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From: David Manning  
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S 299 /02

→ PRIME MINISTER

*Seen by PM - & commented on by him.  
(See end of this minute)*

cc: Jonathan Powell  
Alastair Campbell  
Sally Morgan  
Anna Wechsberg  
Matthew Rycroft

*Non file pm 21/10*

IRAQ: UK MILITARY OPTIONS

Geoff has sent you a minute and accompanying paper (below) pressing for a decision this week on whether to provide Package 2 (predominantly maritime and air) or Package 3 (maritime, air and land), if there is war with Iraq.

The thrust of the minute is to argue strongly in favour of Package 3 because:

- It would be a strong signal of our intent and would increase the pressure on Saddam;
- It is what the US is hoping for;
- It would buy us influence in the conduct of the military campaign against Iraq;
- US gratitude would make Washington correspondingly more inclined to be generous to us in other areas, eg Network Centric Capability;
- It would reduce the risk that we would be expected to contribute large numbers of troops to help administer Iraq after hostilities;
- The British Army would like it; and would be correspondingly demoralised if no use were made of their war fighting capability.

Some of these arguments are pretty dubious:

- It is not clear that Saddam will be much impressed by signals of UK military intent whether Package 2 or Package 3: it is US intent that bothers him;
- Much of the problem about managing US expectations on Package 3 may be self-generated. My guess is that our military have been pretty forward leaning in their contacts with their US opposite numbers;

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- I doubt whether we would have much say in the management of the military campaign, even if we committed to Package 3;
- I am not much persuaded by the argument about US gratitude: it should not be a key factor in our decision. And I am not much persuaded either that, if we help with the war fighting, we shall be spared the post-conflict washing up. It didn't work like that in Afghanistan. Experience shows that once you're in, you're in deep, without queues of grateful countries waiting to take over when the shooting stops;
- Army morale would have to be managed: we needn't fight every war;
- We should not underplay Package 2. It represents a major effort (aircraft carrier, fast jets, etc), even if the Army plays only a minimal role.

Questions that you should explore with Geoff when you see him tomorrow include:

- Why were we told in the summer that we could not do Package 3 if the MOD also had to provide emergency cover for the firemen's strike (Operation Fresco)? What has changed? Are the new assumptions underlying Package 3 really safe and robust?
- If we commit land forces (Package 3), could we bank on Turkish assurances given to the US about access, bases, and supply? Could they fight in a CBW environment; in summer temperatures if necessary?
- Does it make sense to commit ourselves so heavily in Iraq when there are many other calls on UK Forces? How would we respond to a sudden crisis elsewhere; and how quickly?
- Can we afford Package 3, estimated ( ? conservatively) at £1.5-£2 billion? How much does £2 billion buy: two month's campaign; three months? What if the campaign were protracted? How long would it be before the figure rose to £4 billion? What would the opportunity cost be then (would MOD have to cancel a major project, eg a carrier)?

There is also a big, and imminent, domestic handling issue. If you opt for Package 2, you will have to announce no later than 8 November that we were approaching 1,100 Reservists for call up. If you opt for Package 3, the numbers rise to 7,500 by 31 October. In both cases, medical personnel are heavily implicated, with inevitable knock on effects for the NHS.

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In sum, the MOD paper is special pleading for Package 3. You may want to go this route to signal your determination; and for US solidarity reasons. But there are risks and difficulties that need to be thoroughly explored; and there will be costs which are only sketchily dealt with here - and which might balloon.

Personally, I doubt whether there is a strong military case for Package 3. The US would like us along, but could certainly do the job without UK land forces. This is a political call.

*This is a v. tough call.  
I wd need to speak to the  
senior military in detail  
before I committed to 3.*

*David Manning*

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