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20 December 2002

R. M. Thompson

*None of the background on the
state of military planning
(not all of which has yet appeared
in The Sunday Telegraph...)*

IRAQ: CHRISTMAS READING

You asked for some material for the Prime Minister covering the current state of play on US and UK military thinking and preparations.

I attach the following annexes:

- A: Evolving US military thinking
- B: State of UK military preparations (including issues likely to arise in the New Year)
- C: UK & US Forces in theatre (a snapshot of current and projected force levels)
- D: UK Force Packages originally approved by Ministers
- E: The Amphibious Task Group (ATG) (an update to my letter of 12 December)
- F: UK additional land contribution – options (a short note summarising the issues on which we are currently working)
- G: A copy of the latest version of our rolling paper on UK Military Strategic Thinking on Iraq (this is a living document which is regularly updated)

Sir David Manning KCMG
10 Downing Street

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Recycled Paper

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Stepping back from the detail, it is worth highlighting the continuing emphasis in US military planning on squeezing every possible day out of their timelines, both in preparation for and in the prosecution of any campaign. The detailed timings in the Annexes are therefore potentially subject to acceleration at short notice. To keep open options that are synchronised with US plans is likely to require us to take visible steps early in the New Year, probably including a first call-out of Reserves in the first half of January and high-profile maritime deployments around the middle of the month. We will also need to reach an early conclusion on whether we can deploy via Turkey – and thus on the shape of the UK land contribution.

In parallel with these preparations, however, there will be an increasingly pressing need to satisfy ourselves that the US has an overarching political strategy with which the Government is content. If that strategy does envisage military action in the timescales to which US military planners are working, we will need to address soon the question of campaign objectives. This will be necessary to fill the current gap between our existing policy objectives and the likely nature of any US-led military operations, the scale and immediate intensity of which should not be underestimated.

I am copying this letter and enclosures to Simon McDonald (FCO) and to Desmond Bowen (Cabinet Office).

Yours

Peter

P D WATKINS
Private Secretary

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ANNEX B

IRAQ: STATE OF UK MILITARY PREPARATIONS

ACTIVITY CURRENTLY IN HAND

Preparation of earmarked elements of the land package

The purpose of this is to identify shortfalls of manpower and equipment in the nominated units, and once they have been identified move in new personnel and equipment from other units. This activity will have an impact on other parts of the Army (eg, the BATUS Winter Repair Staff will need to return from Canada to Germany and UK), and some of it may be visible (eg, movements of equipment between units).

Cannibalisation and procurement of sustainability items for earmarked land elements

This work is required to prepare equipment for land operations. There will be two main elements. First, approaching industry to procure new items. Second, the cannibalisation of existing equipment, which we are presenting as the sensible management of equipment fleets already in service to ensure that the right quantities will be available to those who may need them.

Land force training in the UK and Germany

The land elements will require significant training although visible activity will not take place until the New Year. Most of the training will take place in Germany and Poland. Although it falls outside the pre-planning training programme and will be theatre-specific (including NBC training and training for urban operations), it will generally take place in barracks and training areas (ie away from the public).

Preparation of Reserves

We are now engaged in "Intelligent Mobilisation" activity, to prepare the ground for any call-out:

- Work continues to refine the requirement.
- Relevant formed Reserve Units will be informed by their COs, in the course of their normal drill nights and/or training weekends, of the potential requirement for a call-out, with no reference to possible dates.
- COs will ask the individuals in their units to indicate any non-availability for the coming 6-12 months, and the Services' Personnel Centres will take similar action with individual reservists.

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- Temporary Mobilisation Centres and other mobilisation infrastructure (within the existing estate) will be prepared, including the installation of necessary equipment and communications.
- The Services' Personnel Centres will prepare draft paperwork, review personal details (such as addresses) and review mobilisation processes.
- The central Reservist policy organisation will prepare and make available to reservists information for their employers, outlining the position, stressing that no decision has been made on call-out, and advising them not to commit resources at this stage to the provision of cover for their reservist employees.
- Relevant training where appropriate and as directed by the Front Line Commands, using normal drill nights and training weekends, and potentially arranging additional training opportunities.

We are also considering the scope for bringing reservists into

, rather than waiting until after mobilisation. Work is in hand to establish whether this can in fact be done before a call-out and whether there are any legal pitfalls.

Chartering shipping for both land and amphibious forces

The shipping market has been approached this week, with a view to chartering 15 ships to transport the land force (in three trips), and 6 ships for the amphibious task group. We can legitimately decline to be drawn on locations for security reasons.

