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TO6388

20 November 2000

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Dear Alan,

IRAQ: FUTURE STRATEGY

We had a useful and wide-ranging discussion with copy addressees this morning. Although we agreed that it was not necessary to keep redrafting the paper, I thought it might be helpful if I recorded briefly the main points that were made.

2. The US. Recent FCO and MOD contacts have underlined that the new US team will want to have a review, and will be keen to discuss the issues with us. This may take time, and will not be their highest priority: indeed, their views will be formed partly as a consequence of their reviews of other issues (MEPP, proliferation, etc). Either Bush or Gore will instinctively want to look at toughening the US approach, but current Administration officials sensed that they would end up looking at variations on the theme of containment.

3. Iraqi WMD. Our current objective is to eliminate Saddam's existing capabilities, and constrain his ability to reconstitute them. Although this appears anomalous in the context of our approach to other proliferators in the region, Iraq merits special treatment both because of its proven willingness to use WMD and because of the requirements that the UN has placed upon it. This is the answer to the accusation of double standards.

4. UNMOVIC. If UNMOVIC ever gets into Iraq, that will not be the end of the story. If UNMOVIC does its job properly, Iraq will presumably try to obstruct it and sooner or later there will be an UNSCOM-style confrontation. Unless we want to leave Saddam's finger on the trigger we should not regard UNMOVIC as a long-term solution.

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5. Economic sanctions. These have had a constraining effect on Saddam, which remains significant. But they are being increasingly eroded and are losing credibility: despite the expansion of OFF, they allow Iraq to focus regional attention on the humanitarian issue rather than the threat posed by the régime. Lifting economic sanctions would give Saddam greater resources, and would enable him to make some progress in reconstituting both WMD and his conventional armed forces, even with an arms embargo in place. On the other hand, it can be argued that lifting them would open up Iraq, and make it easier for us to monitor Saddam's activity.

6. NFZs. The benefits of maintaining the NFZs are:

- i. To prevent Saddam from using his air force to repress the Kurds and Shias: the only legal justification.
- ii. Indirectly, to provide early warning of Iraqi military threats to Kuwait and Saudi Arabia.
- iii. To prevent Saddam from causing tensions by penetrating Kuwaiti or Saudi airspace.

The costs of the NFZs are:

- i. About £20m a year.
- ii. Significant overstretch for our armed forces (though less than it would be if we had to deploy defensive forces in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia)
- iii. The risk to aircrew and aircraft.

In any negotiation over 1284 implementation, Saddam would want the abolition of both NFZs. MOD will think further about alternative approaches, in the context of the options set out in the paper.

7. Overthrow. In discussion it became clear that this term was being interpreted in a number of different ways. The more muscular variants appear impractical. At the other end of the spectrum could be a more rhetorical approach focussing international attention on the behaviour of the régime as a whole, perhaps including indictment for war crimes: but the chances of gaining wider support for this sort of initiative might depend upon taking other measures, such as lifting economic sanctions and withdrawing from one or both NFZs.

8. Actions arising. We agreed that:

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- **MOD** will think about military alternatives to the NFZs that still meet our fundamental objectives
 - **Paul Schulte in consultation with** _____ will write a short note putting the WMD issue into the wider regional proliferation context.
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- **FCO** will prepare a brief for use by Ministers and senior officials in initial contacts with the new US team. This should not prescribe options, but stress that we remain shoulder-to-shoulder with the US in tackling the problem and are willing to discuss with an open mind how best to achieve our objectives.
 - We will fix another meeting before Christmas, probably in the week beginning 11 December.

Yours,
Tom

TOM MCKANE

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