



SECRETARY OF STATE

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11 March 2003

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*Dear David*

*PM has now seen  
and endorsed this.*

20030311Sqs-N010 - The Military - Phn  
**IRAQ: THE MILITARY PLAN**

The US Concept of Operations can achieve a conventional military defeat, and the use of force to secure regime change offers the best route to achieve Iraqi disarmament consistent with the principle of the minimum use of force. Air and maritime elements of US plan remain unchanged. Land plan for the North remains fragile. Land plan for the South remains firm. Overall, the plan represents a robust basis for the committal of UK forces.

We should confirm to the US our willingness - subject to decisions by UK commanders at the time - to contribute specialist capabilities (NBC, engineering and bridging) to facilitate their advance from the South, and to a limited expansion northwards of our Area of Operations during the conflict phase: we need to confirm this by mid-week. We should continue to explore other options for contributing to the US decisive main effort, but without commitment at this stage.

1. Following further military-to-military discussions in theatre, the Defence Secretary believes that it is timely to take stock of the US plan and take decisions on the further development of the UK role within it.

#### **THE US BASE PLAN**

2. As previously described (most recently in my letter of 28 February), the US military plan is crafted around the principle of sudden, decisive effect, creating multiple sets of conditions to which the Iraqi strategic and operational leadership cannot respond. By demonstrating coalition capabilities early in the campaign (whilst minimising collateral damage), the campaign seeks to achieve

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early regime collapse. The plan is to attack simultaneously along several lines of operations.

- Information Operations. IO will be employed to create doubt and disaffection against the regime, aggressively undermining its legitimacy.
- Attacks by long-range strike assets. This includes Tomahawk land attack missiles (TLAM) and bombers operating from the continental US.
- Land operations manoeuvring to secure territory and defeat Iraqi formations. Pressure on the regime will be applied on several axes using rapid manoeuvre. The precise timing of the commencement of the land campaign has not been finalised, but it is possible that the land and air campaigns will be simultaneous or separated only by hours.
- Civil Military Operations. Facilitating humanitarian assistance to the Iraqi people.

#### First Days of the Coalition Air Campaign

3. About 250 targets will be attacked on the first day, for which Baghdad will be the focus for about 70% of attacks, with 170 targets engaged by about TLAMs and air strikes. Baghdad will remain the focus for most targets during days two to four. Around 80 targets outside Baghdad will also be attacked on day one.
4. In subsequent days, targeting will expand to include targets in other regime stronghold areas (Tikrit, Tharthar and Baiji), and regime security/ Special Republican Guard forces in regional cities and governorates. Additionally, there will be selected targeting of critical Regular Army capability, including logistics, engineering and artillery.
5. The aim of the overall air campaign is to create an overwhelming effect, as opposed to using overwhelming force. Accordingly, targets are being selected for the effect they will produce, rather than simply the physical damage that will result.

#### UK Contribution to the Air Campaign

6. The first waves of the attack will include stand-off missiles, including Royal Navy submarine launched TLAM and the first operational use of the new

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STORM SHADOW air-to-ground missile from Tornado GR4 aircraft based in Kuwait.

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8. Other air elements are planned to be involved in a wide variety of missions. Precision strike and reconnaissance (a UK niche capability) will be carried out by 30 Tornado GR4 aircraft split between bases in Kuwait and Qatar. Close air support of ground forces will be carried out by Harrier GR7s based in Kuwait. Operating in support of overall coalition activity will be E-3D airborne early warning and control aircraft, and VC10 and Tristar air-to-air refuellers. A contribution to air defence will be made by Tomado F3s in Saudi Arabia, and also Rapier ground-to-air missiles in Kuwait.

#### The Base Plan for Coalition Land Operations

9. The main elements of the UK's land deployment are Headquarters 1<sup>st</sup> (UK) Armoured Division, 3 Commando Brigade Royal Marines, 7th Armoured Brigade, 16 Air Assault Brigade and a Joint Helicopter Force. The commander of 1 (UK) Armoured Division (Major General Robin Brims) will be under the tactical command of the Commanding General 1<sup>st</sup> US Marine Expeditionary Force (1 MEF), alongside the 1<sup>st</sup> US Marine Division (1 MARDIV) and the 3<sup>rd</sup> US Marine Air Wing (3 MAW), tasked to conduct operations in the Basrah region.

10. The overall US concept of operations is for US land forces to advance north as rapidly as possible, facilitated by information operations and an air campaign designed to overwhelm the regime and its security forces. The US intend to defeat Iraqi forces as necessary, but bypass them where possible, in order to reach Baghdad in the shortest possible time. Current plans envisage 1 MEF reaching the outskirts of Baghdad 12 days after the start of land operations.

