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Commonwealth
Office

2 June 2003

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To Mr. Patten London SW1A 2AH

cc: Mr
NC
DHA
Mo

file per 4/6

Iraqi WMD

Thank you for your letter of 16 May, outlining progress in uncovering hard evidence of Iraqi prohibited weapons programmes. You asked for our views on media handling.

I agree that we have pro-actively to confront some of the negative media about the lack of Iraqi WMD, and work to ensure that some of the evidence that is coming to light finds its way into the public domain. Or, as you say, the media will remain camped on the position of No evidence, No justification. In the absence of independent validation of Coalition WMD finds, the media are playing a crucial role in setting public opinion. Having an effective media strategy, agreed inter-departmentally, will help address this. I understand that this wider issue is being addressed under MoD leadership.

The idea of working with the BBC Panorama programme on Iraqi WMD, seems an excellent way to take the strategy forward in the short term. Providing background briefing, and unobtrusively helping point the programme makers in the right direction

should help bring to light some of the hard evidence that is being uncovered. It will be important to ensure that Panorama maintains its overall independence, and that we play a supporting, not a leading, role in directing the programme. However, we should not regard this as an exclusive for Panorama. One programme, by itself, will not persuade a sceptical audience. Rather, we should work with a range of journalists to ensure that the message comes across clearly and coherently.

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I am copying this letter to Sir David Manning (No 10),
John Scarlett (Chairman JIC), Martin Howard (DCDI, MOD) and
William Ehrman.

Yours ever
Simon

(Simon McDonald)
Principal Private Secretary

Vauxhall Cross

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