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PRIME MINISTER

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### US REQUEST FOR MORE BRITISH TROOPS IN IRAQ

General Fry (Deputy CDS) has given me a heads up on the proposals which will be going to the Chiefs of Staff tomorrow for additional British forces in Iraq following the visit of the recce team over the weekend.

Main points:

- The aim would be to take over two additional provinces (An Najaf and Al Qadisiyah). This would then make a six-province expanded British sector. It would still be commanded by a two star HQ in Basra, but there would be an additional one star HQ in the new provinces.
- At present we have 7,800 troops in the South East sector. The proposal going to Chiefs is that this should rise temporarily (described as 2-6 months, but if possible at the lower end of that range) to over 12,000; but would then move back to a steady state expanded force of around 10,900. ✓
- So there would be a significant short term spike. The additional troops would be needed in order to get the new operation going (engineering and other works); but also to start to do some of the things :  
- , in particular training for Iraqiisation of the security forces and control of the border.
- The MOD know that this temporary bulge is big. But that is the professional advice they have had, and Rob Fry does not think that the Chiefs will want to pare the operation down if it is taken on.

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- On timing, elements of the one star headquarters would arrive by early June; but the main force would arrive at the beginning of July and be fully operational by mid-July.

The detailed papers are coming over to us. Chiefs of Staff will meet on Wednesday morning. There will be then be a recommendation to the Defence Secretary; the MOD will write to us on Thursday or Friday.

The MOD would welcome an informal steer from No 10. I repeated that you wanted the Chiefs and Defence Secretary to give their advice clearly and did not want decisions made simply because the US were asking for a bigger British presence; but would want to be sure that CDS and his colleagues felt that this expansion was desirable and necessary. General Fry, who is the key MOD military planner, gave me his personal view: "I increasingly feel that this is a necessary thing to do in order to underwrite our strategic success". This is because, as we have explained before, the alternatives to the UK taking on this role would be less likely to be successful:

- the Americans could do it; but :  
; and it would take key US forces away from the central Sunni area where they face significant problems already.
- none of the other coalition partners looks able to take on something of this scale. (But we must keep the Poles committed to their command of the Centre South sector, which would of course become smaller if we took over two of their provinces.)

If you have doubts about proposals on these lines, we should say so now, before the Chiefs' discussion. We will in any case put the detailed papers to you when they come from the Ministry of Defence later in the week.

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