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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 LONDON 002066

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TAGS: PREL, MOPS, PGOV, UK
SUBJECT: IRAQ COALITION-BUILDING: UK LABOR PARTY NOT YET
CONVINCED

REVIEW AUTHORITY:
Theodore Sellin, Senior
Reviewer

CLASSIFIED BY: DCM GLYN DAVIES. REASON: 1.6X6

SUMMARY AND COMMENT
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1. (C) FOR NEARLY A MONTH, PM TONY BLAIR HAS MADE PUBLICLY CLEAR HIS COMMITMENT TO A MORE PROACTIVE IRAQ POLICY. REFLECTING THE POLLED SENTIMENTS OF VOTERS, HOWEVER, A SIZABLE NUMBER OF HIS LABOR PARTY MPS REMAINS AT PRESENT OPPOSED TO MILITARY ACTION AGAINST IRAQ. A MAJORITY INDICATE THEY WOULD CHANGE THEIR MINDS IF THEY HAD PROOF OF IRAQI INVOLVEMENT IN SEPTEMBER 11 OR ANOTHER TERRORIST ATROCITY. SOME WOULD FAVOR SHIFTING FROM A POLICY OF CONTAINMENT OF IRAQ IF THEY HAD RECENT (AND PUBLICLY USABLE) PROOF THAT IRAQ IS DEVELOPING WMD/MISSILES OR THAT IRAQ'S WMD STATUS HAS CHANGED FOR THE WORSE. MOST SEEM TO WANT SOME SORT OF UN ENDORSEMENT FOR MILITARY ACTION. BLAIR'S CHALLENGE NOW IS TO JUDGE THE TIMING AND EVOLUTION OF AMERICA'S IRAQ POLICY, AND TO BRING HIS PARTY AND THE BRITISH PEOPLE ONBOARD, SO THAT THE UK -- THE KEYSTONE OF ANY COALITION WE SEEK TO BUILD -- CAN BE FIRMLY IN PLACE. END SUMMARY.

Classification Extended on : 09/27/2013 ~ Class: CONFIDENTIAL ~ Authority: DSCG 11-1
~ Declassify on: 04-02-2022

LABOR MPS BALK AS GOVERNMENT ARTICULATES IRAQ POLICY

2. (C) FOR A NOTICEABLE TIME AFTER THE PRESIDENT IDENTIFIED IRAQ'S DEVELOPMENT OF WMD AND MISSILES AS A SERIOUS THREAT IN THE STATE OF THE UNION ADDRESS, TONY BLAIR'S GOVERNMENT ESSENTIALLY KEPT QUIET ON WHETHER IT AGREED. THIS CHANGED AT THE END OF FEBRUARY AS BLAIR SPOKE OUT FORCEFULLY IN PREPARATION FOR, AND AT, THE COMMONWEALTH HEADS OF GOVERNMENT MEETING IN AUSTRALIA. THE FOLLOWING WEEK, ON MARCH 5, THE GOVERNMENT RELEASED TO THE PARLIAMENTARY LABOR PARTY (PLP) A
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FOREIGN OFFICE-SPONSORED BRIEFING PAPER THAT OUTLINED THE CASE AGAINST IRAQ. A DAY LATER, "THE TIMES" CARRIED A FOREIGN SECRETARY JACK STRAW BYLINER HIGHLIGHTING THE IRAQI WMD THREAT; THE NEXT DAY, THE MASS-CIRCULATION TABLOID "DAILY MAIL" PRINTED A SIMILAR PIECE BY THE PRIME MINISTER. DEBATE ON THESE ISSUES IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS THAT WEEK WAS SHARP, WITH FOREIGN OFFICE JUNIOR MINISTER BENJAMIN BRADSHAW BRANDING EXTREME-LEFT LABOR MP GEORGE GALLOWAY AS AN APOLOGIST AND PAID MOUTHPIECE FOR IRAQ, AND GALLOWAY RETORTING THAT BRADSHAW IS A LIAR.

3. (C) OPPOSITION TO MILITARY ACTION AGAINST SADDAM HUSSEIN GOES, UNFORTUNATELY, WELL BEYOND THE "USUAL SUSPECTS" SUCH AS GALLOWAY. WITHIN A DAY OF RECEIVING THE FOREIGN OFFICE BRIEFING PAPER, 117 MPS SIGNED AN 'EARLY DAY MOTION' (SIMILAR TO A SENSE OF THE CONGRESS RESOLUTION IN THAT IT SIMPLY EXPRESSES AN OPINION, BUT DIFFERENT IN THAT IT DOES NOT COME TO A VOTE) THAT OPPOSED SUPPORTING U.S. MILITARY ACTION AGAINST IRAQ. THE NUMBER OF SIGNATORIES HAS SINCE GROWN TO MORE THAN 130, OF WHICH WELL OVER 100 ARE LABOR PARTY MEMBERS (I.E., ABOUT ONE-QUARTER OF ALL LABOR MPS). ORDINARILY, EARLY DAY MOTIONS DO NOT MEAN MUCH; MANY MPS DON'T BOTHER WITH THEM. THE RELATIVELY LARGE RESPONSE IS THEREFORE SIGNIFICANT, AND WE HEAR THAT MANY MORE MPS DID NOT SIGN BUT DO AGREE WITH ITS THRUST.

