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From: Tim Dowse, CPD
Date: 23 April 2003

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Private Secretary

note below. h.c. from 23/4

SUBJECT: IRAQ WMD: UK/US TALKS, 21-22 APRIL

1. I accompanied Martin Howard (DCDI) and other MOD and SIS representatives to Washington on 21-22 April for discussions with the Americans on taking forward the hunt for Iraqi WMD. Washington telno 534 (attached) gives a good overview of the talks with DOD, State and NSC. I would highlight the following points.

Immediate action

2. The immediate need is to ensure that both the US and UK are making best use of the quite substantial specialist military assets we have in theatre now, to pursue the search for evidence of WMD programmes. Our understanding is that the UK assets are not being used at all in their intended roles; the (500-strong) US 75th Exploitation Task Force is searching sites, but largely on an opportunity basis rather than in accordance with a coherent set of priorities. The commanders on the spot have – understandably – been focussed first on winning the war and then in responding to pressure to restore basic services to the Iraqi people. They now need to make a further gear-change, and put WMD at the top, of their priorities. DCDI will visit theatre early next week to make sure this message gets across to UK commanders. The Americans are taking parallel action with CENTCOM.

3. A particular concern is getting access to scientists and others involved in the Iraqi programmes who, reporting suggests, are ready to spill the beans. We continue to believe that this route is most likely to provide the evidence of Iraqi programmes that we need. individuals; many others are unlocated, but the great

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majority are in the Baghdad area. The real need is for an (advertised) "gateway" in Baghdad from where contact can be made with both walk-ins and others and from where, after filtration, those of real interest can be taken to a secure location for questioning. But such a facility requires security. We agreed with the Americans that this should be pursued urgently with the theatre commanders. ✓

The Iraq Survey Group (ISG)

4. In the short to medium term, the task of hunting down WMD will move to the ISG (which will also be pursuing terrorist and regime targets, MIAs, etc). The reporting telegram's reference to an "initial operating capability" by end-May is a little misleading. General Dayton, the commander-designate, is travelling to the theatre today to settle command and control arrangements with CENTCOM. Thereafter, he expects the ISG to roll out incrementally from the start of May, as existing units are transferred to his command and additional assets arrive. Subject to Mr Hoon's approval, MOD have agreed in principle to a UK contingent in the ISG of about 100 specialist personnel, including the Chief of Staff. The Australians will also have a small team; the Americans are keen to involve other nationalities (though I suspect their ability to attract others may depend on the extent to which the ISG is seen as a competitor or collaborator with the UN).

5. Dayton appeared to envisage his task being completed in 6 months – terminating with the establishment of an Iraqi Interim Authority. Everyone else we saw thought this was unrealistic. (It certainly sits oddly with the ISG's supposed responsibility for *elimination* as well as discovery of WMD programmes. Dayton appeared to envisage handing this role over to other US agencies). But there was clear concern that the longer the operation lasted, the more it risked attracting Iraqi hostility.

Managing Expectations

6. All our interlocutors agreed on the urgent need to manage public expectations. This is not a matter of suggesting that we may not, in the event, find any evidence of WMD programmes – on the contrary, we remain confident that we will. It is more a case of drumming home the twin messages that:

this will not be a quick process. Of course, we might get lucky and find a smoking gun tomorrow. But the chances are that we will not: Saddam has had twelve years to hide the evidence and it is unreasonable to expect us to find it in a couple of weeks. (To date, less than 10% of HMG's priority list of 146 suspect sites have been visited);

the sort of evidence we turn up is less likely to be in the form of finished materiel - stockpiles of chemical or biological weapons, long-range missiles, etc - than testimony from scientists and documentation about WMD development and production programmes. This is not a new line: it is why from the outset we put such emphasis on the UN inspectors

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conducting private interviews. (DOD were inclined to seize on recent media reports, suggesting that the WMD stockpiles had been destroyed immediately prior to hostilities, as the answer to our prayers. We pointed out that, to carry any credibility at all, we would have to back such a claim with convincing evidence – just as we demanded that the Iraqis provide evidence of destruction to the UN).

7. Ms Bronson (DOD) put it rather well: we have a 20,000 piece jigsaw puzzle, where 15,000 pieces have been hidden in a haystack. We need to find the pieces, and then put them together to make the picture. That cannot be done overnight. NSC said that they were considering an early speech by an Administration figure to get these points across. (CENTCOM have also begun to stress in their briefings the painstaking, multi-layered, nature of the process for verifying reported 'finds').

Validation

8. All our interlocutors took the initiative in mentioning the need for credible third-party validation of coalition findings. We made the point that what constituted credibility was inevitably going to be subjective - ie what was sufficient for the UK and US governments might not be enough for the audiences we really needed to convince, including the Security Council (and the UK media). Like it or not, it was hard to escape the fact that a UN seal of approval would be the most difficult for the critics to dismiss. We also needed to bear in mind that most of the other governments we might approach for 'validation' were likely raise questions about the UN role (we have already run across this with the Dutch).

9. The Americans did not seriously try to argue the point, but I doubt that we entirely overcame the deep reluctance – particularly in the Pentagon – to contemplate a further role for UNMOVIC. The US attitude is as much emotional as rational. Even at State, John Wolf (Assistant Secretary) said that he had been asked to speak to Blix before yesterday's Security Council meeting, but had refused.



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NO. OF ATTACHMENTS: 1

On immediate action, Martin Howard,
[UK and US officials] will travel to Baghdad +
Basra next week to set up safe
areas + reception points to which those
with knowledge of Iraqi WMD can
come. They will also work on incentives

h.c. [unclear]
23/4

Page 3

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