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DNP 2/2/11



PERMANENT SECRETARY

D/PUS/2/45(07)

14 January 2003

Secretary of State

IRAQ: WHAT IF?

It is unwise to attempt to calibrate precisely how the US Administration would react if HMG failed to go along with the United States in the event that they decided to use military force against Iraq without a further enabling UNSCR. The extent of damage would be affected by the circumstances at the time, including both the nature of the UN debate and the UK Parliamentary position.

2. It is, however, reasonable to expect that there would be significant damage and that this would be greater than had we behaved like countries such as [redacted]. The US have never had reason to expect much from them and they have much less at stake in the relationship. True, Washington knows that proceeding without a further UN mandate would be difficult [redacted] but it would probably not be straightforward for the US either and this will be seen in the White House as a defining moment for courage and determination. I fear, therefore, that having valued profoundly the way we have stood shoulder-to-shoulder with them so far, the US will feel betrayed by their partner of choice. New Labour's carefully constructed relationship with a Republican Administration (that is set to remain for a second term) would be seriously weakened.

3. It is also reasonable to expect that the damage to our interests and influence would be felt most immediately and strongly in the foreign policy and security field, although other areas of the relationship could not be immune.

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