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Foreign &  
Commonwealth  
Office

129098

15 December 2000

London: SW1A 2AH

*Handwritten signature*

*Dear Sir,*

Iraq

Summary

Containment through implementation of SCR 1284 remains the best option for now. To make this achievable we will need to convince the US that this best serves our objectives and that we should work to agree an implementation package which will unite the P5. The status quo is unsustainable and other options are unattractive.

Detail

Your letter of 27 November asked for the Foreign Secretary's views on how we should approach the Iraq issue.

The Foreign Secretary agrees that full implementation of SCR 1284 remains the best means of pursuing our policy objectives. It would restore in-country control over Iraq's WMD programmes, get us off the hook of responsibility for the humanitarian situation and provide Iraq - and us - with an exit route out of sanctions.

But the shelf life of SCR 1284 is limited. If there is no progress by next summer at the latest, it is likely to lose credibility, leading to growing pressure for a change of approach. While Iraq has shown no sign yet of accepting UNMOVIC, it has not entirely ruled out cooperation.

If Iraq is to be persuaded to comply it is now clear that this will require the elaboration of a package of measures which is sufficiently attractive to lure the Iraqis in. The French recently proposed that the P5 begin elaboration of the ambiguities in SCR 1284, in particular the post-suspension modalities. While the timing of their initiative is not good (between US Administrations), a rapid dismissal of their ideas will risk encouraging them and the Russians eventually to pursue a solution separate from the resolutions. On the other hand, a package which has the support of the P5 will be difficult for Iraq to ignore. If it rejects it, we will be better placed to hold the line on sanctions. If we are to

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reach agreement on a package of measures it will require some painful adjustments for ourselves, and, even more so, for the Americans.

We expect a full policy review under the new US Administration. We need to get in early and be prepared to press them hard. Their first instincts will be to look at tougher measures e.g. tighter sanctions, military action, greater emphasis on regime overthrow. None of these will have any credible wider support. Our pitch should be to persuade the US of the unattractiveness of these options and then convince them that SCR 1284 best serves our interests. This will be far from easy and will require high-level political intervention. The US are already concerned that we are going soft on Iraq.

... At the Cabinet Office meeting, it was agreed that the FCO should prepare a speaking note for use by Ministers and senior officials in contacts with the new Administration. I attach a draft which has not yet been cleared outside the FCO.

The arrival of the new Administration will also be an opportunity to review operations in the NFZs. Officials both here and in the US consider the zones largely ineffective, dangerous and presentationally damaging. Their legal basis is tenuous. It is also very unlikely that Iraq will accept UNMOVIC without a deal on the NFZs.

The Prime Minister expressed concern about the humanitarian situation. With the "oil for food" programme likely to be worth more than \$16 billion this year, the situation on the ground is starting to improve. This has taken some of the sting out of the anti-sanctions campaign. But no matter how big the "oil for food" programme may become, it is cumbersome and bureaucratic and relies on Iraqi cooperation. It will never be able to redress the deterioration of Iraq's infrastructure, the impoverishment of the middle classes, and the stifling of normal economic activity. For as long as sanctions remain in place, responsibility for the humanitarian situation will be ascribed to the US and UK.

*Tim Barrow*  
  
(Tim Barrow)  
Private Secretary

John Sawers  
10 Downing Street

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