



SECRETARY OF STATE

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*Jonathan.*

MO 6/17/15C

*I am not clear where the firemen's wine stands.  
Grateful for a word about  
what to say to Washington when.*

28 August 2002

*Dear David,*

*Am 30/8*



### IRAQ - POTENTIAL UK CONTRIBUTION AND A FIRE STRIKE

Potential UK contribution to US action in Iraq during any fire strike could be the "enhanced support package" of maritime, air and Special Forces. Any further land contribution would be limited to a Brigade which would be insufficient to allow a "discrete" UK role in the North. Need to guard against excessive US expectations of a UK Division. Defence Secretary minded to explain consequences of fire strike to US as soon as decision to start main tranche of training is taken.

I am writing to set out the latest position on the impact of OP FRESCO on our ability potentially to offer forces for operations against Iraq. **The contents of this letter are extremely sensitive.**

The next meeting between the Fire Brigade Union and the employers will take place on 2 September. If negotiations break down, a decision to commence the main tranche of training for OP FRESCO will be required very soon after. Because of the sensitivity, 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.

In Peter Watkins' letter (MO 6/17/15C) of 26 July, he 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 we have continued to refine and optimise OP FRESCO planning in order to

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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 that letter, concurrently with OP FRESCO. This could include substantial maritime and air capabilities, including some in which the US are deficient, and Special Forces. All of our work has assumed that a fire strike would last no longer than three months.

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 already committed to current operations. This means that a UK deployment at divisional scale would not be achievable. Once the main tranche of training for 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, limiting our contribution to a brigade would raise the integration issues which led Chiefs of Staff earlier to view our offering conventional land forces for operations in Southern Iraq as impractical.

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. The Defence Secretary considers it particularly important that we 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 the US.

I am copying this letter to Simon McDonald (FCO) and Sir Andrew Turnbull.

Yours  
M J Williams

M J WILLIAMS  
Private Secretary