

D/Sec(O)/2/37/7

27 August 2002

**PS/Secretary of State**

**Copy to:**

PS/Minister(AF)	PJHQ-CJO
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PS/CAS	DGCC
MA/VCDS	Legal Adviser
Policy Director	PJHQ-CIV SEC
CDI	DOMA
DCDS(C)	

**IRAQ**

**References:**

- A D/DG Op Pol/4/6/1 (64/02) dated 9 August 2002
- B MO 6/17/15C dated 31 July 2002
- C MO 6/17/15C dated 26 July 2002

**Issues**

1. Iraq: update on developments during August; impact of FRESCO on contingency planning.

**Recommendation**

2. Secretary of State should note that:
  - a) The international situation on Iraq remains largely as it did at the beginning of August, but although President Bush took "no decisions", CENTCOM planning and preparation for action against Iraq continues apace;
  - b) Further refinement of UK contingency planning indicates that the impact of OP FRESCO is not as severe as previously advised in that, provided the Operation does not continue beyond three months, packages 1 and 2 can be kept intact; FRESCO would, however, limit any land contribution (package 3) to a brigade. (SF options will be addressed separately.)

And agrees that

- c) If it is decided to go ahead with the main tranche of FRESCO training, we should inform US planners of the practical constraints this would place on our ability to offer ground troops for operations against Iraq notwithstanding the need for political decisions;
- d) You should write to No 10 along the lines of the attached draft.

### Timing

- 3. Routine.

### Background

4. The international situation on Iraq remains more or less as it was at the start of the month. In the US, in the absence of final political decisions, CENTCOM has moved forward in terms of planning and preparation, within the authority already delegated to CINCCENTCOM (see later). At the UN, Iraq's strategy of stringing along the international community, whilst trying to appear reasonable has continued. This has included a letter from its Foreign Minister to the Secretary General on 1 August, which contrary to press reporting did not offer to discuss arrangements for the return of weapons inspectors; a publicly-trumpeted invitation to US Congress members to visit Iraq to carry out their own inspections; and Saddam's "announcement" during an interview with George Galloway, reported in the 11 August Mail on Sunday, that he was ready to comply with resolutions, including "unfettered access" to weapons inspectors. The following day, however, the Iraqi Information Minister was quoted as saying "Inspections have finished in Iraq". A further 10 page letter from the Iraqi Foreign Minister to the Secretary General on 15 August merely confirmed the Iraqi request for further technical talks before allowing weapons inspectors to return.

5. There has been little substantive change in the intelligence picture. Internal security forces continue to focus on preparations for a US attack. Saddam remains secure, with few signs of military disloyalty and no significant threats to the regime. It is assessed that Iraq remains unlikely to consider pre-emptive military actions – such as a move into the Kurdish Autonomous Zone or regional destabilisation. US concerns over a terrorist facility in the ungoverned part of Northern Iraq, of which the Secretary of State was aware, have now been widely reported in the media, along with a US decision not to mount a military operation.

6. Recent JIC papers have covered *Regime Cohesion, Saddam's Diplomatic and Military Options* and *Regional Attitudes and Impact of Military Action*. For ease of reference, I attach a summary of the key judgements of each paper at Annex A.

7. At home media speculation has continued, but no new themes have emerged. Reporting has focused on the Washington decision making process (with varying interpretations of President Bush's statements as either talking up or cooling down the potential for military action); whether UK might participate in US-led action and the form military action might take (although notably no clear picture has emerged in the media setting out sensitive aspects of US planning such as the running start concept). The month has also seen some notable articles, including an Economist Leader (3 August), making the case for military action. Others, such as Michael Quinlan (FT, 7 August), have, however, raised serious concerns about the impact of military action both in terms of its ability both to seed political division in the UK and instability in the Arab World. Finally, Gen Wesley Clark, the former SACEUR, used a Today programme interview to point out that the US would rely heavily on the assumption of UK support, but that this was not necessarily guaranteed.

8. In the US a much greater public debate has emerged over the last month. Television coverage and newspaper opinion pages are now dominated by Iraq; influential figures such as former Secretaries of State Albright and Baker have joined prominent Republicans Amery, Lugar, Kissinger and Scowcroft in expressing reservations and stating preconditions. These focus on the lack of a clear threat to the US justifying military action **now**, the need to convince and involve allies, the impact on the region and the lack of a "what next?" strategy. Debates on the need or otherwise for a new and specific UN mandate, and for Congressional approval for military action rumble on (Cheney has just said this is not *legally* necessary). After a period when the "hawks" held the stage, the pendulum is perhaps shifting slightly as a wider spectrum of opinion formers begins to question whether Bush has made the case for military action.

