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London SW1A 2AH

from The Foreign Secretary

21 February 2003

Choreography of Statements over the Weekend

Thanks for the latest version. It looks fine to me, and also to Peter Ricketts with this important caveat. I don't think that there should be any reference to an "ultimatum", nor to "benchmarks".

On "ultimatum", as I mentioned to you on the phone, Powell was very hostile to its inclusion because he felt it was premature and would cut across a real ultimatum which President Bush had in mind to issue at about the time the Resolution was voted - to Saddam to "get out of town". I agree with Powell here. Aside from other considerations we will debase the currency of an "ultimatum" and it risks being used against us by those calling for more time.

On benchmarks, there is a trap here for us to avoid. If we are too specific about how we judge Saddam's compliance, we set ourselves up as a target, both from Saddam but also from Blix. Saddam will know what he appears to have to do to get ticks in the right boxes. Judging by the Prime Minister's conversation with Blix yesterday, I think Blix is also in the mood to say if he possibly can that Iraq has passed any benchmarks that we offer. Most the members of the Security Council will look to Blix for their judgement.

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I am copying this letter to Jonathan Powell.

Yours truly,
Jack Straw

JACK STRAW

Alastair Campbell Esq

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