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From: Matthew Rycroft
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PRIME MINISTER

cc: Jonathan Powell
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PRESS CONFERENCE: IRAQ: DIFFICULT QUESTIONS

Attached is some further briefing material on Iraq for your press conference, including answers to your five questions to David. Here are some difficult questions and proposed answers:

If the issue is WMD, why not attack North Korea too?

The whole issue of WMD needs to be moved up the agenda. This is not just about Iraq. We need a strategy for handling each country that we suspect of developing WMD. Those strategies will differ from country to country.

So the big issue is WMD, not Iraq. What makes Iraq stand out is first that it is in breach of 23 specific UN commitments. This is about UN credibility. Second, Saddam has a track record of having actually used WMD against his own people and his neighbours.

Is a further UN resolution required to authorise military action?

No decisions have been taken on military action. Whether a further UN resolution is required will depend on the circumstances at the time. Saddam is in breach of no fewer than 23 of 27 UN demands in 9 separate UN resolutions. I can assure you that whatever action is taken, it will be in accordance with international law.

I shall consider, with President Bush and others, the Foreign Affairs Committee's recommendation that the UN should set a deadline for Iraq to comply with their obligations.

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Splits within US Administration. Which bit of the Bush Administration do you agree with?

The British and American Governments are united in our determination to deal with the threat from Saddam and his clear attempts to acquire more WMD. The UN has made absolutely clear what Saddam must do. He must allow the weapons inspectors back in – anyone, any time, any place – so that we can ensure that he is disarming. If he does not comply, we shall consider all the options.

Saddam's record is abhorrent (see attached for examples). It is absurd for anyone to defend him, from the standpoint of human rights.

Do you believe in regime change? Or is it enough for Saddam to allow the weapons inspectors back in?

As I have said before, the world, the Middle East and above all ordinary Iraqis would all be better off without Saddam. But the end objective is Iraqi compliance with UN demands, particularly about WMD. If those demands are met by a changed, disarmed Saddam, fine. But if not, then we cannot stand idly by while he develops his WMD still further.

Why do EU countries disagree with you/US about military action?

Neither President Bush nor I have taken any decisions about military action. So there is nothing to agree or disagree with. All EU countries recognise the threats from WMD and the nature of Saddam's regime. They also all want to ensure that the UN maintains its credibility. If ultimately we opted for military action, I would expect widespread international support.

What about Arab countries? How can you attack Iraq if all regional players oppose? When will there be progress on the Middle East?

Many leaders of Arab countries want to see Saddam go. They all recognise the unique danger that his regime poses. It is vital, whatever happens about Iraq, to make progress on the Middle East Peace Process.

What happens after Saddam?

As I said, the real issue is not Saddam but WMD. If Saddam goes, he must be replaced by someone who leads Iraq in a totally different way, who abides by UN obligations, who respects human rights within Iraq, and who brings Iraq out of its self-imposed exile and into the international community where it belongs. We

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shall be ready to welcome him. It will also be important that Iraq retains its territorial integrity.

Containment has worked, hasn't it?

It is true that UN measures have played a vital role in frustrating Saddam's ambitions to develop WMD. But Saddam threw out the weapons inspectors. He continues to pursue ballistic, nuclear, chemical and biological programmes, in breach of UN obligations. His regime has admitted producing chemical and biological weapons. We believe the regime has recently accelerated its weapons programmes, including its ballistic missile programme and its nuclear procurement programme.

So containment may have worked in the cold war, but it does not work for WMD.

Is there a current threat to Britain from Iraq?

Yes, Britain's interests are threatened when someone like Saddam acquires weapons as destructive as those he has and is seeking. Nor is it in our interests that he should acquire weapons that would allow him to blackmail or intimidate his neighbours.

Was Iraq involved in September 11th?

Not as far as we know. The lesson from September 11th, though, is that if we in the international community fail to deal with threats as they arise, we only allow them to grow until they have devastating consequences. We cannot allow that to happen. Inaction is not an option.

Are there links between Iraq and Al Qaeda?

We do not know. Any such link would be extremely serious. But the case against Saddam is so overwhelming in terms of his development of WMD and his breach of numerous UN demands, that it does not depend on a link with Al Qaeda.

Why should Britain be involved militarily? What do we get out of it?

No decisions have been taken on military action.

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One of the reasons we have such excellent armed forces is to promote our interests and to help respond to threats. I can think of no threat more serious than that of WMD.

How much are you prepared to spend on military action that won't go to schools and hospitals?

This is a false choice. If we allow threats like WMD to grow, the cost – in financial or human or any other terms – would be astronomical. Military action is not to be undertaken lightly: we have to assess the consequences; but we must also weigh the consequences of not taking action.

Will you be visiting Bush?

I am in close touch with the President, as are Jack Straw and Geoff Hoon with their American opposite numbers. (If pressed) We may get together if we judge it useful.

Why are you George Bush's poodle? If you are influential with him, what have you got out of the relationship?

This is the wrong way of looking at things. On some issues, like climate change, I disagree with the US Administration and as my speech on Monday showed I have no problem with making that public. When I agree with the US, as I do on many other issues, I do so not for the sake of it or to get things out of the relationship, but because it is the right thing to do.

What advice are you giving Bush? Are you constraining him?

That is not how the relationship works. President Bush does not need advice or constraining. As we saw over Afghanistan, he approaches issues in a careful and measured way, and consults his allies. The same is true of Iraq and WMD.

Convincing the public. When will you publish the evidence document? Do you accept that you have not made the case against Saddam?

As I have said, when the time is right we shall publish a dossier documenting the evidence against Saddam. I am confident that when that time comes, many people will come to see the threat that Saddam poses. Examples from attached. There is

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much more that can and will be said about the nature of Saddam's regime. There can be no doubt about his intentions, or his capability, or his record.

Differences within Cabinet?

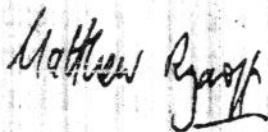
The Cabinet has already discussed Iraq, and will doubtless do so again. No decisions have been taken. It is right that there should be a proper airing of views in private.

Consulting parliament: do you agree with Jack Straw that you will convene Cabinet and recall Parliament to discuss military action before any action is taken? Will you allow a substantive motion on Iraq before you take action?

As I have said before, action is not imminent. There are many issues to be considered before we get to the point of decisions. I am not going to pin myself to any specific form of consultation. But of course I agree with Jack Straw that Cabinet and Parliament will be consulted in the normal way.

What will you do if the TUC or Labour Party Conference vote against action against Iraq?

I find it particularly absurd when those on the left argue in favour of allowing Saddam to remain in power and to remain in breach of 23 specific UN obligations. Of course we must consider military action very carefully, but we must also consider the consequences of not taking action.

**MATTHEW RYCROFT****DECLASSIFIED**