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SECRETARY OF STATE

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PRIME MINISTER

IRAQ

The key strategic problem is the spread of WMD – of which Saddam is only one unpleasant dimension. A more active counter-proliferation strategy is required for the region as a whole (for example any Iraqi Government will seek WMD if Iran is getting them so our strategy must cover both). On Iraq, we should support President Bush and be ready for a military contribution. It would take our forces longer to get there than the US's (if they are working on 90 days from decision). US planning : we should be involved in the detail before we commit our forces.

Before Crawford, may I register a few points from our analysis here.

The spread of WMD is a serious problem: !

In objective terms, Iran may be the greater problem for the UK: their missiles with WMD will be able to reach Europe including us by . There is no current plan to deal with these risks. Ironically, we have Saddam Hussein bound into an established control mechanism. There is some substance in the US view that he as an individual is at the root of the WMD risk in Iraq. But any Iraqi Government is liable to try to achieve a balance of forces with Iran. I strongly support the parallel campaign by Jack to tackle Iran through the IAEA system.

In considering how to support President Bush on Iraq there are three factors we should keep in mind:



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- a. The US already has heavy land forces in the region; ours are in Europe. The US is planning on the basis that it would take 90 days to deploy all necessary forces to the region; it would take us longer.
- b. Despite ten years of searching, no one has found a credible successor to Saddam.
- c. If a coalition takes control of Baghdad (especially without catching Saddam), it will probably have to stay there for many years.

As matters stand we are not privy to detailed US planning, either strategically across the region or on Iraq. Before any decision to commit British forces, we ought to know that the US has a militarily plausible plan with a reasonable prospect of success compared to the risks and within the framework of international law. Our involvement in planning would improve their process - and help address our lead-time problem. It would enable either CDS to reassure you that there is a sound military plan or give you a basis to hold back if the US cannot find a sensible scheme. Although we have made some progress at getting inside the Pentagon loop, I suggest one of your objectives at Crawford should be to secure agreement to the UK's participation in US military planning, recognising that we shall have to give reassurances on operational security. (We would make the arrangements with the Pentagon so there is no need to get into detail.)

You might also raise with President Bush the need for a comprehensive public handling strategy, so that we can explain convincingly why we need to take such drastic action against Iraq's WMD now.

I am copying this minute to the Foreign Secretary and Sir Richard Wilson only.


(G H)

Ministry of Defence

22 March 2002