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24 February 2003

IRAQ: POLITICAL AND MILITARY QUESTIONS

Your letter of 20 February asked for advice on a number of questions. Of those allocated to MOD, FCO have agreed that the lead on question 5 falls to them. Answers to questions 1-4 are set out below.

- (1) **What is our military's assessment of the likely consequences of an attack on Iraq; ie how many casualties; how quickly the collapse?**

To answer these in reverse order:

(a) **Iraqi Regime Collapse**

The US plan is aimed at achieving overwhelming effect very early in the campaign. In terms of fostering regime collapse, the key element of this overwhelming effect will be the dislocation of the regime (through decapitated command and control and disrupted communications) supported by the deployment of ground forces into Iraq and their move towards Baghdad. Apart from the practical consequences of these elements of the plan, they should remove any doubt in Iraqi minds about the coalition's determination to remove the regime. It is therefore possible that the regime will collapse once this line of manoeuvre becomes apparent, ie in the first few days. Nonetheless, it is impossible to predict human behaviour with certainty, and US planning assumes up to 125 days of decisive ground operations.

(b) **Casualty Estimates**

This question is easier to ask than to answer. Casualty estimation is an imprecise and contextual process, requiring a significant number of assumptions to be made for it to take place at all. Whilst the range of outcomes of a specific engagement in which both sides choose to fight may be predicted

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with reasonable confidence, forecasting which engagements will take place, in what sequence and under what conditions is much less certain.

It is harder still to take account of low-probability, high-impact events, such as a successful chemical or biological attack, or successful attack on eg a ship. In such cases, predictions about casualties only have value when based on very specific information about the circumstances of the attack.

Against this background, work to estimate the number of casualties that might be incurred in a ground campaign has been based on the following assumptions:

- Iraqi forces do engage the coalition and do not suffer a rapid, total collapse at the start of the campaign.
- The campaign lasts for a total of 30 days (of which about 6 or 7 days would be combat operations/high intensity fighting).
- The current 'base' US campaign plan and associated UK missions are carried out (ie, the plan does not change in any significant way).

It should also be noted that the estimates derived from this work exclude:

- Potential Special Forces casualties.
- Casualties incurred through fighting in urban areas.

Based on these assumptions, we estimate likely UK land battle casualties as being in the order of 30-60 killed and 120-200 wounded. Total Iraqi land battle casualties are assessed as being in the order of 500-1,200 killed and 2,000-4,800 wounded.

Detailed assessments of likely Iraqi casualties from the air campaign can be carried out only on a target-by-target basis. This work is in hand. Further advice is being prepared for the Defence Secretary. This includes assessments of likely civilian casualties. Iraqi civilian casualties from anything other than the air campaign are likely to be relatively few, unless coalition forces become engaged in fighting in urban areas.

For low-probability attacks, the possible impact of a single small-scale, but well-executed surprise chemical attack by artillery has been assessed. The effects of such an attack would be dependent on a range of factors, including weather and the proximity of unprotected British forces. Such an attack could result, in the worst foreseeable case, in up to 100 killed and over 200 requiring medical treatment.

(2) Why do we not think the SRG will dig in, inside Baghdad and fight a guerrilla campaign?

We have consistently assessed that the SRG will be the final line of defence in inner Baghdad – it is also worth noting that they may have tactical control of

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CBW within the city. recently judged that although once military action has begun, widespread lack of loyalty to the regime will become clear. However, security elements closely identified within the regime, such as the SRG, may fight until their position becomes untenable.

Two factors may mitigate the SRG's ability to mount a protracted guerrilla campaign against the coalition. First, they are not trained to do so – the SRG are a light infantry force designed to protect the regime from internal security threats and coup attempts. Second, they will have no support from the local populace in Baghdad (SRG troops are overwhelmingly Tikriti and their chief role is repression of Baghdad's population).

- (3) What is the prospect of a pre-emptive BW or CW attack on our troops in Kuwait and are we certain we are adequately prepared and our troops protected?**

Iraq retains the capability (through a variety of means) to pre-emptively deliver CBW against coalition forces in Kuwait. The question is one of intent. We have no intelligence to indicate that the regime is currently planning a pre-emptive strike. We assess that this remains highly unlikely whilst Saddam believes war can be averted. We are unsure as to what indicators might convince Saddam that war was inevitable and imminent. But we assess that these might include a second UNSCR or the withdrawal of UNMOVIC. A combination of those might make a pre-emptive move more attractive for Saddam, but we still consider that it is more likely that Saddam would employ CBW after the onset of the campaign.

The planned levels of NBC Defence equipment for UK forces should enable all troops to withstand BW or CW attack. In the event of BW/CW casualties, the Primary Casualty Receiving Ship (ARGUS) has CB-capable beds, and plans are in place to ensure that an uncontaminated hospital with a further beds can be available in theatre within

As we have noted before (most recently in Martyn Williams' letter of 21 February), it would be more difficult to mitigate the consequences of a successful BW/CW attack either on host nations/neighbours or on the Iraqi civilian population. For the former, a limited capability exists in the US-led Combined Joint Task Force Consequence Management, based in Bahrain and Kuwait. But neither Iraqi nor coalition medical facilities would be able to cope with major CBW casualties amongst Iraq's civilian population.

- (4) Why will the 2,000 key individuals and the 26,000 SRG personnel mentioned in Ochmanek and Dodge's essays not fight to the death, given the hatred of them by ordinary Iraqis?**

See our answer to Question 2. The figures quoted are, however, inaccurate. There are 8,000 SRG personnel in central Baghdad (other far smaller numbers in Tikrit and some presidential sites). The two RG SF Brigades that may reinforce them constitute a further 6,000 troops. Hence perhaps 14,000 troops in inner Baghdad. The 2,000 key individuals refers to the numerous other

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security/intelligence agencies (SSO, DGI) present in the city. We do not know how exactly these people will behave but, even if they do "fight to the death", their capability to mount any form of organised resistance against coalition forces is minimal.

I am copying this letter to Simon McDonald (FCO), Anna Bewes (DFID), John Scarlett and Desmond Bowen (Cabinet Office).

*(Signed by Pete Watkins
as signed by him above)*

P D WATKINS
Private Secretary

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