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PM/02/042

PRIME MINISTER

1384

Iraq: Contingency Planning

1. I have seen the MOD's report on the 27-29 June US/UK talks on contingency planning for military action against Iraq (Peter Watkins' 2 July letter to David Manning). The report raises several points which concern me. I support Geoff Hoon's suggestion of an early meeting. In preparation, I offer the following thoughts.

2. We are all agreed that we must act to remove the threat posed by Iraqi WMD. If the US decide that to do so requires military action then the UK will want to support them. But this will be harder for us to do without serious US effort to address some of the lacunae in their plan, notably:

- no strategic concept for the military plan and, in particular, no thought apparently given to "day after" scenarios. Although other parts of the US Administration have done some work on such aspects, US military planning so far has taken place in a vacuum;
- weak intelligence analysis and a quite unrealistic assumption that Iraqi WMD would be easy to identify and destroy;
- an assumption that Kuwait would host a large-scale US military effort for the 1-2 years probably necessary, that other Gulf States would provide necessary support, and that Syria and Iran would sit quietly on the sidelines;

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- no mention of your three conditions for UK involvement, nor of the legal base.

3. Much of what is required is covered by your three conditions for UK involvement (preparation of public opinion, UN route exhausted, and some MEPP improvement). Regional states in particular will want assurance that the US has thought through the "day after" questions before giving even tacit support. The support even of key allies such as Kuwait cannot be counted on in the absence of some serious ground-work by the US.

4. The fact that the US plan apparently ignores these conditions causes me particular concern. Are they determined to go ahead regardless? Does the omission signal a weakening of US commitment to work for progress in these areas before deciding to launch military action? None of them is getting any easier:

- in the Middle East (and elsewhere), public opinion remains deeply hostile to military action. An aggressive PR campaign, demonstrating - truthfully - that we had exhausted all other options and making the most of what limited new WMD evidence we have, would be needed to reduce this;
- on the UN route, the UN Secretary-General's dialogue with Iraq has so far made no concrete progress. But nor have talks unambiguously broken down, and the Iraqis are enjoying some propaganda success in presenting themselves as flexible and reasonable. Their aim is clearly to string out this state of affairs for as long as possible, including by making gestures on secondary issues such as Kuwaiti prisoners and property. We have not yet had a read-out from the 4-5 July talks, but we are not expecting any breakthroughs. The US position on the ICC, (and Annan's letter) has not improved atmospherics there, nor

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within the EU;

- President Bush's speech has not improved the prospects of moving the Israeli/Palestinian conflict into calmer waters.
- the prospects for constructing a legal basis for military action are uncertain at best.

5. I look forward to discussing these concerns, as well as planned UK follow-up work, at our meeting. The key point is how to get through to the Americans that the success of any military operation against Iraq - and protection of our fundamental interests in the region - depends on devising in advance a coherent strategy which assesses the political and economic, as well as military implications. They must also understand that we are serious about our conditions for UK involvement.

6. I am copying this minute to Geoff Hoon, Gordon Brown and Sir Richard Wilson.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jack Straw'.

(JACK STRAW)

Foreign and Commonwealth Office
8 July 2002

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