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1. Mr. Haigh
2. Mr. Wood o/r

From: Edward Chaplin,
Director MENA

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cc: PS/Mr O'Brien
PS/PUS
Peter Ricketts
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To: Private Secretary

IRAQ: MILITARY ACTION

1. The Cabinet Office are preparing a paper (with FCO and MoD input) for Ministerial discussion on 23 July. This will focus on the need to persuade the US Administration to put their military planning in a broader political context. MED will submit briefing nearer the time. There are also some broader points worth revisiting - which I am submitting now, as I shall be on leave for the next two weeks.
2. As the Foreign Secretary noted in his minute to the Prime Minister of 8 July, fundamental UK interests in the region are at stake. I am less gloomy than some of our Ambassadors about the consequences of military action. But the risks are high.
3. There are the immediate risks of retaliation against UK interests (ranging from political and economic retaliation to mob violence and terrorist attack). In the medium term we may be left struggling with chronic instability in Iraq. Longer term, we risk a repeat of the Suez debacle, which apart from its short-term effects (eg sweeping away the Hashemite regime in Iraq) changed Arab popular opinion towards Britain for a generation. There are also serious implications for the success of the global counter-terrorism campaign.
4. These risks can be reduced significantly by careful preparation. The 3 conditions spelled out to the Americans by the Prime Minister are interrelated. To build a coalition for military action and get domestic and international opinion on side we need:
 - clear and publicly usable evidence that the Iraq WMD threat is real (there are few believers at present in Europe, let alone the region);
 - a clear effort to exhaust all other avenues, principally the UN route. This is likely to be necessary for us to establish a legal base for military action;
 - visible improvement in the Israel/Palestine situation, to give us some protection against the arguments of double standards.

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5. These things will also increase the chances of Saddam Hussein finally backing down on inspections, which I believe is possible once he sees no alternative.

6. The Prime Minister has promised President Bush UK support for military action if these conditions are met. There is no commitment yet to UK participation in military action, nor any collective Ministerial discussion of this yet. As well as urging the US to do their political homework (on which we can help), we need to re-emphasise at the highest levels that the three conditions we have set are not just desirable in themselves for any action, but essential for UK participation, on whatever scale.



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