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From: Nicholas Cannon
Date: 4 March 2003

cc: Jonathan Powell
Alastair Campbell
David Manning
Stephen Wall
Matthew Rycroft

IRAQ: "CLUSTERS" DOCUMENT

You asked for further information on some aspects of the UNMOVIC "clusters" document.

Background to the paper: on 24 February, Blix circulated the draft paper on "Outstanding Issues Concerning Iraq's Proscribed Weapons Programmes" to UNMOVIC's College of Commissioners (experts who serve in their personal capacities: the UK Commissioner is a MoD official). The paper is intended to form the basis for UNMOVIC's determination of the "Key Disarmament Tasks", which, under UNSCR 1284, has to be submitted to the Security Council by 27 March. Blix plans to make it public on 7 March. But the separate document on the work programme (with long time-scales) will not be published.

Blix breaks down the outstanding issues into 29 areas, under the headings of missiles, munitions, CW and BW. On each, UNMOVIC offers an analysis of the state of play, together with a suggested list of questions that would enable outstanding issues to be resolved. There are hundreds of such questions.

UK approach: the document is rather historical. Most of the information is drawn from UNSCOM's work up to 1998. We have urged Blix to expand the paper to give appropriate weight to post-1998 unresolved issues. Blix has promised to try, but argues that while it is possible to establish material balances for the earlier period, it is less clear what one could do with the flat Iraqi denial of any activity in the latter period. He says it is unclear whether all gaps could be resolved.

France, Germany and Russia have pressed for the paper and the work programme to be released to the Security Council. We suspect that they intend to distil from the clusters a few bench-marks to assess Iraqi compliance. We doubt

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whether it would be possible to define "key tests" that did not allow Iraq room to fudge compliance or Security Council members room for debate about whether Iraq was meeting the criteria or not. Saddam would be encouraged to continue to dribble out concessions piecemeal rather than offer a step change on cooperation. So we have so far argued that without full cooperation from Iraq, specific disarmament tasks are at best irrelevant and at worst allow Saddam off the hook.

Can we use the clusters document as evidence of Iraq's failure to cooperate? Yes. The document, as it stands, exposes the scale and range of the Iraqi WMD, and the long-term pattern of concealment and deceit. It flags up recent examples of Iraqi deception. It sets out clearly and in a more up-to-date way than the 1999 UNSCOM report Saddam's unaccounted for WMD. Its UN provenance gives it more credibility than products of potential belligerents eg HMG's dossier

Can we use the "clusters" as a quarry for "bench marks"? After publication, yes. But the questions in the "clusters" tend to focus on hardware rather than interviews. The sheer number of outstanding questions makes it possible for the Iraqis to reasonably ask for more time, yet if the Security Council boils down the list, we may find ourselves open to suggestions that the Iraqis have partially complied. On past form, it would be dangerous to let Blix himself set the "bench marks". But we can draw on the "clusters" in drawing up our own "bench marks", as suggested in Matthew's minute of 3 March: this would make it easier for eg the Chileans and Mexicans to sign up to them. We need to ensure that on balance it is seen as a list of things that Iraq should have done, not a list of things for Iraq to do in the future.

Signed : Nicholas Cannon
04/03/2003

NICHOLAS CANNON

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