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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 7 MARCH 2002
at 10.30 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 Alistair Darling MP
Secretary of State for Work and Pensions

The Rt Hon Stephen Byers MP
Secretary of State for Transport,
Local Government and the Regions

The Rt Hon Alan Milburn MP
Secretary of State for Health

The Rt Hon Dr John Reid MP
Secretary of State for Northern Ireland

The Rt Hon Paul Murphy MP
Secretary of State for Wales

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The Rt Hon Geoff Hoon MP
Secretary of State for Defence

The Rt Hon Helen Liddell MP
Secretary of State for Scotland

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 Andrew Smith MP
Chief Secretary to the Treasury

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

The Rt Hon Estelle Morris MP
Secretary of State for Education and Skills

The Rt Hon Hilary Armstrong MP
Chief Whip

The Rt Hon Charles Clarke MP
Minister without Portfolio and Party Chair

ALSO PRESENT

The Rt Hon The Lord Carter
Captain of the Gentlemen-at-Arms

The Rt Hon John Spellar MP
Minister for Transport

SECRETARIAT

Sir Richard Wilson

Sir David Manning

Mr P Britton

Ms L Bell

Mr T McKane

Mr M Roberts

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FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Iraq

3. THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS said that, in view of current media speculation about military action against the regime of President Saddam Hussein of Iraq, it was important to remind colleagues of the background to the current situation. President Saddam Hussein launched an unprovoked invasion of Kuwait in 1990. Following his defeat in 1991, 27 separate obligations, designed to provide a peaceful future for the Iraqi people and Iraq's neighbours, were imposed by the United Nations Security Council. Of these President Saddam Hussein's regime had met only three. His regime continued to pose a threat to peace through its development of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) and the means to deliver them. United Nations weapons inspectors had been forced to leave Iraq in 1998 because they were close to exposing the full extent of President Saddam Hussein's programmes. Iraq's neighbours were concerned about the threat to peace which President Saddam Hussein

Iraq Inquiry note. This paragraph continues unbroken onto the next page.

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posed but feared that military action which did not result in his removal from power would strengthen his position.

Continuing, THE FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH SECRETARY said that sanctions imposed by the United Nations were not preventing food and other humanitarian goods from reaching Iraq. Contracts to a value of \$30 billion had been approved under the Oil For Food programme administered by the United Nations. The United Kingdom alone had given £100 million in humanitarian aid to Iraq. Negotiations were currently in train to change the sanctions regime so that, with the exception of those military and dual-use goods included on a Goods Review List, all goods could be imported into Iraq without the prior approval of the United Nations. President Saddam Hussein's regime had to comply fully with all relevant United Nations Security Council resolutions, including the elimination of all WMD, in order to normalise its relations with its neighbours and the wider international community. No decision had been taken on launching further military action against the Iraqi regime but it was important to ensure that the British public and international opinion understood the true nature of the threat posed by the regime and the need to respond effectively.

In discussion, the following were the main points made:

- a. it was important to distinguish between the campaign against international terrorism and efforts to address the threat to international peace posed by the Iraqi regime's continuing development of WMD;
- b. it would be more difficult to convince the public of the need for military action against President Saddam Hussein than it had been to secure support for action against Al Qa'ida and the Taleban regime in Afghanistan after the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001. It would be necessary to have a clear legal basis for military action and to convince people that the situation had deteriorated sufficiently to justify military action;
- c. any military action would create new tensions in the United Kingdom, particularly within the Moslem community. The domestic impact of military action would have to be weighed up carefully before any decisions were taken;

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- d. it would be important to secure maximum international support, including within the United Nations Security Council and the European Union, before any military action took place. Western policy would have to be carefully calibrated to convince President Saddam Hussein that military action would ensue if he failed to comply with United Nations Security Council Resolutions without making such action inevitable;
- e. it should be kept in mind that the military action taken in December 1998, while meeting the objectives set out by the coalition at the time, had boosted President Saddam Hussein's reputation on the Arab Street. The Iraqi regime was a more formidable opponent than the Taliban regime in Afghanistan;
- f. in order to isolate President Saddam Hussein from the rest of the Arab world it was necessary to make progress towards resolving the Israel/Palestine problem. Otherwise, the West would be accused of not being even handed. Many people believed that the Government of the United States were uncritical supporters of the Government of Israel. It was important to persuade the Government of the United States to make clear that this was not the case. The Prime Minister could play a key role in achieving this;
- g. it was important that support for the efforts of the Government of the United States to respond to the threat from the Iraqi regime was not undermined because of the current trade dispute between the European Union and the United States over steel. These two very different issues should be placed in their proper context.

Summing up, THE PRIME MINISTER said that the concerns expressed in discussion were justified. It was important that the United States did not appear to be acting unilaterally. It was critically important to reinvigorate the Middle East Peace Process. Any military action taken against President Saddam Hussein's regime had to be effective. On the other hand, the Iraqi regime was in clear breach of its obligations under several United Nations Security Council Resolutions. Its WMD

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programmes posed a threat to peace. Iraq's neighbours regarded President Saddam Hussein as a danger. The right strategy was to engage closely with the Government of the United States in order to be in a position to shape policy and its presentation. The international community should proceed in a measured but determined way to decide how to respond to the real threat represented by the Iraqi regime. No decisions to launch military action had been taken and any action taken would be in accordance with international law.

The Cabinet -

Took note, with approval.

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