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Peter Ricketts

Iraq

The Foreign Secretary telephoned Colin Powell on a secure line at lunchtime on 26 July. After a brief discussion about India/Pakistan (recorded separately) the Foreign Secretary raised Iraq. He asked whether it would be possible to see Powell for a tete-a-tete discussion in late August.

Powell said that he would like to hear the Foreign Secretary's views. There had already been some contact, or contact was planned, with the Prime Minister and Geoff Hoon. He said that he wanted the Foreign Secretary to know that, the week after next, meetings would become "much more serious" but would not necessarily accelerate the timing of any action.

The Foreign Secretary said that Iraq was an increasingly big issue in the UK. He was not a military expert, but as well as planning military action, we had to make the case in public for such action. There had also to be a process for getting as many people on board internationally as possible. Afghanistan had been a model of how to handle such a problem. The case for action against the Taliban had been made the moment the Twin Towers came down. Even so, the Administration had decided on a clear process for getting the rest of the world on board. The President's speech on 20 September had been hugely important in developing public opinion around the world. Although the operation had looked straightforward in retrospect, it had not been straightforward at the time.

The Foreign Secretary said that we had to be similarly careful on Iraq. He and Powell knew some of what was going on. The public at large did not. And now serious folk were writing serious letters to the Prime Minister along the lines: yes, Saddam Hussein was terrible; yes, he had weapons of mass destruction; but how was Iraq different from North Korea, Libya or Iran? And why was action necessary now? The Foreign

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Secretary said that the process of getting other people on board was vital. He knew that some issues were difficult in Washington - weapons inspectors and issuing an ultimatum - but they still had to be faced.

Colin Powell said that he understood perfectly. His people were looking at the data. Tenet was looking at a paper for possible publication.

The Foreign Secretary rehearsed the history of the British paper. The first draft had dealt with four countries. Objectively, the case against Iraq was third or fourth strongest; Iraq was not in a top priority category of its own.

The Foreign Secretary asked whether Powell had heard of Michael Quinlan (Powell had). Quinlan had just written to the Prime Minister, asking what had changed in the last year? Was there really any evidence that Saddam Hussein was about to use WMD? Quinlan had concluded that not much had changed.

The Foreign Secretary agreed: his impression was that Saddam was evil but not insane. [The note then reported that Secretary Powell referred to the warning about

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the use of WMD the US had issued to Saddam in 1991.]

Powell said that

[Mr Straw and Mr Powell also discussed the consequences of military action; and that the only way to ensure a strong central government would be for the US and UK to stay on. That might require "an army of occupation for years to come".]

The Foreign Secretary said that he was concerned that while doing damage to Saddam, we would also damage other alliances. The Europeans would eventually fall into line (); but the same did not necessarily apply in the Middle East.

Powell said that,

. Polls in Saudi Arabia showed that 95% of Saudis opposed any military action against any other Arabs. Mubarak and King Abdullah faced similar constraints.

Powell ended by saying that by the third week in August plans would be well advanced. Perhaps it would be worth the Foreign Secretary's while flying over before then? Otherwise he would be happy to meet at the place he would be staying in the Hamptons. He would keep in touch.



26 July 2002

(Simon McDonald)

cc: FUS

Sir David Manning, 10 Downing Street

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