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25 May 2004

Dear Matthew,

IRAQ: OPTIONS FOR A UK MILITARY CONTRIBUTION TO THE WIDER SOUTH**Outcome of further consideration of options:**

- Although we would not have considered taking any role in MND(CS) if the US had not approached us, there are longer-term strategic arguments which militate against "doing nothing" as an option.
- The advice of the Chiefs of Staff is that the option which would have the greatest effect and the least military risk would be the deployment of both HQ ARRC to command both MND(CS) and MND(SE) and a Brigade to replace US forces in the provinces of Najaf and Qadisiyah.
- The Chiefs of Staff recognise that this option carries with it significant penalties, including the wider impact on the Armed Forces and costs. Moreover, the situation in Iraq will evolve during the coming months, in ways we cannot confidently predict. Against this background, the Chiefs of Staff judge that a pragmatic approach would be to deploy HQ ARRC, which would have available to it the armoured infantry mobile reserve battlegroup we already propose to deploy to MND(SE); and to prepare a brigade and its battlegroups in the UK. The brigade could be deployed to Iraq if this became necessary to guarantee the delivery of the effects we seek, but such deployments would be the subject of separate future Ministerial decisions in the light of circumstances at the time.
- If this option is to be taken forward, there are some other preparatory steps which ideally need to be taken now, without prejudice to a final decision on whether to pursue the proposed option. Some of these steps would be presentationally very difficult in advance of a Parliamentary announcement. But delay will have a knock-on effect

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on the timescales within which military options can be delivered. In particular, some key equipments are unlikely to be fully available until well into the autumn at best, and delay in consulting industry will increase the risk. Ministers need to decide as soon as possible whether these steps should proceed.

- Ministers should note the implications and presentational challenges associated with this option, including in respect of the armed forces restructuring plans which would be announced at around the time that additional UK forces would be deploying. There would also be significant impact on the BOWMAN digitisation programme which is central to the development of Network Enabled Capability, and on tour intervals which are extremely important to the morale and retention of our personnel and their families.

Detail

The Defence Secretary and the Chiefs of Staff have discussed further the options for making an additional UK military contribution in Iraq which would involve us in MND(CS) as well as MND(SE).

On that wider role, discussion has focussed on those options which might have a significant effect, namely:

- HQ ARRC(+): HQ ARRC, with a battlegroup (which would be the same battlegroup we already plan to deploy to MND(SE)), to command MND(CS) as well as MND(SE)
- Expand MND(SE): A Brigade with three battlegroups to replace US forces in Najaf and Qadisiyah, bringing those provinces into MND(SE).
- HQ ARRC(+) and replace US forces: ie, both of the above.

US forces have replaced the Spanish, and could continue to do so albeit at increasing pain. There is a political judgement, rather than a military judgement, to be made about the implications of not helping the US out in current circumstances in Iraq. But there is also a longer-term issue. If the coalition were forced to exit Iraq in ignominious circumstances, future US military intervention in the region would become an unlikely prospect for many years to come. As long as we have well-founded serious concerns about Iran,

Although UK assistance with MND(CS) may not by itself be decisive in avoiding strategic failure in Iraq, we judge that it would at least reduce that risk.

Against this background, the judgement of the Chiefs of Staff is that the option which would have the greatest effect and the least military risk would be HQ ARRC(+) and replace US forces: ie, the deployment of both HQ ARRC to command both MND(CS) and MND(SE) and a brigade to replace

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US forces in the provinces of Najaf and Qadisiyah. Replacing US forces along with expanding MND(SE) to take Najaf and Qadisiyah under command would improve the sensitivity with which Najaf in particular was handled at the tactical level. This tactical action would potentially have strategic impact, as the UK would have control of what is effectively the Shia cultural and religious centre of gravity, but this effect could still be overpowered by the consequences of US actions elsewhere, such as in Karbala. Conversely, although the deployment of only HQ ARRC, with the armoured infantry battlegroup as a reserve, would have an effect at the operational level, influencing the coalition's approach to five additional provinces rather than two, it would be largely dependent on US and other forces for implementation at the tactical level.

The case for tackling both sides of the equation is therefore strong. But it carries with it a significant bill in every respect, which is described further below. It would also take 3-4 months to implement in full, and we cannot at this stage predict with any certainty what sort of environment we would be going into. We do know two things:

- The coalition will have to operate very differently after 30 June, and within parameters acceptable to the Interim Iraqi Government. It also needs to work to make itself redundant as rapidly as possible by helping the Iraqi Security Forces take greater responsibility. As time goes on, this may increasingly argue against putting further boots on the ground. In any event, Iraqisation would clearly be central to UK forces' mission.

..... This also is an argument for keeping the level and nature of our commitment under close review.