Warning units of reduced Notice to Move.

For instance, the Package 2 air elements will be brought to 10 days' NTM or less, and the Package 2 maritime elements to 5 days' NTM or less. We continue to decline to discuss with the media the status of specific units, stressing that we are ensuring the readiness of a range of options, not committing a definitive force package.

Pre-positioning of air weapons and other equipment.

Pre-positioning is somewhat hampered by the uncertainty over Turkey. But this is being mitigated to some extent which can take place discreetly alongside the other preparations which are now underway there to facilitate the activation of the Western SBA as a Forward Mounting Base.

ACTIVITY EARLY IN THE NEW YEAR

This will depend crucially on how the US plan evolves, how the timings develop (not least the sequencing of the campaign itself), and on the outcome of the Turkey issue.

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Maritime

U Apart from the deployment of a submarine on 6 January, the majority of the additional maritime contribution, including the amphibious elements, will not need to deploy from the UK until 16 January. With the exception of one support ship expected to deploy in February, we currently expect the maritime departures to take place from 16 to 24 January. This will be highly visible, particularly the departures of the hospital ship RFA ARGUS (from Plymouth on 16 January), HMS ARK ROYAL (from Portsmouth on 17 January), HQ 3 Cdo Bde (from Plymouth on 17 January), and HMS OCEAN (from Plymouth on 18 January). Prior to their departure from UK ports, there will be a certain amount of visible preparatory activity (work-up training, loading stores and ammunition, etc).

Until the ships transit the Suez Canal, we can argue (though we may not be believed) that they are not committed to the Gulf. Until recently, we envisaged that the amphibious task group and associated shipping would need to transit Suez around "P Day". But the continuing compression of the US plan, which may involve amphibious operations beginning prior to the air campaign, means that the maritime package needs to be ready in theatre by P Day, and this suggests that transit will now need to take place between 31 January-2 February: this is likely to be achieved more by cutting down on the amount of training en route than by bringing forward the departure dates, although we cannot exclude the possibility that some ships may need to sail before 16 January. Transit of Suez will be interpreted as a big signal, in advance of any political decision to commit UK forces to military action.

Air

U Air elements already in theatre (ie, in Package 1) patrolling the No Fly Zones would form the nucleus of the UK contribution to the US air campaign. The additional air elements in Package 2 would not all need to be in place at the beginning of the air campaign. If the original US concept of a 16-day gap between P Day and the start of the air campaign remains (and there are signs that they would prefer to reduce this gap to the minimum), the Package 2 air could be deployed from P Day rather than beforehand. On that basis, the main preparatory activity (other than training) before P Day would be the pre-positioning of weapons in theatre. This is currently hampered by the uncertainty over Turkey, but the US have said that they will find a way of accommodating UK air in the South if necessary.

Land

Current preparatory activity will continue into the New Year. But we will need to reach a firm conclusion on Turkey as soon as possible, and on the precise composition, role and deployment timings of our land contribution. There are some large and difficult issues here.

Reserves

Much of the reserve element of the UK force is related to the land package, and a large proportion of that could deploy towards the end of the main land deployment.

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But some reservists are likely to be required in theatre at the beginning of the deployment, and this will mean calling them out before P Day. Indeed, however the land package develops in the light of Turkey and other issues, the reservist elements of the maritime and air packages will need to be in theatre as early as possible. It is therefore probable that we will need to make a Call-Out Order early in the New Year, and send an initial tranche of Call-Out Notices to several thousand reservists. This will trigger a number of practical preparations,

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ANNEX D

IRAQ: UK FORCE PACKAGES ORIGINALLY APPROVED BY MINISTERS

Package 2

Maritime Component

- *Carrier Group*: HMS ARK ROYAL provides command facilities coupled with the capability to operate 8 – 10 GR7 (if available); 6 FA2; 3 SK Mk7 (ASACS); 3-4 Merlin; 2 SK 6 (utility) or role change into a Helicopter carrier to support the ARG; 2 Frigate/Destroyer escorts and requisite RFA support shipping
- *Submarines*: 2 TLAM capable SSN
- *Amphibious Ready Group*: 45 Cdo Group based afloat in HMS OCEAN with 3 landing ships and combat support afloat in 4 support ships with 2 Frigate/Destroyer escorts, with 5 x Chinook, 12 x Sea King, 4 x Lynx and 4 x Gazelle as a TAG
- *Currently Deployed In-theatre Assets*: 1 Destroyer; 1 Frigate; 1 tanker (Op ORACLE/RESINATE/ARMILLA)
- *Mine counter-measures group*: 4 - 6 mine counter-measures vessels; 1 LSL support ship; 1 Destroyer escort.
- *Survey*: HMS ROEBUCK.
- *Primary Casualty Receiving Ship*: 1 PCRS (with embarked surgical support team)
- *Maritime Patrol*: 2-4 Nimrod MR2 MPA – provided by STC