4. (C) THESE MPS APPEAR TO BE REFLECTING OVERALL VOTER OPINION: 51 PERCENT (ACCORDING TO A GUARDIAN/ICM POLL RELEASED MARCH 19) ARE AGAINST UK POLITICAL SUPPORT FOR A U.S. MILITARY ACTION AGAINST IRAQ, WITH 35 PERCENT IN FAVOR. VIRTUALLY ALL MPS WE HAVE CONTACTED MAKE A POINT OF
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CONTRASTING THE BROAD SUPPORT FOR ACTION IN AFGHANISTAN (74 PERCENT OF VOTERS IN FAVOR) WITH THE DEEP UNEASE THAT MPS FEEL ABOUT WAR WITH IRAQ. SEVERAL MPS SAY THAT POST-9/11 SYMPATHY FOR THE U.S. IS "EBBING AWAY," AS PERCEPTIONS GROW OF ALLEGED U.S. UNILATERALISM, PROTECTIONISM, AND ONE-SIDED SUPPORT FOR ISRAEL. LABOR MPS WHO CONSIDER THEMSELVES TO BE MODERATE AND STRONGLY PRO-U.S. TELL US THEY NEED MORE EVIDENCE OF IRAQ'S CONNIVANCE WITH TERRORISM AND/OR

WILLINGNESS TO USE WMD BEFORE THEY COULD SUPPORT HMG COOPERATION WITH MILITARY ACTION. (NOTE: IN THE SAME POLL, THIRD-PARTY LIBERAL DEMOCRAT VOTER OPINION IS 67 PERCENT AGAINST BACKING U.S. MILITARY ACTION; A SIZABLE NUMBER OF LIBDEM MPS HAVE ALSO SIGNED UP TO THE EARLY DAY MOTION. THOUGH CONSERVATIVE VOTER OPINION IN THE POLL IS MARGINALLY OPPOSED TO SUPPORTING THE U.S. ON IRAQ, NO TORY MP HAS SIGNED THE MOTION.)

CONCERNS

5. (C) THERE IS SIGNIFICANT UNEASE IN THE HOUSE OF LORDS AS WELL.

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 02 OF 03 LONDON 002066

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LABOR PEERS WANT EVIDENCE THAT IRAQ PROMOTES TERROR ATTACKS, OR THAT ITS WMD POSE A CLEAR AND PRESENT THREAT. HE SAID PROOF THAT IRAQ HAS DEVELOPED SUCH WEAPONS IS PROBABLY NOT ENOUGH, IN ITSELF, TO SWING A MAJORITY IN LORDS BEHIND THE
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MILITARY OPTION.

6. (C) LABOR MPS ESPECIALLY RAISE CONCERNS ABOUT THE REACTION OF THE ARAB WORLD, CLAIMING THAT ACTION AGAINST SADDAM WOULD UNDERCUT VITAL ARAB COOPERATION IN THE WAR ON TERRORISM. THEY ARE NOT CONVINCED THAT THE IRAQI OPPOSITION FORMS A CREDIBLE ALTERNATIVE OR THAT MILITARY ACTION WOULD BE QUICK AND EFFECTIVE. SEVERAL MPS TOLD US THAT PROGRESS IN THE MIDDLE EAST PEACE PROCESS COULD DEFUSE SOME OF THEIR CONCERNS. ANOTHER ELEMENT RAISED WAS THAT THERE WOULD BE LESS NEGATIVE FALLOUT IF MILITARY ACTION WERE TAKEN ONLY AFTER ALL OTHER OPTIONS WERE SEEN TO HAVE BEEN EXHAUSTED. VIRTUALLY ALL MPS WITH WHOM WE SPOKE WANT THE UNSC TO ENDORSE ANY MILITARY ACTION. THEY SUPPORT ADDITIONAL PRESSURE TO COMPEL IRAQ TO ADHERE TO EXISTING OBLIGATIONS, BUT DO NOT BELIEVE EXISTING UNSCRS OFFER A SUFFICIENT LEGAL BASIS FOR ATTACK.

