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Conclusions

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CABINET

CONCLUSIONS of a Meeting of the Cabinet
held at 10 Downing Street on

Extracts relating to Iraq

THURSDAY 16 JANUARY 2003
at 10.30 am

P R E S E N T

The Rt Hon Tony Blair MP
Prime Minister

The Rt Hon John Prescott MP
Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State

The Rt Hon Gordon Brown MP
Chancellor of the Exchequer

The Rt Hon Robin Cook MP
Leader of the House of Commons and
President of the Council

The Rt Hon The Lord Irvine of Lairg
Lord Chancellor

The Rt Hon Jack Straw MP
Secretary of State for Foreign and
Commonwealth Affairs

The Rt Hon David Blunkett MP
Secretary of State for the Home
Department

The Rt Hon Margaret Beckett MP
Secretary of State for the Environment,
Food and Rural Affairs

The Rt Hon Clare Short MP
Secretary of State for International
Development

The Rt Hon Alistair Darling MP
Secretary of State for Transport

The Rt Hon Alan Milburn MP
Secretary of State for Health

The Rt Hon Dr John Reid MP
Minister without Portfolio and Party Chair

The Rt Hon Paul Murphy MP
Secretary of State for Northern Ireland

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The Rt Hon Geoff Hoon MP
Secretary of State for Defence

The Rt Hon Helen Liddell MP
Secretary of State for Scotland

The Rt Hon Patricia Hewitt MP
Secretary of State for Trade and Industry

The Rt Hon Hilary Armstrong MP
Chief Whip

The Rt Hon Paul Boateng MP
Chief Secretary to the Treasury

The Rt Hon Andrew Smith MP
Secretary of State for Work and Pensions

The Rt Hon The Lord Williams of Mostyn QC
Leader of the House of Lords

The Rt Hon Tessa Jowell MP
Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport

The Rt Hon Charles Clarke MP
Secretary of State for Education and Skills

The Rt Hon Peter Hain MP
Secretary of State for Wales

ALSO PRESENT

The Rt Hon Nick Brown MP
Minister for Work

The Rt Hon The Lord Grocott
Captain of the Gentlemen-at-Arms

The Rt Hon The Lord Goldsmith QC
Attorney General

SECRETARIAT

Sir Andrew Turnbull

Sir David Manning

Mr P Britton

Ms L Bell

Mr D Bowen

Mr M Donnelly

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Iraq

Previous reference:
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THE PRIME MINISTER said that he wanted to make the United Nations route work. The inspectors were doing their job inside Iraq and he was optimistic that they would discover weapons of mass destruction and their associated programmes which had been concealed. They needed time to achieve results, including from better co-ordinated intelligence. If Iraq was not complying with the demands of the United Nations, he believed that the United Nations Security Council would

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pass a second resolution. Evidence from the inspectors would make the use of a veto less likely by other permanent members of the Security Council. Meanwhile, British and American forces were being built up in the Gulf. If it came to conflict it would be important for success to be achieved quickly. The build up was having an effect on the Iraqi regime, with internal support dwindling for President Saddam Hussein of Iraq. The strategy remained to pursue the United Nations course. He would be meeting President Bush of the United States to discuss Iraq at the end of the month, after Dr Blix had reported to the Security Council on 27 January.

THE FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH SECRETARY said that he was aware of anxieties about the possibility of having to diverge from the United Nations path. There was a good prospect of achieving a second resolution. Many had been doubtful last summer about getting the first resolution; in the event, the United Nations Security Council vote had been unanimous. While sticking with the United Nations route we should not rule out the possibility of military action without a second resolution. Voting decisions in the Security Council could be driven by domestic politics not the demands of the international situation. In his recent contacts with the Muslim and Arab world, all could see the benefit of Saddam Hussein's demise. He had utterly rejected the notion that we were hostile to Islam. The evidence was that Saddam Hussein himself had attacked his own people and his neighbours - all Muslims.

THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT said that keeping to the United Nations route would hold the Government's support together. She had been reviewing humanitarian scenarios for Iraq and concluded that extra resources would be required, given the other humanitarian priority of Southern Africa. A particularly worrying scenario was that of chemical and biological weapons being used inside Iraq, and their effect on local civilians. On the management of the aftermath of military action, the involvement of the United Nations was essential. This would provide legitimacy for the political and economic reconstruction of Iraq, including the use of oil revenues. Work on the aftermath should be taken forward urgently.

In discussion, the following points were made:

- a. communication with the Government's supporters and

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with the country as a whole needed to be improved, on the basis of a core script;

- b. the message of our policy on Iraq was complex but should start from first principles;
- c. part of the message was that our policy flowed from our own national interest and respect for international law;
- d. the leadership of the United States was not widely trusted in this country, but President Bush's resolve was weakening the Iraqi regime;
- e. while a small proportion of the British population would always be opposed to military action, the political battle was for the centre ground, which could be won by argument;
- f. the inspectors had only recently started their work and it was unreasonable for opponents to assert that the absence of evidence so far meant that military action was unjustified;
- g. once evidence of weapons of mass destruction was produced the public mood would change dramatically;
- h. maintaining internal cohesion was important, not least in respect of the Islamic community;
- i. although the Prime Minister, Foreign Secretary and Secretary of State for Defence were best able to speak from an informed position, since they had access to the intelligence, Cabinet members more generally needed to speak up for the Government's policy on Iraq;
- j. pushing the Middle East Peace Process forward remained an important part of our policy, as was stability in the region;

Summing up the discussion, THE PRIME MINISTER said that the strategy based on the United Nations route was clear although the uncertainties loomed large and there was a natural reluctance to go to

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war. It was to be expected that the public would want the inspectors to find the evidence before military action was taken. Pursuing the United Nations route was the right policy, but we should not rule out the possibility of military action without a second resolution. The priorities for the immediate future were: improved communications, which would set out the Government's strategy and be promoted by the whole Cabinet; preparatory work on planning the aftermath of any military action and the role of the United Nations in that, which should in turn be conveyed to the Iraqi people so that they had a vision of a better life in prospect; and contingency work on the unintended consequences which could arise from the Iraqi use of weapons of mass destruction, environmental catastrophe or internecine strife within Iraq.

The Cabinet -

Took note.

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