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From: Edward Chaplin  
Date: 13 February 2003 cc: As below

To: Peter Ricketts

**SUBJECT: IRAQ: THE ENDGAME**

1. Valentine's Day in New York will mark the start of the endgame on Iraq. So this is probably the last opportunity to reflect on whether we can extract, from the sound and fury of transatlantic and EU spats, a better outcome for UK interests than at present looks likely.
2. The mood in Washington points to early tabling of a second SCR and a quick drive to adoption. At best this will secure 9-10 positive votes and 5-6 abstentions. There is a substantial risk, especially while Chirac remains in Messianic mood, that the text will be vetoed, at which point the US, despite its current promises, will go for military action regardless. I cannot imagine the Prime Minister then refusing to follow.
3. An SCR with a bare majority and only 2 of the P5 voting in favour is a lot better than nothing. But international and regional buy-in will be much reduced. The French and others will be waiting to exploit the difficulties we shall certainly encounter in Iraq, to our disadvantage elsewhere in the region. British public opinion will remain fretful.
4. No SCR and a feeble, at best, legal basis for military action is a nightmare scenario. The domestic consequences (and increased risk from terrorism to British citizens and staff) are daunting enough for Ministers. But the longer term damage to UK interests would be more severe because longer lasting. The image of the UK, lone ally of a rampant US in its assault on Iraq, will be the touchstone for Arab and Muslim attitudes for a generation – this is the real Suez effect. A quick collapse of the Iraqi regime (quite likely); subsequent clear proof, because we find the stuff, that we were right all along about the Iraqi WMD threat (questionable – what convinces the experts may not convince public opinion unless it is pretty spectacular); and a smooth transfer to a new democratic and stable government (improbable, especially without UN cover) would reduce the damage. But this is a high risk route.
5. Before we go down this road, we should have a last look at alternatives, as Jeremy Greenstock is urging. The Franco/German ideas are a pretty desperate attempt to avert war. They would have some merit as a contribution to active containment. But we and the

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US have moved on from that. Nevertheless they give us an opening to exploit, as the Foreign Secretary has suggested. The goal should be to give the Security Council a last chance to reunite and put the pressure back on Saddam Hussein. That is the only way to shift him and achieve, even at this late hour, a peaceful solution.

6. So I think we (US/UK) should consider a deal with the French/Russians/Germans. I would go for something less ambitious than UKMIS New York (their telno 239). The goal would be one more last chance for Saddam Hussein. The components might be
  - insistence on full Iraqi compliance with a short list of key disarmament tasks eg accounting for the missing 6,500 bombs; the 8.500 litres of BW; unfettered interviews with the top 50 scientists
  - maximise the number of inspectors by calling in more from the rota (ie no delay to recruit and train more)
  - increased air surveillance with French and Russian participation
  - a short deadline for all the above eg until 15 March
  - P5 signal in advance that, if there is less than 100% Iraqi compliance, they will vote for an "all necessary means" text, agreed in advance, and will actively support military action (the French might signal participation)
  - 10 days after the passage of a second SCR, to allow the Arabs to persuade Saddam Hussein to step down
  
7. Of course the US would find such ideas a tiresome distraction, although they were advocating some of them at an earlier stage. But the potential prize is huge: either Saddam Hussein cracks in the face of a united Security Council, or military action follows with full Security Council and therefore international backing, which in turn will bring full support for the Day After phase. That is as much in US as UK interests.
  
8. We agreed that we would not put these ideas to Ministers at this stage, but that you would discuss with the Foreign Secretary en route to New York tomorrow.

*Edward Chaplin*

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