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NOTE

The stakes are now much higher. It is apparent to me from the EU summit that France wants to make this a crucial test: is Europe America's partner or competitor? Germany - for reasons we know - is bound in to France. For the first time, however, there is emerging a strong bloc prepared to challenge France and Germany. This comprises Britain, Spain, Italy, Denmark, Holland, Ireland and Portugal. In addition, the Swedes and Finns - though temperamentally anti-war - are worried that Europe pulling away from the US will leave them at the mercy of Russia. The EU accession countries are with the US but are being pressed hard by France and Germany

In my view, we are looking at a defining moment in EU/US relations and in the future direction of Europe.

The advantage the French have, however, is European public opinion, which seems to favour them. So they are using that to embarrass the pro-US case, to inhibit the pro-US leaders. These leaders are, it has to be said, remarkably firm in the face of really difficult polls and demonstrations.

But the issue will be this: is it the US that is forced to go it alone with the UK; or is it France that is left isolated with a choice as to whether to use its veto?

That in turn is a function of where public opinion is outside of the US. In respect of that, opinion is far more nuanced than people think. In my judgement, people are not against conflict in all circumstances. What

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they fear is that we are hell bent on war, come what may, that we don't really want the UN to succeed. It's absurd, given 12 years of waiting and UNSCR 1441 but there it is.

The issue of time for the Inspections has become vicariously, the focus for this sentiment. At the heart of this is a confusion between active and passive co-operation. The duty on Saddam is to co-operate fully: ie actively to help the Inspectors. If he isn't he's in breach. But the France/Germany view - too much shared by others on the UN Security Council - is that the Inspectors should have the time they need to "sniff out" the weapons as Schroeder put it on Monday night; and all Saddam needs to do is to offer passive co-operation, ie the absence of obstruction. Obviously if this is right, they could be there for months or years. Our view, which is correct, is that time is irrelevant unless he is co-operating fully and actively. If he isn't, the time needed is just the time necessary to make a judgement as to his co-operation: is it full or not? And actually no one, including France or Germany, is seriously suggesting Saddam is co-operating fully.

Blix, unfortunately, embodies this confusion. His report on 14 February never suggested there was full co-operation; indeed the opposite. But its tone of writing seemed to imply that because Saddam was co-operating more on process, that was an improvement despite the fact that there was no co-operation on substance. However, the most recent conversations we have had with Blix show that he is aware of this problem, and is prepared to countenance a definitive judgement and was shocked at how negatively for the US/UK his report was spun. Take that as you will. My faith in Blix is somewhat shaken. But he remains key.

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So: the trick we need to take is this: we have to find a way of re-focussing the issue on the absence of full co-operation by Saddam; and do so in a way that pulls public opinion and the UNSC waverers back to us by showing that we have indeed made every effort to avoid war. In my judgement the waverers need this to justify shifting. And for us in Europe it is vital in altering the state of our opinion.

My proposal is as follows.

1. We put down a new UN Resolution soon, probably early next week. That Resolution is simple and clear and as easy to vote for as we can make it.
2. We say we will put it to a vote on 14 March, the date France has suggested for a meeting of Foreign Ministers. That then becomes the deadline for action.
3. At the same time as we put it down, we define the categories of full co-operation. We do this - not in the Resolution but in a side statement, based on what was in 1441. This should include the works, everything, not a detailed list of items but of areas: full disclosure of the 1998 leftovers; witnesses interviewed outside Iraq; destruction of the rocket motors etc. It should be sufficient if he did it, to amount to a complete and total capitulation by Saddam. That is the ultimatum.
4. We tie in Blix to accept that this is indeed what must happen; or at least not to contradict it. I have fixed up a call on a secure line with him tomorrow and could take him through it and assess the chances.

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5. We say that failure in any respect to meet this test, will amount to non-co-operation; that this is a final attempt by us to disarm Saddam peacefully; that by 14 March, it will be 4 months since 1441, quite long enough to assess whether he is co-operating or not.

6. We work like crazy next week to get the UNSC members to agree or at least not oppose this strategy; and then build the support to carry a majority for 14 March.

The disadvantages of this:

(a) He might conceivably comply fully - but the chances of this, according to all the intelligence are minimal. And if he does, it would still amount to a huge humiliation.

(b) He may "seem" to comply. But this is a risk in any event and by defining non-compliance so clearly, we minimise the chances of ambiguity.

(c) It may delay the start of military action by a week. But this is not long and the blunt truth is that by next Friday ie the 28th February or even a week later the 7th March, the chances of securing 9 votes are very slim. A week's wait is worth a Resolution; or at least a majority on the UNSC.

The advantages are:

(a) It puts us back in the driving seat, with a clear deadline and ultimatum.

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- (b) It refocuses the debate where it should be ie on his duty fully to cooperate.
- (c) It gives the doubters a reason to sign up.
- (d) It helps the Arab world come on board.
- (e) It accepts the French date, so prevents them from quarrelling over the time.
- (f) It allows us to show the world we are going to war, not because we want to, but because we have to.

Above all, it shows the US reaching out, understanding concerns, but still firmly willing to act. It sets the UN a fundamental test. It gives the Europeans something to rally round. When we do act, it will show we went the last mile for peace.

A successful second resolution would be an enormous success for your diplomacy over the last few months.

I have never come across an issue in which the dividing line between overwhelming support and overwhelming opposition is so slender. In Britain - which has been reasonably typical of European opinion on this - we have actually had considerable success in our arguments. Large majorities believe Saddam is a threat and needs disarming. The same believe that without the threat of action, he wouldn't disarm. Again large majorities believe in military action if there is a new UN Resolution or even without a Resolution if we had a majority of the UNSC with us, ie

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France could veto and we could still do it. Around 80% support an ultimatum and though they support more time for inspections, they acknowledge that inspections can only work if Saddam co-operates. Yet a majority oppose action now.

The only explanation for this is that they need to be persuaded that we would prefer peaceful disarmament if that were possible. Proving it isn't possible is the huge benefit of the ultimatum route.

Two further thoughts. Publishing the MEPP Roadmap would have a massive impact in Europe and the Arab world. As ever, the salience of this just can't be overstated. Interestingly, a group of international Christian clergy I met yesterday, including American Bishops said this would make a big difference to their attitude on Iraq.

Secondly, we need to start firming up the humanitarian work for the aftermath of the conflict. There is a lot of work going on, but we should start to surface it and show how we will protect and improve the lives of Iraqi people.

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