If Ministers decide to pursue this option, therefore, we should try to do so in an incremental and sequenced way which allows us to take stock at intervals before committing further elements of the force. This will also enable us to retain some capacity, *in extremis*, to respond to other contingencies.

If HQ ARRC were to take command of Coalition military operations in southern Iraq, the intent would be for it to deliver "Regional Control" in both MND (CS) and MND (SE) within its tenure of up to 12 months. This is part of the Coalition (CENTCOM's) extant military strategy for Iraq, where Iraqi security forces, trained and mentored by the Coalition are responsible for security, but are backed up by Coalition forces based in the region (i.e. in southern Iraq) as their guarantor. As the precursor to complete handover and withdrawal, HQ ARRC should press on towards this important operational milestone even if its delivery in the Sunni areas by US forces is delayed. The intent would be to reduce the UK commitment to no more than a divisional HQ (MND (SE)) and a brigade within the 12 month period.

The preparation of the elements of this force would be concurrent but its deployment would be in 3 broad stages, allowing for several decision-points

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along the way when we could take into account developments in the situation after 30 June:

- The forward elements of HQ ARRC, probably deployed to the MND (CS) area. This deployment could be complete in Iraq within 3 to 4 weeks of a decision, assuming a deployment by air.
- The balance of HQ ARRC its battlegroup and its logistic support. This deployment could be complete in Iraq within 6 to 10 weeks of a decision.
- A brigade able to deploy rapidly to Iraq if the situation requires it. In order to have this effect it would be prepared to be at very high readiness (less than 10 days' notice) for operations in Iraq with its heavy equipment deployed forward in theatre as soon as possible. Some elements of the brigade (the headquarters and a light battlegroup) could be ready to deploy within 4 weeks of a decision, but it would take about 3 months for the entire brigade to be ready at less than 10 day's Notice To Move with equipment pre-positioned. In order to sustain this brigade over time, whether in the UK or in Iraq, we would need to replace the selected formation in the autumn, and again every 6 months thereafter.

Implications

Manpower numbers. The initial uplift in manpower, would be in the order of 1,900 personnel. A further 600 enabling troops may be required for up to three months to support the initial deployment, depending on the level of US support available. The brigade, whether deployed in Iraq or held at very high readiness in the UK with some of its equipment forward in theatre, would commit up to a further 4,100 troops, although this might be reduced by about 600 if US support (particularly medical, logistic and aviation) were guaranteed. In short, the worst case net additional manpower requirement, including those we would rear-base in the UK, would be 6,600; the best case would be about 5,400. Numbers in theatre would rise by anything from 1,900 to 6,600, depending on deployment decisions and the level of US support.

Reservists. The deployment of HQ ARRC would result in a small increase in the requirement to mobilise Reserves. Subject to detailed reconnaissance, we currently assess that up to 100 additional Reservists would be required initially, but over time this number might increase to approximately 400 to support roulement of HQ ARRC posts and supporting elements over a 12-month period. We anticipate that any announcement on these Reservists would be incorporated in the next planned announcement on mobilisation of Reservists for Iraq in mid June. Any deployment of the brigade on an enduring basis would increase the mobilisation requirement by up to a further 300.

Equipment and logistic support. The Defence Secretary will write separately to the Chief Secretary about Urgent Operational Requirements (UORs) and their cost implications. Most of the additional equipment and logistic needs

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will involve extensions to existing UORs, and the Defence Secretary therefore judges that we should begin consulting industry now. We would also seek to obtain some assistance from the US to fill some logistic capability gaps, including medical support, helicopters for casualty evacuation, and bulk fuel vehicles.

Even if a decision is taken now, and assuming that some risk is taken with the availability of equipment for the Northern Ireland marching season, most key force protection equipment may only be available in sufficient quantities for HQ ARRC and its battlegroup by early August, and for the brigade by the end of September. Communications will take longer to resolve: the extension of the Coalition communications network to the expanded area of operations would take a minimum of 5 months, assuming the availability of contractor support; and the provision of the most modern personal radio equipment, which has not yet been completed even in MND(SE), will also take several months. Field accommodation of the same standard as that in MND(SE) will take some 6 months to be fully delivered. The Defence Secretary is therefore concerned that the availability of equipment in some important areas may lag behind the availability of the personnel. Finally, the deployment timescales indicated above assume the availability of air transport, which may be affected by EURO 2004 and the Athens Olympics.

Costs. Further work will be necessary to refine cost estimates, and the costs actually incurred will of course depend on the extent to which all the forces prepared are actually deployed, and for how long they are kept in theatre. But initial estimates suggest that HQ ARRC and its battlegroup reserve would cost some £255M in the first year, with subsequent annual costs (if applicable) of some £65M. If, however, the entire brigade was deployed as well, the whole option would cost some £600M in the first year, with subsequent annual costs (if applicable) of £200M.

