



SECRETARY OF STATE

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2 July 2002

Dear David,

DM  
C.M.

IRAQ

My letter of 26 June promised to let you know the outcome of the visit by the MOD team to the US last week. This follows, together with suggestions on what work needs to be done here and what further contact is desirable. **The briefing given to the UK (and Australian) MOD teams has not been shared with any other US Departments except at the most senior (Principal/ Deputy) level. The MOD access is privileged and our knowledge of US planning should be very closely held.**

US military thinking is quite well advanced. CENTCOM is in no doubt that the desired military outcome can be accomplished. The planners' assumed mission is "to conduct offensive operations in Iraq to overthrow the régime, destroy the WMD capability, and reduce the threat to the Iraqi people, the region and the US". The military concept briefed to the President on 19 June by CENTCOM is now being turned into an operational plan. It is for a big operation involving about 250,000 troops in the region, the call-up of 300,000 reservists to backfill in the USA and provide logistics in theatre, and an estimated cost of \$70bn. At present, the plan is for the use of US military forces only, although the *de facto* invitation to the UK and Australia to participate is now on the table.

The plan requires, at an absolute minimum, availability of bases and support from Kuwait, Jordan and Turkey. The former two have indicated their willingness to do so to General Franks (although with limitations in the case of Jordan).

US planners assume the availability of Diego Garcia as a bomber base, and the use of our Cyprus airfield for reconnaissance and transit aircraft. They also intend to obtain bases in Qatar, Oman, UAE and Bahrain and overflight rights from Saudi Arabia. Support from other countries, including the main European actors, would also be needed.

Sir David Manning KCMG  
No 10 Downing Street

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The plan is flexible in that the forces could be generated from a standing start following a Presidential order or could be triggered in response to action undertaken by Iraq to pre-empt or deter the coalition, e.g. in the No Fly Zones. In the former case, three months would be needed to put forces in place before action was initiated; in the latter, military engagement could start much sooner with the likely weight of military effort needed to be developed over three months. US military planners repeatedly stressed that political decisions had not been taken. Nevertheless, the current planning is designed to put CENTCOM in a position to be able to activate their plan from August 2002 onwards.

The UK team's initial comments on the plan highlight its critical dependence on local basing and overflight, both in the Gulf and in Turkey. The logistic concept also looks fragile, although the constraints are induced by politics as much as by geography – Saudi Arabia is not envisaged as a base. Knowledge of where and what WMD are to be tackled during military operations is negligible. And the desired participation of the UK is unclear, apart from bases and air enablers such as reconnaissance aircraft and air-to-air refuelling; some ground forces are clearly expected, maybe up to a divisional size, but this was left open. What is glaringly obvious is that the military planning so far has taken place in a policy void. The first area of the jigsaw puzzle that is being assembled is the military option, to check its viability. But the end-state to be achieved after conflict has not been defined and the identified military task currently runs out after the overthrow of the régime.

In the Joint Staff of the Pentagon and at CENTCOM there is recognition that the military plan stands in splendid isolation – without an overarching campaign strategy for dealing with Iraq. The approach to be taken to establishing a broad-based successor government has not been elaborated, let alone agreed. The State Department, we hear, has been considering (without conclusion) orchestrating a conference of Iraqi opposition figures to produce a declaration of principles. The means to woo the international community and, in particular, the regional states whose direct support would be essential has not been thought through; and the legal basis for action remains obscure. The Joint Staff hope to persuade the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs that he should lobby for a tightly knit interagency process to work up a campaign strategy. In a chance meeting in Washington with our team, General Ralston (double-hatted as SACEUR and C-in-C US European Command) conveyed his view that a broad strategic plan had to be put in place in order to persuade Turkey and other European players to co-operate.

From talking to the Pentagon and CENTCOM planners, what they want from us is:

- a. a second opinion and conceptual thinking to help them with their operational planning;
- b. participation in an operation to spread the political load, but also bring key enablers and specific capability;

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c. influence at the political level to place the military option into a strategic campaign plan.

The Defence Secretary intends to respond positively to the invitation for a small number of British planners to join the US planning teams at the various levels of command. He has sanctioned the early despatch of a six man team to Tampa, on the basis that no political decisions have been made in the UK on our participation in an operation. The US military recognise that this makes sense and we will ensure that the point is firmly registered. Such involvement in the planning is essential in helping to inform the MOD's own thinking so that the Defence Secretary can make recommendations on what our contribution should be. It should attract no public visibility. Were questions to arise, we would adopt our standard line: we are already engaged in air operations over Iraq with the US; military planning for contingencies is standard practice; as the Prime Minister has made clear no decisions on action against Iraq have been taken.

The Defence Secretary is very conscious that decisions about a British military contribution cannot be made in the absence of a coherent and integrated strategic framework. An agreed strategy will be key to taking matters forward, not simply to provide justification for military action, but to clarify timelines; to incorporate the Prime Minister's conditions for UK participation; and to establish the framework for an information campaign. The draft public documents, which you are currently considering, would ultimately form an important part of that campaign. He suggests that the Prime Minister may like to call an early meeting of a small group of colleagues to consider how best to get the US to address the strategic, as opposed to the narrowly military, dimension. The freestanding military option is not a viable political proposition. Meanwhile, officials from the MOD, FCO and Cabinet Office should do some more homework urgently to put the Prime Minister and you in a better position to influence the President's and Condi Rice's thinking on all this before the updated CENTCOM plan is briefed to the President in the course of August. Mr Hoon will also review the possibilities over the next few weeks for contact with the US Defense Secretary.

I am copying this letter to Simon McDonald (FCO),  
and Tom McKane (Cabinet Office)

(HMT) and to

*Yours  
Peter*

P D WATKINS  
Private Secretary

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