

CONFIDENTIAL

PERSONAL IRAQ: CONVERSATION WITH BLIX

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SUMMARY

1. Conversation with Blix shows that Iraq provided little new on substance in Baghdad and that progress on private interviews remains unsatisfactory. Blix likely to bring this out on 14 February, but will also point to movement on U-2s, Iraqi "commissions" to investigate WMD and suggest further small improvements could be in the pipeline. Blix will also report on the Al-Samoud missile but will want to allow Iraq a chance to comment before announcing UNMOVIC decision on destruction/dismantling.

DETAIL

2. I saw Blix on 12 February to discuss Iraq. I was accompanied by [redacted]. I set out the situation. Ministers would now be coming to the Blix/El-Baradei briefing on 14 February. It was not impossible that we would float a second resolution then, but we were more likely to do so the following week.

3. Blix said he had been cautious with the press in Baghdad - there had been no breakthrough and no drastic progress. But the Iraqis were starting to focus on key substantive issues they had claimed were irrelevant in the past. They had given UNMOVIC clarifying papers on VX, anthrax and missiles but, according to UNMOVIC experts, these did not contain new evidence. They had also provided a couple of other documents though, said Corcoran, these did not answer key questions. Blix said he would be surprised if Iraq did not have more documentary evidence or could not at least provide witnesses to alleged WMD destruction. Blix added that Iraq had extended its "commission" searching for chemical warheads to cover all WMD and established another "commission" to search for documents, including in private residences. These could be channels for genuine co-operation if the Iraqis were so inclined.

4. I asked Blix whether he still felt Iraq was concealing WMD. Blix said he had no evidence of his own, but no reason to doubt the material we had given him. He was concerned some of the Iraqi conversations presented by Powell were ambiguous, e.g. that on "nerve gas". We said this was one of many conversations Powell could have quoted. More revealing conversations had not been played given the need to protect collection methods. Blix said he was inclined to say a little about Powell's presentation on 14 February - particularly about the US aerial analysis of sites on which his experts had questions.

5. We then went through some specific issues.

- Intelligence: I said I had heard Blix might criticise some of the intelligence he had been receiving. I hoped he would be

JI - an implication that UK intelligence had not been useful could be damaging. Blix said he would be cautious. The main intelligence-based successes had all come from UK sources, though overall there had only had modest achievements thus far.

- Interviews: We said interviews were a crucial component to finding Iraqi WMD - UNMOVIC had to take a rigorous approach complementing our own work with defectors and intelligence sources, and factoring in the pressures imposed by Iraq. I asked whether Blix was now getting the interviews he wanted. Blix said that so far no one selected by UNMOVIC had accepted an interview without a minder or a tape recorder (though the Iraqis had volunteered interviewees). (Comment: Blix seemed not to have a clear view of how to take forward Iraqi non-compliance on interviews);

- U-2 overflights: I asked whether Iraq continued to impose conditions. Blix said he did not think so, though Saddam's recent interview seemed to go back on this. The Iraqi letter on U-2s had accepted overflights, made clear Iraq would do all it could to ensure safety, but had also "stressed the need" for timely notice of entry, altitude, call signs and speed. Blix did not see these as conditions and would make clear Iraq would get the same information provided by UNSCOM. Iraq had been brought round by UNMOVIC's intention to use Mirage and Antonov flights in addition to the U-2;

- Mobile WMD Facilities: I handed over UK advice on how to conduct inspections of vehicles. Blix said UNMOVIC had been discussing how best to go about these inspections, e.g. how to tackle the likely Iraqi use of wireless communications to circumvent checkpoints. Blix thought it would be no bad thing if such checks led the Iraqis to keep the trucks in their garages (where they could be more easily inspected). UNMOVIC would probably need more inspectors to carry out such checks. Any new resolution might cover this issue.

