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Foreign Policy Adviser to the Prime Minister,
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Alan Simon,

IRAQ: CONVERSATION WITH CONDI RICE

I spoke to Condi this afternoon at 1700 hours on a secure line from Chequers. I asked how she saw the situation.

THIS LETTER IS EXTREMELY SENSITIVE AND SHOULD BE SHOWN ONLY TO THOSE WITH A REAL NEED TO KNOW. IT MUST NOT BE COPIED FURTHER. IT MUST NOT BE DISCUSSED WITH OTHER US INTERLOCUTORS.

Condi said that Colin Powell had spoken earlier today to de Villepin. They had agreed to reflect over the weekend on the wording for the draft resolution. De Villepin would come back to Powell on Monday with proposals. Condi commented that this was reasonably encouraging. But the US Administration was making it clear that the wording of the resolution must be resolved by the end of next week.

Condi said that she had become a bit concerned about Blix. He was being very insistent on his independence and legitimacy, and a bit awkward about aspects of the UNMOVIC regime. Condi understood his sensitivities. But it was vital that he did not underestimate the tricks Saddam would play and the efforts he would make to obstruct the inspectors.

Condi speculated that Saddam might find it very hard to deal with a really tough inspection regime. There was a possibility that he would panic when he understood what was involved. He might refuse to allow the inspections to go ahead. This would be a casus belli. Alternatively his authority might crumble once rigorous inspections were taking place. Either way this would be the end of Saddam. I said the second outcome would be ideal. To my surprise, Condi warmly agreed.

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Comment

Condi gave me the impression that she believes Powell and de Villepin are now seriously engaged. But she also left me in little doubt that Washington's patience is wearing very thin. The Administration is clearly determined to bring things to a head by next weekend.

I was struck, too, by her comment on the possible collapse of Saddam's regime. Perhaps, even in the White House, there is now a faint sense of disquiet about what a military campaign against Iraq, and its subsequent occupation, would involve. Long shot though it may be, the thought that the Iraqis might do the job themselves may seem increasingly attractive.

I am copying this letter to Peter Watkins, CDS and Sir Kevin Tebbit (MOD), Sir Andrew Turnbull, John Scarlett and Desmond Bowen (CO), Sir Michael Jay (FCO), 'C', Sir Francis Richards, Eliza Manningham Buller, Sir Christopher Meyer (Washington), Sir Jeremy Greenstock (UKMis New York), Sir John Holmes (Paris), Sir Paul Lever (Berlin), Sir Roderic Lyne (Moscow), Sir Nigel Sheinwald (UKRep Brussels), Sir Emyr Jones Parry (UKDel NATO), Sir Stephen Wall and Jonathan Powell.



DAVID MANNING

Simon McDonald
FCO

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