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SECRETARY OF STATE



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MO 6/17/15H

5 December 2002

Dear David,

DM
cc. MR
AW
JPO

TS
5/12

IRAQ: MILITARY PLANNING

Clear indications that CENTCOM is putting US forces on course to reach a peak of readiness for a political decision from mid-February onwards to commit forces. Difficult to judge US political intent but, to keep options open for significant UK military participation in this timescale, we need to press ahead with further preparations. None of these would constitute a final commitment to military action and the initial ones can be done without further parliamentary announcement. But many of them would be visible, and our presentational posture will need to become more forward-leaning.

My letter of 29 November promised further advice on the additional visible activity that would be required to bring the readiness of UK forces more closely into line with that of US forces.

Current Position

CENTCOM continue to reduce the time they would need to launch full military operations following a political decision authorising military action. The US already have a limited capability in theatre, and have spent over \$1 Billion on materiel preparations. They intend to deploy the remainder of the 3rd Infantry Division over Christmas, to link up with equipment pre-positioned in Kuwait. They have also reduced the Notice To Move of the 4th Infantry Division, currently in the US and earmarked for Turkey.

There is no formal US position on the date by which they must be ready to act. They have a wide range of options, including the ability to mount some sort of operation (with varying degrees of risk) at any time. But our assessment is that CENTCOM's preparations are geared to being able to launch operations in the February/March window (since sustaining the present force posture and readiness over the Summer and beyond would present difficulties). **They appear to be making**

Sir David Manning KCMG
10 Downing Street

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a working assumption that a political decision to commit forces to operations could come as early as 15 February. For the purposes of this minute, we are assuming that the US and UK would take this political decision together and will refer to 15 February as "P Day".

Under the developing US plan (and assuming that P Day is 15 February), P Day would be followed about 16 days later (i.e. early March) by the beginning of the air campaign and amphibious offensive operations. The main ground effort would commence about 60 days after P Day (i.e. mid-April). If P Day were to slip until end of March, the ground effort could slip in turn to the end of May – right up against the hottest weather of the year. But this may be mitigated in US eyes by an assumption (or hope) – which we believe may be over sanguine – that the regime would probably collapse quite quickly once the inevitability of major ground operations was apparent.

We must stress that a P Day from 15 February onwards (until the end of March) is a UK assumption inferred from our knowledge of US military planning, not (as far as we know) a firm political intention. It cannot therefore be regarded as a firm date, except in the sense of a working assumption to guide preparation activity. Wolfowitz on Monday acknowledged that there might not be enough evidence by February/March to persuade the Security Council of a *casus belli*, and that we could be in for a much longer haul. But he also stated that the "early Spring" was a potential window for decisions on military action. CENTCOM's efforts to minimise their lead-times aim to keep military options open for that window, whilst allowing maximum time for the UN/diplomatic process to unfold. We should recognise that, as US forces reach a peak of readiness in February, a "use it or lose it" argument may come into play in Washington.

Turkey remains a key uncertainty. Our understanding from Pentagon sources is that the Turks have not yet agreed basing for US land forces, but have agreed to preparatory activity (reconnaissance visits, etc); this looks like at least an amber light. For UK forces, Pentagon feedback is that the Turks gave "neither a definite Yes nor a definite No". We understand that the Turks gave a similar response to the Foreign Secretary, with some suggestion that their position might depend on the details of any UK request, and that we ought to discuss this bilaterally. We are considering with the FCO the best approach to securing Turkish agreement, taking into account our wider interests. Our sense is that we are unlikely to be able to make any progress on this until after Copenhagen. Action thereafter may include a visit by the Defence Secretary, probably accompanied by CDS (who has developed a good rapport with his opposite number) and Kevin Tebbit (drawing on his extensive experience of Turkey).

