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MO 6/17/15K

**PRIME MINISTER****IRAQ**

1. We have been taking forward contingency planning work on Iraq. To make further progress we now need greater clarity on US thinking. Donald Rumsfeld's visit to the UK on 5 June offers us an opportunity to seek this.
2. We briefed you in advance of your meeting with President Bush at Crawford on our preliminary thoughts on Iraq. A key issue was the need to understand US thinking, but since Crawford there has been no take up of the offer you made for us to help the US in its planning. In the meantime, MOD officials have taken forward, with FCO and intelligence colleagues, close hold contingency planning. Jack and I have agreed tentative objectives to guide the work which I attach at Annex A. In particular, we have looked at what the UK might be able to contribute were the US to assemble a coalition along the lines of that assembled for Operation DESERT STORM which we consider at the maximum of the scale of military effort.
3. I attach our preliminary conclusions at Annex B. The key message from this work is that if we wish to be able to contribute meaningfully to any operation our Armed Forces would need plenty of warning time, much more than we think the US would need themselves. We are clear that, for the UK to have influence on detailed planning, the US would require a significant contribution to any large scale operation. Our own analysis indicates that this would have to be at division level for land forces. (It is possible that the

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objective could be achieved by a more rapid blow, but we cannot count on that.).

4. I now need to set in hand further work to look at how we might reduce the UK lead time necessary for providing a division sized force, but inevitably this will come at a significant price. Furthermore, any decisions we take soon in order to prepare for potential military action will be interpreted publicly that we have decided to take action against Iraq. Should we go ahead with preparation, we will therefore need a robust public handling strategy.

5. In order for us to plan properly we need to know what outcome in Iraq the US would wish to achieve - there are signs that a Bonn Conference model is gaining currency in Washington - and when the US might wish to take action. It would also be useful to know how long the US see themselves as remaining engaged in Iraq. Further, we need to clarify the policy basis and legal justification for any action.

6. In broaching these topics with Rumsfeld, we face a dilemma. On the one hand, if we discuss the detail and timescales of a potential UK military contribution to a US-led coalition, it could send a misleading signal that we have decided to support a specific line of military action. (Such a signal could be used in Washington by the supporters of military action to promote their cause.) Equally if we are not clear with the US at this stage about our military constraints, we face the danger of our not being able to bring anything meaningful to the table at the right time and the consequent loss of influence that would bring. Finally, it could be precisely our readiness to participate that would allow you to counsel the President against proceeding if no convincing plan were to emerge.

7. I have been reflecting on how best we should tackle Rumsfeld during his visit. One approach might be simply to probe him generally on Washington thinking. But I consider there may be more mileage in raising practicalities. I would make clear that our conditions for involvement in military action remain as you have set them out: public opinion would need to be prepared; the UN

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Inspectors route would need to be given every chance of success; and there would have to be an adequate degree of stability in the Arab/Israel conflict. Further, by raising, in general terms, that our work on contingency planning has shown we need plenty of warning in order to be able to contribute to military action, I would reinforce the need for the UK to be exposed fully to US thinking as soon as possible.

*120.  
Political  
Sec  
w/ my  
message*

8. I am sending a copy of this minute to Sir Richard Wilson, Gordon Brown and Jack Straw.

*Peter Hunt*  
(Private Secretary)

Ministry of Defence

31 May 2002

(GH)

*(Approved by the Defence  
Secretary and signed  
in his absence)*

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~~LIMDIS - NOT TO BE COPIED FURTHER~~**ANNEX A: IRAQ: PRELIMINARY OBJECTIVE**

"A stable and law-abiding Iraq, within its present borders, co-operating with the international community, no longer posing a threat to its neighbours or to international security, abiding by its international obligations on WMD."

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## ANNEX B: IRAQ CONTINGENCY PLANNING INTERIM CONCLUSIONS

- Due to air transport constraints imposed by OPERATION JACANA (in Afghanistan), UK could not contribute significantly to offensive operations before the end of **November**.
- Given **three months** warning of offensive operations the UK could deploy a **Medium Scale** Joint Force to the Gulf<sup>1</sup>. This would comprise deployment of around 60 fast jets plus additional support aircraft; a naval task group of around 10 major warships and ground forces comprising 15 000 personnel. The force package would, however, risk being a token contribution; decisions incurring significant expenditure would be required immediately, and work on basing rights, and deployment would need to start almost immediately. The cost of generating forces to the required level of readiness, including essential work to meet equipment shortfalls, would be some **£500M - £800M**.
- With **six months** warning UK could deploy a **Large Scale** land warfighting force of some 35 000 personnel together with a Medium Scale maritime/air component, as for three months warning ("Division minus package"); at this level of deployment we judge the land component as making a *significant* contribution a US led coalition. The limited time for preparation would, however, prejudice the capability and sustainability of the force. Decisions incurring significant expenditure would be required within a month; basing rights would need to be secured within three months; a decision on a six month deployment **now** would permit offensive operation to begin in **December**. The cost of generating forces to the required level of readiness, including essential work to meet equipment shortfalls, would be some **£800M - £1.1Bn**.
- With **nine months** warning the recommended force package would remain as for six months, but inherent risks would be significantly reduced; the large scale land for package in particular becomes more credible, capable and sustainable. As a result the cost of generating the required level of readiness would be rather higher – some **£900M - £1.2Bn**.
- Deployment and campaign costs would be **in addition** to those set out above.
- Deployment and offensive operations would lead to significant downstream opportunity costs. Given the need to recover and recuperate forces of this size, particularly our ability to engage on other operations would be severely limited; if the US plan a long term presence in Iraq we should not be able to sustain at a significant level such a commitment.
- Further work is needed to refine the above work and consider costed options for what action might be taken soon in order to reduce the warning time for the "Division Minus" option.

<sup>1</sup> This would involve a deployment greater than that for Exercise SAIF SAREEA II in Oman last year, which involved some 22 000 personnel across all three Services.

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