

From: Nick Gibbons  
Date: 30 January 2003

**DAVID MANNING**

cc Desmond Bowen  
John Scarlett

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## IRAQ: CRISIS MANAGEMENT

I attach the draft of a possible note to the Prime Minister on Iraq, for you to consider (and perhaps discuss with the Prime Minister) before it is submitted to Andrew Turnbull. There are two points worth highlighting.

### "War Cabinet"

2. The proposal in the note is for a very small, informal group which will meet regularly, and whose terms of reference will not be published. In terms of managing the business this is fine. But the absence of a formally constituted "War Cabinet", as we had with Afghanistan, which was the public face of Government decision-making could lead to unhelpful speculation about how any conflict was being managed. Other Ministers might also feel excluded. One way round the problem would be for DOP to be convened occasionally (thereby bringing in Clare Short and Gordon Brown) when there is a need for a wider discussion – perhaps before Cabinet each week. This would be in addition to the more regular meetings of the inner group.

### Press Briefings

3. I have not mentioned this aspect in the note. But MOD are planning on the basis of perhaps a daily press briefing around 11.00am. This is something that Alastair will no doubt look at in due course but it will be important to strike a balance between the various briefings in theatre, here and in Washington.

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NICK GIBBONS

PRIME MINISTER

## IRAQ: COMMITTEE ARRANGEMENTS

We need to think now, on a contingency basis, about meeting and briefing arrangements for handling any conflict with Iraq.

**"War Cabinet"**

2. I recommend that you chair a small group of Ministers each morning as necessary to oversee the UK's involvement. The meetings themselves could be fairly informal affairs, along the lines of the early morning intelligence sessions during the Afghanistan conflict. A short note recording only the main decisions would be produced by the Cabinet Office (OD Secretariat) after each meeting.

3. Given the sensitivity of the information and issues to be discussed, **I think that the core group should be very small.** I propose that it be limited to the Foreign Secretary, Defence Secretary, CDS, "C", John Scarlett plus a small Secretariat. There is also a case also for including a non-departmental Cabinet Minister who is not quite so close to the action. An obvious candidate would be John Reid. The membership could be also extended **as necessary on a case by case basis**, if there was a need to involve any other Minister (such as the Attorney General or Development Secretary) in the discussions. [(Alternatively DOP could meet when there was requirement for wider participation.)]

4. The core group could be formally constituted as a Cabinet Committee. But I recommend that it be established as an Ad Hoc Ministerial Committee. This would help foster an air of informality and obviate the need to publish any composition and terms of reference.

**COBR**

5. I propose that COBR should be activated in the immediate run up to any military action, and manned on a 24 hour basis. As during the Afghanistan conflict, David Manning would chair official-level meetings (both in restricted and wider formats) to co-ordinate and galvanise

Departmental activity and to ensure that you are properly briefed on developments.

**Intelligence**

6. John Scarlett would brief your Group on the intelligence picture. Additionally, his staff will produce written intelligence updates. As for Afghanistan, these will normally issue at 08:00 (or at around 10:00 at weekends).

**Situation Reporting**

7. In addition to the intelligence assessments and updates, I envisage the following reports being prepared by COBR on a regular (probably daily) basis:

- A one page **Overnight Sitrep** prepared early each morning covering the main international and military developments.
- A more detailed thematic **Evening Round-Up** following the Afghanistan model. This would include a top secret annex covering special operations.

7. It would helpful to have your views on whether this thinking is along the right lines. Of course I would not propose to take action on any of this at this stage, but

8. I am copying this to Alastair Campbell, Jonathan Powell and David Manning.

**ANDREW TURNBULL**