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INFO IMMEDIATE WASHINGTON, SANTIAGO, UKMIS NEW YORK

PERSONAL FOR HMA's, CABINET OFFICE (MILLER, RYCROFT), FCO (PS)

SUBJECT: NOSEC: IRAQ: MEXICO

## SUMMARY

1. Manning and Scarlet briefed President Fox. He listened carefully and with open mind. Some points clearly went home. Fox emphasised independence of his position, but indicated what it might take to get him on side.

## DETAIL

2. David Manning and John Scarlett undertook a short visit to Mexico to brief President Fox on the background to the UK position on Iraq. Foreign Minister Derbez was not able to participate because of an unbreakable prior commitment. He was represented by one of his junior Ministers, Gutierrez.

3. Manning set the political scene. The Prime Minister was convinced that we had to deal with the WMD issue now or face a worse situation later. He had been pleased with the SCR 1441, which established that Iraq was in breach of its obligations and must come into compliance. It gave Iraq a final chance to do so peacefully. He had been disappointed with the Iraqi statement, which Blix had described as practically empty of new evidence. It did not address vital issues like the whereabouts of eg VX and Anthrax agents. It indicated that Iraq was still not serious about cooperation. Since then the Inspection regime had been prevented from doing its job properly. The slight progress there had been was only after intense pressure. The Prime Minister was particularly concerned that the Iraqis were not allowing proper interviews of scientists.

4. The Prime Minister now believed that matters had come to a head. The International Community could not continue to churn out toothless resolutions: UN credibility was eroding. Containment was not sustainable. Iraq must come clean now or face the consequences.

5. Scarlet set out the bones of the technical case. As part of his presentation he handed over a summary of Iraq's WMD holdings

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and, stressing its sensitivity, an extract of delicate source reporting.

6. Scarlet said that (over a number of years) we had developed a range of sources, some inside Iraq, that had proven reliability. We had built up a consistent picture in which we had confidence. Our allies, including Europeans, had no serious differences of substance with us on this.

7. While we believed that UNSCOM had been able to disarticulate Iraq's nuclear program, it had not been able to account for a wide range of chemical and biological materials - we were particularly worried about VX and anthrax. Even conservative estimates of material Iraq still held indicated the capacity to assemble thousands of WMD artillery shells. Since 1998 Iraq had continued to produce new agents, develop its missile capability and, with less success, reconstitute its nuclear program.

8. In 2002 a conscious decision was taken to deny possession of WMD to frustrate a renewed and strengthened Inspection program. We had watched a policy of concealment and intimidation develop. Evidence had been dispersed, factories cleaned up and scientists cowed.

9. Iraq's scheme had worked for a while. Some UNMOVIC success in January resulted in further efforts to hide evidence and deceive Inspectors. Continued small successes forced Iraq to move to a policy of slow, small concessions to give the impression of movement (eg on missiles). For the UK, the litmus test would be interviews with scientists. Iraq realised their knowledge was their achilles heel, hence the intimidation.

10. Fox was grateful for our efforts to brief him. He knew that there were many strands to the Iraq issue, some technical, some objective, some relating to public opinion and some political. It was difficult to strike the right balance. Non-permanent members of the Security Council were put in a difficult position when the P5 were so far apart in their analysis. Mexico had an open mind but wanted to continue to seek consensus on the way forward, as it had in the run up to SCR 1441. On that occasion everyone had had to give some ground.

11. Mexico considered military action as the option of absolutely the last resort. Internal consequences of overriding international institutions were particularly grave for countries like Mexico, which were nurturing fragile, newly created institutions of their own.

12. Fox recognised the threat of international terrorism and the danger of WMD. He was aware the clock was running. He was attracted to the (Canadian) idea of benchmarking Iraqi cooperation - this would either ratchet Iraq towards compliance or delineate the case for military action. He did not like talk of action quote with or without the UN unquote. Mexico was engaged with both sides in the negotiations in New York. Mexico and Chile were in particularly close contact, given the similarity of their views and problems.

14. Manning said the the Prime Minister would strongly agree with

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any of Fox's concerns. War must be a last resort. But Saddam Hussain knew how to play the game and spin things out - the international community could not allow him to get away with this. Proper access to scientists was one key to progress.

## COMMENT

15. Sir D Manning was struck by the way Fox was careful to emphasise his equidistance from either side of the argument, and his need for objective benchmarks to be delivered by Iraq on a clear, but not necessarily long, timetable. Fox also emphasised his wish to stay close to Chile. He concluded that a Mexican vote for a second resolution was not impossible, but would not be easy, and would almost certainly require some movement. Sir D Manning's view is that we should review the option of a visit by the Foreign Secretary in the course of next week.

## HMA'S COMMENT

16. It is a pity that Derbez was not able to attend the meeting. But Fox and Under-Secretary Gutierrez both listened hard, and some points clearly made amark. The Mexicans will not be convinced by the need to provide international respectability for US adventurism. But Fox's body language responded to Sir D Manning's emphasis on war as a genuine last resort; and his argument that the French/German position was weakening the pressure on Saddam. He also registered the fact that, where we had seen evidence, it bore out what our intelligence was telling us. Fox was at pains to be seen as an independent vote, not ruling out the need for war as a last resort. This is at least a better position than he seemed to be taking a couple of weeks ago.

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