

CONFIDENTIAL
DECLASSIFIED



PM/03/033

PRIME MINISTER

Prime Minister
You should be aware.
We are pushing the hard
 dossier hard: but US's
 points are well taken

DN
cc: SP
NR
NC

Now file ppe
AG

✓ *Ann 7/5.*

Iraq: WMD Detection and Elimination

1. I have seen Martyn Williams' letter of 28 April to Sir David Manning, reporting on the recent MOD/FCO/SIS officials' visit to Washington to discuss US plans for handling the detection and elimination of Iraqi WMD.
2. As you know, I am concerned that this issue should not become the foundation on which critics of our military action in Iraq can build a new case to attack us. I am therefore pleased that action is under way to impress on the commanders in theatre the attention which the search for evidence of WMD must receive among their various competing priorities. It is important that the various specialist military assets which both we and the US have deployed are used to their greatest effect. I am also pleased that work is in hand to identify a substantial UK contribution to the US-led Iraq Survey Group (ISG), which will carry forward the task of uncovering Saddam's illegal programmes in the medium term.
3. The timeframe for deployment of the ISG (between six months and two years) points up the need to do more to manage expectations on this issue. This is not a matter of suggesting that we may not, in the event, find any evidence of WMD programmes. On the contrary, as you told the media on 28 April, we are confident that we will. But we must keep drumming home three messages:

CONFIDENTIAL

DECLASSIFIED

CONFIDENTIAL
DECLASSIFIED



- we already have substantial evidence: both from before the fighting and in what we have discovered since. There is 173 pages of evidence in Blix's 7 March report. Examples since include the discoveries of large stockpiles of protective suits and atropine: coalition forces were well-known not to possess chemical weapons, so what reason would Iraq have had for such stockpiles other than to protect its forces against its own chemical weapons?
- this will not be a quick process. Saddam has had twelve years to hide the evidence and it is unreasonable to expect us to uncover it in a few weeks. We should be stressing that the process of discovery and validation cannot be rushed: we must be extremely thorough to minimise the risk of false alarms. We have a 20,000-piece jigsaw, where almost all of the pieces have been hidden. We need first to find the pieces and then put them together to reveal the picture;
- evidence can take many forms. It may well not be in the form of finished materiel (stockpiles of munitions, barrels of nerve agent etc); it is equally if not more likely to come in the form of testimony from scientists and other Iraqi personnel, and documentation. That sort of evidence is no less valid.

4. I note the MOD's concern that this second message might be interpreted as moving the goalposts. It clearly needs to be deployed with care, but it is an important point which needs to be got across. And it is not new: it is why we placed such emphasis on the UN inspectors conducting secure interviews with scientists. I think it carries more weight than the claim raised in some US newspapers that the Iraqis may have destroyed their WMD in the days immediately prior to the war. For that to carry any credibility at all, it would have to be backed with very convincing evidence of such destruction.

CONFIDENTIAL

DECLASSIFIED

CONFIDENTIAL
DECLASSIFIED



5. Finally, I note that the US Administration accepts the need for some form of credible independent validation of coalition WMD discoveries, but some within it remain resistant to this role being fulfilled by UNMOVIC or the IAEA. I think that we should go on trying to change US minds about this, albeit most realistically for the medium rather than the short term. Blix will retire from the scene in June, which may help; but we need to work with the US on the right succession. Whatever we may think of the inspectors' past competence, their task has now changed, to one essentially of observation and reporting. Coalition forces will do the detective work. But the fact is that the inspectors still carry most weight with the audiences we need to convince, in the Security Council or the media. It would be odd if the coalition was now to refuse to co-operate with the weapons inspectors after we made this a centrepiece of our case against Saddam.

6. I am copying this minute to Geoff Hoon, "C", Dr David Pepper, Sir David Manning, John Scarlett and Sir Andrew Turnbull.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Jack Straw".

(JACK STRAW)

Foreign and Commonwealth Office

02 May 2003

CONFIDENTIAL

DECLASSIFIED

