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From: David Manning  
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PRIME MINISTER

cc: Jonathan Powell  
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## IRAQ: MILITARY PLANNING

MOD have provided an update on the state of US military planning. The two key working assumptions are that US forces must be ready to move by 15 February, and that they will be able to transit Turkey.

The 15 February date is a guess. But it fits with the sort of things Condi has been saying to me about putting the pressure on Saddam and resolving the Iraqi issue sooner rather than later. Turkey will probably agree in the end ; but it is not at all certain that agreement to US transit will extend to UK.

MOD argue that if the US are preparing for a 15 February date, we need to as well. This means Geoff Hoon taking early decisions. I think this is right.

If we go ahead with our preparations, we shall need a media handling strategy. I am not sure MOD have got this right (pages 5 and 6). I think they should discuss with Alastair.

The update is silent on two major uncertainties:

- How do the US (and we) cope militarily if Saddam provokes military action before 15 February? CENTCOM talks about an "ugly" start, ie immediate but limited military action that would build up gradually as more forces reached theatre. But this could lead to a protracted and messy campaign and give Saddam the chance to inflict real damage in the early stages.

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- What do we do if the Turks refuse us transit? Is there a Plan B for UK land forces?

I plan to discuss some of these issues with Condi in Washington on Monday. Meanwhile, if you agree, I suggest you authorise MOD to go ahead with their plans (subject to consulting Alastair on presentation), but that you ask Geoff Hoon (? and CDS) to come in and discuss either on Wednesday (when I am back from Washington) or post Copenhagen. In particular, they need to explain how we handle "ugly" start; and what we do if the Turks won't let us deploy for the Northern option.



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