7. (C) OTHER ELEMENTS OF PARLIAMENTARY CONCERN WE HAVE PICKED UP RELATE TO THE PERCEIVED UNILATERALISM OF U.S. FOREIGN POLICY. FOLLOWING RELATIVELY QUICK SUCCESS IN AFGHANISTAN, MPS WORRY THAT THE U.S. IS "LOOKING FOR ANOTHER FIGHT" AND WILL "IGNORE EVEN ITS CLOSE FRIENDS" IF THEY OBJECT. THEY ACKNOWLEDGE THAT MANY HAVE NOT RETHOUGHT BASIC UK AND INTERNATIONAL SECURITY SITUATIONS SINCE SEPTEMBER 11, AND THEY ALSO ACCEPT THAT U.S. ACTIONS SINCE 9/11 HAVE BEEN MEASURED AND TAKEN IN CONSULTATION WITH ALLIES. NONETHELESS, THERE IS THE IMPRESSION THAT U.S. FOREIGN POLICY IS INCREASINGLY DRIVEN BY TOO-NARROW SECURITY INTERESTS, AND THAT THE U.S. IS NOT ACKNOWLEDGING THE RELEVANCE OF THE UK TO THE U.S. AGENDA.

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 CONSTRAINTS ON BLAIR

8. (C) MANY LABOR (AND LIBDEM) MPS HAVE INSISTED THAT THE PRIME MINISTER CONSULT PARLIAMENT (AND SOME HAVE DEMANDED A VOTE) BEFORE OFFERING SUPPORT TO THE U.S. ON IRAQ. BLAIR IS NOT COMPELLED TO DO SO; NEITHER MARGARET THATCHER NOR JOHN MAJOR ASKED PARLIAMENT TO VOTE BEFORE TAKING MILITARY ACTION IN THE FALKLANDS AND IN OPERATION DESERT STORM. STILL, BLAIR WOULD PAY A POLITICAL PRICE FOR IGNORING BACKBENCHERS COMPLETELY OR FAILING TO CONSULT HIS CABINET. IT IS OFTEN RECALLED THAT, IN THE 1990'S WHEN LABOR WAS IN OPPOSITION, LEFT-LEANING CLARE SHORT, WHO IS NOW SECRETARY OF STATE FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT, QUIT THE SHADOW CABINET TWICE OVER THE ISSUES OF INTERVENTION IN IRAQ AND SOMALIA. PRESSED ABOUT THIS IN A MARCH 15 INTERVIEW, SHE SAID, "THERE ARE CONDITIONS IN WHICH I WOULD NOT BE ABLE TO SUPPORT ACTION, BUT I DO NOT EXPECT THEM TO BE PROPOSED." SHE WAS MORE EXPLICIT TWO DAYS LATER WHEN SHE DECLARED OPPOSITION TO "A BLIND MILITARY ATTACK ON IRAQ." ALSO IN THE CABINET, HOME

SECRETARY DAVID BLUNKETT HAS REPORTEDLY WARNED FELLOW MINISTERS PRIVATELY THAT BRITISH PARTICIPATION IN AN ATTACK ON IRAQ COULD LEAD TO A SERIOUS RISE IN RACIAL TENSION IN BRITAIN OR EVEN RIOTING.

9. (C) THERE HAVE BEEN A FEW SPECULATIVE PIECES IN THE MORE FEVERISH PRESS ABOUT LABOR UNEASE RE IRAQ POLICY (AND UNHAPPINESS WITH AN "ARROGANT" TONY BLAIR WHOSE GOVERNMENT HAS NOT YET DELIVERED ON SOCIAL POLICY), WHICH HAVE GONE ON
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TO IDENTIFY THE BEGINNINGS OF A CHALLENGE TO BLAIR'S LEADERSHIP OF THE LABOR PARTY. MOST POLITICAL COMMENTATORS AND MPS SCOFF AT SUCH RUMORS. FORMER CABINET MEMBER PETER MANDELSON, STILL AN INSIDER, CALLED IT ALL "FROTH."
NONETHELESS, THIS IS THE FIRST TIME SINCE THE 1997 ELECTION THAT SUCH A STORY IS EVEN BEING PRINTED.

TOLD US THE INTENTION OF THOSE FEEDING THE STORY IS NOT TO BRING DOWN BLAIR BUT TO INFLUENCE HIM ON THE IRAQ ISSUE.

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10. (C) UNDER PARTY RULES, REBEL MPS CAN ONLY TRIGGER A VOTE OF NO-CONFIDENCE AT A PARTY CONFERENCE WITH THE SUPPORT OF UNION LEADERS AND THE BACKING OF THE CONSTITUENCY PARTY ORGANIZATIONS. IN OTHER WORDS, A LABOR PARTY LEADER CANNOT BE CHANGED JUST BY THE PARTY CAUCUS IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS, NOR CAN A CHANGE HAPPEN OVERNIGHT. IN FACT, THERE IS NO SIGN OF A REAL EFFORT TO UNSEAT BLAIR. MOREOVER, BLAIR AND HIS TEAM ARE WORKING TO MANAGE DISSENTING MP VIEWS. HE IS CONFIDENT THAT HE OCCUPIES THE POLITICAL CENTER AND SEEMS NOT OVERLY CONCERNED WITH BACKBENCH SNIPING -- THOUGH HE CANNOT HELP BUT NOTICE THAT HIS PERSONAL-POPULARITY NUMBERS HAVE APPRECIABLY SLIPPED.

