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CABINET

MINISTERIAL COMMITTEE ON DEFENCE AND OVERSEAS POLICY

SUB-COMMITTEE ON IRAQ

UK MILITARY PLANS FOR SOUTHERN IRAQ IN 2007

Note by the Secretaries

TO OIR
PA Iraq
general

The attached memorandum by the Ministry of Defence is circulated to the Committee for consideration at its meeting on Thursday 07 December 2006. The meeting will be chaired by the Defence Secretary at 09.00am.

Signed

M ALDRED

Cabinet Office
06 December 2006

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UK MILITARY PLANS FOR SOUTHERN IRAQ IN 2007
A briefing paper for DOP-I by Officials

1. This paper builds on previous papers considered by DOP-I¹ and provides an overview of emerging UK military plans for MND(SE) in 2007. These plans are designed to be consistent with US and Iraqi intent to speed the process of transition, but are subject to further discussion, both with Other Government Departments, the Iraqi Government and in particular, the US at all levels. This paper should not be regarded as a final or definitive statement of UK plans for Iraq, but rather a basis for more detailed work and discussion.
2. Ministers are requested to note the direction of emerging plans and agree the next steps.

Present Situation

3. We have transferred Dhi Qar and Al-Muthanna provinces to Iraqi control and overwatch in these provinces appears to be working well. De facto overwatch already operates in Maysan province, where recent unrest was dealt with by the Iraqi authorities, and we believe handover could take place there early in the New Year. UK commanders also judge that Op SINBAD could create the conditions for handover in Basra as early as March next year, although it is likely that the US, in particular, will take some convincing that transfer should occur that early.

Re-posturing of UK Forces

4. At the end of Op SINBAD, which effectively represents the graduation exercise for the Iraqi Army in Southern Iraq, there will be no military advantage from UK forces staying in Basra City. Were they to remain, they would simply act as targets, for no significant military-strategic benefit, which would be wrong. Therefore, at the conclusion of Op SINBAD, we intend to re-posture into Basra Air Station and, from there, to conduct a "Military Assistance Mission", which includes mentoring and providing support for the Iraqi Security Forces. The end of Op SINBAD also offers a significant presentational opportunity, allowing us to leave in good order and not hand a media victory to JAM or Iranian backed terrorists. Ideally transfer would occur at this stage, but the decision on this is not entirely in the UK's gift. That said, for a number of reasons, not least the presentational opportunity at the end of Op SINBAD, we need to continue to work with the Iraqi Government, coalition partners and other key US interlocutors, to explain our strategy, and to highlight the advantages of handover being coincident with the end of Op SINBAD. In any event, re-posturing is the right thing to do militarily, and is the best way to achieve handover in Basra.

5. Following re-posturing and/or handover, Basra Air Station would become the main base of operations for UK forces in MND(SE). We would maintain a residual presence in Basra at the Permanent Joint Control Centre

¹ DJC/ IRAQ/ BRIEFS/ DOP(I) Iraq - Medium Term Prospects and Implications - 12/10/2006

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(The Warren) and will have no detachments along the Iranian border, at Safwan Hill and at the port in Umm Qasr. Subject to Other Government Departments' plans, following the transfer of Shaibah Logistics Base to Iraqi control in January (already agreed but not announced), the preferred order of closure would be: the Shatt Al Arab Hotel (SAAH), Old State Building and finally Basra Palace. Consolidating the UK's efforts at Basra Air Station provides an opportunity to reinvigorate the comprehensive approach but further work on the implications of closing Basra Palace in particular, which includes the impact on intelligence collection and situational awareness, will need to be done before this aspect of the plan is confirmed.

Military Tasks

6. Post handover in MND(SE) the primary focus will be as a 'Military Assistance Mission', continuing to build the capacity of the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF). Operational Battlegroups (OBGs) will be set up to train and mentor the Iraqi Army, Police Force and Department of Border Enforcement.

7. We will continue to support Other Government Departments' efforts on Iraqi police training and reconstruction as required. In particular, we are coordinating plans to disband the Serious Crimes Unit (SCU), the largest and most corrupt of Basra's police units.

8. Should the security situation in any of the provinces deteriorate significantly we will also maintain a capacity to intervene and take over the operational role of the ISF at the formal request of the Iraqi Government. The force will also need to be capable of meeting existing coalition tasks in southern Iraq, including the protection of main supply routes to Baghdad/central Iraq.

Force Levels

9. The above plans will lead to troop reductions, primarily due to the reduced force protection requirement as bases are closed. If all goes to plan, at the next roulement in May 2007, UK forces should have reduced from six to four battle groups. This will see troop numbers reduced from the present level of 7100 to fewer than 4500. Further reductions may be possible in the second half of 2007 depending on conditions, in particular the likelihood of re-intervention and ISF training requirements, probably through a further progressive battle group by battle group reduction.

Next Steps

- Further work with OGDs to refine emerging plans to accommodate their requirements and exploit opportunities to improve the comprehensive approach in MND(SE).
- Develop handling plans for briefing/discussing these intentions with the US (covering both Baghdad and Washington), coalition allies, and Iraqi Government (in Baghdad and Basra), containing key implementation targets.

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- Develop strategic communication plans for public presentation. It will be extremely important to portray our plans as directly linked to supporting the Iraq Government and provincial transfer decisions are Iraqi led.

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