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11 April 2003

- urgent test up structure
- UK sector

- Public relations machinery

for the action now in hand
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David Manning

IRAQ: WMD DETECTION AND ELIMINATION

Detection and elimination of undeclared WMD and delivery systems becoming main strategic effort. Evidence will come in a number of forms, ranging from WMD materials through research facilities to documentation and IT records. Seven out of 146 suspect sites already examined by coalition forces. But years of concealment mean that WMD could be located elsewhere. Interviews of scientists and other staff likely to be one of the most fruitful source of evidence. Also, essential to minimise risks of scientists and technicians "proliferating" elsewhere. US and UK commanders have access to details of personnel of interest and given direction to search them out and hold them. US proposals for Phase IV post-conflict activity on WMD elimination and other issues (the Iraq Survey Group). Proposals for UK involvement. Importance of third party verification of WMD finds. Proposed public handling strategy both to deal with individual incidents and to moderate expectations of very early progress. Points to make to President Bush.

Detail

As high intensity military action begins to draw to a close, and with the successful removal of regime control, our strategic priority in Iraq should be the detection and elimination of undeclared WMD and delivery systems.

Evidence of undeclared WMD and delivery systems can take many forms. (There is a diminishing prospect of actual use.) At one end of the spectrum, we

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may find delivery systems (eg SCUD missiles) or CBW munitions and materials. We may find manufacturing, research and storage facilities, along with documents and IT storage media which will also provide evidence of WMD programmes. The sites could be civilian or military, or concealed within locations such as universities. Before the conflict started, we drew up – with the US – a list of sensitive sites for WMD exploitation (SSEs); both the UK and the US have assets deployed for the SSE role. As of 11 April, some seven sites out of a total of 146 have been examined with no confirmed finds of WMD materials so far. There have in addition been 12 inspections of so called “ad hoc sites” – ie. those such as ammunition storage sites which aroused suspicion as coalition forces encountered them. Again, testing has so far not revealed any WMD at these sites, although in some cases testing is continuing.

Given Iraq's past history of deception and concealment, the likelihood is that evidence of WMD holdings will be found at sites pinpointed by intelligence during the course of our activities in Iraq rather than at the pre-identified sites. Information about this may come from a number of sources, one of the most fruitful being the controlled and detailed interviewing of Iraqi scientists and other staff, both civilian and military, involved in Iraq's WMD programme. We must also as a matter of urgency try to prevent these key individuals escaping to Syria or elsewhere, taking their expertise with them. The identification and detention of these individuals is now therefore one of our highest priorities. The US and UK have compiled databases of names – the relevant UK database contains some 5,000 names. Details of these are already available to US and British commanders in theatre and they should be giving high priority to tracking down such individuals and where necessary detaining them (the legal advice is that we can do this in the case of both military and civilian scientists). UK Special Forces have been given information about specific individuals who are of particular interest.

Looking further ahead, the US intend to form a dedicated post conflict organisation, to be called the Iraq Survey Group, which will have responsibility for investigation and exploitation in a number of areas including WMD, terrorism, prisoners of war/missing in action, and war crimes. This body is being set up under the auspices of the US Defence Intelligence Agency. Once deployed, it will report to General Abizaid and then to General Franks. At full strength, it is likely to consist of some 1500 personnel including analysts, interviewers, IT experts and weapons experts. The main operational hub would be in and around Baghdad with sector organisations from which mobile teams would deploy across Iraq. The US are keen to integrate UK and Australian expertise into this organisation. We intend, in the first instance, to offer elements of the UK's WMD expertise already deployed in theatre. This comprises weapons systems experts, document exploitation experts, NBC detection and protection assets, and HUMINT assets. The total of our personnel currently deployed in these areas is some 100, increasing to 120 later this month. We are also looking at whether we can provide other assets to support the US effort, including the UK laboratory currently in the process of being deployed to theatre.

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It will be important that any UK contribution works closely with the Iraq Survey Group and operates across the theatre as a whole, rather than in just the UK area of responsibility where sites and personnel of interest are thinner on the ground. In terms of timescale, given the complexity of the logistics and other arrangements that have to be made, it is very unlikely that the ISG will be fully deployed in less than about a month. But we have recognised that WMD exploitation and indeed eventual destruction is likely to be a long haul. We must certainly think in terms of months if not years – although we could run into problems if there is an early major drawdown of the coalition military presence in Iraq.

Another important facet, if we find actual CBRN materials, is the credibility of our testing process. The US and UK have a system whereby samples are initially tested at "silver" laboratories in the field and then, if positive, at "gold" OPCW accredited laboratories either in the US or UK. Given suspicions about coalition motives, positive results would have considerably more force if they were verified "separately" by a non-US/UK laboratory. Ultimately, we would like to see UNMOVIC or a successor body back in play. But US aversion to the UN means that this is unlikely to be achievable in the short/medium term. An alternative to UNMOVIC would be to involve other independent laboratories in a third country (the FCO are approaching the Netherlands). Detailed procedures would have to be very carefully worked out (and are being so), but the US reaction to this in principle has so far been reasonably positive. But, if we do not secure early return of UNMOVIC, we will need to have prepared a robust position on when we think they would be able to return.

In terms of public handling, there are three issues:

- We will need to have an agreed handling plan with the US for the announcement of any positive results. This will need to take into account the fact that testing will take a considerable period to produce a conclusive answer and could be further complicated by the need for third party verification.
- It is unrealistic to think that information will not leak out in the period between an initial discovery and any final announcement – we may want to alert our troops to the hazard immediately. We will therefore need generic defensive lines stressing caution until the dependable result has been reached and then announced.
- There is a case for taking proactive action to brief journalists on our proposed approach to this issue, not least to moderate expectations of a flood of early evidence.

If the Prime Minister is content with this general approach, I attach some points on when to draw when next speaking to President Bush.

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I am copying this letter to Simon McDonald (FCO) and to John Scarlett and Desmond Bowen (Cabinet Office).

Yours
Peter

P D WATKINS
Private Secretary

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**WMD EXPLOITATION AND ELIMINATION: POINTS TO MAKE TO
PRESIDENT BUSH**

- Detection and elimination of undeclared WMD and delivery systems now becoming our top political priority. Need to build on current efforts and demonstrate that our casus belli has substance.
- Interviews of Iraqi scientists and other staff, both civilian and military, likely to prove one of the most fruitful sources of information in this area. Coalition Commanders should give high priority to identifying and detaining such individuals so that they can be interviewed. Also critical to prevent them taking their WMD expertise elsewhere particularly as we move into Phase IV. We will continue to share our information on likely suspects with US both in Washington and in theatre. Will extend cooperation to Canberra if they choose to engage with us.
- Very much support proposals for an Iraq Support Group under DOD auspices. Understand this will pull together all WMD exploitation activities along with other post conflict issues such as terrorism and war crimes. Hope it can deploy into theatre as soon as possible to support existing effort.
- Grateful for invitation for UK participation in Iraq Survey Group. Will respond initially using already deployed assets in theatre. Our experts are already in touch.
- Independent verification of US/UK WMD finds would be extremely useful politically, although clearly a complicating factor.
- UK ultimate objective is to involve the UN in this process, but recognise that US has reservations.

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- In the meantime would like to pursue idea of supplementing national analysis with use of independent laboratories in third party countries. Overall believe political advantages outweigh practical complications.
- Public handling extremely delicate and will need close co-ordination. Key areas are handling announcements of positive results; handling leaks between initial discovery and final results; and more generally moderating expectations of a flood of early discoveries. We should work closely together on all these issues.

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