A FCO Minister's Note on the need to situate Britain's Decision to Use Military Force in Iraq in March 2003 in a wider European context.

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1. I was appointed an FCO minister in May 2001 and became Minister of State in November 2002. I never heard a single senior European leader challenge the assertion that Saddam Hussein had WMD. Many opposed the idea of an invasion to remove him but all said publicly as well as privately that Saddam was a threat and he either had the capability or the intention of developing and using WMD. The idea that WMD was invented or fashioned as an excuse to justify the intervention is hard to square with the view of most governments I had to deal with that Saddam had WMD.

2. The big change in the politics of the pre-invasion period was the election victory for Gerhard Schröder in September 2002 when he won a second period in office as Chancellor on a strong anti-American ticket. His opponent, Edmund Stoiber, said early in the campaign that if elected he would forbid any over-flights of German territory by US planes in the event of a conflict in Iraq. Mr Schröder trumped him with stronger language. Visiting Ground Zero in 2001 with President Bush, Mr Schröder pledged "Unlimited Solidarity" from Germany as the US sought to tackle new threats. To win his election 12 months later, Mr Schröder placed limits on German solidarity. In the past, this would not have mattered. Previous German chancellors were constitutionally banned from involvement in overseas military operation. Mr Kohl simply signed cheques for the first Gulf War. After taking power in 1998, the SPD-Green coalition had changed the German constitution to allow Germany to take a full normal part in military operation overseas – with permission of the Bundestag. Mr Schröder owed his re-election to a rejection of tough military action against Saddam.
3. France was in a different position. With hindsight, it would have been better had President Chirac made clear at a much earlier stage that France would veto UN military action. President Sarkozy has described his predecessor's veto threat in March 2003 as "arrogant." Only a few weeks previously at the Franco-British summit in Le Touquet I had been told by a high French official that France would not leave the US, Britain and other allies alone in any action against Saddam. Other senior British officials present received similar assurances. Important and influential French foreign policy experts, including the former Foreign Minister, Bernard Kouchner, as well as the MP Pierre Lellouche, then chair of the Nato parliamentary assembly, and Dominique Moisi, the leading French international policy analyst all supported US intervention. Kouchner, in particular, had developed the concept of "*le droit d'ingérence*" – the right to intervene in a sovereign state when its internal behaviour flouts universal values and UN law. But it later became public knowledge that France had cut a bi-lateral deal with Mr Schröder to preserve the Common Agricultural Policy – despite German policy being in favour of CAP reform. The German foreign minister, Joschka Fischer, criticised the Chirac-Schröder deal.
4. Fischer has said that 'jihadi fundamentalism is the new totalitarianism'. He opposed the invasion arguing it would make Iran – of which he has intimate knowledge – a much stronger regional player. What, to me, was frustrating at the time was that while Germany and France opposed an invasion they offered no workable alternative policy to a) make Saddam conform with UN resolutions; b) stop his support for terrorism; c) ensure the weapons' inspectors could carry out their task.
5. Only M Chirac can tell us what went through his mind and what led him to the final veto announcement. It is a fashionable lie to state that other than Blair following Bush, Europe was opposed to the intervention. The governments of Italy, Spain, Poland, the Netherlands, Portugal and other smaller central and east European states backed tough action. Saddam counted on a divide and rule tactics made worse by Donald Rumsfeld's "old and new Europe" metaphor. US diplomacy in this period was an oxymoron. There was no effort to persuade Europe and the

world of the need to take action against Saddam. All during this period I took part in angry conversations with the Americans on the International Criminal Court, on Kyoto or on protectionist tariffs against British steel and other exports. It seemed to me that Washington wanted to make enemies and dis-influence people.