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11. Land operations in the North. The original US plan envisaged the 4<sup>th</sup> US Infantry Division (4ID) playing a critical role in seizing the Kirkuk oilfields, but this has been compromised by Turkish delays. The US plan in the North therefore remains fragile. It depends upon the US 173rd Brigade and Special Forces securing Bashur airfield in the north-east around two days from the beginning of the Air campaign (A+2), once the air situation is favourable to such an operation. US planners currently judge that this plan, taken with the continued presence of 4ID in the Eastern Mediterranean and continued preparatory activity in Turkey, may be enough to fix Iraqi forces in the North and to keep Turks and Kurds separate. Given the limited size and mobility of 173rd Brigade, however, there remains some doubt about its ability to achieve the necessary effects, and this in itself may require wider US plans to be

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adjusted (although they do have a brigade of the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division and 26 Marine Expeditionary Unit as a theatre reserve if needed). Nonetheless, US plans in the South remain firm, and continue to be refined and rehearsed.

#### **UK Contribution to the Land Campaign Base Plan**

12. On current plans, a number of hours before "G Day" (around G-36 hours), **3 Commando Brigade** will seize the oil infrastructure on the Al Faw Peninsula in order to prevent its destruction and consequent environmental damage. The current plan for insertion of combat power onto the peninsula envisages a night assault. This would be preceded by a short but intense preparatory bombardment to neutralise Iraqi artillery and anti-aircraft systems. In the case of a daylight operation or bad weather, it might be necessary to land by surface assault in order to secure helicopter landing sites.

13. Some hours later (around G-24 hours), the 5<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> Regimental Combat Teams (RCTs) from the US Marines 1 MARDIV will be tasked to seize the Rumaila oilfields and their gas-oil separation platforms (GOSPs), and the pumping station at Az Zubayr, respectively. The latter operation will require the defeat of the 51<sup>st</sup> Iraqi Mechanised Division.

14. **16 Air Assault Brigade** and **7 Armoured Brigade** would subsequently relieve 5 and 7 RCTs in place to allow them to continue their advance north. UK forces would block and, if necessary defeat, remaining Iraqi forces in the vicinity of Basrah. Thereafter, and provided the environment was sufficiently permissive, they would plan to enter Basrah to restore or maintain security and stability.

15. However, as plans continue to develop, a number of additional options for the use of UK land forces are emerging, on which guidance now needs to be given to the National Contingent Commander. These are addressed separately below (paragraphs 22-30).

#### **The Base Plan for Coalition Maritime Operations**

16. Maritime forces will make a significant contribution to shaping the battlefield and providing a theatre entry capability in the initial part of offensive operations. This will include air interdiction, offensive counter air and close air support from US Carrier Air Groups, and TLAM attacks.

#### **UK Contribution**

17. HM Submarines **TURBULENT** and **SPLENDID** – operating in the Arabian Gulf – will contribute TLAM to the initial air strikes on the first day of offensive action. Royal Navy frigates and destroyers with their embarked helicopters, supported by RAF Nimrod Maritime Patrol Aircraft, will maintain a maritime blockade of the Iraqi coast, and will provide force protection to shipping against Iraqi maritime and wider, terrorist threats.

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18. A combined UK/US Mine Counter Measures (MCM) Task Group will continue defensive operations to protect the strategic sea line of communication into Kuwaiti ports. Once the flank of the Khawr Abd Allah waterway is secured, the MCM Task Group will commence offensive operations to clear the approaches to Umm Qasr. The Royal Fleet Auxillary ARGUS will provide medical support, with a 100-bed hospital facility afloat.

19. As reflected above, 3 Commando Brigade, including 40 and 42 Commandos, and with the US Marine Corps 15 Marine Expeditionary Unit under its command, will defeat the enemy on the Al Faw peninsula as part of 1 (UK) Division's concept of operations. This will be undertaken from afloat, in the Amphibious Task Group based in HMS ARK ROYAL and HMS OCEAN, and ashore in assembly areas in northern Kuwait.

#### **ASSESSMENT OF THE US BASE PLAN AND UK ROLE**

20. The air and maritime elements of the plan are essentially unchanged. The land plan in the North has continued to be in a state of flux, and remains fragile. The land plan in the South is much firmer, and represents a robust basis for the committal of UK forces.

21. The UK role within the US base plan remains crucial in all three operating environments. On the land, although the base plan initially commits only 3 Commando brigade to combat operations, there is sufficient uncertainty about Basrah, and about the potential threat from Iraqi formations further north and in Basrah itself, to merit the involvement of a strong and flexible UK division. The UK land role is crucial to the overall US plan:

- Defeating Iraqi forces on the Al Faw peninsula and seeking to prevent an environmental catastrophe ✓
- Enabling US forces to advance more rapidly to Baghdad by conducting reliefs-in-place to hold ground behind 1 MEF and the US Army's V Corps ✓
- Playing an early role in Phase IV ("Day After") humanitarian operations ✓

#### **Further Development of the UK Land Contribution**

22. Continuing discussions with US commanders have identified three broad areas in which UK land forces could make additional contributions to the plan:

- Use of specialist capabilities to support US forces at an early stage, enabling them to advance more rapidly
- Expansion of the UK Area of Operations up to 150km further north, to negate the threat posed by Iraqi formations north of Basrah
- Contingency planning for possible contributions to decisive US actions.

5  
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These three areas are described more fully below.

