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BEIJING, BERLIN, CABINET OFFICE, MADRID

PERSONAL FOR PRIVATE SECRETARY, RICKETTS AND MANNING (No 10)

PERSONAL FOR AMBASSADORS

SUBJECT: PERSONAL : IRAQ

SUMMARY

1. USUN tell me Washington is contemplating putting down a US/UK draft on 14 February. Australian PM finds Blix relatively unchanged, though disinclined to come to hard conclusions. Further comment on state of play in the Council: 9 votes difficult to spot for our approach. Should we not consider a more radical halfway-house plan?

DETAIL

2. Negroponte told me on 11 February that Washington was coming to the conclusion that we might have to put a draft resolution down on 14 February, at the end of Blix's presentation and Council discussion on it. This idea was not just designed to keep a priority place for US/UK language. The Americans were conscious of the EU meeting on 17 February and the open debate in the Council on 18 February. They did not want the Franco-German proposals to be the only ones out there. They also liked the implication that the US/UK were not going to wait around. And they thought it sensible to have something around which the supporters so far of our approach could group.

3. As for our ultimatum ideas, Negroponte had had a word with Rice, who was reluctant. The waters would be further muddled. If the ultimatum was to be in any way related to Saddam's departure, Washington could see the disadvantage that regime change was not part of the UN approach and would not attract Council votes.

4. I also had a word with my Australian colleague (Dauth), who reported on his Prime Minister's talks with Blix and Annan today. With Blix they had found no real change from his approach on 27

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January. Blix had said that there was no evidence of a fundamental Iraqi shift of approach, though he "detected the possibility of a shift in the future". The 14 February presentation would acknowledge some Iraqi gestures on procedure, but little new on substance. Certainly he could not claim that there was anything like full compliance. Blix had also expressed continuing disappointment.

Annan had given Howard the impression that he accepted the inevitability of military action at some point, but was focussed on gaining more time: not so much for the inspectors, because he realised the limitations; more for the Security Council, as he saw that more than a few days would be needed to find language that brought people together. The manifest centrepiece of Annan's thinking was to keep the Council as united as possible. Finally, Dauth said that Howard (like the Prime Minister) had found Bush in Washington very firmly set on the military route.

COMMENT

5. I understand (telecons with Manning and Ricketts) that a lot of thought is being given in London to ideas for the final stages of diplomatic activity.

6. The Franco-German proposals for reinforced inspectors will be recognised by the Security Council middle ground as a delaying tactic and unlikely to make a difference on complete disarmament. The way they have come out has not impressed people (even my German colleague was scathing). But Council members remain very reluctant to grant cover for military action within weeks and will probably clutch at the French straw. The Americans may be upbeat about the likely effect of their lobbying and cajoling. But I cannot say at this point that we would definitely get nine votes for a material breach resolution on the basis of what seems to be the Blix/Baradei intentions for the 14 February report.

7. Injecting an ultimatum into the text might possibly help at the margins. This could mean a further positive vote or two, though I would hesitate to bank on it. If the ultimatum was directed at Saddam's departure from Iraq, that would be a clearer criterion than offering up elements of WMD. But the Americans are right that the Council majority are expressly opposed to the idea of regime change. They would assume that Saddam would stay put and would conclude that that route held no greater attraction than a straight material breach decision. If France, Germany, Russia, China and Syria continued to push the inspection proposal, they would probably have enough momentum to capture another two abstentions.

8. If the UK has to be sure of recapturing the initiative, we may have to think bolder. We should test the Franco-German model to destruction. A Chapter VII resolution authorising all necessary means for the specific purpose of hunting down hidden WMD is worth considering. The objective would be to place enough coalition troops on the ground, with No Fly and No Drive Zones declared by the Security Council throughout Iraq, for mobile WMD transports etc to be tracked down, revealed and destroyed. Baghdad and other major cities would be left to one side, at least for the first stage. There could be arrangements for interviews offering

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greater protection than the present.

9. When faced with the alternatives, Council Members would, I think, rally to this approach. There would a much wider range of willing participants: perhaps even the Germans, to judge from something Pleuger has recently said to me. It would mend the breach in NATO.

10. The Americans would no doubt object. It does not readily fit their military preferences. They would worry about force protection. But the most important aspect of an approach of this kind would be Saddam's reaction. He would bitterly oppose a UN-authorized take-over of parts of Iraq. If it were imposed on him, he might quickly break the no-resistance conditions. In that case, the 'last resort' would have been much more clearly established.

11. This plan does not have to be used immediately. We could go through the stages of presenting and arguing for a second resolution of the kind we have been discussing, before coming to a final decision. But the prospect of a 15-0 SCR (even the Arabs might see the advantages, provided the end-objective was an Iraq for Iraqis), and of a stronger consensus in the EU and NATO, needs to be weighed against all the lateral implications of the wave we are riding at present.

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