### US Planning

9. At reference A, we reported the outcome of President Bush's 5 August briefing; specifically noting that, although President Bush remained committed to regime change in Iraq, he had taken no decisions other than allowing planning and preparation to continue under authority already delegated to the Defense Department. We also reported feedback from State Department sources that the President had raised concerns over the need to build an international coalition, "the day after" and the various courses of action open to Saddam. It now seems that these concerns are beginning to be addressed as part of the US interagency process. In particular we understand that at the

Foreign Secretary's (private) meeting with Colin Powell on 20 August that discussions focused on the idea of setting out at the UN an ultimatum for the return of weapons inspectors to Iraq. We understand that Iraq was not on the official agenda at Bush's recent Crawford meeting which neither Powell or Gen Tommy Franks attended.

10. We reported that CENTCOM had begun work on 32 (now 41) preparation tasks, some 22 (now 31) of which required diplomatic clearance by host nations. We understand that work on each of these tasks is being taken forward by CENTCOM under a tailored approach for each task/country. US Ambassadors have now been briefed through informal telephone calls direct from CENTCOM, rather than under a co-ordinated approach by the State Department. Both Ambassadors and Component Commanders have been asked to take the line that the tasks are prudent irrespective of whether or not a major offensive is required. CENTCOM continue to brief that the US will look to the UK for diplomatic support for their engagement strategy, but as yet we have received no such request from State. A picture is emerging of CENTCOM potentially driving forward the diplomatic process because of a perceived lack of decisions at State.

11. Operations in Northern Iraq are increasingly seen by the US planners as a highly desirable and an important addition to the campaign plan. The overwhelming effect of simultaneous action against Saddam is one of the principal features of the campaign design. It is increasingly accepted that action in the North would play an important part in that; adding a significant additional complication that he will have to overcome.

#### UK Planning

12. We have continued to refine contingency planning for a UK contribution to US-led military action within the constraints you set out at reference B. As Secretary of State will recall, we have been considering three military capability packages which the UK could potentially offer in support of US-led action: an *in place support package* (package 1) derived from existing forces in theatre; an *enhanced support package* (package 2) which adds substantial maritime and air capabilities; and a *discrete UK package* (package 3) which offers the possibility of a leading role for UK forces for operations. At annex B I attach illustrative force packages underpinning this work. This is now being developed into a more refined set of force packages, which will be more flexible in composition.

13. In particular as the need to commence substantial training for QP FRESCO has come closer, we have sought to optimise FRESCO planning in order to maximise capabilities available for contingency purposes. The position is now significantly better than that reported in your letter to No. 10 at reference C. Provided a fire dispute lasted no more than three months, both

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packages 1 and 2 (including SF) would still be achievable concurrently with FRESCO. We previously warned that only Package 1 might be available during a fire dispute.

14. Our ability to offer Package 3 would, however, be constrained immediately once a decision to begin full scale training for OP FRESCO is taken and then for the duration for the dispute. LAND would have to commit 35 combat and combat support arm major units to FRESCO, which would be 75% of that type of unit not committed to current operations. This means that Package 3 at divisional scale would not be achievable. Once training for OP FRESCO starts it would not be possible to provide a brigade within JRRF readiness, but once FRESCO has begun it should be possible to release forces to enable the deployment of a Brigade tailored to operational needs. This would fall well short of the contribution required to enable the UK to carry out a "discrete" role in the North and could raise some of the integration issues which led Chiefs of Staff to view our offering conventional land forces for operations in Southern Iraq as impractical. We continue, however, to explore ideas of how such a contribution could be made to work alongside other potential partners and drawing heavily on US goodwill and resources.

15. As Secretary of State will be aware we anticipate that a Fire Brigade strike could commence around 24 October (probably not before), which means the main tranche of OP FRESCO training needs to commence by 9 September. The next meeting between the Fire Brigade Union and the employers will take place on 2 September. If negotiations break down a decision on FRESCO training will be required very soon after. Because of the sensitivity of Iraq contingency planning work, the impact of FRESCO on our Iraq contingency planning work is *not* being exposed as part of this decision making process across Whitehall. It makes sense, therefore, to warn No.10 of this aspect in advance of the decision. A detailed statement showing the longer-term impact of FRESCO on the Armed Forces is being worked up at present.

