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D/PJHQ/10/5341

27 March 2003

PS/Secretary of State

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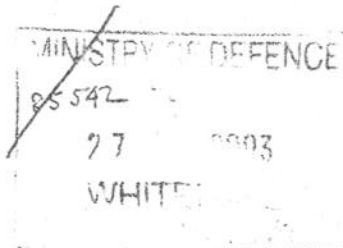
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Special Advisers

**IRAQ: BASRA - COALITION CAMPAIGN STRATEGY**

Reference: D/Sec(O)/2/37/8 dated 10 March '03.

Issue

1. The significance of Basra within the wider campaign strategy.

Recommendation

2. That Secretary of State notes the details of coalition planning in respect of Basra, and the continuing imperative attached to operations in respect of Baghdad.

Timing

3. Urgent. We understand that Secretary of State will be seeing Cabinet colleagues today, and will wish to draw on this advice.

Background

4. Secretary of State is aware that regime removal is at the heart of the coalition's objectives, and that to achieve this, it will be necessary to overcome resistance - including the possible use of CBW - from Iraqi forces. The US campaign plan identified Baghdad as the centre of gravity for achieving these, and our other objectives. It has always been Gen McKiernan's (the coalition's Land Component Commander) understanding that at some stage it would be necessary to take Baghdad, and that the entry

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of an attacking division into Baghdad would be a strategically decisive point in the campaign. The same cannot be said of any other area (including Basra). Hence it has long been the US plan – as reflected at Reference – to advance north as rapidly as possible, and reach Baghdad in the shortest possible time (around 12 days, according to Gen Franks when he visited London in late February). Overcoming Republican Guard forces along the way is on the critical path to achieving this objective, and would send a critical message of intent both to the regime, other Iraqi forces and the wider population.

5. This base plan remains at the heart of US intent. Gen McKiernan plans to mount a simultaneous, multi-corps attack, that applies pressure to the regime and isolates it. This attack will start soon. In order to ensure its execution, Gen McKiernan wishes to avoid committing all his forces to combat at the same time. With both V Corps and 1 MEF committed to combat, and other US forces increasingly committed to maintaining and securing the line of communication, he will not be able to divert forces to overcoming opposition within Basra.

Basra

6. Basra is Iraq's third largest city with a population of 1.4 million, the vast majority of whom are Shiite. There is potential for the population to rise up against the regime, which in local terms is represented by the State Security Organisation and Ba'ath Party officials, supplemented by local thugs and sometimes-co-opted regular forces. Whilst the moral of the estimated 6000 regular forces is assessed to be low, that of the 2000 or so irregulars is not – they are committed supporters of the regime with everything to lose. We have always recognised that the local population would be wary of rising up in this way, given the experience of 1991. Moreover, the coalition's information operations have stressed that people should stay in their houses, or risk being engaged. Notwithstanding Tuesday's report of an uprising, the message to stay at home seems on the whole to have got through, and we could expect anything other than an overwhelming uprising ruthlessly to be put down.

7. Against that background, GOC I UK Div's intent (as reflected at Reference) has been to defeat Iraqi forces in the vicinity of Basra and his intent is to continue in this vein; to isolate Iraqi irregular forces from the civilian population, both by degrading their communications, and, on an opportunity basis, by attacking at key points. GOC 1 UK Div continues to gather information that will help identify such opportunities. In accordance with this approach, 7 Armd Bde conducted a successful raid on the SSO HQ in Az Zubayr (on the outskirts of Basra) and the coalition attacked the Ba'ath Party HQ in Basra. Thereafter, when there is a sufficiently permissive environment, he intends to enter Basra to restore and/or maintain security there.

8. This approach supports, and reflects, Gen McKiernan's overall intent. While he doesn't underestimate the importance of Basra, his assessment is

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that the fall of Baghdad guarantees the fall of Basra, but that the reverse is not likely.

9. Fighting in an urban environment is complex, and GOC 1 UK Div does not have the forces at his disposal to conduct a successful, opposed entry into Basra. He could not overcome Iraqi forces operating there with just the tacit support of the majority population; he would need their active engagement in defeating them.

10. Other than media reporting, there is no evidence that this approach is contributing to a humanitarian catastrophe in Basra, nor that there is an overwhelming need to deliver aid. Electricity remains on, and water purification within Basra wasn't possible before the conflict started, and we understand supplies into the city were stopped by the regime on 21 March – 50% of pumping capacity is reported to have since been restored by the ICRC. Communications have been disrupted, but mainly in respect of the Ba'ath Party and SSO; telephones are still working. Finally, the World Food Programme estimates the people of Basra have sufficient food to last until the end of May.

[signed]

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