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cc: NS  
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OPERATIONAL TRANSITION IN IRAQ

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We spoke earlier today about the handling of the DOP-I paper and my concern that some of the detail in the full paper would be extremely sensitive if leaked. We agreed that the best way forward would be for me to produce a "full" paper for the Prime Minister and a single page of recommendations for other colleagues.

... I attach the full paper for the Prime Minister and a copy of the single page document which I will ask the Cabinet Office to distribute on a CMO basis. (The text in bold forms the basis of the abbreviated note). I, along with the CDS, will brief to the wider paper at the meeting on Thursday morning.

I also think it would be useful for me to talk to the Prime Minister ahead of Thursday's meeting: I will try and get my office to find a slot.

you are  
  
JOHN REID

Jonathan Powell  
10 Downing Street

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OPERATIONAL TRANSITION IN IRAQ  
Paper by the Secretary of State for Defence

Issue

1. Plans need to be agreed for the progressive handover of responsibility to Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) in south-east Iraq and the consequential implications for UK force structures and size; to set those plans in motion from the autumn as conditions allow; and on a strategy for handling the Iraqis, allies and public and parliamentary opinion.

Recommendation

2. DOP(I) Ministers should:

- note that plans for transition to Iraqi control in Multinational Division (South East) (MND(SE)) envisage a progressive assumption of Iraqi primacy province by province, with UK and other coalition forces increasingly assuming a reserve role. This in turn should lead to a reduction in the profile of UK forces and in due course reductions in numbers. In the longer term we should aim for a situation where the forces we commit to Iraq are based largely outside the country.
- note that the plan depends on the continuation of current trends in the capacity of the Iraqi security forces genuinely to take responsibility for dealing with security in MND(SE) and on there being no major deterioration in the security situation.
- agree that subject to these conditions being satisfied, we should plan to implement these proposals from about October, starting in Maysan and Al Muthanna provinces, with the process commencing in Dhi Qar and Basra in around March 2006. This in turn could lead to initial reductions of around 1000 in UK force levels from about April 2006, leading, by around July/August 2006, to a likely force package of around 3000 remaining in Iraq to cover essential

coalition tasks and as a mobile reserve in support of the Iraqis (probably in MND(SE)).

- **note** that further work will need to be done on planning for full disengagement which will be closely linked to wider coalition planning across Iraq as a whole.
- **agree** that detailed plans need to be drawn up now for explaining our plans to the Iraqis, the US, other allies and UK parliamentary and public opinion, based around the core script at Annex A, based on transition rather than force reductions, majors principally on conditionality rather than timetables and stressing consultation with Iraq and allies.
- **note** the resource implications of implementing the transition plans.

#### **Security Situation & Development of the ISF in MND(SE)**

3. Sporadic violence against coalition forces in MND(SE) continues, but at a much lower level than elsewhere with less than 1% of all attacks in Iraq. A minority of Sunni Arab insurgents continues to mount low-level attacks in and around Basra, targeting both the ISF and coalition forces. Islamist jihadists maintain a presence and have mounted occasional suicide attacks in MND(SE). Shia extremist attacks, particularly in Maysan province, continue to cause casualties: a British soldier was killed on 29 May.

4. Whilst the ISF remain fragile and untested, there has been considerable development. At the lower levels, recruiting and training remain on track, as does capability building at brigade and divisional levels. Reliance on coalition enablers (logistics, training, and communications) is gradually reducing and overall, transition to Iraqi control is progressing well, with good coordination between ISF elements in some areas of MND(SE).

#### **Operational Transition Plans for MND(SE)**

5. MOD has developed plans for operational transition in MND(SE). These are conditions-based, flexible, phased and adjustable in line with

political and security developments, including the evolution of coalition and Iraqi plans for the progressive disengagement of the coalition. The plans are entirely consistent with Multinational Forces – Iraq (MNF-I) planning; General Casey (the US force commander in Iraq) has been briefed on them and is content. They are also reversible (up to the point where UK forces are completely withdrawn from Iraq) in the event that re-intervention to support Iraqi Security Forces is required.

**Proposed Implementation of the Operational Transition Plans**

6. The focus of the UK effort in MND(SE) will continue to be on training and mentoring the ISF. Troop numbers in Iraq will for now, and through the planned electoral process at the end of 2005, remain broadly the same (8,500) but implementation of the transition plan starting in October 2005, in accordance with current military assumptions, will mean that, as the ISF capabilities improve, so our forces will assume an increasingly lower profile. Barring serious setbacks, it should be possible to withdraw the bulk of UK forces from Maysan and Al Muthanna provinces by around March 2006, with provincial security control being then fully in the hands of the Iraqis. At this stage, UK force numbers could be reduced by about 1000. Between spring and summer 2006 our forces would provide a mobile reserve force in neighbouring Al Basrah province, which would be able to intervene in Maysan and Al Muthanna if the security position threatened to deteriorate.

