



SECRETARY OF STATE

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MST 4/5/2K

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1) cc: JPO
D4

I spoke to Chris Baker (MOD) today to say that the M10 was in the Black Water should leave in early Dec + be replaced by Americans, ie no further British deployment (pace x below). This is agreed, but there is still no precise plan for the eventual

DEPLOYMENT OF UK FORCES TO THE NORTH BABIL REGION

The Chiefs of Staff, having received advice from the reconnaissance team in north Babil, are of the view that there is a clear military benefit in carrying out the operation in terms of reducing the risk associated with the proposed ISF/US Fallujah operation. I intend to accept their recommendation and announce this in the House today.

The US military in Baghdad has requested one UK Battlegroup to replace one US battalion (the 1/23 Stryker Battalion) in north Babil to release additional US combat forces for future operations in Fallujah. The US cannot do this by re-balancing their own forces because of their very high level of commitment elsewhere across Iraq. The provision of the UK armoured Battlegroup is therefore a significant force generator for the US.

The task is likely to involve the securing of bridges and supply routes across the River Euphrates; denying Anti Iraq Forces (AIF) the ability to interfere with

The Rt Hon Tony Blair MP
Prime Minister

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MNF/ISF movement in support of Fallujah operations; and, on commencement of operations in Fallujah, conduct route security and disrupt AIF movement west of the River Euphrates.

The most recent threat assessment indicates that most of the AIF activity has been to the east of the Euphrates and is related to the continuing MNF/ISF counter-insurgency operations. Incidents in the potential UK area of responsibility have been far fewer. But the threat is dynamic and is certain to change once operations in Fallujah commence. Overall, the threat assessment is that the risk to UK forces should be no higher than that experienced during August in MND(SE).

At present, 1st Battalion Black Watch are the divisional armoured infantry reserve in MND(SE). The reconnaissance of north Babil indicates that this unit would be best suited to carry out the task requested by the US. If the Black Watch deploy, there will be a short period when MND(SE) will be without its armoured infantry reserve, until the Scots Guards start to arrive in theatre on 29 October as part of the planned roulement (originally to relieve the Black Watch). The Scots Guards will deploy with their own Warrior vehicles and will form the divisional reserve in MND(SE). General Rollo has indicated that the short period without his divisional reserve between when the Black Watch deploy to north Babil and the arrival of the Scots Guards is a risk that he is prepared to accept.

The US has made clear that the UK deployment would be for no more than 30 days. This period would cover exactly the calendar month of November. But Prime Minister Allawi has yet to finally authorise the operation in Fallujah and there remain political hurdles for him to cross, which could delay the start of operations. Further contingency work will now take place to set out options should an overriding requirement emerge for UK forces to remain in position for longer than this period.

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I am copying this letter to Jack Straw, Hilary Benn, Paul Boateng and Peter Goldsmith.

Yours sincerely

Geoff

GEOFFREY HOON

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