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11 December 2002

PS/Secretary of State

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Legal Adviser

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DTIO

DNO

DMO

DAO

DJW

D News

SGD D MED OP CAP

DOMA AD(ME)

Sec(O)1

What sort of
risk assessment
is being prepared?
I assume the SGT
is aware that there
would be lead
elements in an
operation where
we are
likely to
have the
benefit of surprise

IRAQ MILITARY PLANNING: AMPHIBIOUS TASK GROUP (ATG) or of choice

Issue

1. The role envisaged for the UK Amphibious Task Group (ATG) in the event of operations against Iraq.

Recommendation

2. That the Secretary of State should:

- (a) Note that the US plan in the South requires the securing of Um Qasr, and therefore the securing of the Al Faw peninsula and mine clearance of the Khawr Abd Allah waterway, at an early stage in the operation. *the operation risk are*
- (b) Note that the COS endorse this as a role for the ATG, judging that it would be consistent with UK objectives and provide valuable strategic, operational and presentational effect. *clear &*
- (c) Note that unless this role is undertaken by the ATG, the US would have to divert other forces, at the cost of several days' delay and increased risk. *balanced way.*
- (d) Note that the ATG can be provided for this role by taking the actions set out in your letter of 5 December to Sir David Manning, with no change to timings on the assumption of a 15 February "P Day". *be*
- (e) Agree that, subject to the usual caveat that no political decision has been taken to commit UK forces, US/UK planning should

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proceed on the assumption that the ATG would undertake this role.

- (f) Agree that you should write to Sir David Manning in terms of the draft attached to this minute.

Timing

3. Priority, to allow planning to proceed on a firmer basis.

Background

4. The Secretary of State was briefed today on the role envisaged for the ATG in the event of operations against Iraq. The purpose of this minute is to summarise this role and seek its endorsement for planning purposes.

Context

5. Under current US planning, US ground operations against Iraq in the South are now planned to commence simultaneously with the air campaign, some 16 days after P Day -- ie, in early March if P Day is 15 February. The intention is to establish a second Sea Point Of Disembarkation (SPOD) in order to enhance logistic flow and to prevent Iraqi destruction of key oil production and distribution nodes. Having established a southern security zone and secured the oilfields, the US will operationally pause and rapidly build-up the force. The US will then launch the main ground effort with the objective of securing Baghdad. The provision of a second SPOD at UM QASR is an essential part of this plan, because it facilitates the rapid build-up of forces for the main effort.

6. UM QASR contains core oil distribution nodes and is located in southern Iraq at the head of the AL FAW peninsula (see map attached). The peninsula is 25 nautical miles long and is bordered by the Khawr Abd Allah (KAA) and Shatt al Arab (SAA) waterways. These form the Iraqi border between Kuwait and Iran respectively. The ground is low-lying and consists of swampy mud flats, salt pans and date plantations. The limited numbers of roads are raised on levees. The only built up area is the town of AL FAW on the southern bank of the KAA. In order to open the SPOD and secure the oil nodes, UM QASR needs to be taken, the AL FAW peninsula captured and the KAA waterway cleared of mines. US planning for this, developed with UK input, is now well advanced.

Forces

7. Iraqi forces. Iraqi options for defending the AL FAW peninsula and hampering coalition maritime forces include land-based anti-ship (Seersucker) missiles, some additional artillery and mortar capability, the use of fast inshore attack craft, and the release of oil into the KAA waterway. The Iraqi troop presence is assessed at some 2-3,000. These could in theory be reinforced by the 51st Mechanised Division based at Az Zubayr and Al Basrah (some

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60km and 80km away respectively): US planning is designed to prevent such reinforcement from being attempted at all, but if it were attempted coalition forces should be able to defeat it with ease.

8. US forces. US Maritime forces are centred on five Carrier Battle Groups, based in the Mediterranean and in the Arabian Gulf. As far as the amphibious operation in the AL FAW peninsula is concerned, the US are only able to provide one Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU) – roughly equivalent in size to an RM Commando Group, but with greater firepower and mobility, including both fixed-wing and rotary air elements.

9. UK forces. The ATG would be based around 40 Cdo Gp embarked in HMS OCEAN, supported by HMS ARK ROYAL operating as a second LPH. In addition, the UK force (including Package 1 forces already in theatre) would include 2 TLAM submarines, 4 MCMVs, 4 DD/FF, 3 LSLs, 4 Charter ships, 3 support ships and 2 oilers. Further work is looking at the possibility of making a second RM Commando available for follow-on or aftermath operations.