6. I felt strongly that a wider case should have been made against Saddam. I suggested that a description of his Baathist ideology which derived from 1940s right-wing totalitarianism should be offered to the public. But I was told that the Prime Minister was seeking to build links with the Baathist leadership in Syria. Robin Cook had made the most powerful denunciations of Saddam and his murdering and torturing regime. But Cook's demotion from his post of Foreign Secretary removed his powerful voice and set him off in the direction of leaving the Blair administration.
7. I tried without success to get the FCO to invest more time in Europe but the view was that talking with Colin Powell was the wisest investment of senior FCO time and energy.
8. A major mistake was the failure to explain that the only reason the UN weapons inspectors were allowed back into Iraq was the presence of 250,000 US and British troops knocking on Saddam's door. David Kelly wrote that only regime change would allow effective weapons inspections and, with hindsight, it was a mistake not to make clear that military action was likely and probable and not dependent on the goodwill of China or Russia, whose desire to see the US and the West humiliated meant that irrespective of a French veto a second UN resolution was unlikely to be forthcoming.
9. Many of course warned that chaos would follow the collapse of Saddam. But we heard the same reasons to justify the failure to stop the Milosevic wars in the Balkans in the 1990s. Earlier, Mrs Thatcher and Francois Mitterrand were alarmed at the idea of a re-united Germany following the end of communism. Foreign policy realists can always find reasons why nothing should be done. But the British government was under huge public pressure over the decade long failure to solve Iraq. Ministers were accused of complicity in the deaths of hundreds of thousands of Iraq children as well as other Saddam brutalities. More than a dozen mandatory UN resolutions had been adopted and Saddam flouted them all making the UN look powerless and unable to impose its authority. Hindsight may argue it would have been better to continue for years and years with UN resolutions and sanctions and live with the protests from NGOs, churches, the medical profession and many in the press that the UK by backing a sanctions regime was co-responsible for the deaths of Iraqi children and for keeping Saddam in power. In addition, Saddam was bankrolling terrorist suicide bombers in the Middle East. His adoption of Islamist and religious references, despite the nominal secularism of Baathism, drew him closer to the wider terrorist assaults on the West, even if as Jason Burke argues in his book, Al Qaeda, it was Bin Laden who rebuffed Saddam's advances. Iraq was not part of the 9/11 attacks any more than Mussolini did not take part in the invasion of Poland in 1939. But Saddam had done more to militarise, and make militant fundamentalist ideology and assaults on democracy than any other state leader in the region.
10. The Foreign Office and related agencies were so busy managing the day-to-day tactics of handling the different political pressures that arose after 9/11 and during 2002 and 2003 as the moment for invasion approached that there was no time nor investment in strategic planning on what to do in Afghanistan once the Taliban had been chased out, or what to do in Iraq once Saddam had been toppled. The failure to resource construction and development in Afghanistan after December 2001 was a major error – on a par with the failure to help Afghanistan once the Soviets had been driven out by 1989. Similarly, as far as I was aware, there was no planning or thinking about what would happen in Iraq once Saddam was gone. The UK has far more experience than the US or many other countries on Iraq and the region. I had my nose to the European constitutional treaty grindstone, as well as negotiating EU enlargement, regularly visiting the powder-keg Balkans, or trying to defuse the growing Spanish-UK conflict over Gibraltar. But the FCO has deep historical knowledge, clever planners and access to variety of expertise in UK universities and foreign policy think tanks. We might have set up a task force to produce a 1000 page volume on what to do in Iraq once Saddam was overthrown. The FCO was too busy on minutiae of UN language or managing UK public and parliamentary opinion to devote resources to offering Washington a blue print for a post-Saddam Iraq that would have avoided some of the errors committed made after Saddam fell.

11. History may decide that it would have been better to leave Saddam in place. To contain rather than confront him and ignore the manifest failure of the UN to enforce its own resolution and leave Saddam supporting the global jihad against democracy. That is for the inquiry to decide. My evidence is based on what I saw which is namely that the rest of Europe did consider WMD was a real problem. No-one publicly at the time said Saddam had no WMD. It is a lie to say there were lies over WMD – unless President Chirac and other European leaders who expressed concern about Saddam's WMD were also liars. I do feel that a wider political case should have been made for intervention. The UK should have devoted more public diplomacy resources to making the case for intervention to the European public. The emergence of a neutralist-pacifist hostility to the US at the highest level of Germany was a first in post-war Europe. Instead of grandstanding with rhetoric at the UN, it would have been better if France had made clear from the beginning it would never take part in military action against Saddam. The FCO or Whitehall as a whole should have prepared a blue-print for the governance of post-Saddam Iraq and given it to President Bush and made clear UK participation was contingent on a serious plan for running Iraq.
12. I wish I could believe that the UK and its friends and allies would never again have the kind of dilemma over whether or not to take action against a tyrants who defies the UN, has a proven record of invading other countries, or sponsoring and validating terrorism outside his borders, and who inflicts cruelty on his people such as we have not seen since the Nazi era. I ask myself how British public and political and media opinion would have dealt with a British government that left America alone to deal with Saddam. The consequences of an isolated, angry America feeling had been left in the lurch by all of Europe including the UK would have had many consequences. If action on Iraq was fraught with danger, inaction on Iraq was equally full of problems. Many of these points were debated in the Commons in 2002 and 2003. People remember the big statements and the final vote but Jack Straw cannot be faulted for his willingness to make statement after statement in the Commons and to answer questions fully. Many of those politicians who discovered the UK policy was wrong as the occupation unfolded had no such reservations in 2002 or even 2003. Those politicians loudest in calls for military intervention, with or without UN authority, in the Balkans or Africa are now loudest in condemnation following the manifest failure in Iraq. Foreign policy success had many fathers. Iraq is an orphan. But what is important is to learn the lessons of the strategic and tactical errors made in the run-up to March 2003 and the occupation that followed.

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