7. Al Basrah province will represent a more complex challenge to our orderly disengagement from MND(SE), and our plans for transition will therefore start later (around March 2006). We envisage the transition being completed in Al Basrah by around July 2006, with the Iraqis assuming security control. The mobile reserve mentioned in para 6 would be retained; coordination will be needed with Danish and Australian forces if they agree to contribute to this force. Dhi Qar province also straddles strategic routes extending north to Baghdad. Our plans assume that the Italians will stay the course, and will oversee the transition process in the province, but with similarly reducing force levels. Against this background, and if the security

position remains stable, then it should be possible to reduce overall UK troop numbers in MND(SE) to about 3000 by around July/August 2006.

8. The maritime dimension of the plans centres on maintaining a ship in the north Arabian Gulf and a reduced presence at Umm Qasr port, continuing support to the training and development of the Iraqi Navy.

9. Looking further ahead, if the development of the Iraqi security capacity continues as planned, we would envisage moving to a position in November 2006 where the majority of the forces we commit to Iraq will be based outside of that country. This needs further work, however, and is even more linked to wider MNF(I) plans for withdrawal and drawdown<sup>1</sup>. Beyond that, we are already giving some preliminary thought to the nature of the longer term bilateral defence relationship.

### Risks

10. There are two principal risks to implementing our transition plans in MND(SE):

- a deterioration in the security situation resulting from a change in the Shia quiescence: and
- failure to deliver an effective ISF (includes the Iraqi Police Service) and wider criminal justice capacity.

A short delay in the political timetable is unlikely to impact severely on our plans in MND(SE), but a prolonged political vacuum resulting from, for example, rejection of the constitution at the referendum would need careful assessment. Two other potential risks include the failure to deliver a process of central command and control over the ISF; and if the 10<sup>th</sup> Division of the ISF, which is based in MND(SE), is deployed elsewhere in Iraq before UK forces have completed all of the training – the latter development is

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<sup>1</sup> The UK contribution might include bilateral military training/advisory relationships; a contribution to the NATO Training Mission; provision of niche security capabilities to compensate for ISF shortfalls and elements of an over the horizon reserve force.

considered unlikely. It is also possible that other (FCO and DFID) activity in Iraq aimed at developing the Iraqi police service and reconstruction will need to be curtailed or reduced, with consequent implications for HMG's wider effort, because of the difficulties of running projects without UK military support and protection. This will need to be looked at in more detail with Other Government Departments.

### **Handling**

11. The leak to the press of the last DOP(I) paper has already necessitated revision of our handling strategy. But this should not prevent us from taking forward the plans for transition to Iraqi control. The key themes to emphasise in any handling strategy are:

- highlighting that this is good news and represents progress;
- providing reassurance that the UK transition plan is part of the wider coalition transition plan and is also coordinated with Iraqi plans;
- providing reassurance that the transition plans are conditions-based, even though they are informally placed within a timeframe;
- engagement, at an early stage, with other MND(SE) allies on our plans.

A cross-Whitehall core script will be required, which focuses on transition rather than force reductions, majors on conditionality rather than timetables and stresses consultation with Iraq and the allies. A first draft is attached at Annex A.

There are five aspects to the handling strategy.

### **(1) Parliament and Media**

12. We should expect that consultations with allies and preparations for implementing the transition will mean that details of our plans will enter the public domain over the summer. Soon after Parliament returns in October it will be necessary to announce to Parliament our transition plans for MND(SE).



In the interim we should deploy the core script. We will need to consider whether this is done proactively or reactively.

## **(2) US**

13. Potentially the US will be the most challenging partner to deal with. There are three sensitive issues for the US and engagement with them should be viewed through this prism.

- There is disappointment that the UK is not doing more in Iraq outside of MND(SE).
- Following recent ITG expressions of concern that the MNF-I might be about to withdraw from Iraq, President Bush firmly stated that changes in force posture will not be linked to a timetable.
- General Casey has won the debate in Washington for a more conservative approach to US force reductions in Iraq. At most, we can expect up to four US brigades (about 20,000 troops) to be withdrawn (or not deployed) by early 2006; thereafter US forces levels would remain at 14 brigades (about 75,000 troops) until conditions warrant further reductions.

14. Contacts with the US military in Washington are being initiated to explain further the UK's transition plans. Similar contacts will also be required at the political level to drive home the point that we need to make progress on implementing our plans and confirming that the US are doing the same sort of planning, particularly for the north of Iraq.