Concept of Operations

10. The operation to open the UM QASR SPOD would be conducted in 3 phases:

a. Phase 1 – Shaping. Phase 1 would run between P and P+16 – ie, in the second half of February if P Day is 15 February. Maritime Interdiction Operations (MIO) would blockade and contain Iraqi forces and shipping within the KAA. Simultaneously, defensive MCM operations would maintain access to the Kuwaiti ports, allowing the US MEU to deploy ashore. UK Package 1 maritime forces (2 DD/FF, one SSN, 4 MCMVs, 1 LSL, 1 RFA and 1 oiler) would contribute appropriately and 2 DD / FF would deploy ahead of the main body of the ATG to ensure that MCM and MIO tasks could be conducted concurrently.

b. Phase 2 – Setting Conditions. Phase 2 would begin at P+16 (ie, early March). As the air campaign begins, the US MEU would seize the port of UM QASR in a land-mounted operation from Kuwait, isolating key oil pumping nodes. This would prevent the threat of mining and the use of oil as a weapon. It would also seal the AL FAW peninsula from the north, allowing the committal of the ATG to defeat the enemy, protect the oil installations and secure the northern maritime flank of the KAA, setting the conditions for phase 3.

c. Phase 3 – Establish the SPOD. With the flanks of the KAA, key oil infrastructure nodes and the port of UM QASR secure, MCMVs would clear the KAA of mines. Salvage and survey operations would also be conducted as required. This would allow the SPOD to be established and the in-flow of equipment, building the ground force prior to the main effort towards Baghdad. The ATG would consolidate its position and prepare for any subsequent operations.

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Command and Control

11. Command of UK forces would be exercised at 1* level by the Commander of the ATG (COMATG), who would command both the amphibious and MCM elements of the ATG. It is also possible, subject to further work, that both the US MCM contribution and the US MEU could be placed under UK command.

Contribution to the US Plan

12. Contribution to the US Plan. Employing the ATG in this role would allow the AL FAW peninsula to be taken at the same time as the US MEU secures UM QASR. If the ATG was unavailable, the MEU would have to complete both tasks one after the other. This would mean:

- a. A strategic delay to follow on operations by the US Marine Expeditionary Force in BASRA and in crossing the Euphrates.
- b. An increased risk of the destruction of oil infrastructure, with the added potential for environmental impact.

The availability of the ATG would therefore make a significant difference to the viability of the US plan.

Impact of ATG operations on other elements of the UK contribution

13. The ATG can be provided without prejudice to the RN/RM contribution to Op FRESCO and the Operational Tour Plot. Previous concerns that it might not be possible to support the ATG concurrently with other elements of the UK force packages – in terms of logistics, support helicopters and medical support – have been assuaged. Although supporting resources will be stretched, the stretch is judged to be manageable. And once the UM QASR/AL FAW operation is complete, some elements of the ATG could be released for other tasks, reducing the demands on the support elements.

Timelines

14. Timelines for the ATG remain as set out in my minute of 4 December. In summary:

- a. Charter 4 ships from the commercial market by 19 December and once available load with equipment.
- b. Nominate and inform units and bring deploying elements' readiness to 5 days' Notice to Move from the beginning of January.
- c. Load and deploy elements of the ATG around 16 January.

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- d. Conduct amphibious training package in the Eastern Mediterranean from c.3 February. This would combine a training package for HMS OCEAN with the early part of HMS ARK ROYAL's NTG 03 deployment. Both ships would conduct aviation training on passage, before the ATG assembles at Cyprus, and subsequently conduct an amphibious exercise with 40 Cdo Gp.
- e. Transit Suez Canal on c.15 February.

Presentation

15. The presentational issues associated with preparation of the ATG are being addressed in the context of media handling for Iraq military planning in general. The preparatory steps set out above will, on current plans, be preceded by the proposed background briefing of defence correspondents on 17 December.

DAVID JOHNSON
Head of Sec(Iraq)
MT3/27 :

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DRAFT LETTER TO SIR DAVID MANNING

IRAQ: MILITARY PLANNING - AMPHIBIOUS TASK GROUP (ATG)

UK Amphibious Task Group could play a key early role in US operations in the South of Iraq. Without it, US ground operations would be delayed, and there would be a greater risk of destruction of oil infrastructure and environmental damage. Preparations proceeding as set out in my letter of 5 December.

At their meeting today the Defence Secretary mentioned to the Prime Minister the role envisaged for the UK Amphibious Task Group (ATG) in potential operations against Iraq. You will recall that the ATG would be based around 40 Royal Marine Commando Group embarked in HMS OCEAN, supported by HMS ARK ROYAL operating as a second helicopter landing platform. In addition, the UK force (including Package 1 forces already in theatre) would include 2 TLAM submarines, 4 mine countermeasures vessels, 4 destroyers/frigates, and various support vessels including chartered shipping.

