

DECLASSIFIED

CONFIDENTIAL

NOSEC: MIPT: IRAQ: AVOIDING A FRENCH VETO

From: PARIS

TO IMMEDIATE FCO

TELNO 111

OF 041800Z MARCH 03

AND TO IMMEDIATE CABINET OFFICE

INFO PRIORITY , BEIJING, BERLIN, MADRID, MODUK, MOSCOW

INFO PRIORITY UKMIS NEW YORK, WASHINGTON,

CABINET OFFICE FOR MANNING AND RYCROFT

~~SEE MIPT~~

ARGUMENTS TO USE WITH THE FRENCH

- the French have repeatedly said that war is the worst of all possible solutions. But war has been made more likely by Saddam's ability to exploit differences in the international community. The chances of Saddam taking the opportunity to avoid war now look slim. Certainly a veto cannot help in these circumstances. The only conceivable way of achieving a peaceful solution now is to increase the pressure on Saddam by re-establishing the maximum degree of consensus in the UN, backed up by the certainty that military action will follow if Saddam does not give way very quickly. (Comment: the closer we get to military action, the more this argument loses its force, but it remains true for now);
- France has argued strongly that war is a disproportionate response to the threat posed by Saddam's WMD. Disagreement may be legitimate over this. But there comes a point at which failure to act firmly (or delaying for a few more weeks/months) causes disproportionate damage to the credibility of the will of the international community and our wider efforts to limit proliferation of WMD. We have now reached that point;
- if Security Council credibility is damaged, as it is bound to be if a veto by a major power like France is shown to be without practical effect, the main losers will be Permanent Members like France and Britain. The long-term consequence of this reduction of our influence and restraining power could be extremely negative
- if war becomes inevitable it will be easier to limit the destabilising effect elsewhere in the region, about which France has been rightly concerned, if military intervention is seen to be taken with the authority of the international community, rather than by a coalition of the willing after a UN resolution has been vetoed. In particular, weakening UN credibility on the eve of war will make it even more difficult to re-establish the clear and authoritative UN-backed administration and the rapid transition to a civil regime in Iraq in the aftermath of war which we both want to see; and more difficult for Europe to play the role the region and the world will need at that point, including vital joint UK-French pressure for a different US MEPP policy;
- we have so far contained the effects of our bilateral divergences over Iraq, and retained our ability to work together towards joint objectives eg for the development of CFSP and ESDP and for our collective efforts to limit WMD proliferation - with the best will in the world, a veto will make that more difficult. As the two EU countries that are serious about defence and foreign policy, we know we have to work together to achieve things in the world -
- a French veto against two of her principal allies on an issue where the objective of disarmament is shared and we have the same

DECLASSIFIED

DECLASSIFIED

analysis of the appalling Iraqi regime, would be hard to accept or explain. It would certainly create a major transatlantic rift, even if it were not intended as an anti-American gesture. The consequences of this for Europe, and for France herself, need to be weighed very carefully.

HOLMES

Sent by PARIS on 04-03-2003 18:00

Received by No10 on 04-03-2003 18:38

DECLASSIFIED