

Letter from Richard Dearlove's Private Secretary to Sir David Manning

3 December 2001

IRAQ

I attach three papers produced by [SIS4]. The first is that paper you discussed with him last Friday, the second an expansion of it and the third some thoughts on the risks and costs of US attacks on Iraq.

[signed]

Private Secretary to C

Attachment 1 to letter of 3 December 2001

IRAQ

1. What can be done about Iraq? If the US heads for direct action, have we ideas which could divert them to an alternative course?
2. These first principles and factors bear on planning against Iraq:
 - **Iraq is a centralised state.** The read-across from Afghanistan (cf Richard Perle's ideas) is deceptive: the defences of the Iraqi regime are formidable. The Tikritis are not a bunch of Taliban.
 - **Saddam rules** through fear and patronage. The Tikritis lead the Sunni minority. Neighbouring Arab states prefer the Sunnis to the Shi'i alternative. They fear Kurdish expansionism. Iraqi Sunnis will only replace Saddam, if their future in power is assured. The intelligence view of Saddam's health gives him at least 5 years to live.
 - **The failure to unseat Saddam** in 1991 set up a conviction in the Middle East that Saddam coincides with US interest. Iraqi confidence in the West has been undermined.
 - [...]
 - **Iraqi external** opposition groups are divided, badly penetrated by the DGI and have little credibility inside Iraq.
 - **US intentions.** Action against Iraq will be seen as a change of agenda from the war against terror (which most Arab regimes support). This would undermine today's unity of purpose. There is no convincing intelligence (or common sense) case that Iraq supports Sunni extremism.
 - Two factors in political reaction in the region:
 - **The Street** will sympathise with the Iraqis and this will threaten Arab regimes.
 - **Regimes** will see action against WMD as a trailer for action against themselves. The concern is concealed in worries about the street. [...]
 - **The Shi'ah and the Kurds** are unstable allies and a red rag to the neighbours.
 - There are **significant fragilities** among the neighbours: Jordan, Syria, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia.
 - **The implications for our regional alliances** of a US installed regime in Iraq are profound and not all positive. 'Fundamentalism' would be boosted.

3. [...]

WMD

4. [...] It is not clear [...] that destruction of these facilities would do more than temporarily arrest Iraq's WMD capabilities. Note the absence of a nuclear target.

[...]

5. [...]

THE STRATEGIC VIEW

- Iraq, like Syria and Iran, has significant link with Russia; a resonance throughout the Islamic world for opposition to US and Israel; a revolutionary regime which resonate with the Street under conservative regimes; a significant WMD capability; and hostility to our 'traditionally friendly' Arab governments. Action against Iraq climbs a steep gradient of complex regional opposition.
- EU governments, perhaps recognising the above, have political initiatives with both Baghdad and Tehran. EU co-ordination is therefore problematic.
- UNSC co-ordination has already proved difficult (because the Iraqis influence the Russians and, less, the Chinese). In 1990, UNSCRs provided legitimacy.
- Iraq, like Syria and Iran, has an important border with Turkey. The Turks are elemental to successful policy in Iraq, as they are in a range of NATO, counter narcotics, Cyprus and other issues.
- Iraq policy is inextricably tied up with the problem of Israel. Egypt, vital to UK interests in the Middle East – especially on overflights, is vulnerable to Iraqi influence due to the failure of MEPP. [...]
- Maintaining international cohesion against terrorism is a prior imperative. It will cost Iraq influence and prestige to be left out of this.
- While Iraq is succeeding in eroding sanctions, isolation is costing Baghdad heavily [...] pressure from the military to upgrade and maintain balances (especially with Iran) is a problem for Saddam.

Attachment 2 to letter of 3 December 2001

IRAQ: Further thoughts

1. At our meeting on 30 November, we discussed how we could combine an objective of regime change in Baghdad with the need to protect important regional interest which would be at grave risk, if a bombing campaign against Iraq were launched in the short term. The attachment sets out these risks and costs. The paragraphs below draw on our discussion of a possible way ahead.

2. The problem so far:

- [...]
- Regionally, Saddam has won the Street, posing a threat to pro-Western states and clients.
- Regimes have compromised with Baghdad (sanctions busting) for gain because they see no prospect of effective action to remove Saddam.
- Iraq policy has got bogged down in talk about double standards over Israel and WMD.

WHY MOVE?

3. The removal of Saddam remains a prize because it could give new security to oil supplies; engage a powerful and secular state in the fight against Sunni extremist terror, open political horizons in the GCC states, remove a threat to Jordan/Israel, undermine the regional logic on WMD. The major challenge would be managing the regional reintegration of Iraq, without damaging important local relationships. Working for regime change could be a dynamic process of alliance building which could effect climatic change in the Arab-Israeli conflict.

A NEW ROUTE MAP

4. The key idea is that it is possible to speak openly about support for regime change in Iraq, without compromising the actual project to support a coup. The overall plan would need to be like an onion – each layer concealing the one below. The whole is a policy statement: **we want regime change in Baghdad and we are ready to provide air support to coup makers** (in practice they would need to be Sunnis ready to abide by UN resolutions). The inmost part is knowledge of the coup makers with whom we are in touch and their operational plan. The layers in between would need to include operational plans under these headings:

5. To meet US impatience a 12-18 month time-frame should be imposed.

- Government law officers to provide assurances of **legality** (there has been a serious problem here).

