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PERMANENT SECRETARY

D/PUS/2/45(216)

28 May 2004

Secretary of State

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CDS

IRAQ: UK MILITARY PRESENCE

I have seen Matthew Rycroft's note on the discussion with the Prime Minister yesterday on the options for a UK military contribution to the wider South. As I was not there I can only work on the basis of the record, which is sufficiently brief to leave open the possibility that some nuances may have been missed. But as set out, it read as if the Prime Minister was in danger of believing that the options developed are based on operational military judgements of what is needed for the success of the overall mission, when it can equally be argued that they are operational military judgements of how best to proceed if Ministers decide there is an overriding political need to do more.

2. Of course, the two aspects are not entirely separable. But it would be wrong to get into the position of sending more troops – and allowing the US to transfer huge political as well as military risks to the UK – on the basis of a misunderstanding of what the Chiefs of Staff are calling for. The PS note of 25 May makes clear that the Chiefs' advice was offered as options of what could be done (in anticipation of a political decision to do more), more than as what they judged needed to be done (in contrast, for example, to yesterday's announcement which was driven by the military requirement). It is important that this distinction is not misunderstood.

3. In any event my advice remains that we should not take final decisions until the UNSCR and associated security agreement with the Iraqis are sorted out, and even then to be prepared to change tack in light of the evolving situation in the wider South, especially if it is the case that significant forces can't be there until September, by which time US actions or reactions could have changed – for better or worse – the strategic picture beyond a stage that we could alter.

4. It is also the case, I believe, that we should not consider a further military contribution without a reassurance that the FCO, DFID [redacted] can put their own resources in as well to help produce the broader security result.

KEVIN TEBBIT

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4/5/2 #22

6.2
I agree with that
be the chief's advice on what
needs to be done?
GWR
29/5