Legal issues. In taking command of US and other forces we would be assuming some legal responsibility for their actions. We would need to look carefully at their Rules of Engagement and operating procedures, and satisfy ourselves that we had done everything possible to minimise the risk that US forces in particular (who are still operating on warfighting ROE) might take actions which would not be legal for UK forces. We would also need to satisfy ourselves that the forces in question shared our understanding of their obligations under the Geneva Conventions and International Humanitarian Law in general. In short, we would need to try to ensure that they behaved as we would expect UK forces to behave. This is unlikely to be an easy issue to manage. Even if we do deploy UK forces to take over from the US in Najaf and Qadisiyah, there will be a considerable period before this can happen, during which we will have no option but to command the US forces currently deployed.

Risks. Any expanded commitment will inevitably increase the likelihood of casualties. The more troops we put on the ground, particularly around religiously sensitive areas, the greater this likelihood will be. The focus on Iraqiisation, and on having tasks carried out by the ISF rather than the MNF

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wherever possible, should mitigate the risk. But we must be prepared for the worst case.

Wider impact on the Armed Forces. Deploying HQ ARRC and the **battlegroup** would result in further truncation of tour intervals for many personnel: deployment of the battlegroup will involve some impact on the infantry, some 40% of which has already had or will have tour intervals of less than 12 months (against a policy of 24 months) at some point in the three-year period 2002-2004; deploying HQ ARRC will add to the impact on combat service support personnel, including for instance a reduction in Signals squadrons' tour intervals to an average of less than 10 months and less still for some specific units. Reduced tour intervals will affect training and thus future capability. They will also significantly further reduce the time Service personnel and their families expect to spend together: for instance, if we decide to deploy HQ ARRC many Service families will have to cancel summer holidays. For some, this may be the straw that breaks the camel's back and leads to experienced personnel leaving the Services.

Holding a brigade at readiness has more significant impact, even if it is not deployed outside the UK. There would be a loss of formation-level warfighting training, and a 12-month delay to the delivery of the already much-delayed BOWMAN digitisation capability, which is absolutely central to the development of Network Enabled Capability, and to the our land forces' future ability to operate closely with their US counterparts. If the entire brigade were deployed to Iraq for 12 months, tour intervals would reduce to an average of 12 months (half the stated policy), and the position will inevitably be worse for some specific units. Depending on the duration of the deployment, it is unlikely that we could provide the Land Component to the NATO Response Force from January - June 2006. While the brigade is committed - whether in the UK or deployed - the Armed Forces would be unable to commit to any other land operations at medium scale and above. This would remain the case for some time after the commitment had ended: it would be at least 6 months before a brigade-sized intervention operation could be undertaken. During the commitment, the pool of forces available for a small scale operation, or for other contingencies such as a Firefighters' strike, would also be considerably reduced.

All these considerations reinforce the need to proceed incrementally. They also add to the difficulties associated with the Armed Forces restructuring announcements planned for the Summer.

Next Steps

If Ministers decide to pursue this approach, a number of steps will need to be taken. On the assumption that a final decision and announcement may be some weeks away (see below), there are **some steps for which early Ministerial agreement would be helpful where possible**, if we are not to add significant delay to the timelines for deployment. These steps include:

- **NATO.** In order to release HQ ARRC smoothly we would wish to prepare the ground fully with our NATO partners. We would wish to consult closely

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with the US, other NATO capitals and specifically SACEUR, to inform them early of our intentions on a "no decision" basis.

- **COMARRC Recce.** Commander ARRC will need to do his reconnaissance as soon as possible. He will need to visit Washington, CENTCOM and, perhaps, Warsaw, before going to Iraq. This will be a 'scoping' reconnaissance, but is likely to be read by the US as signalling commitment, and its timing therefore needs careful consideration.
- **Poles.** Our Polish allies will need careful consultation in both Warsaw and Iraq, to explain the decision for HQ ARRC's assumption of responsibility for MND(CS) and (SE).
- **UN/IGC.** The US and UK will need to engage with both the UN and the Interim Iraqi Government, when appointed, to explain the decision to deploy HQ ARRC. The political line of operation will be increasingly driven by the UN and the Iraqis and COMARRC must be able to mesh his security efforts with this political process.
- **Notice to Move.** In order to avoid delays to the preparation and (where appropriate) deployment of forces, it would be necessary to reduce the Notice To Move of:
- **HQ ARRC.** Ideally we would like to authorise COMARRC to reduce from 15 days to 5-10 days. Although there is obviously a risk of leaks, this risk already exists as HQ ARRC staff are aware that deployment to Iraq is an option under serious consideration.
- **3 Commando Brigade and Other Supporting Elements:** 3 Commando Brigade would be the first brigade, and we would need to reduce its Notice To Move from 20 days to 5-10 days. We cannot do this until it returns from the multinational Exercise AURORA. The exercise does not end until 25 June, but we would not propose to pull it out now because this would be interpreted as signalling a decision, and in advance of an announcement would lay us open to accusations of deploying by stealth. Equally, assuming a decision on or around 14 June, we would not propose to withdraw it from the exercise at that stage for the sake of avoiding 11 days' delay. Thus the brigade would probably not be ready until around mid-September.
- **Equipment and logistics.** We must engage with industry on equipment and logistic requirements as early as possible. Obviously there is again some risk of leaks, but this has to be set against the risk of delays in the provision of equipment and stocks, which in some areas already seems likely to lag behind the availability of the personnel themselves. The Defence Secretary believes that the Government would face exceptionally severe criticism if additional UK forces were deployed without all the

