

3/1/03

~~SECRET AND PERSONAL~~  
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*Sign for Condi today that Washington is aware of this  
pitfall and thinking in terms of a Second Resolution  
I see my second of my conversation, marked by.*

PM/03/001

PRIME MINISTER

*Y. H.  
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Iraq - Plan B

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A7*

1. We need urgently to lower public expectations, here and abroad, that military action against Iraq is inevitable, and that the die will be cast at the Security Council meeting on 27 January. If we are not careful, the necessary military build-up of UK as well as US troops will allow the media to set us up for a fall - "UK snubbed", "UK humiliated" - when and if the outcome of the 27 January meeting is far from an authorisation for war. Your speech to the Diplomatic Service Conference on Tuesday is therefore very important in setting the scene for the next three weeks.

2. As you know, a lot of effort is now being made by both the [redacted] agencies to provide Blix and El-Baradei [with leads drawing on intelligence reports] to enable them to upgrade their inspections over the next three weeks. It is possible that this will produce a big smoking gun, sufficient for Blix and El-Baradei to point in their 27 January report to a breach of obligation by Iraq sufficient to trigger OPs 11 and 12 of 1441, a further meeting of the Security Council, and a resolution authorising the use of force. But in my view (shared by Powell) it would be rash to bank on this. So far, reality has not matched the expectation generated by the intelligence. Nor should we assume that over the next three weeks there will be sufficient non-cooperation

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by Hussein in respect of interviews outside Iraq to add up to a material breach under OP4. Scenarios just as likely as a clear material breach by 27 January are:

- i) an indication from Blix/El-Baradei that they have been broadly satisfied with the level of cooperation by Iraq, and have so far found nothing of any significance but will continue looking;
- ii) concerns by them of some lack of cooperation, and in respect of some of their finds, but in neither case adding up to a casus belli to satisfy a majority on the Security Council.

3. A further complicating factor so far as the 27 January meeting is concerned is that of military preparedness. Lack of cooperation by Turkey (they will not allow US or UK troops through on the ground) is leading CENTCOM to re-think their planning. This must have an impact on the robustness of the overall plan, and the timelines.

4. So I suggest our messages should be:

- i) To emphasise that our preferred strategy continues to be Iraq's WMD disarmament by peaceful means, through the UN system.
- ii) The 27 January meeting is not and never has been a decision deadline for military action. The meeting is being held because 1441 requires that the inspectors give their first formal reports on that date (60 days from the start); but no more. The inspectors can (and most certainly will) go on inspecting.

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iii) Whatever the inspectors say to the 27 January meeting, decisions, particularly on military action, would not be taken then, but some days (even weeks) later, after informal and formal negotiation in the Security Council.

5. Internally (with the US) we need urgently to reflect on the fact that a find or finds by the inspectors may not of themselves be a convincing casus belli. The public (certainly here and in Europe, and I suspect in the US too) will calibrate their response according to the gravity of the find(s). But we will be faced with the argument that the finds prove that inspection is working: we will be told to let them continue and destroy what they find rather than going to war.

6. Given all this, I think we need to discuss very privately with the Americans over the next few weeks our strategy if inspections produce no early and large smoking gun. I will be in Washington to see Powell on 22/23 January. You are planning to see President Bush shortly after his State of the Union address on 28 January. That will be a crucial moment to explore with him whether he believes he can maintain the position for weeks or even months on the basis of (a) continuing inspections; (b) military build-up at a high state of readiness to maintain the pressure on Saddam Hussein; but I also think it important that we lay the ground now so that we (US/UK) have more room for manoeuvre at the end of the month.

7. All this may not be attractive to the President. But the alternative, of going to war without a publicly convincing trigger, and without a second UNSCR, could well be politically worse for him in the US, as well as acutely difficult for us. There are signs in what the President has been saying in recent days that he recognises this. Powell

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certainly does. He said to me in a call four days ago that if there was an insufficient case for a second resolution, there would equally be an insufficient case for the US to go unilateral.

8. I am around this weekend and of course happy to discuss this with you.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Jack Straw'.

(JACK STRAW)

Foreign and Commonwealth Office  
3 January 2003

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