### Specialist Contributions

23. Three specific areas have been identified in which specialist UK forces could make a significant difference to the US advance from the South:

- CBW decontamination and detection capability.

- Specialist Engineering capabilities.

- Bridging capabilities. A key part of the early US advance will be the crossing of the Euphrates at An Nasirayah. If the Iraqis destroy the bridges, the US will need UK combat bridging assets to provide for the crossing, to avoid tying up US bridging assets which it will need for crossing the Tigris shortly afterwards.

The commitment of UK forces to each of these three tasks would reinforce key gaps in US capability and facilitate a rapid US advance, without detriment to the tasks required of UK forces in our Area of Operations. The risk to the UK forces involved is assessed to be low, except in the case of the EOD operation at the oilfields which (given the nature of such operations) is considered medium risk.

24. The Defence Secretary therefore believes that we should confirm to US commanders that we are very willing to make these specialist capabilities available on these terms, subject to decision at the time by UK commanders in theatre.

### Expansion of the UK Area of Operations Northwards

25. Following the relief in place of US forces, one of 1 (UK) Division's key tasks will be to isolate Basrah. At that stage, there will still be substantial enemy forces (notably the 6<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> Armoured Divisions and the 14<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division) that could pose a threat towards Basrah, or could interfere with the

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right flank of the US 1 MEF's advance towards Al Kut on the Tigris. There is a clear military case for advancing to defeat these formations, if required, and their dispositions are such that they could be engaged sequentially rather than together.

26. The US Land Component Commander has therefore developed a plan that would expand the UK Area of Operations by up to 150km up to and beyond Al Amarah (but short of Al Kut), remaining within the reach of UK logistics. There are several options for conducting this task with UK forces whilst retaining two of our three brigades within our existing Area of Operations; this task would, however, require the UK's specialist bridging capabilities, and would therefore rule out making them available to the US as in paragraph 23 above. The task would in itself contribute towards setting the conditions for successful Phase IV (Day After) operations within our existing Area of Operations. In terms of risk, in the worst case, assuming that all the Iraqi formations fight and have to be defeated, Operational Analysis suggests that maximum additional UK casualties would be of the order of 150 (on top of the base estimate of 150-260 for the land campaign).

27. The case for pushing a UK formation northwards will ultimately have to be judged at the time. Clearly, it will depend to some extent on what is happening in the Basrah area. It is also the case that an exemplary Phase IV operation depends on a satisfactory conclusion to the conflict phase (Phase III). The Defence Secretary therefore judges that the senior UK operational commander (the Chief of Joint Operations) should be authorised to expand the Phase III Area of Operations northwards if that is required to achieve a satisfactory outcome to Phase III. The focus for the UK in Phase IV should, however, remain the South-Eastern Area of Operations as currently understood.

#### **Contingency Planning for Possible Contributions to Decisive US Action**

28. Given the delays in the deployment of some US forces, as described in our letter of 6 March, in some scenarios the US may need the additional combat power that the UK land component could provide. The main scenarios are

- Air insertion of a light force into Central Iraq. Once the campaign has begun, events could move very quickly, including the possibility of early regime collapse. The coalition needs to be able to respond flexibly. The US are therefore developing plans for the insertion by air of forces to seize and secure Saddam International Airport to the west of Baghdad as a precursor to operations in and around the city. Other possibilities include the securing of forward operating bases for 1 MEF's 3<sup>rd</sup> Marine Air Wing, bridges over the Tigris around Al Kut, and airfields for humanitarian operations.
- Armoured options in support of the US Main Effort. In some scenarios (e.g. stiffer than expected Iraqi resistance to 1 MEF and V (US) Corps), the addition of 7th Armoured Brigade's combat power could tip the

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balance. This would, however, require US logistic and medical support, as well as a benign situation in the UK's Area of Operations. And as mentioned in our letter of 6 March, we would need an assurance from the US that 7th Armoured Brigade would be able to return rapidly to the UK Area of Operations at the end of Phase III.

29. In circumstances where the situation in the UK's existing Area of Operations was benign, and where Iraqi forces had generally collapsed, it might be possible for 1 (UK) Division to provide forces to contribute to decisive US action in addition to the specialist contributions and the northwards expansion described above. The Defence Secretary believes that the Chief of Joint Operations should be authorised to participate in planning discussions with the US without commitment, and on the understanding that any decision to commit UK forces to reinforce the US in decisive action would be a matter for Ministers.

**Priorities for Further Development of the UK Land Contribution**

30. On this basis, the Defence Secretary judges that our first priority should be to confirm the specialist roles described in paragraph 23 above. Secondly, we should be forward-leaning on the idea of extending our Area of Operations northwards (paragraph 26 above), provided that UK commanders judge this sensible in circumstances at the time. We need to confirm both these points to the US by mid-week. Lastly, we should be prepared to continue exploring options for reinforcing US forces at decisive points (paragraph 28 above), but without commitment at this stage.

31. I am copying this letter go to Simon McDonald (FCO), Mark Bowman (HMT), and to Desmond Bowen (Cabinet Office).

*Yours*  
*Peter*

P D WATKINS  
Private Secretary

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