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PM/03/023

PRIME MINISTER

**Iraq: UK Military Contribution to post-conflict Iraq**

1. We need to be aware of the state of US military planning for post-conflict Iraq and decide what the scale of our contribution should be to it. Some of these issues could confront us as early as next week, particularly as our forces will be operating in the South of Iraq. We invite colleagues to agree to the propositions below.
  - (a) The maximum size of task that UK forces would contribute to in the early days should not exceed our overall military capability. A focus in the south east of Iraq would be reasonable.
  - (b) The UK contribution to such a task in advance of a Security Council resolution would be limited to the facilitation of humanitarian assistance and a secure environment and the elimination of WMD.
  - (c) We therefore need to agree urgently with the US a realistic authorising Security Council resolution for post-conflict Iraq.
  - (d) We should agree urgently a plan with the US to help us find military partners to enable us to draw down and, in due course, design an exit strategy.
  - (e) In broad terms the MOD will need to draw down its scale of effort to nearer a third of its current commitment by the autumn.

**The early days: stabilising Iraq**

2. Much will depend on how the campaign develops, but in the first few weeks we should expect Coalition forces to be spread across Iraq. The expectation is that UK

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forces will end up in southern Iraq, loosely centred on Basrah. However, we should be prepared for elements of our forces to be dispersed fairly widely across Iraq (perhaps with a brigade near Baghdad, having been deployed there in support of the overall campaign objective).

3. US military planning continues to be fluid. But it envisages Coalition forces re-deploying into a more tailored security framework as soon as the situation permits. This will concentrate forces on potential flash points. The military task will be to facilitate a secure environment (including law and order, deterring adventurism and a variety of military-technical tasks) to enable immediate humanitarian relief to be conducted. To help UK forces win hearts and minds, HMT have allocated them £30m. for humanitarian purposes in the first month as well as £10m for quick win projects. (Clare has allocated £20m for UN agencies' preparations and earmarked another £60m from DfID's contingency reserve for humanitarian operations. But this is a drop in the ocean; in the worse case, if the oil for food programme ground to a halt, Iraq could need as much as a billion dollars a month for humanitarian aid.)

4. The expectation is that UK forces would be responsible for a task focused on Basrah and other key military objectives in the south east of Iraq, which could include around 20% of the Iraqi population. This task is broadly proportionate to the size of the UK's contribution to overall Coalition land forces. The US military will exercise overall command from within Iraq.

5. In parallel, and under the overall military command, the US plan to bring in a transitional administration<sup>1</sup> to co-ordinate immediate civil relief and humanitarian assistance. The transitional administration is making plans for allocating its limited resources, including provision for public sector salaries, on a nation-wide, Coalition basis. There is no expectation that the UK would be asked to contribute any resources to

<sup>1</sup> The Office of Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance (ORHA) becomes the transitional administration once it is established inside Iraq.

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anything other than security. So there is no suggestion that the UK would be left to foot the bill for the civil administration or the costs of humanitarian relief and reconstruction in any area.

### **Beyond the early days**

6. Once the initial period has passed and a major part of Iraq has been stabilised, US military planning remains sensibly flexible. It recognises that parts of Iraq will be more permissive than others and that security could well be provided through something other than sectors. And it would be premature now to take a view on the merits of sectors for this stage. We are well placed to influence US thinking with a number of military officers and officials embedded within their military headquarters and in ITCA. **It would be helpful for them, and for military planners generally, to agree what our scale of effort should be in our medium term contribution to Iraq.**

### **Scale of medium term UK military effort**

7. It will be necessary to draw down our current commitment to nearer a third by no later than the autumn in order to avoid long term damage to the armed forces. Keeping more forces in Iraq would be outside our current defence planning assumptions. If Ministers wanted us to, we would need decisions now so that we would be able to recommend what would have to give elsewhere. Scaling down to nearer a third will limit our contribution thereafter to a maximum of around one brigade, a two star headquarters and possibly a contribution to higher level command and control<sup>2</sup>, air and maritime components, and support enablers. Our view is that we should probably agree now to tell the US, for planning purposes, that this is the upper limit of our contribution.

<sup>2</sup> We are aware that HQ ARRC features in current CENTCOM thinking as a multi-national headquarters that could play a role in post-conflict Iraq – this will be the subject of a separate paper.

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Setting the conditions for success

8. It is not enough to agree on the scale of our commitment in the medium term. We also need to be satisfied that the conditions in which our forces will operate are conducive to success. The key to this is a UN Security Council Resolution authorising international activity in the post-conflict period. We should also let the US know the key importance of internationalising the security arrangements now so that we can reduce our commitment as set out above. And we would expect US support in building a wider coalition to operate alongside our forces, allow us to draw down and eventually to provide us with an exit strategy.
9. We should be realistic about the limited prospects of our finding any genuine military capability to help us take this task on. New coalition partners are thin on the ground and, if the post-conflict phase does not go well, there will not be many nations who will be prepared or able to take part.
10. And finally, we shall need to return to this issue once we are clear how the campaign is developing and look at our wider contribution in the round.
11. We are copying this minute to the Chancellor, the Development Secretary, and to Sir David Manning.

JACK STRAW

Foreign and Commonwealth Office

GEOFF HOON

Ministry of Defence

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