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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 13 MARCH 2003
at 10.00 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 Geoff Hoon MP
Secretary of State for Defence

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

The Rt Hon Helen Liddell MP
Secretary of State for Scotland

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

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

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

The Rt Hon Hilary Armstrong MP
Chief Whip

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

The Rt Hon Paul Boateng MP
Chief Secretary to the Treasury

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

SECRETARIAT

Sir Andrew Turnbull
Sir Stephen Wall
Sir David Manning
Mr P Britton
Mr D Bowen
Mr R Fellgett

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FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Iraq

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3. THE PRIME MINISTER said that work continued in the United Nations to obtain a second Security Council Resolution. Yesterday we had presented the six tests by which we would judge whether President Saddam Hussein of Iraq had decided to commit himself to Iraq's disarmament. These tests were endorsed by Dr Blix, one of the United Nations Chief Inspectors. Satisfying these tests would not mean that disarmament was complete, but that the first steps had been taken to this end. The non-permanent members of the Security Council were uncomfortable in a situation where, following the French decision to veto, the five permanent members were not shouldering their responsibilities properly. But the outcome in the Security Council remained open. If the United Nations process broke down, difficult decisions would be required and, in that case, he intended to hold another Cabinet meeting at which the Attorney General would be present.

Continuing, THE PRIME MINISTER said that there were two other important points. The Middle East Peace Process needed to be revived. The reconstruction of Iraq after a conflict would need a United Nations Security Council Resolution. The United States of America had now agreed to this, which would help bring countries with divergent views on military action back together again. A final point was that there were worries about deteriorating relations between the Turks and Iraqi Kurds. He and President Bush of the United States had

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sent messages to the Turkish leadership to enjoin restraint.

THE FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH SECRETARY said that although members of the Security Council differed over the handling of Iraq, none was saying that Iraq was complying with its international obligations. It followed that Iraq continued to be in material breach. As regards the legal basis for military action, he was already on record in setting out the position to the Foreign Affairs Committee. The negotiating history of Security Council Resolution 1441 was as follows: the French and Russians had wanted a definition of what would constitute a material breach, but had settled for the facts being presented to the Security Council; they had also wanted a statement that explicit authorisation was required for military action and instead had settled for further consideration by the Security Council of the situation. Failure by Iraq to comply with Security Council Resolution 1441 revived the authorisations existing in Security Council Resolutions 678 and 687. He noted that when the issue had been discussed with the Government's supporters there had been a clear preference for a second Security Council Resolution but that had not been seen as an absolute necessity. In New York, good progress had been made in gaining the support of uncertain non-permanent members of the Security Council, including Mexico and Chile. The French President's public assertion on Tuesday that France would veto in any circumstance was utterly irresponsible. The United Nations Secretary-General was equally unhappy with this development. Overall, the sense he had in the House of Commons was that there was growing understanding for the Government's case.

In discussion, the following points were made:

- a. the integrity of the United Nations process should be respected and enough time allowed for Saddam Hussein to meet the tests we had set;
- b. the French threat to veto a second Security Council Resolution was significant because it implied that France would never be prepared to use force despite having committed itself to that possibility in agreeing to Security Council Resolution 1441: their approach amounted to dismissing the evidence and insisting on indefinite delay;
- c. the unity of the Security Council had been undermined

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by the French position which did not allow the logic of Security Council Resolution 1441 to be followed through;

- d. United Nations authority for the reconstruction of Iraq was essential so that all countries and international institutions could contribute;
- e. whatever the outcome of negotiations in the United Nations, bridges would have to be rebuilt, including with the French;
- f. the majority of support in Europe amongst the 25 was with the British line;
- g. a balance had to be struck between striving for a second Security Council Resolution and then being prepared to do without it if that was the outcome of negotiations in the Security Council; the political, moral and legal case would be easier to make if such a Resolution could be achieved;
- h. the atmosphere in the Middle East and more generally would be transformed for the better if the United States could be persuaded to publish the "road map" for the Middle East Peace Process;
- i. the flexibility shown by the United Kingdom in trying to achieve a second Security Council Resolution should be juxtaposed with the rigidity of the French and German position;
- j. although the rhetoric by the United States leadership was sometimes unpopular in this country, that did not mean that their policy was wrong: the American President had made more use of the United Nations than his predecessor and had publicly committed the United States to a two state solution in the Middle East;
- k. reports of the Government's supporters resigning in their thousands were untrue, indeed there had recently been a net gain in membership.

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Summing up, THE PRIME MINISTER said that there had been welcome progress in the Middle East with the appointment of a Palestinian Prime Minister. This called for a positive response by the United States. In considering the reconstruction of Iraq, it was essential that oil revenues should be administered by a trust fund set up by the United Nations. Why the French had adopted their position of veto looked to be based on a calculation of strategic benefit. It was in contradiction of the Security Council's earlier view that military action would follow if Iraq did not fully and unconditionally co-operate with the inspectors. France's motivation seemed to be in establishing a rival pole of power to that of the United States. Chancellor Schroeder of Germany was uncomfortable with such an approach. The United Kingdom would continue to show flexibility in its efforts to achieve a second Security Council Resolution, and if France could be shown to be intransigent the mood of the Security Council could change towards support for the British draft.

The Cabinet -

Took note

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