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appropriate equipment and logistic support. Since what is required is, in most cases, an extension of existing UORs, Mr Hoon believes that we should begin consulting industry now.

Delaying these steps will obviously have a knock-on effect on the timescales within which military capability can be delivered on the ground. In broad terms, the impact will be commensurate with the delay. Thus, if no steps are taken until a decision is announced on, say, 14 June, the forward elements of HQ ARRC would not be in theatre until mid July, and the full capability until possibly the end of August. The brigade would not be ready at less than 10 days' Notice To Move until perhaps mid September, at which point we would shortly need to replace it with a different brigade. Delays in approaching industry would obviously increase the time required to deliver important equipment, some of which is already likely to be available months after any deployment.

After an announcement, the formal force generation process would swing into action, with further reductions in Notice To Move, further recesses, and the training and equipping of nominated units.

We would also need to make clear to the US the conditions attached to this package. This would include:

- detailed requests for military support to minimise the manpower burden on the UK
- an understanding that the US equivalent of Quick Impact Project funding will remain available to MND(CS), although we will of course expect a continuation of Quick Impact Project funding as well
- an understanding that any withdrawal by current MND(CS) troop contributors would be backfilled by US forces
- an understanding that the commitment of HQ ARRC would be for no more than 12 months
- and most importantly, a clear understanding that we would expect both to be able to run the South in a British way and to be fully consulted over the overall conduct of the campaign through various mechanisms.

Presentation

Any decision to deploy additional troops beyond MND(SE) would need very careful presentation. This would not be simply a superficial 'line to take', since a deployment that was quantitatively or qualitatively significant would prompt searching questions as to its strategic rationale. It will not be self-evident to Parliament or the media that the application of additional military effort - which however large to the UK is small in relation to the overall size of the coalition - can achieve the strategic effect being sought. The Defence

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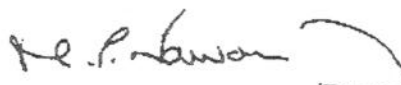
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Secretary believes that any desire to play down the numbers to avoid domestic political difficulties and avoid throwing the spotlight on the stress to the force structure will simply exacerbate this weakness. Conversely, a presentation that seeks to claim decisive strategic effect for UK forces needs to be set firmly within a clear political strategy if it is to carry conviction. Since the political strategy in Iraq is increasingly owned by the UN and – certainly by the time any deployment could take place – by Iraqis, the announcement will have to deal definitively with questions about the multi-national force's legitimacy and command relationship with the Interim Iraqi Government.

Unless a decision is taken, and the ground prepared with key partners, very rapidly, the first opportunity for an announcement to Parliament would be the week beginning 14 June. If an announcement is delayed until the week beginning 14 June, then to the extent that practical military preparations (including those set out above) are delayed accordingly there will of course be a knock-on effect on the timescales for deployment and the achievement of operational capability on the ground. On the other hand, the political process, the relationship between the coalition and the Interim Government, and the position of the UN Security Council should all be clearer by this time, and this will make it easier to present the decision as representing the continuation and reinforcement of a strategy which is bearing fruit.

Mr Hoon believes that we should also bear in mind, however, that if the need to prepare a reinforcement package to Iraq is agreed, even though the precise shape and timings will be determined by events on the ground over the coming months, it will be both sizeable and visible. The Chiefs of Staff are deeply concerned that they will be unable to sell to their people the starkly conflicting messages of an increase in commitment, alongside the emergent view in the public domain of sizeable adjustments downwards in our force structures. It is also significant that planned announcements about force structures and capability reductions are likely to coincide with the actual deployment of forces.

I am copying this letter to Ciara Mulligan (DPM), Kara Owen (FCO), Mark Bowman (HMT), Moazzam Malik (DfID), Carolyn Barlett (Attorney General) and Desmond Bowen (Cabinet Office).



M P NAWORYNSKY
Private Secretary

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