- A short pause for **confidential high level discussions** with key partners in US, EU, NATO, UNSC the region. The message is as in bold in 4 above plus assurances that this approach is going to be balanced, studied, planned and proportionate – better than bombing now.
- Initial contacts with **EU** [...] to reinforce political message, survey local sensitivities, considerations and solutions.
- [...]
- **Diplomatic examination** of interests affected and ways and means to compensate (especially Turkey, Iran and Syria).
- **Military planning:** requirements for air support and feasibilities. Introduction of necessary military infrastructure into the region. Consideration of international participation in this task force.
- **Legal examination of Iraqi liabilities** and draft arrangements to manage these (war reparations, Russian debt, Kuwaiti losses &c).
- **Significant economic attention** to Turkey, Syria and Jordan – advantageous investment projects, visits, technical and political support.
- Briefing of Palestinians and their support engaged. **Increased DfID involvement in Palestinian areas.**
- Step up in **cultural support:** a wider waterfront of engagement is needed: student scholarships, missions, step up in British Council activity.
- **Military links:** anti-terrorist training, strategic management &c.
- Step change in **intelligence collection** and sharing on Iraq. [...]
- **Management of nervous systems in Israel and Egypt** – both have traditional fears of Iraqi political/economic competition though there are significant opportunities for both. Egypt (as before 1990) will play a significant role.
- Promotion of serious **debate** within the region on **WMD:** costs and responsibilities. **Egyptian propaganda capabilities engaged** to prepare the region for change in Iraq.

STAFFING

6. The Whitehall implementation and co-ordination of this programme would need a dedicated team – led by a DUS in FCO or a senior military officer?

[...]

7. [...]

OUR AIMS FOR THE REGION

8. Behind this Iraqi agenda lies two further aims: climatic change in the psychology of regimes in the region, a precondition for progress in the Arab-Israel dispute; and revealing a further horizon of intention to address the regional issue of WMD. The problem of WMD is an element in driving for action against Iraq. In turn, this should open prospects for Arab-Israelis talks, and, beyond, regional work to reduce the WMD inventories which threaten Europe as well.

Attachment 3 to letter of 3 December 2001

US ATTACKS ON IRAQ: THE RISKS AND COSTS

Iraq is a centralised state. The read across from Afghanistan (cf Richard Perle's ideas) is deceptive: the defences of the Iraqi regime are formidable. The Tikritis are not a bunch of Taliban. The outcomes of a bombing campaign would be both uncertain and hard to control. In 1991, 40 days of heavy bombing did not unseat Saddam, or inspire a coup, or eliminate his WMD capabilities, or destroy the Iraqi army.

Key points:

STRATEGIC

- US seen as moving the goal posts. Increased distrust of US motives throughout the Islamic world. Confidence in HMG, as a close US ally, also damaged.
- Serious strain on the coalition against terrorism.
- Terrorists' motives and grievances reinforced, lifting the threat from terrorist action.
- Turbulence in the oil markets. Corresponding damage to Third World economies.

UNITED NATIONS

- Further erosion of UN sanctions, as sympathy for Iraq grows amongst Arab/Muslim states.
- Renewed splits in the UNSC (France, Russia and China). End any hope of revised sanctions implementation by June 2002.
- Damage to US/Russian/Chinese relations (impact on NATO's dealings with Russia).
- HMG faced with EU opposition, both popular and governmental.
- Higher oil prices as Iraq ceases oil exports under the UN programme. Prices rise further as war creates market uncertainty. Saudi interventions (or lack of them) determine price levels.

REGIONAL

- Anger and resentment in the Arab Street. The bombing will be seen [sic] as an attack on ordinary Arabs, rather than Saddam. Consequent popular pressure on regional regimes, especially in the Gulf.
- Major political/diplomatic disturbance. The Arab League has declared 'an attack on one, an attack on all'. Jordan and Saudi Arabia have agreed a common rejection of military action against Iraq.
- Accusations of double standards (one law for the Israelis; another for the Arabs).
- Increase in radical Islamist extremism, particularly in Egypt. Threat to tourists.
- Threat to key allies' stability and (consequently) to oil supplies: Saudi Arabia and Kuwait both vulnerable to accusations of US clientship, and Jordan where sympathy for Iraq (and some cynicism about the king) runs high.
- Potential damage to Turkish economy.
- Increased danger to UK nationals and embassies.
- Implications for Iraqi No Fly Zones: Saudis may refuse to allow future air-strikes or deny basing rights, with impact on our containment policy (CNFZ) and ability to defence

Kuwait. Turkish support for NNFZ will wane if the Saudis prevent the SNFZ from operating.

- Regional states could refuse over-flight rights for military aircraft.
- Boost to the Intifada and damage to MEPP efforts.
- Impact on Pakistan. Musharraf compromised as a US puppet. Implications for Indian reactions to Pakistani turbulence.
- And on Iran, another major WMD state (with influence in Afghanistan).

IRAQ INTERNAL

- Likely to bolster Saddam internally, particularly amongst the Sunni elite.
- If Saddam sees an existential threat, he may attack Israel with any remaining SCUD type missiles armed with CBW warheads: The Samson Scenario.
- Short of this and to draw in other Arab states, Saddam may attack Israel with conventional weapons. Unconventional attacks on Israel or UK/US military assets in the region cannot be ruled out.
- Division of Iraq consequent on regime change, though unlikely, is opposed by Iraq's neighbours.
- Shi'ah or Kurds wielding power likewise unacceptable.
- External opposition's lack of internal credibility a problem in any nation-building post-regime change.
- Possible refugee/humanitarian crisis. [...]