It is already increasingly difficult, for both US and UK staffs, to plan and prepare in the abstract without knowing where the UK land package will be based. There are also presentational risks in living with this uncertainty as time goes on: the Turks may interpret continuing UK preparations as taking their acquiescence for granted, and the media may eventually conclude that we are getting all dressed up with no place to go. But, if we wish to remain aligned with US planning, we cannot wait for an answer from Turkey before taking further steps to improve the readiness of UK forces. These steps are not particularly tied to the Northern option in any event.

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Recent
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Readiness of UK forces

As my letter of 29 November explained, the rapidly increasing US readiness does not present a problem for our Packages 0 and 1 (Special Forces and in-place forces), although we need to get on with some limited enabling work at Cyprus to support air operations for Package 1. The steps required to bring the additional air and naval elements of Package 2 into line with US timescales are also relatively limited. But a significant readiness gap is developing between US and UK amphibious and land forces. In round terms, we judge that we need to halve the lead times associated with these UK forces if we are to catch up with the US by mid-February - and this on the assumption that the US do not further reduce their own timelines.

I set out below, and in greater detail at Annex, the steps required to bring our naval, amphibious, air and land forces to be ready for a decision on 15 February to authorise military action. They cannot be regarded as immutable, given that a P Day of 15 February is a working assumption and the dynamic nature of the US planning.

Naval Forces

In-place UK naval forces (including a TLAM-capable submarine - a second could be added later - together with the Mine Counter Measures Task Group which is in the Gulf region conducting routine exercises until May 2003) will be able to support operations from mid-February onwards (or earlier if required). The initial tasks for the UK naval contribution are expected to include maritime interdiction operations, force protection for the logistic in-flow to the South, defensive mine warfare and logistics support. In order to achieve these tasks, we would need to deploy one Royal Fleet Auxiliary oiler and two destroyers or frigates from our Package 2 no later than 24 days before P Day - i.e. around 22 January. Clearly, if P Day seemed likely to slip beyond 15 February, there would be some scope for delay.

Amphibious Forces

The Amphibious Task Group (ATG) consists of a Royal Marine Commando Group plus HMS OCEAN, HMS ARK ROYAL, two destroyers or frigates, the Primary Casualty Receiving Ship, three Landing Ships Logistic, and supporting RFAs and commercial shipping. The ATG is currently in the UK conducting limited material preparations (loading stores, etc) for potential operations.

The US plan envisages that the ATG would conduct operations in the Northern Arabian Gulf and ashore from the beginning of the air campaign onwards (16 days after P Day). To deliver the ATG on time we will need to:

- a. Charter four ships from the commercial market by 19 December and, once available, load with equipment.
- b. Nominate and inform units and bring deploying elements' readiness to 5 days' Notice to Move from the beginning of January.

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- c. Load and deploy elements of the ATG around 16 January.
- d. Conduct amphibious training package (to integrate the force and bring HMS OCEAN to the appropriate readiness level) from about 3 February.
- e. Transit Suez Canal on about 15 February.

The Defence Secretary intends to proceed with steps a. and b. above on this basis, and plan to take steps c to e at the times indicated unless US timescales change significantly.

Air Forces

The RAF aircraft already patrolling the No-Fly Zones would form the nucleus of the UK contribution to the US air campaign, which would begin some 16 days after P Day. The first priority for our additional (Package 2) air contribution will be to support The remainder of Package 2 (including ISTAR and Air-to-Air Refuelling, as well as additional fast jets) will provide the US with niche capabilities for the air campaign.

The limited enabling actions needed to deliver the Package 2 air contribution on time are:

- a. Bring all elements to 10 days' Notice To Move or less on 27 December.
- b. Pre-position air weapons and other equipment in Turkey on 30 December.

The Defence Secretary intends to take these steps on the dates shown, unless it becomes clear that P Day will be significantly earlier or later than 15 February.