## **(3) MND(SE) Coalition Partners**

15. We have already had to reassure partners following the weekend's leak to the press. Further briefing of partners, as a group<sup>2</sup>, and in capitals will

be required soon.

The **Australians** expected their deployment to last a year (from May 2005) but their work in Al Muthanna should be finished by December. There will be a need to manage their expectations and agree with them the possible contribution to the mobile reserve outlined in para 6.

The **Japanese** and have been attacked twice recently;

Ideally,

we would expect the Japanese to withdraw from MND(SE) by the end of 2005, but to keep coalition numbers up the US are now encouraging them to stay and carry out training;

16. We should also not underestimate the impact of our plans on coalition partners in adjacent MND(Centre South) - there are strong indications that the Poles could embark on implementing their own transition plan before us. We intend to share and coordinate our planning with the Poles.

#### **(4) Iraqis**

17. In June senior members of the ITG wobbled when they misunderstood the US review of the campaign plan, interpreting the force re-posturing as a sign of coalition withdrawal. Prime Minister Ja'afari expressed his concern strongly to President Bush. Following US reassurances, the Iraqis seem to have recovered their nerve; to prevent a recurrence it will be important to ensure that our plans are coordinated with the recently established Joint Coalition/Iraqi Committee whose purpose is to manage the transition to ISF provincial control.



## (5) NGOs

The announcement of any drawdown of UK forces in the south will have to be managed carefully to ensure that there is no loss of confidence by major NGOs (in particular the UN Agencies and the World Bank), which might lead them to postpone plans for greater engagement in Iraq.

## Resources

18. At present our commitment to Iraq at Medium Scale+ (about 10,000<sup>3</sup> troops) is expected to draw circa £1000m from the Reserve in FY 05/06. Reducing to Small Scale+ (about 3000 troops) in autumn 06 is expected to reduce the cost to around £ 650M in FY 06/07. This takes into account funding for increased logistics and support helicopter elements, base closures and recovery of equipment to UK. More detail is required on the levels of recuperation required and costs will not be available until detailed surveys have been completed. In addition, Project OSIRIS 1&2 (total value £53M) and a new round of Quick Impact Projects (QIPs) (£20M), on which MOD will be submitting business cases to the Treasury, will contribute to setting the conditions for transition in FY 05/06. There is considerable uncertainty over the costs in FY 07/08, which under the plans described in this paper would be about £250M. Significant delays could, however, lead to large cost escalations. Other Government Departments operating in Iraq may also face increased security costs as they are forced to seek commercial alternatives to military force protection. As for our future strategic posture ("strategic overwatch") in the region, a maritime and air element could reduce our costs to the order of around £50M per annum at the end of FY 07/08 and beyond.

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<sup>3</sup> UK troop numbers for the whole Iraq operation, including forces deployed elsewhere total about 10,000. Forces deployed only in Iraq number about 8,500.

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Core Script for Transition in Iraq

ANNEX A

- The positive security situation and good progress in development of the Iraqi Security Forces in the four southern provinces covered by MND(SE) means that UK and coalition forces will, later this year, be ready to begin the process of transferring full responsibility for security to the Iraqi Security Forces in these areas.
- This transition will mean that UK and coalition forces will progressively have less direct involvement in providing day-to-day security in MND(SE) and, therefore, less visibility. They will, however, continue to train and mentor the Iraqi Security Forces.
- The precise timing, and pace, of the transition process will be geared to conditions in Iraq. These conditions will include the capability of the Iraqi Security Forces, the overall security situation and progress on the political process. We will not make significant changes to the UK's force posture in any province in Iraq until we and the Iraqis are confident that the conditions allow and the Iraqi Security Forces are robust and able to discharge their security tasks.
- The transition in MND(SE) is part of a wider Multinational Force – Iraq transition plan which has been developed in close consultation with our coalition allies, the Iraqi Government and Security Forces.
- We anticipate that transition will take place over a number of months and take up to a year to complete. Provided the conditions are right we would expect, in consultation with coalition allies and the Iraqi Government, to begin the process withdrawing UK forces from Iraq over this period.
- The transition of full responsibility for security to the Iraqi Security Forces in MND(SE) is an important milestone and reflects the hard work that UK and coalition forces have done in training the Iraqi Security Forces.

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Recommendation

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  - note that the plan depends on the continuation of current trends in the capacity of the Iraqi security forces genuinely to take responsibility for dealing with security in MND(SE) and on there being no major deterioration in the security situation.
  - agree that subject to these conditions being satisfied, we should plan to implement these proposals from about October, starting in Maysan and Al Muthanna provinces, with the process commencing in Dhi Qar and Basra in around March 2006.
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