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FOREIGN SECRETARY'S VISIT TO WASHINGTON, 14-15 OCTOBER

IRAQ: FORWARD THINKING

What would new governmental structures look like?

- Various possible scenarios set out in our paper. No clear blue-print yet.
- Not easy:
 - ethnic/religious/tribal mix;
 - residual Ba'th influence;
 - uneven distribution of resources;
 - lack of political infrastructure or unifying figure;
 - scope for neighbours to meddle.
- But I imagine we can agree on a few underlying principles:
 - Iraq to remain a unitary state;
 - no need for root and branch dismantling of government;
 - Iraqis should determine their own government; and
 - need for more representative government, but not necessarily full democracy in short term.
- If it comes to military action, legitimacy ie credible legal base and UN framework will make a huge difference to handling of whole range of Day After questions. Much suspicion in region of US motives, which will be increased by appearance of US taking over/imposing new government. Will need clear plan to show transition to new governing structures decided by Iraqis. Our preliminary thinking is for UN-led transitional Administration, with international personnel running existing government structures (cf Cambodia or East Timor), gradually handing over to Iraqis.
- Transitional administration will need a clear exit strategy. Means offering an understanding of what Iraq could look like and a process to get there.
- International security presence – coalition-led at outset - could evolve over time, eg with others providing troops for various "soft" security tasks.

Duration and size of international presence?

- Impossible to say. Need to be prepared to stay as long as necessary.

How to minimise risk of disintegration?

- Not easy. Possibility of Kurd/ Shi'a uprisings before, during or after any conflict.
- But should not fall into opposite trap of exaggerating Iraq's fragility. Has been remarkably resilient in past. And few of its neighbours want it fragmented, unstable.

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- Nor should we overlay confessional distinctions. Many urban Shi'a have as much in common with Sunni as with rural Shi'a (and they are in any case Arabs, not Iranians).
- So:
 - pre-conflict: need to give clear message of commitment to Iraq's territorial integrity; and .
 - post conflict: international security force probably needed to maintain stability and hold Iraq together whilst longer term structures developed; clear message to other countries not to meddle in Iraq's internal affairs.
- Any new government should reflect Iraq's ethnic diversity. But need to avoid institutionalising confessional and other divisions.
- Kurdish situation particularly tricky. They would not want to settle for less than they have now (ie substantial autonomy). Turks and others would not accept Kurdish independence. Implies need for some sort of federal structure

Consequences for region?

- Much would depend on how and how rapidly any military campaign were conducted. Need to start thinking about handling unintended consequences : unrest could present a security threat to Western interests in much of region., impact on friendly governments, especially Jordan, refugees; environment (eg after a scorched earth policy) etc
- WMD: Significant psychological impact, even if limited effect. Possible panic; requests for assistance. But hard to judge. No mass exodus in 1991 when we expected Iraqis to launch Scuds with CW warheads.
- Iran torn between wish to see the back of Saddam and concern about US hostility (Axis of Evil). Need for mechanism to ensure no Iran/US misunderstandings and to encourage Iranian support for post-war settlement. Happy to use our contacts meanwhile.

MEPP?

- Increase in terrorism; clamp down by Israeli security forces; peace process frozen; no Palestinian elections.
- Israeli retaliation for Iraqi missile attacks would significantly increase Muslim anger.

Consequences for anti-terror coalition?

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- Possible distraction. Increased support for terrorists. Additional incentive to act.
- important not to divert attention and resources from Afghanistan. Increased threat to international presence there?

Post Saddam reconstruction

- understand need to reassure Russians that their economic interests in Iraq will not be neglected;
- but current speculation on post-Saddam arrangements in Iraqi oil sector are damaging public perceptions of our motives. See some risk of creating misimpression we are in this for the sake of spoils;
- any new regime in Baghdad will need to be seen to honour legitimate existing commitments, and to maintain open bidding procedure for oil and gas investment (unlike Kuwait after 1991).

Middle East Department
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