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*Dear David*

**IRAQ: MILITARY PLANNING AFTER UNSCR 1441**

**Need to continue military preparations to underpin the diplomacy/ inspection track, without bringing forces to an unsustainable level of readiness. But still no progress on Turkey:**

**– helpful if you could reinforce with Condi Rice need for this. Lack of clarity in US thinking about possible triggers for military action needs to be resolved quickly, particularly in relation to the no-fly zones. Iraq Debate on 25 November offers opportunity to trail preparatory work on Reservists and other issues with long lead-times; this will better allow us to address some concerns already expressed by other government departments.**

My letter of 29 October set out the state of military planning at that time. Although there was a sense amongst US planners that the realistic timetable for action was slipping, in part because of uncertainty over the Turkish position, there had been no US political endorsement of any later date for planning purposes.

Following Kevin Tebbit's calls in Washington on 5 November, CDS, General Pigott and Ian Lee visited the US last week to explore further US thinking in the light of UNSCR 1441. A number of themes emerged, many of which are inter-related.

**Turkey**

The US continue to describe the Northern Front as an essential part of the plan, but there is no clear agreement yet with the Turks who had declined to be definitive pending the appointment of a new government. The US may be in for a long and expensive negotiation, and it is clear that their first priority will

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### Timetable and Triggers

To some extent, triggers are now under Saddam's control and so cannot be slotted into any firm timetable. Moreover, what constitutes a 'violation' and/or 'material breach' remains undefined: many in the US are reduced to saying "we'll know it when we see it", which is not a suitable basis for planning.

There is a sense in the US that there are now two broad timelines in play, implying two different plans:

- a. A high-impact event to which the US might feel the need to respond quickly at short notice.
- b. A decision that a material breach has occurred, followed by a more deliberative build-up to military action.

Each of these is problematic. The first effectively hands the initiative to Saddam, allowing him to provoke a rapid response which might be dramatic but would not necessarily be decisive, because by definition it could not involve sufficient land forces to take control of Iraq (unless, of course, it leads quickly to regime collapse, a scenario in which the US seem to invest quite a lot of hope). The second avoids getting too ready too soon, but would mean a delay of two months or more in order to amass decisive forces - a timelag which Saddam might be able to exploit diplomatically and militarily.

There are limits to our ability to reach certainty about timelines. The deferral of some key preparatory steps in the US has effectively ruled out the possibility of beginning a deliberate campaign, as hitherto conceived, in early January. If the US were to move in that timescale, they would be making a "running start" with whatever they had available. A deliberate campaign would require some 60-90 days' build-up, and the time will soon come when the question has to be confronted of whether it is sensible to contemplate fighting in the summer. But the question of triggers is logically prior to that of timelines. We need to reach a common understanding with the US at least on how to approach this, and shape our plans accordingly.

### No-Fly Zones

This is, in effect, a sub-set of the 'trigger' debate. But it is highly-charged, both because it relates to actual current operations and because there are risks of US and UK positions being divergent. In the UK legal view the NFZs are not authorised by any specific SCR and hostile action by Iraq against coalition aircraft is not actually covered by SCR 1441 (even OP8). An attempt to justify action on this basis would present serious political and legal difficulties. On the other hand hostile action by Iraq will continue to prompt responses in self-defence. Furthermore, the shooting-down of a coalition aircraft would, under longstanding plans, trigger a massive US response: should this arise, the US could well treat it as the occasion for a "running start" campaign, as in paragraph 9a above. In these circumstances, it might become difficult to

disentangle the legal situation, or indeed the handling of a return to the Security Council.

### Aftermath

Our own work has increasingly convinced us that the aftermath of any military action will be a major challenge in its own right. This needs to guide thinking on the conflict phase, for all sorts of reasons:

- However successful the conflict phase, a badly-handled aftermath would make our intervention a net failure.
- Day 1 of conflict will also be Day 1 of the aftermath for some parts of Iraq.
- The nature of the conflict will influence the type of aftermath we find ourselves managing: in particular, Iraqi behaviour will have a big impact on the scale of the humanitarian and reconstruction tasks that might emerge.
- The forces we commit to conflict will also have to deal with the initial phase of the aftermath, simply by virtue of being there. And of course their location in the conflict phase will largely determine their post-conflict role: if UK forces are deployed in the North, they are likely in the aftermath to find themselves dealing with either the Kurds or the Sunni heartland.
- We also need to bear in mind that the aftermath could arise with little or no prior conflict, in the event that the regime collapses under pressure. Although the US tend to believe that the regime would indeed collapse very quickly, their thinking on the aftermath is, paradoxically, focused almost entirely on managing a post-conflict scenario.

Although the US recognise that the aftermath is important, their own thinking remains somewhat immature, fitting the problem to their pre-conceived solution. In particular, despite having spent two months securing unanimity in the Security Council, they continue to have difficulty understanding why anybody might think that some kind of UN umbrella will be important in the aftermath stage. We need to keep trying to inject realism into their thinking.

### Conclusions

Against this background, the Defence Secretary believes we should:

- a. Press for clarity on the Turkish position, one way or the other. As noted above, the Defence Secretary would be grateful if you could reinforce with Condi Rice the need for the President to try to unblock

this. If we do have to fall back on a Southern role, we should try to ensure that it is as part of the main effort rather than as follow-on forces.

b. Work quickly to reach an agreed US/UK view on triggers: we need to sort this out in theory well before we are confronted with it in practice.

c. On the question of the NFZs, we need to continue to explain to the US that we do not believe OP8 of SCR 1441 applies and that we believe our posture should for now remain as it was before. This means that hostility can be met with self-defence responses. We are not yet convinced that there is a settled view in Washington that would not raise difficulties for us, particularly as their public line relies on a legal interpretation at variance with our own. More work is needed urgently on how to manage possible UNMOVIC activity within the no-fly zones.

d. Continue with military preparations to keep options open. We need to get on with steps that will improve our readiness without making us "too ready". In particular, it would be sensible now to begin preparatory work and consultations on the Reservist requirement – this would not commit us to proceeding with a call-out, which we would aim to synchronise with the US if and when the time came. The Iraq debate on 25 November is an opportunity to make some public reference to these preparations, including work being undertaken on equipment and other planning, and is usefully distant from the 8 December deadline for Iraq's WMD declaration.

e. Continue trying to influence US thinking on the aftermath, recognising that this is not something which can neatly be separated from any conflict phase (and indeed, might arise without conflict at all).

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

*Yours*

*Peter*

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Private Secretary