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Copy to Jonathan
Matthew

1875

Prime Minister

JS: last para: I am pretty sure

Condi anyway gets the message.

21 April 2003

Prime Minister

The key is to find people not material -
who can talk about Saddam's WMD.
programmes / aspirations / deception.

IRAQ: THE SEARCH FOR WMD AND THE CASE FOR THE WAR

1. I am very worried that, inexorably, we are being pushed into a position where we accept that the war will only have been justified if a significant WMD find is made. This is exactly the place where our opponents, at home and abroad, and the media want us. We should not go there.

2. The military action was justified the day we took it, on the grounds that:-

(i) the Saddam regime had had chemical and biological systems - we know that for sure;

(ii) it had failed to meet a mountain of UN obligations;

(iii) a huge number of questions about its WMD position and capabilities remained unanswered (Blix's 173 page report), and Iraq simply refused to cooperate properly, raising entirely legitimate issues in the minds of most members of the Security Council that they had a lot to hide.

3. However, I remain sceptical that physical evidence of WMD will be found:-

(i) Saddam had every motive, and months of notice before the fall of Baghdad, to destroy all WMD evidence; so did his collaborators;

(ii) remarkably little circumstantial evidence has so far been forthcoming;

(iii) the expectations from the intelligence have always been greater than the product, so far;

(iv) I was struck by General Franks' caution on this when I saw him (Powell has been dubious about finds going back to last summer and I think this reflects a wider view in the US military);

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(v) Your point that our experience in Northern Ireland with PIRA shows that large arms caches can be concealed for years, even with thousands of highly professional security forces searching for the dumps.

4. Yes, we did take military action in order to disarm Iraq of its WMD. But if it turns out that under the pressure of the US/UK military build up, he disarmed himself, so be it.

5. Of course I understand exquisitely that public appreciation across the world of why we took military action will be enhanced, to say the least, if there are good finds. But if we carry on saying confidently that the material is there for the finding, and have 1000 men doing nothing but search for the next six months, and still nothing is found, what then? Knowing that it was there is not the same as knowing it is there.

6. Our opponents have a further motive for making this the sole object of the war, which is to move the spotlight away from the obvious success of the military action, when they were banking on us being bogged down for weeks of ferocious fighting by forces who were true to Chirac's claim [to you] that "the Iraqis love Saddam".

7. However, if we can not point to significant WMD finds, it becomes all the more important that we can point out that post-war Iraq is a far better place than Saddam's Iraq. When Baghdad first fell we could do this. Now the story from Baghdad is not good. Because this all looks so different from the other side of the Atlantic (where the picture is a much simpler and more triumphalist one) I am wondering whether the whole US Administration really appreciates the imperative of getting the water and power back on, the hospitals fully working and so on. I will call you to discuss all this.

Jack Straw

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