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#### NOTE

What's the problem? If we delay, we risk Saddam messing us about, sucking us back into a game of hide and seek with the Inspectors where, unless they find "the smoking gun", the thing drags on for ever until we give up or get distracted.

On the other hand, at present there is not support for a second UN Resolution; and Blix is not yet in a clear and unambiguous position on Iraqi non-co-operation.

The arguments for proceeding with a second Resolution, or at the very least a clear statement from Blix which allows us to argue that a failure to pass a second Resolution is a breach of the spirit of 1441, remain, in my view, overwhelming.

1. It is the best protection in the admittedly unlikely event there is a military hitch; or for any reason the "shock and awe" strike doesn't immediately do the job; and a campaign is more protracted.
2. Since part of the military strategy involves the immediate death of significant numbers of Iraqi soldiers - to deter the rest - and since again there is always a risk of civilian casualties, doing this in the context of international opposition to the whole venture will be very tough.
3. My canvassing of Arab opinion is that yes they want it done, and want it done quickly, but they are assuming a second Resolution. Without one, they would be in a real bind, especially if parts of Europe, Russia, China, etc were all vociferous in their opposition.

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4. As always, the object of our attack – in this case Saddam – is emboldened by a lack of international support for us and weakened by its existence. Saddam hunkering down in Baghdad is not impossible, if he believes international opinion is against us.

5. The biggest risk we face is internecine fighting between all the rival groups, religions, tribes, etc. in Iraq when the military strike destabilises the regime. They are perfectly capable, on previous form, of killing each other in large numbers. We will need the backing of the international community and preferably the UN to handle it. We will get the blame for any fighting without it.

6. Above all – in so far as these things are fought nowadays, diplomatically and politically as well as militarily – we lose the high ground by forfeiting the UN route. We have invested huge capital in it and it has given everyone – as you saw at Prague – a big comfort blanket. Take it away and this is about US power, naked and in their face. At present, the blunt position is there are big majorities against action without UN backing everywhere, even in the UK (to be blunt, even in the UK Cabinet). This will be so in spades if even the UN Inspectors appear to be asking for more time and we are refusing.

What's the way through?

In truth, the world is in contradiction. No one is really prepared for war, except us. But equally no one believes Saddam is telling the truth. In part, we are victims of our own success. Your strength on the issue has forced Saddam to let

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Inspectors back in; has made him seem weak and back in his box. So, everyone asks: why bother?

But they also know, deep down, WMD is an issue and that given half a chance Saddam would be at it again. And they don't want, ideally, to fall out with the US. But to avoid falling out, they need some cover.

This contradiction is personified in the UN Inspectors and attitudes to them. The French/German view of the Inspectors is precisely that they are there to play hide and seek. So they should stay as long as it takes for them to find everything, without any obligation on Saddam other than not to hinder them in looking.

The true view of the inspections is that the Iraqi duty set out in 1441 is to co-operate fully: not just in access, but in being open, honest and transparent about where WMD is and actively helping the Inspectors to seize it and destroy it.

Fortunately, and despite the odd wobble, Blix himself accepts the true view. Based on my talk with him, if he finds "the smoking gun" (and we are working very hard to get it for him), that is it and immediately the UN should discuss action; if things carry on as they are, then he will say there is not full co-operation though there is not either the absence of any co-operation; but as he continues to demand Iraq fully co-operates and they continue to refuse, this pattern of non-co-operation – even in the absence of any "smoking gun" is sufficient for him to harden up his findings; and I think will be sufficient for us:

i.e. in the US/UK view, the failure of Iraq fully to co-operate is enough now and technically we are right. 27 January should be crunch time. But we won't carry

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other people on this on 27 January. However, if Blix carries on reporting non-co-operation, makes increasing demands, and hardens his findings with each stage, I think we will carry people – even without “the smoking gun” – shortly.

My view is that military action starting at the end of March/early April, rather than the end of February/early March, is not a big military problem – especially given the force we contemplate. But the extra time could be crucial in carrying international opinion with us, provided we define clearly what the true role of the Inspectors is and get Blix behind it.

So my proposal is:

- Blix reports on 27 January and says he is not satisfied that Iraq is doing all it can to co-operate. There are X and Y further questions – what’s happened to the leftovers from 1998, where are the witnesses, etc.
- We set out clearly the true role of the Inspectors and get Blix’s support for it. We say we believe Iraq is in breach but even so, out of deference to allies, we are prepared to give the Inspectors some time.
- Blix agrees to report in February and again in March, perhaps at two weekly intervals.
- We make it clear that if by the time of the late March report there is not a definitive change of Iraqi attitude, we will take it back to the UN and expect action.
- Blix continues to find an absence of full co-operation not once on 27 January but in February and again in March, so we have built a clear pattern of deceit.

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The disadvantages of this strategy are military delay – but it's only, effectively, a month. And of course Saddam may adjust his behaviour or Blix may become less clear. But that is a risk in any event.

The advantages, however, are huge.

- It allows us to build a case based on the Inspectors not just our own judgement.
- Blix may find “the smoking gun” (and I certainly don't discount this, though neither do I rely on it).
- Saddam may crack.
- We have a far better chance of a second Resolution, and a second Resolution gives us a clear run with public support.
- The Saudis and other Arabs can build support for their strategy to push Saddam out.
- We have time – which I believe we need – to work up more coherent post Saddam and “aftermath” plans.
- Above all, it gives those who want to support us, but at present feel they've no cover, to say: the US has listened; time has been given to Blix; we agree with their deadline on that basis and their interpretation of Iraq's duty to co-operate under 1441.
- It also gives us time to make a bigger case on WMD and the link with terrorism. The world is very complacent about this. As I say, partly because of our success in forcing Saddam to back down and accept inspections, support for war has ebbed rather than flowed. Opinion sort of feels we are bent on war, would prefer it to peace even. That is the reason why people are

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taking refuge in the UN. We need to re-make the context for this, and show a bit of willing in the meantime to carry our critics.

In parallel we should of course maintain our rhetoric and step up military preparations.

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