16. If a fire strike led to FRESCO operations commencing in late October and continued for at least one month, this would limit any UK land contribution to no more than a brigade well into January, the time we consider most likely for US action. In any case, Secretary of State is already aware of the considerable warning time we would need to deploy anything greater than a brigade, notwithstanding FRESCO and the need to take forward the UORs which would be required for all three services. PJHQ is working on this with a view to significantly reducing the deployment timelines.

17. In spite of regular UK caveats, we suspect that the US planners continue to believe that the UK could deliver a Division if supported by the US. There are, however, signs that they are now looking at the provision of US forces if we do not. To date EUCOM planning in this area has lacked clear

direction. We have now seen, however, the draft of a new planning directive from CENTCOM (due to be issued shortly) that will task EUCOM with providing logistic support for the deployment of a divisional size force, either coalition or US only, to execute the northern option.

18. That said, it continues to be important to guard against any false assumptions the US might make about the UK's potential contribution to any military action. We have not so far shared the impact of FRESCO on our potential ability to contribute to land forces with the US. Explaining the impact of OP FRESCO to the US would, we believe, serve to focus US planners on the real practical limitations we would face, were political decisions taken to join the US in military action. I recommend therefore that as soon as a decision to commence the main tranche of FRESCO training is taken, we should explain the consequences to US planners through our liaison team at CENTCOM.

19. I attach a draft letter for you to send to No 10 setting out the impact of FRESCO on our contingency planning for Iraq and suggesting we inform the US once a decision on FRESCO has been taken.

20. Finally, the Secretary of State may wish to be aware of how other nations are being engaged in the US planning process. Although they have yet to make a military commitment (or take national political decisions), Australia remains engaged with the US in a similar way to the UK, having deployed around 16 planners to CENTCOM and the Component Commands. Further, in recent days, it has emerged that the US are planning to begin engaging Turkey in military planning in the next few days.

Simon Cholerton  
Sec(O)1

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Draft letter from PS/Secretary of State to No 10

1. I am writing to set out the latest position on the impact of OP FRESCO on our ability to potentially offer ground troops for operations against Iraq.

**The contents of this letter are extremely sensitive.**

2. The next meeting between the Fire Brigade Union and the employers will take place on 2 September. If negotiations break down a decision on to commence the main tranche of training for OP FRESCO will be required very soon after. Because of the sensitivity of Iraq contingency planning work, the impact of FRESCO on our Iraq contingency planning work is *not* being exposed as part of this decision making process across Whitehall. This letter sets out the implications of such a decision in advance.

3. In my letter (MO 6/17/15C) of 26 July, I set out the potential UK military contributions to US-led military action against Iraq and warned that if OP FRESCO went ahead it was possible that we would not be able to offer anything other than the "in-place support package" – effectively forces already deployed in the region – and Special Forces. As FRESCO draws closer to the horizon, we have continued to refine our contingency planning and to optimise OP FRESCO planning in order to maximise our contingency capabilities. The position is now improved in that we now believe that we would be able to offer the "enhanced support package" described in my letter concurrently with OP FRESCO. All of our work has assumed that a fire strike would last no longer than three months.

4. FRESCO would, however, continue to constrain our ability to offer land forces. Land Command would have to commit 35 combat and combat support arm major units to FRESCO, which would be 75% of that type of unit not committed to current operations. This means that a UK deployment at divisional scale would not be achievable. Once the main tranche of training for

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OP FRESCO has begun we will be prevented from providing a brigade within readiness (two months). If OP FRESCO is implemented in full (from late October) it should, however, be possible to release forces to enable the deployment of a brigade, although this would fall well short of the contribution required to enable the UK to carry out a "discrete" role in the North. Furthermore by limiting our contribution to a brigade we would need to revisit the integration issues which led Chiefs of Staff earlier to view our offering conventional land forces for operations in Southern Iraq as impractical.

5. In spite of regular UK caveats through our liaison team at CENTCOM, we suspect that the US planners continue to believe that the UK could deliver a Division for operations in the North if supported by the US; although there are signs that they are now looking at the provision of US forces if we do not.