The main changes to this package are that ARK ROYAL will deploy as a second helicopter landing platform (like HMS OCEAN), and without its fast jets; and that we plan to strengthen the amphibious element of the force by adding HQ 3 Cdo Brigade and earmarking 42 Cdo RM to deploy by air after the ATG deployment. As a result 6 rather than 4 support ships are being chartered.

Air Component

Up to:

- SF:
- Essential Enablers: Air to Air Refuelling/Transport: 4 x Tristar; 8 x VC10; In Theatre C130 as required. Reconnaissance/EW: 4 x E3D; 2 x PR9; 2 x MR2; 1 x Nimrod R1;
- Offensive Ops: 64 Fast Jets: 8 x Tornado F3, 30 x Tornado GR4, 8 x Jag, 18 x Harrier GR7
- Support: 2 x Ground-based Air Defence Sqns; 4 x Field Sqns; 1 x Jt NBC Regt; 3 x RE Sqn airfield

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Package 3

Land Component in addition to Package 2

Up to:

- Full Divisional HQ with manoeuvre capability
- Divisional troops
- One square armoured brigade (of two armoured Battle Groups and two armoured infantry Battle Groups)
- Integral brigade Combat Support and Combat Service Support;
- Support helicopters
- A Divisional Support Group
- A large logistic group.

The composition of the land package is under review (see separate note).

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ANNEX E

THE AMPHIBIOUS TASK GROUP (ATG)

1. The envisaged role of the ATG was set out in our letter of 12 December (attached). It should be noted that the timings indicated are potentially subject to change as the US continue to improve readiness and compress timescales.
2. The detailed composition of the ATG has also changed. We now plan that:
 - (a) it should include HQ 3 Commando Brigade, to provide command of both UK and US elements of the AL FAW/UM QASR operation described in the attachment, and potentially for subsequent operations. We said that we were looking at the option of taking US forces under command; the US have now agreed to put their Marine Expeditionary Unit under HQ 3 Cdo Bde.
 - (b) two additional civilian ships should be chartered (bringing the total number of ATG charter vessels to 6) and loaded with the additional equipment required to provide for a second commando/battalion (42 Commando Royal Marines).
 - (c) the Notice to Move of 42 Commando should be reduced from R4 to R2 (5 days' notice) in line with other elements of the ATG. 42 Commando would not deploy with the main body of the ATG, but would follow by air if required.
3. The ships making up the ATG are due to sail from the UK from 16 January onwards. We now envisage that most of them will transit Suez around 31 January-2 February, to be ready in theatre by 15 February.

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UK ADDITIONAL LAND CONTRIBUTION – OPTIONS

1. The UK land package previously endorsed by Ministers for planning purposes consisted of a divisional HQ commanding a single square armoured brigade with appropriate divisional and logistic support. We have assumed for some time, on the basis of discussions with the US, that they would make available their 3rd Armoured Cavalry Regiment (3 ACR) – roughly equivalent to a brigade in UK terms – to operate as part of the UK-led division. This would have given the division a second manoeuvre formation, which we judge to be necessary for its intended mission in the North.

2. However, the US land commander has now decided that he does not wish to place 3 ACR under UK command, because he does not wish to break up the composition of the US 4th Infantry Division. He has instead offered 2 Light Cavalry Regiment (2 LCR). 2 LCR is a much lighter formation than 3 ACR, equipped with armoured vehicles rather than tanks. Although 2 LCR is a capable formation in its own right, it cannot manoeuvre alongside a brigade based on tanks. From a military perspective, a division consisting of a UK armoured brigade plus 2 LCR would be unbalanced, and its mission therefore more risky.

3. Work is therefore in hand to look at alternatives. This will take account of the following issues:

- Op FRESCO, and the scope for releasing units sufficient to enable Package 3 to be reconfigured for operations in the North as a division of two UK brigades
- Options for embedding a single UK brigade in a US division (North or South)
- Options for the South, if Turkey cannot be delivered. Further work is needed to assess whether an armoured formation could be delivered to the South within US timelines, and to consider alternatives involving light forces.

4. At this stage we cannot be fully confident that we have a conclusion on these choices.