- Missile engines: Blix said the previous day's meeting of missile experts meant UNMOVIC would need to act on the Al-Samoud missile and all Volga engines. Blix would report the expert finding that these missiles were proscribed on 14 February but give the Iraqis a chance to have their say. Thereafter UNMOVIC could take a decision to destroy the missiles at any moment (comment: Blix seemed less certain that experts had concluded the Al-Rafah test stand was prohibited).

- French ideas: Blix said he was likely to comment on 14 February. While the French would quite like Blix to come up with his "clustered" list of remaining disarmament issues, he remained reluctant spontaneously to put this to the Council. Iraq would say that "at long last" they were receiving details of UNMOVIC's concerns and ask for six months to respond. Blix also did not see the need for an extra inspections co-ordinator in Baghdad, though perhaps the individual heading up UNMOVIC's Baghdad operation could be strengthened. He also had doubts about an intelligence handing committee. We confirmed we would be nervous about giving intelligence to such a body. Blix said the French idea of monitoring dual use facilities was not a bad one, though some of this was already done by UNMOVIC.

6. We then got into a deeper discussion of the way ahead. Blix asked our thinking about an ultimatum. Could we ask Saddam to leave? How could we craft a concrete ultimatum on the need for Iraqi co-operation on substance, of which there had not yet provided enough? Should we focus on more tangible elements - the Syrian pipeline, dismantling proscribed rockets, agreeing to

the inspections? I said an ultimatum remained an option. This could be pursued as part of a resolution or come directly, e.g. from the US. An ultimatum asking Saddam to leave was unlikely to run given regime change was not Security Council business.

7. I also underlined that pushing for reinforced inspections missed the point. The Security Council needed to realise Saddam was in denial of 1441 and there had to be a firm UN decision that he either gave up his WMD, left Iraq, or faced military action. Blix wondered whether this issue would be coming to a head after only 2 and a half months of inspections (compared to 8 years under UNSCOM) if it were not for the weather (i.e. the need to start military action soon). I said it was about more than the climate for military action. The US was worried about losing backing and momentum and saw only one real way to deal with Iraqi non-co-operation. That was why we were running out of time. I added that I had always felt that the best way to keep the UN together was through a WMD find which demonstrated the Iraqi lie. The Chinese had indicated that this would allow them to change their position. By distracting from the main issue of Iraqi co-operation and giving the Iraqis false hope, the French ideas could make war more likely. We needed strong Council unity to get the Iraqis to crack (comment: Blix could see our arguments).

8. Lastly Blix said that, if inspections came to an end, he would happily go home. But had we thought of using UNMOVIC's expertise in a post-war scenario? We said we had indeed been giving the issue some thought. I said I also believed that there needed to be a more rigorous international system to counter proliferation (e.g. a proliferation commission to overlook the implementation of non-proliferation treaties). UNMOVIC's experience might also come in useful there.

COMMENT

9. Blix was mildly unforthcoming in this discussion. But the exchanges showed that little has changed from the Iraqi side. Blix knows what we are looking for, and remains jealous of his independence. He genuinely believes that the inspections still have something to contribute, but could not claim that he had acquired anything further of substance out of the recent period. I believe he will say as much on 14 February (noting movement on U-2s, documents, and the Iraqi "commissions"), while suggesting that further small improvements could be in the pipeline.

10. It would be helpful if your intervention on 14 February could include some questions for Blix/El-Baradei that draw out the non-co-operation truths: e.g. do the Iraqis have a clear understanding of the main unresolved questions; did the documents presented in Baghdad throw any light whatsoever on the BW area; is Blix getting real co-operation on private interviews and, if not, how does he plan to take the issue forward; and has anything of substance come out of any interviewee? We have to establish over the next few days why it is that we believe that inspections as they are now going, or even on the Franco-German basis, could not possibly achieve complete disarmament. Blix's report will in substance support our case. But his instincts will be to preserve the UN route, and he is torn between more time for peaceful disarmament through inspections and helping to pile on the pressure to make the Iraqis crack. He would have been more inclined to follow the latter course if he felt less certain that the Americans were hell-bent on war anyway.

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