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24 February 2003

Sir David Manning KCMG
Foreign Policy Adviser to the Prime Minister
and Head of the Defence and Overseas Secretariat
10 Downing Street
LONDON SW1A 2AA

Dear David,

IRAQ: FRANCE

1. At the usual risk of grandmothers and eggs, two quick thoughts now that we are putting our draft resolution down in New York:
 - (i) talking to Chirac remains important, even if there is at present no chance of changing his mind. At a certain stage, it is likely to be important for both the Prime Minister and President Bush to try to persuade Chirac to do the decent thing in the Security Council. My reading of him is that he will not play ball just because we ask him to, but he is much less likely to do so if we do not ask him. And it will be much easier to attempt any final persuasion if we have kept up a dialogue meanwhile. I realise there will be the usual problems about who picks the phone up first, but if you can find a way of getting them to talk in the next week or few days, I think it would be well worthwhile

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- (ii) outside my province, and very much for Jeremy, but the assumption here is that the French will not have to decide whether to veto if we cannot assemble nine positive votes – hence they are working the phones at least as hard as we are. But have we thought about going ahead with a vote even if we know we cannot get nine positive votes? Might there not be value in a vote with 6 or 7 positive votes and everyone else abstaining – it would be a diplomatic failure in one sense, but if no-one had voted against, perhaps more of a political mandate than otherwise? There might of course still be a risk of a French vote against, but would they really want to do it in these circumstances? It is obviously too soon to know how all this will play out in the end, but it might be worth keeping the thought in mind.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John Holmes".

John Holmes

cc by e-mail

Peter Ricketts CMG, DG - Political, FCO
Edward Chaplin, DG – Middle East/North Africa, FCO
Matthew Rycroft, 10 Downing Street
Sir Jeremy Greenstock KCMG, UKMis NEW YORK
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