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DG Op Pol/4/6/1(10/00)

12 January 2001

Tom McKane  
Defence & Overseas Secretariat  
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*Dear Tom,*

**IRAQ : FUTURE MILITARY OPTIONS**

Following the meeting of your group on 17<sup>th</sup> November, we have undertaken some more detailed study on the military factors that might underpin the evolution of a future policy towards Iraq. Rather than trying to pick a specific 'new' military solution, which will better await the renewed dialogue with new US counterparts, we have tried to get at some of the underlying factors. The conclusions will need to be put to the Chiefs of Staff and Ministers here but I thought that an initial readout might be helpful ahead of your meeting next week, especially since some of the conclusions might be unexpected.

On WMD, the key point is that the military options are only a partial solution to our objective of seeking to eliminate Saddam's capabilities in this field. We cannot achieve our objective here without inspections: air power alone is not enough. Iraq has become very adept at concealing its facilities, many of which (particularly in relation to CBW) are in any case not susceptible to the conventional tools for identification and targeting.

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On the No Fly Zones, our analysis indicates that there may be scope for adjustment in the north. The small size of the zone and the fact that Baghdad does not control the territory in which we are most interested (of the Kurdish Autonomous Zone) suggests that it might be possible either to limit our future patrolling to that airspace directly above the KAZ, or to cease patrolling completely over Iraqi territory and rely on monitoring from Turkish airspace. The full implications of this would need to be considered, taking account in particular of the implications of a change for Kurdish confidence and the restrictions likely to be imposed by the Turks on both training (which could impact on sustainability) and the circumstances in which we might respond in the event of renewed Iraqi aggression against the Kurds. But it is certainly worth considering further.

In the south, the picture is rather different. Here we have concluded that the existence of the southern no fly zone remains justified for the humanitarian reasons. But, more important, it is essential to our core policy objective of preventing Saddam from endangering regional stability by threatening his southern neighbours. As the JIC has recently reminded us, the coalition could not defeat an Iraqi invasion of Kuwait with the limited assets currently held in theatre. The no fly zone provides vital early warning of an attack, allowing coalition recce assets to identify early any Iraqi build up. Coalition contingency plans are predicated on having the time thus afforded rapidly to reinforce, and on being able to use those limited in place assets substantially to engage an Iraqi move south as it moved south, crucially before it reached the Kuwaiti border.

We could defend Kuwait without the southern no fly zone: but to do so would require a substantial revision of coalition contingency planning, with some likely highly unwelcome implications (both for us, the US and our regional allies) for the size and readiness of permanently deployed forces. For the UK these would be very difficult to sustain and would absorb the global pooled budget for conflict prevention. This argues that sustaining the zone, or something that looks very like it, may be the least worst option militarily.

*Reduced patrolling  
UAVs*

The quest for lower-risk ways of sustaining the zones continues but so far the Commanders have not found a solution that obviates the low-volume patrolling which came out of last winter's review.

On sanctions our analysis suggests scope for flexibility on the categories of goods that could be allowed to flow into Iraq: but if Saddam could get control of the oil revenues then he would build up his Armed forces at an accelerating rate, exacerbating the problem we face.

*Sanctions keep on  
- modern military  
technology  
- oil revenue*

We have nothing new to add on 'overthrow'. From my experiences of Argentina and the Balkans, it is noticeable that finally progress has come through democratic change. At the risk of tilting at shibboleths, as long as we tacitly accept non-democratic structures in the Gulf generally, we cannot really be surprised if dictators are hard to dislodge.

I am sending copies to those who attend your group.

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