Land Forces (Package 3)

CENTCOM's plan for the North would require the lead Division, currently 1 UK (Armoured) Division, to cross the line of departure at approximately P+60 (i.e. mid-April), followed by the US 4th Infantry Division. The Northern option needs more work – including, for instance, on whether the US would second a brigade of their own to the UK Division – and so the precise composition of the UK land package will have to be kept under review. But, as the land package has the longest lead-time of all, we cannot delay taking action to improve its readiness if we are to have any chance of being ready from mid-February onwards.

The key enabling actions for the land package are:

- a. to commence initial preparations of earmarked elements of the land package.
- b. to begin cannibalisation and procurement of sustainability items for earmarked elements.

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- c. to begin training in the UK and Germany.
- d. To place holding contracts on charter shipping, in order to guarantee its timely availability, by 17 December.

These steps can be regarded as covered by the Foreign Secretary's and the Defence Secretary's comments in the Iraq Debate on 25 November about military preparations. The Defence Secretary intends to let steps a. to c. above start next week, and step d. shortly thereafter. The presentational aspect is addressed in more detail below.

Reserves

Following the Defence Secretary's reference to contingency planning in relation to reservists in the Iraq Debate on 25 November, work is in hand to refine the total numbers required. We can reduce timescales and risk, and help meet home Departments' need for more detailed information, by proceeding to involve reserve units and individual reservists in the planning process, checking on likely availability, contacting employers, and preparing a Call-Out Order and Notices, without actually proceeding to call-out (although we should be prepared for leakage of information sufficient to enable the media to establish the likely size and composition of the reserve contribution). The announcement on 25 November provides sufficient Parliamentary cover for all these steps, and the Defence Secretary intends to proceed to this stage as soon as possible. The actual call-out and mobilisation of reservists would need to take place no later than P Day, and would require a Call-Out Order and announcement to be made to Parliament. Ideally some reservists with key enabling roles would be called out earlier than P Day. We are doing further work on this.

Pre-Positioning

As preparatory actions commence and equipment becomes available for shipping, it would be prudent to begin pre-positioning equipment both in Cyprus, for further transshipment later, and in Turkey. This would allow us to use spare capacity on current strategic lift, thereby minimising costs and reducing deployment risk later. The Defence Secretary proposes that every opportunity should be taken to pre-position equipment.

Presentation

Although none of the steps proposed would necessarily require any announcement, we could expect most or all of them to become visible. There are both downsides and upsides to this:

- Those who are convinced that we and the US are set on war might have their prejudices reinforced, although we could say that none of these measures committed us to military action and reiterate the Foreign Secretary's point that the more prepared we are for the military action, the

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greater the likelihood of full compliance by Saddam without the use of force.

- There would probably be a number of stories of the "MOD cancels Christmas" variety
- Any winding-down of our readiness in the spring would need very careful handling: we would need to be able to point to some success in Iraqi behaviour so far, whilst emphasising our ability and willingness to bring our forces back to the necessary readiness if required. But this would in any case take place against the background of similar adjustments to the US force posture.

On the other hand:

- It would signal that we were serious about the use of force in the event of non-compliance, and to that extent would add to the coercive pressure on Saddam
- It would help answer allegations that our military preparations are not proceeding with sufficient urgency
- It would reinforce our credibility with the US, and improve our chances of securing the support we need from them, on Turkey and other issues.

Our presentational posture would need to be adjusted accordingly. Although we should continue to emphasise that military action was not inevitable, the media would quickly pick up the acceleration of our preparations. Our current low-key handling, which is already operating at the limits of credibility, would need to be replaced by a rather more pro-active approach. In particular, we should need to consider briefing defence correspondents on a background basis, and making available facilities with UK forces both in-theatre and in the UK and Germany.

The presentation of these preparations will also need to be viewed in the wider political context as it evolves, not least as it concerns the progress of inspections, their reports to the UNSC, and the continuous assessment of Iraqi compliance.

