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SUBJECT: PERSONAL: IVANOV'S VISIT TO LONDON: IRAQ

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SUMMARY

1. Influenced by Paris and Berlin, Russia's position is hardening. The current policy is to stay with (and behind) the French and Germans, while trying not to antagonise the Americans. The Russians largely agree with Chirac. Putin huddles with Schroeder; Ivanov with the Chinese; Primakov goes to Baghdad: not good signs. They recognise US action is not far off. Their preferred option is to prevent 9 positive votes and thus avoid an awkward choice on the veto. They are thus unlikely to be the first to break ranks. It seems far-fetched to conceive of them helping us to get the swing votes (UKMIS TUR).

2. US relationship the key. Bush needs to speak in very plain terms to Putin, and to offer incentives (including Russian inclusion in post-conflict arrangements). We should do the same with Ivanov.

DETAIL

POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT

3. There is no great ferment in Russia. The populace are largely indifferent: they dislike American power, but don't like Saddam or what he stands for. The authorities are keeping the temperature down.

4. In the political class, almost everyone would vote for endless containment rather than conflict. US arguments for bringing this to a head are not accepted. There is nervousness about the wider consequences. US policy is seen as potentially dangerous, and part of a Right-wing "axis of evil" agenda. Latent anti-Americanism is surfacing. However, no one to the right of

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the Communists is arguing that Russia should obstruct the Americans. The prevailing mood is that Russia should not endorse war, but should stand to one side, take care of her interests, and not confront the USA. The Americans have decided on war. Let them get on with it: keep our heads below the parapet. Pundits are speculating that Russia is bidding up the price of its support.

GOVERNMENT POSITION

5. The French campaign, the divisions within Europe, and public opinion there, have stiffened the Russian position. If the French and Germans stay together, plus the Chinese (and others), it would be very hard for the Russians to be the first to defect. HMG's influence with the Russians is partially undercut by domestic opposition in the UK. They see our line as driven by Washington (and are on a drip-feed from the French and Germans).

6. A fairly consistent public line has been developed, from Putin downwards, which seeks to sidestep the question of a veto, supports pressure on Saddam, and says that on current evidence Russia "could not support" a resolution authorising force. In private, people with links to the Kremlin do not expect a Russian veto. Igor Ivanov deploys the clever, complex line you have heard, which - like Putin's - can be read in different ways, but is essentially the French position. His immediate subordinates are sometimes blunter. Deputy Minister Mamedov is privately telling Western interlocutors that Russia will veto (irrespective of the French). Deputy Minister Saltanov is unflinching in opposition to the US/UK case.

WHAT'S PUTIN UP TO?

7. Putin will decide this issue. As usual, he is playing his cards close. A choice between the USA and Iraq would be simple; but between USA/UK and France/Germany is much more difficult. He will try to avoid this decision if he possibly can. How does it stack up for him?

- The Chirac/Schroeder campaign is highly seductive for Russia. Putin was sucked into the gravitational pull of Chirac and Schroeder two weeks ago, and hasn't fallen out.

- Putin would find it very hard to justify internally a vote in favour of war, absent a smoking gun or a Security Council near-consensus. He would fear that this could be turned against him.

- He doesn't want to antagonise the Americans, so he's not being actively obstructive, , or taking the lead. If he

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stays in the middle of the pack, and gives them a quiet nod, he would not expect American wrath.

-The Russians do worry about the UN's authority. But they don't buy our argument that this obliges them to support the US regardless. They would prefer it if we were forced not to put our resolution to the vote.

-But they want to be part of the action, especially economic, in the aftermath. This, too, they think, can be achieved by giving the Americans a quiet nod, without necessarily voting their way.

8. All of which suggests that the best course for Russia is to stay in the lee of France and Germany, support "rational" arguments for longer inspections etc, and quietly contribute to a situation in which we and the US can't get 9 positive votes. This is where they appear to be pinning their hopes, and French confidence is rubbing off on them.

9. Since his Berlin/Paris trip. Putin has been much more active. He has been playing mutual and balanced telephone calls, and trying to keep his finger on the pulse. Prodi was summoned to dinner to give him the flavour of the Special European Council. As Voloshin set off for Washington, Primakov went to Baghdad (with the Kremlin concealing this from the Americans). Now Schroeder, like Prodi, has been invited at short notice to a confab. without officials, a bare fortnight since the last meeting.

10. The purpose of these encounters is not entirely clear. Did Primakov go just to tell Saddam that time was up and he ought to budge? Or to offer advice? Was Putin cross-checking with Schroeder that the front of refusal would stand firm?

CAN THE RUSSIANS BE SHIFTED?

11. If Blix reports a violation to the Council which obliges others (especially the French) to shift, the Russians know that they'll have to shift too. But the chances of getting the Russians to budge ahead of others look very slim.

12. What matters to Putin is his re-election, linked with the state of his economy, his chances of producing an apparent improvement in Chechnya, and the "success" of his foreign and domestic policies. This gives the Americans (and us) some leverage, given Putin's heavy investment in relations with the US and the West and in the anti-terrorist coalition. The best, and probably the only, chance of getting the Russians onside without a smoking gun would be for Bush to spell out personally to Putin that support for the resolution will determine the future of the US/Russian relationship. That would face Putin with the choice he

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seeks to avoid. Obviously I cannot judge if Bush is prepared to go that far.

13. That apart, the most fertile ground I have found is the keen Russian interest in having a say in post-conflict arrangements, with a view both to economic benefits and political influence.

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