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17 February 2003



Foreign &  
Commonwealth  
Office

London SW1A 2AH

from The Foreign Secretary

*Dear David 17/2*

Iraq: Telephone Conversation with Colin Powell, 16 February

**THIS LETTER IS VERY SENSITIVE. IT IS NOT TO BE COPIED.  
ITS CONTENTS MUST NOT BE DISCLOSED TO ANY  
US INTERLOCUTOR.**

I spoke to Powell at 1.00pm yesterday on a secure line. Powell said there was three feet of snow in Washington so he was hoping for a quiet day. Monday is a holiday.

I briefed Powell on emerging thinking here, emphasising that these were early ideas, and had not yet been agreed by the Prime Minister. I would be talking to him later today.

I explained the suggestions in Peter Ricketts' minute to me (copied to you), which tried to turn the French 14 March date against them, by saying that this was the date when we expected Blix and El Baradei to say whether Iraq was actively and fully cooperating, perhaps against a checklist. I thought (not least from my conversation on Friday with Blix) that Blix would try to avoid responsibility for this. But whilst a further material breach and what we did

Sir David Manning KCMG

*I have NOT  
seen this.  
I did  
not  
my meeting  
with Peter  
on Saturday.  
I did not  
expect him to put  
it in a paper.*

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about it were matters for the Security Council, saying whether Iraq was or was not cooperating had initially to be a matter for the inspectors since the information on this was theirs. After all, it was Blix's statement on Friday about further cooperation by Iraq on process which had put us on the back foot.

Powell said that their thinking was basically on the same lines. Condi had spoken to Blix yesterday, and had discussed the idea - similar to that in the Ricketts paper - of benchmarks against which to measure Iraq's compliance. Blix had told Condi that he was ready to share his hitherto secret list of Iraq's unresolved tasks. John Wolf would go to New York at the beginning of the week to view the list.

We discussed the content of any list. I said that it was important that the list did not become a "tick in the box for compliance", but rather good evidence of compliance and it had to be very comprehensive, so that if he did all these things he was complying in reality. Powell agreed. He said there were those who thought that a tough list of "uncompleted tasks" would never be fulfilled by Saddam. It was said, for example, that he would never agree to the destruction of the missile engines because they had cost billions of dollars. "I am not so sure about this", said Powell. "If it's a choice between the missile engines and his regime, he'll choose the survival of his regime." I said this was my view too, and since the objective of HMG's policy was 1441, and the disarmament of Iraq's WMD if possible by peaceful means, clear and continuing evidence of Saddam's compliance on substance would be bound to negate the case for the UK's involvement in military action.

Powell said he understood this, but he was not sure that this was where the President was. He might still be inclined to "go it alone" for the removal of Saddam, and the President believed that the Prime Minister would commit UK troops in any event. I said that the Prime Minister's personal loyalty to the President was never in doubt, but that alone would not answer the question.

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whether there was adequate legal and political justification for UK military involvement.

Powell complimented the Prime Minister's Glasgow speech, but said that he assumed that the scale of yesterday's demonstration made a second Resolution even more necessary. I said yes. If there were nine votes or more in the Security Council for a second Resolution, and this majority was subject to a veto by one only of the P5, I thought we could carry the day in the Commons and the country but there would have to be with clear evidence of substantive non-compliance by Iraq of 1441. Without the latter, we could have no chance. Regime change per se had never been the objective of HMG's strategy however desirable it was. I said that even with a second Resolution (or a majority and veto but good case) the political and public order consequences of the early stages of military action on current plans would be hard to handle without a very strong case, consistent with our clear, already stated objectives, they could become unmanageable. Unless we were very lucky, military action without an effective international consensus could severely damage US as well as UK interests. Powell said that he fully understood this, but some of his colleagues took the view that "if it was OK in Iowa, it was OK for them".

On timing of a second Resolution, Powell said he still had in mind that there could be merit in tabling a second Resolution this week, but saying at the same time that we were not asking for a vote on it immediately. The Resolution would be a "simple one" (material breach/serious consequences). I said that I had not come to a final conclusion on this nor spoken yet to the Prime Minister but my instinct was more and more against tabling this week. Parliament would be in recess, there was no routine Cabinet meeting planned. If we tabled, we would be faced with immediate demands for Parliament to be recalled if we said that we were tabling without any commitments to put it to an early vote, it would be said this was a sign of weakness, a recognition that we did not have the votes. Premature tabling might also make it harder to get

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swing E10 votes later. Their Heads of Government and Foreign Ministers would immediately be asked for their attitude, even if we said we were not going to have a vote, they might well say it was premature and, wound up by France, that we were ignoring the outcome of the next inspectors' reports on 28 February. So I could not see the point though, as ever, I was open to argument. Powell said he would reflect on this.

We returned to the Ricketts paper ideas. Powell said that there was something to be said in a deadline and Ministerial Security Council of 8 March (that's a Saturday I now see, so he might have had the 7<sup>th</sup> in mind), rather than 14 March. I said I had no strong feelings on this.

Powell said the *NY Times*' main story on Sunday under Steve Weisman's by-line gave a good indication of Administration thinking.

I am copying this letter to Sir Jeremy Greenstock (UKM's New York), Sir Christopher Meyer (Washington), Sir Michael Jay and Peter Ricketts

Yours ever

Simon

JP

JACK STRAW

(Dictated by the Foreign Secretary  
and signed in his absence by the  
Private Secretary)

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