Conclusion

Unless we are prepared now to foreclose military options for a February/March timescale, the Defence Secretary believes that we need to proceed with the further preparatory steps set out above. This is a question of cocking the pistol, not firing it. We will of course need to keep timelines under review: if the US were to shift its focus to later in 2003, we would adjust accordingly. But, as long as a date for a political decision as early as 15 February for the committal of forces remains a possibility, we cannot afford to lose any more time if we to have any chance of re-aligning our readiness with that of US forces.

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I am copying this letter to Simon McDonald (FCO), Mark Bowman (HMT) and to Desmond Bowen (Cabinet Office).

Yours
Peter

P D WATKINS
Private Secretary

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ANNEX

DETAIL OF PREPARATIONS FOR UK FORCE PACKAGESNaval Forces

1. In-place UK naval forces - including a TLAM submarine to which a second would be added later, together with the Mine Counter Measures Task Group which recently deployed on routine exercises and will remain in theatre until May 2003 - will be able to support operations from mid-February onwards (or indeed somewhat earlier if required). The initial tasks for the UK naval contribution are expected to include maritime interdiction operations, force protection for the logistic in-flow to the South, defensive mine warfare and logistics support. In order to achieve these tasks, **we would need to deploy one Royal Fleet Auxiliary oiler and two destroyers/frigates from our Package 2 no later than 24 days before P Day - i.e. around 22 January.** Preparations for this deployment would be indistinguishable from routine ships' programming and therefore publicly ambiguous.

Amphibious Forces

2. The Amphibious Task Group (ATG) consists of a Royal Marine Commando Group plus HMS OCEAN, HMS ARK ROYAL, 2 DD/FF, the Primary Casualty Receiving Ship, 3 Landing Ships Logistic, and supporting RFAs and commercial shipping. The ATG is currently in the UK conducting limited material preparations (loading stores, etc) for potential operations.

3. The US plan envisages that the ATG would conduct operations in the Northern Arabian Gulf and ashore from 16 days after P Day, from the beginning of the air campaign onwards. To deliver the ATG on time we will need to:

a. **Charter 4 ships from the commercial market by 19 December and once available load with equipment.** This will provide sealift to transport the stores, ammunition, landing craft and vehicles needed to support the complete amphibious package throughout its deployment. The vessels would be chartered for a period of time rather than for a specific journey, preserving a degree of ambiguity until they were loaded and given a destination. The costs are estimated at £4.65M for the first three months, and £1.5M per month thereafter.

b. **Nominate and inform units and bring deploying elements' readiness to 5 days' Notice to Move from the beginning of January.** Formal nomination will allow full preparation and region-specific training. Although it would not need to be announced publicly, it is probable that the media would get wind of it.

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c. **Load and deploy elements of the ATG around 16 January.** The ATG will need to sail from the UK about 30 days before P Day – i.e. 16 January. Elements of the ATG would sail from different locations around the country over a period of several days. This would of course be visible and generate media speculation, although it is also, and could be presented as, part of a long-planned exercise.

d. **Conduct amphibious training package (to integrate the force and bring HMS OCEAN to the appropriate readiness level) from c.3 February.** Because of her programme and delays in the completion of her refit, HMS OCEAN will not have completed her full training and integration package prior to sailing from the UK. The ATG will therefore require a period of force integration and individual unit training in order to bring all elements to the appropriate readiness state. To minimise timelines the intention is to conduct this training on transit to and in Cyprus.

e. **Transit Suez Canal on c.15 February.** The transit of the ATG would take place over approximately 4 days around P Day. This is the first clearly unambiguous event signalling a potential role for the ATG in any possible operations against Iraq. The ATG would not be able to delay beyond this point due the speed of vessels and the transit time needed to join up with coalition elements in the Northern Arabian Gulf.

Air Forces

4. The RAF aircraft already in theatre patrolling the No-Fly Zones would form the nucleus of the UK contribution to the US air campaign, which would begin some 16 days after P Day. The first priority for our additional (Package 2) air contribution will be to support i. The remainder of Package 2 (including ISTAR and Air-to-Air Refuelling, as well as additional fast jets) will provide the US with niche capabilities for the air campaign.

