



10 DOWNING STREET

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LOBBY BRIEFING: 11AM MONDAY 9 SEPTEMBER 2002WAR ON TERROR/IRAQ

Asked for Downing Street's view on the IISS report, the PMOS said that the report really spoke for itself. This was clearly a very serious piece of work. As we had said over the weekend, it had been produced without any access to intelligence material. People should read it carefully and digest exactly what it was saying. It painted a powerful picture of a highly unstable regime with access to biological and chemical weapons. On the nuclear side, it underlined the point made by Jacques Baute of the International Atomic Energy Agency that, since putting an end to weapons inspection in 1998, Iraq had had the opportunity to reconstitute elements of its nuclear weapons programme and to keep it secret. It also portrayed very clearly and succinctly precisely how Saddam had played games with the UN weapons inspectors and the international community during the time they had been inside Iraq. The Government's own evidence dossier was due to be published soon, and we also believed it was important to go back through some of the history in order to remind people what we were dealing with and precisely why we were in the position we were in today. Asked if he was implying that the Government's dossier would go further than the IISS report, the PMOS pointed out that the former would contain intelligence material which the latter was obviously unable to do, although discussions were still ongoing as to what we would and would not be able to include. Clearly, the use of intelligence material was a serious matter since we did not want to jeopardise our sources. It was also worth pointing out that the dossier, by definition, was going to be incomplete given we had had no access to Iraq for four years. As Mr Baute had pointed out on the radio last week, four years was a long time for there to be no inspections to evaluate Iraq's nuclear capability, for example. Clearly, Saddam could have done a lot within that timescale and the amount of illegal funds he was now getting hold of would be helping him.

In answer to further questions about the IISS report, the PMOS took the opportunity to note the effects of 'language fatigue' within the whole issue of chemical and biological weapons. These terms had become fairly commonplace - so much so that sometimes we failed to focus in on what they actually meant. The term 'biological' did not refer to washing powder. He went through part of the chapter in the IISS report on biological weapons. For botuline toxin, the symptoms were nausea, weakness, vomiting and respiratory paralysis. The mortality rate, if untreated, was 60-90%. Almost 20,000 litres of production had been declared by Iraq, but UNSCOM had been unable to verify this. Indeed, UNSCOM had estimated that Iraq could possess double the stated amount. For gas gangrene, the symptoms were confusion, sweating, vomiting, diarrhoea, burning skin pain, rashes or blisters, bleeding and acute lung distress. The mortality rate, if untreated, was high. 340 litres of production had been declared by Iraq, which UNSCOM, again, had been unable to verify. It was clear that the picture painted by the IISS report was very important. The PMOS said he believed that the world was waking up to the threat being posed by Saddam.

Asked the Government's view of Scott Ritter, a former UN weapons inspector, the PMOS said that Mr Ritter was obviously someone who had his own particular view which he had stated several times in the past. We were focussing on information provided by UNSCOM and the IAEA, as well as taking into account Saddam's past actions and record and the intelligence we had been given as to the current state of play within Iraq. Asked if we believed Scott Ritter was 'misguided', the PMOS said that Mr Ritter had his own view - and it was not one shared by the British Government. There was no doubt that Saddam posed a very real threat. Equally, there was no doubt that he was in breach of twenty three out of twenty seven of his obligations set out by the UN. In his speech to the TUC in Blackpool tomorrow afternoon, the Prime Minister would say that the UN could be the route to resolve this problem, but that the UN had to deliver. It was important to recognise that the United Nations was the embodiment of the international community. Saddam was a threat to the international community. He was clearly in violation of a large number of UN Resolutions. There was obviously an issue as to how long the UN was prepared for its own authority to be flouted.

Asked for a reaction to President Chirac's comments in an interview in the New York Times and his ideas for handling the issue within the UN, the PMOS observed that there had been a pretty clear indication over the course of the weekend and last week that there was a desire to build as broad a coalition of international support as possible. He said that President Bush's speech to the UN General Assembly, which he was due to deliver on Thursday, would be important and he had no intention of pre-empting it. As he had just said, the Prime Minister would use his TUC speech to talk about the challenge that lay ahead for the UN. The coverage of President Chirac's comments gave the lie to the idea that others in the international community were not focussing in on the issue of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction and recognising it as a threat. On the contrary. There was a debate as to how to go about dealing with the issue. Asked whether the Prime Minister would support President Chirac's proposal for a two-stage deadline, the PMOS suggested journalists exercise a little patience and wait and see how things mapped out. Saddam could not be allowed to flout the will of the international community forever. There was a shared strategy with the US, as the Prime Minister had said on Saturday night. It would evolve in due course.

Asked if the Prime Minister believed that a new UN Resolution on Iraq was 'imminent', the PMOS repeated that President Bush would be making a speech later this week and that people should be patient.

Asked when the Prime Minister would be briefing Select Committee Chairmen, the PMOS said that he was unable to give precise dates at this stage. Diaries were being checked to find a time suitable for all.

TUC

Asked the Prime Minister's view of comments by Bob Crow describing city workers as 'scum', the PMOS said he was reluctant to get into a commentary about what individual union leaders might or might not have said. The annual TUC meeting was currently taking place in Blackpool, so obviously there was a focus on the unions. It was entirely appropriate for union leaders to raise issues of concern to their members. People chose their own language and had to make their own decision as to whether the way they phrased things was the best way to take forward political debate.

Questioned as to whether the Prime Minister would address the issue of growing militancy within the trade union leadership, the PMOS said that the Prime Minister was still working on his speech. What he would talk about was the Government's record with regard to investing in and reforming our public services, in addition to recruiting record numbers of public sector staff.

Asked our position on pensions, the PMOS reminded journalists that we had received the Pickering Report and Sandler Review in July and had said at the time that we would produce a Government Green Paper by the end of the year. That remained the position.

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