Context

Current US planning envisages that US ground operations in the South would begin simultaneously with the air campaign, some 16 days after P Day - ie, in early March if a political decision to authorise military action ("P Day") is 15 February. The intention is to establish a second Sea Point Of Disembarkation (SPOD), to enable the more rapid build-up of ground forces for the main effort from the South, and to prevent Iraqi spoiling actions such as the destruction of key oil production and distribution nodes.

In order to open this second SPOD and secure the key oil nodes, the US plan to use a US Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU) seize the port of UM QASR at the head of the AL FAW peninsula. This will require the peninsula itself to be captured, and Khawr Abd Allah waterway to be cleared of mines, and this is where our ATG would come in.

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Concept of Operations

The operation would be conducted in 3 phases:

- a. Phase 1 – Shaping. Phase 1 would run between P and P+16 – ie, in the second half of February if P Day is 15 February. Maritime Interdiction Operations (MIO) would blockade and contain Iraqi forces and shipping within the Khawr Abd Allah. Simultaneously, defensive mine countermeasures operations would maintain access to the Kuwaiti ports, allowing the US MEU to deploy ashore. UK Package 1 maritime forces (2 destroyers/frigates, one submarine, 4 mine countermeasures vessels, and supporting ships) would contribute to these operations.
- b. Phase 2 – Setting Conditions. Phase 2 would begin at P+16 (ie, early March). As the air campaign begins, the US MEU would seize the port of UM QASR in a land-mounted operation from Kuwait, isolating key oil pumping nodes. This would prevent the Iraqis from mining the port or using oil as a weapon. It would also seal the AL FAW peninsula from the north, allowing the ATG to be committed to defeat enemy forces on the peninsula, protect the oil installations and secure the northern maritime flank of the Khawr Abd Allah, setting the conditions for phase 3.
- c. Phase 3 – Establish the SPOD. With the flanks of the Khawr Abd Allah, key oil infrastructure nodes and the port of UM QASR secure, mine countermeasures vessels would clear the waterway of mines. Salvage and survey operations would also be conducted as required. This would allow the SPOD to be established and the in-flow of equipment, building the US ground force prior to the main effort towards Baghdad. The ATG would consolidate its position and prepare for any subsequent operations.

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Employing the ATG in this role would allow the AL FAW peninsula to be taken at the same time as the US MEU secures UM QASR. If the ATG was unavailable, the MEU would have to complete both tasks one after the other. This would mean a strategic delay to follow-on operations by the US Marine Expeditionary Force in BASRA and in crossing the Euphrates, and an increased risk of the destruction of oil infrastructure, with the added potential for environmental impact.

The availability of the ATG would therefore make a significant difference to the viability of the US plan in the South, and the Chiefs of Staff judge that its employment in this role would be valuable strategically, operationally and presentationally. It is also possible – but this needs further work - that both the US contribution to mine countermeasures operations and the MEU which would seize UM QASR could be placed under the UK commander, adding to the profile of the UK contribution. We are also investigating the possibility of deploying a second Royal Marine Commando to provide additional forces for follow-on or aftermath operations.

Preparations

The preparatory steps necessary to make the ATG ready for operations in this timescale remain those set out in my letter of 5 December. In summary:

- a. Charter 4 ships from the commercial market by 19 December and once available load with equipment.
- b. Nominate and inform units and bring deploying elements' readiness to 5 days' Notice to Move from the beginning of January.
- c. Load and deploy elements of the ATG around 16 January.

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- d. Conduct an amphibious training package in the Eastern Mediterranean from c.3 February, in combination with a long-planned naval task group deployment.
- e. Transit Suez Canal on c.15 February.

Subject, of course, to any changes in US timescales, and with the usual caveat that no political decision has been taken to commit UK forces to action, planning is now proceeding on this basis.

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The map illustrates the geographical context of Kuwait, showing its position relative to Iraq, Iran, and the Persian Gulf. Key features include:

- Geographical Features:** Kuwait Bay, Bubiyan Island, and the Persian Gulf.
- Political Boundaries:** The agreed-upon maritime boundary between Kuwait and Iran is clearly marked.
- Key Locations:**
 - Kuwait:** Kuwait City, Al Jahrah, Al Fahaheel, Al Maqwa, Al Ahmad, Al Fuhayhil, Mina' al Ahmadi, Ash Shu'aybah, Mina' Abd Allah, Al Wafrah, Al Khiran, Qasr.
 - Other Regions:** Al Jahrah, Al Fahaheel, Al Maqwa, Al Ahmad, Al Fuhayhil, Mina' al Ahmadi, Ash Shu'aybah, Mina' Abd Allah, Al Wafrah, Al Khiran, Qasr.

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