

DECLASSIFIED**PERSONAL: IRAQ: UN ENDGAME****From: WASHINGTON****TO IMMEDIATE FCO****TELNO 294****OF 060123Z MARCH 03****INFO IMMEDIATE****BEIJING, BERLIN, CABINET OFFICE, MADRID, MODUK****INFO IMMEDIATE MOSCOW, PARIS, SECURITY COUNCIL POSTS, SOSFA****INFO IMMEDIATE UKMILREP CENTCOM, UKMIS NEW YORK, UKMIS VIENNA****SIC CAO/A2N/A2M/A2P/LDQ/INX****IRAQ LIMITED****SEE MIFT****SUMMARY**

1. The US are now firmly on track for military action - with or without a second Security Council Resolution. The only event which might significantly affect their timetable would be problems for the UK - and they are therefore pulling out all the stops in the UN. They are reasonably hopeful of getting the nine votes.

DETAIL

2. It may be worth trying to pull together where the US now sees itself. I have discussed this (in confidence) with both and today.

3. Barring a highly improbable volte face by Saddam, the US is firmly on track for military action in the very near future. This does not depend on the adoption of a second Security Council resolution. But the military planning does assume that the UK will act alongside US forces. Franks is advising the President that he is ready to go. Turkey is a complication with "operational consequences", but one that can be got round without imposing significant extra delay. If, however, there were any question about UK involvement it would be, according to "huge - like trying to play football without the quarterback".

4. While a second resolution is not crucial for the US, they fully understand its importance for us. I took both and through the parliamentary arithmetic. (They had also gained the impression that we need the resolution for legal reasons: I explained the real situation.) They are reasonably hopeful of getting the nine votes (although a little disturbed that the Mexicans have not yet come back to them on our suggested amendment). On vetoes, they are sanguine about the Russians (although a planned trip by Condi to Moscow has not proved possible). The Chinese will not veto unless, at least, the French and Russians do. The French they cannot call. If the French, etc come forward with a draft resolution of their own, the current US plan is to press for ours to be voted on first - but they expect to discuss tactics at this level with you in New York tomorrow.

5. I did not go into deep detail on timing which, at this stage, is militarily highly sensitive. But the US intention remains to go for a vote in the course of next week, perhaps with the period for a very short ultimatum tagged on (talked in terms of 48 hours, but the State Department are thinking more in terms of a week). On this subject I made two points. Firstly, it was not helpful for the US to refer to the possibility of not going for a vote - took careful note of the line we are taking in the run up to next week. And, secondly, we would need a clear window to warn dependants and British citizens to get out. said the same applied to them - we should co-ordinate our advice (as I think is happening).

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COMMENT

6. The main conclusion I draw from all this is that the military clock is now audibly ticking and only a major shock to our (ie UK) plans is likely to jolt it substantially. The US can be expected to deal quite firmly with any efforts in the UN to slow things down.

7. See MIFT for more detail on "swing votes".

BRENTON

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