convincingly the US can demonstrate publicly the seriousness of the Iraqi WMD threat.

Other Key Countries

14. Japan is most unlikely to oppose US action in public but, in the absence of legal justification, may be forced to distance itself from the US, especially if the operation is not swift and successful. India will find itself torn between not wanting to offend the US (crucial in the current crisis with Pakistan) and maintaining NAM solidarity. The result may well be muted protest, becoming less muted if military action is drawn out. South Africa will be critical in the absence of a direct link to September 11. They would be susceptible to Saddam Hussein playing the Palestinian solidarity card, given the longstanding ANC/Palestinian links. So, here too, progress on the MEPP would be an important factor.

Foreign and Commonwealth Office
March 2002

CONFIDENTIAL

DECLASSIFIED