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cc COS
FALGARS
AC/Press

20 February 2001

Foreign &
Commonwealth
Office

London SW1A 2AH

Dear John,

Iraq: Policy Review

The Foreign Secretary has read the Cabinet Office paper on Iraq. Although he agrees with much of it, he is concerned that it reflects military priorities at the expense of the broader diplomatic and political issues. Ultimately, however robust our military planning, our policy can succeed only if there is a degree of international consensus.

The Foreign Secretary is not persuaded by the reference to more active patrolling in the Southern No-Fly-Zone. He believes we must strongly discourage the Pentagon from going down this path. The 16 February R04 operation has demonstrated our joint resolve to counter Saddam's military ambitions, and has thus created the right background against which we can rebalance policy (Colin Powell's "anchor to the right"). Aside from the thorny question of legality, upping the tempo would also undermine our efforts to build regional and wider international support for a new approach.

The Foreign Secretary feels that the paper overstates the Iraqi threat to Kuwait were we to cease patrolling the Southern No-Fly-Zone. Saddam should be in no doubt that should he move against Kuwait, the UK/US response would be massive. So would it really be necessary to commit UK troops on the scale suggested by the paper (up to 5000)?

Therefore the Foreign Secretary believes that we should focus our efforts on exploring deterrence options with the US instead.

The Foreign Secretary is sceptical about support for exile groups. While we should make every effort to focus international attention on Saddam's brutality - Indict and other NGOs can be useful in this context - this should not translate into support for opposition groups in exile. We should keep our distance from this element of US policy.

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The Foreign Secretary judges that ideas for "narrowing" sanctions will succeed only if we use SCR 1284 as the basis. Were we seen to back off at the UN and rebuff French initiatives to elaborate the post-suspension modalities, we, not Iraq, would be seen as the obstacle to progress and would be held responsible for the prolongation of sanctions. We would remain isolated at the UN and would have little regional support. To succeed, we need to emphasise two themes - minimising Saddam's ability to develop WMD and minimising the impact of his policies on the Iraqi people.

*Yours eye
fark*

(Mark Sedwill)
Private Secretary

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