WHAT BLAIR NEEDS TO MAKE HIS CASE

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 03 OF 03 LONDON 002066

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11. (C) WHAT WOULD IT TAKE TO CONVINCCE LABOR
PARLIAMENTARIANS TO SUPPORT MILITARY ACTION AGAINST IRAQ?
REVULSION WITH THE IRAQI REGIME IS ALREADY WIDESPREAD, BUT
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THAT DOES NOT NECESSARILY TRANSLATE INTO SUPPORT FOR WAR.
SOME MPS WOULD ENDORSE ACTION IF THEY HAD PROOF THAT IRAQ HAS
CONTINUED TO DEVELOP WMD SINCE UN INSPECTORS LEFT. MORE
WOULD FOLLOW IF CONVINCED THAT IRAQ HAS SUCCEEDED IN
DEVELOPING SIGNIFICANT WMD CAPABILITY (NOT JUST CW, BUT BW
AND/OR NUCLEAR/RADIOLOGICAL) AND THE MISSILES TO DELIVER IT.
MANY MORE WOULD FOLLOW IF THEY SEE COMPELLING EVIDENCE THAT
IRAQ INTENDS AND PLANS TO USE SUCH WEAPONS. A CLEAR MAJORITY
WOULD SUPPORT MILITARY ACTION AGAINST IRAQ IF SADDAM IS
IMPLICATED IN THE 9/11 ATTACKS OR OTHER EGREGIOUS ACTS OF
TERRORISM. OTHER FACTORS OF INFLUENCE INCLUDE SUCH VARIABLES
AS: ARAB SENTIMENT, PROGRESS IN THE MEPP, UN SUPPORT,
CIVILIAN CASUALTIES, AND HAVING A PLAN THAT WORKS.

12. (C) SINCE MAKING HIS DECISION TO MOVE TO A MORE ROBUST
PUBLIC DIPLOMACY ON IRAQ, BLAIR PLUS STRAW AND DEFENSE
SECRETARY HOON HAVE MADE A STRING OF TOUGH STATEMENTS. BLAIR
WAS ESPECIALLY FORTHRIGHT WHEN STANDING ALONGSIDE VP CHENEY
ON MARCH 11.

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MOREOVER, BLAIR, STRAW, AND BRADSHAW HAVE LATELY SHOWN SOME
INTEREST IN THE IRAQI OPPOSITION. NORMALLY RECEIVED BY
LOW-RANKING FCO OFFICIALS, BOTH THE INC AND THE "GROUP OF 4"
OPPOSITION GROUPS WERE RECEIVED BY BRADSHAW WITHIN DAYS OF
EACH OTHER EARLIER THIS MONTH, AND BLAIR HAS REPORTEDLY ASKED
FCO FOR A RECOMMENDATION ON WHETHER HE SHOULD MEET WITH
OPPOSITION LEADERS.

13. (C) BLAIR HAS PROVED AN EXCELLENT JUDGE OF POLITICAL
TIMING, AND HE WILL NEED TO BE ESPECIALLY CAREFUL ABOUT WHEN
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TO LAUNCH A RAMPED-UP CAMPAIGN TO BUILD SUPPORT FOR ACTION
AGAINST IRAQ. HE WILL WANT NEITHER TO BE TOO FAR IN FRONT,
OR BEHIND, U.S. POLICY. AS ONE FCO OFFICIAL POINTED OUT TO

US, IF BLAIR UNLEASHES A FULL-SCALE CAMPAIGN IN PARLIAMENT AND WITH THE GENERAL PUBLIC WHEN PARLIAMENT RETURNS FROM THE EASTER RECESS, AND U.S. POLICY TURNS OUT TO BE ON A LONGER-TERM TRAJECTORY, WHEN THE TIME COMES FOR ACTION, THE PM MAY FIND THAT HIS PREPARATIONS HAVE COME UNGLUED. ON THE OTHER HAND, IF HE WAITS TOO LONG, THEN THE KEYSTONE OF ANY COALITION WE WISH TO BUILD MAY NOT BE FIRMLY IN PLACE. NO DOUBT THESE ARE THE CALCULATIONS THAT BLAIR HOPES TO FIRM UP WHEN HE MEETS THE PRESIDENT AT CRAWFORD APRIL 5-7.
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