6. The Defence Secretary considers it particularly important that guard against any false assumptions the US might make about the UK's potential contribution to any military action. We have not so far shared the impact of FRESCO on our potential ability to contribute to land forces with the US. Explaining the impact of OP FRESCO to the US would, we believe, serve to focus US planners on the real practical limitations we would face, were political decisions taken to join the US in military action. The Defence Secretary is therefore minded that as soon as a decision to commence the main tranche of FRESCO training is taken, we should explain the consequences to US planners through our liaison team at CENTCOM.

6. I am copying this letter to PS/Foreign Secretary and Sir Andrew Turnbull.



Annex A to D/Sec(O)/2/37/7  
dated 27 August

***Regional Attitudes and Impact of Military Action***

- No regional State would give Iraq significant practical support against a US-led attack.
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- Arab governments' support would be badly damaged.  
Their support might also be reduced if any military campaign is prolonged or causes many civilian casualties.
- A US-led attack on Iraq would spark large-scale protests across the Arab world. Security forces would probably be able to maintain control, at least initially, but Jordan could be particularly exposed.

***Regime Cohesion***

- Only massive military force would be guaranteed to topple Saddam.
- Real loyalty and support for Saddam is confined to the top of the hierarchy.
- The Special Republican Guard (SRG) and the Republican Guard Forces Command (RGFC) are more reliable than the Regular Army (RA). All would initially fight a US-led attack. Once the regime was perceived as doomed the military's will to fight on would be sorely tested.
- Regime disintegration would be most likely if Iraqi ground forces were being comprehensively defeated; if top military officers could be persuaded that their fate was not irrevocably tied to that of Saddam; or if Saddam himself were to be killed. Military units are more likely to suffer mass desertions than revolt as coherent units.

***Saddam's Diplomatic and Military Options***

- Saddam will use all options to remain in power. He remains innovative and capable of surprising us.

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- Saddam is likely to pursue continued talks with the UN on the return of weapons inspectors as a means to delay a US attack. He would permit their return if he believed that the threat of large-scale US military action was imminent.
- Saddam is likely to be cautious in using force early and will play for time. But the closer and more credible an attack seemed, the more risks he will be willing to take, perhaps including deniable terrorist attacks.
- Early on in any conflict, Saddam would order missile attacks on Israel, coalition forces and regional States providing the US with bases.
- Saddam would order the use of CBW against coalition forces at some point, probably after a coalition attack had begun. Once Saddam was convinced that his fate was sealed, he would order the unrestrained use of CBW against coalition forces, supporting regional states and Israel.
- Iraq would probably try to ride out air strikes while conserving its ground forces. Iraq's likely strategy for a ground war would be to make any coalition advance as slow and costly as possible, trying to force the coalition to fight in urban areas.
- There is significant potential for Saddam to miscalculate, either by escalating a crisis at an early stage, or by making concessions too late in the day to avert an attack.

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Annex B to D/Sec(O)/2/37/7  
dated 27 August

### **Illustrative Force Packages**

#### **Package 1 – In Place Support Package**

##### Maritime

MCC  
2xFFGH  
TLAM SSN  
1xLSL  
3xRFA

##### Air

ACC  
4xJaguar  
6xTornado F3  
8xGR4  
2xVC10  
2xTriStar Mk2  
2xMR2; 2xE3D; 4xC130J;  
1xHS125; 1xC130K

Plus SF, which will include significant tri-service support.

#### **Package 2 – Enhanced Support Package**

SF as for package 1.

##### Maritime

MCC  
CVS Gp  
5xDD/FF  
TLAM SSN  
ARG (Coy level Mil Force)  
MCMTG  
RFA Group

##### Air

ACC  
62xFast Jet  
12xAAR  
3xRecce  
4xAWACS  
2xMPA  
Joint NBC Regiment  
3xGround Based Air Defence  
4x Field Sqn (RAF Regt)  
In theatre transport aircraft as  
required

### Package 3 – Discrete UK Package

(The exact force package for a discrete UK package is contingent on a number of factors which as yet unknown. The one below, however, illustrates the type of asset that could be used.)

SF as for package 1. Air as for package 2.

#### Maritime

MCC  
CVS Gp  
5xDD/FF  
2xTLAM SSN  
ARG (Cdo level Mil Force available post Oct 02)  
MCMTG  
RFA Group

#### Land

1xArmd Div + CS + CSS  
Comprising of:  
1 Div HQ  
2 Square Armd Brigades  
1 Man Sp Bde  
2 Log Bde  
OSG (incl Avn)  
SH package

Lt Bde (Air Assault capable)