5. The limited enabling actions needed to deliver the Package 2 air contribution on time are:

a. **Bring all elements to 10 days' Notice To Move or less on 27 December.** This is necessary to allow materiel, training and personal preparations to begin.

b. **Pre-position air weapons and other equipment in Turkey on 30 December.** The timing is dictated by the lead-times for charter and transit, but this action (costing approximately £500K) need not be visible or distinguishable from support to the Northern No-Fly Zone.

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Land Forces (Package 3)

6. The US plan for the North would require the lead Division, currently 1 UK (Armoured) Division, to cross the line of departure at approximately P+60 (i.e., mid-April), followed by the US 4th Infantry Division. The Northern option needs more work – including, for instance, on whether the US would second a brigade of their own to the UK Division – and so the precise composition of the UK land package will have to be kept under review. But as the land package has the longest lead-time of all, we cannot delay taking action to improve its readiness if we are to have any chance of being ready from mid-February onwards.
7. The key enabling actions for the land package are:
- Earmarked elements of the land package to commence force generation and preparation now.** Land Command need formal authority to take this step, which will enable the chain of command to identify and resolve any shortfalls in manpower and equipment. This is likely to generate media speculation about increased preparations and the involvement of specific formations and units.
 - Cannibalisation and procurement of sustainability items for earmarked elements to begin now.** This work is required to prepare equipment for operations and pre-position it either near Points of Embarkation in the UK, in Cyprus or in Turkey. It would be visible but could reasonably be explained as prudent contingency planning and part of our continuing coercion strategy.
 - Training to begin in the UK and Germany now.** Land elements need significant theatre-specific training, including for urban operations, and there will be little time for this once deployed to theatre. This is likely to be visible, and could prompt speculation about fighting in Baghdad.
 - Place holding contracts on charter shipping, in order to guarantee its timely availability, by 17 December.** The current force package requires the equivalent of 45 ships' worth of lift to arrive in Turkey in a compressed period from P Day onwards, allowing the US 4th Infantry Division to follow on behind. It will take 60 days to assemble the appropriate mix of vessels. The approximate cost of these contracts, until May 2003, would be £30M.

Reserves

8. Following the Defence Secretary's reference in the 25 November Iraq Debate to contingency planning in relation to reservists, work is in hand to refine the total numbers required. We can reduce timescales and risk, and help meet home Departments' need for more detailed information, by:
- proceeding to involve reserve units and individual reservists in the planning process

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- checking on likely availability
- contacting employers to give them maximum notice, whilst emphasising that no decision had been taken to proceed to call-out, and advising them not to commit resources at this stage to arranging cover for the potential absence of their employees
- preparing a Call-Out Order and Notices

without actually proceeding to call-out (although we should be prepared for leakage of information sufficient to enable the media to establish the likely size and composition of the reserve contribution). The 25 November Debate has provided sufficient Parliamentary cover for all these steps. The actual call-out and mobilisation of reservists would need to take place no later than P Day, and would require a Call-Out Order and announcement to be made to Parliament. Ideally some reservists with key enabling roles would be called out earlier than P Day, but we are doing further work on options which might avoid the need for this.

Pre-Positioning

9. As preparatory actions commence and equipment becomes available for shipping, it would be prudent to begin pre-positioning equipment both in Cyprus, for further transshipment later, and in Turkey. This would include the movement of air-weapons, defence stores and sustainability stocks as well as general infrastructure items needed to enable operating bases. An early decision to begin pre-positioning would allow us to use spare capacity on current strategic lift, thereby minimising costs and reducing deployment risk later. It might also reduce the overall demand for air transport in the early, and most critical, stages of a general deployment. With the majority of equipment being containerised this would be a publicly ambiguous action.

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