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MO 6/17/15C

12 December 2002

Dear David,

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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 previously detailed.

As you will recall from the Defence Secretary's letter of 15 October, the maritime contribution we propose for any operation in Iraq includes an amphibious task group. As the US military plan has developed, it is clear that there is an important role for this group. The Defence Secretary mentioned this to the Prime Minister on 11 December, and I attach details.

The US plan envisages an early capture of the port of Um Qasr, in Southern Iraq. This would allow the rate of inflow of heavy armoured forces to be doubled, allowing the decisive ground engagement to take place as early as possible.

The UK Commando Group (operating from HMS Ocean and HMS Ark Royal as part of a balanced task group) would secure the Al Faw peninsula. This would start on Day 1 of offensive operations, in parallel with US forces who would secure the port of Um Qasr. After mine clearance operations by Royal Naval vessels, this would allow the rapid inflow of heavy reinforcements.

The involvement of the amphibious group would be early, possibly of high intensity and could bring forward the decisive employment of armoured forces by up to 10 days. It also reduces the risk of destruction of oil infrastructure and the associated environmental damage. It has strategic and operational effect, and provides an opportunity for UK land involvement even if agreement cannot be gained from Turkey for the Northern Option.

Sir David Manning KCMG
No 10 Downing Street

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Planning and preparation actions are contained within the measures identified in Peter Watkins' letter of 5 December.

I am copying this to Simon McDonald (FCO) and Desmond Bowen (Cabinet Office).

Yours,

Mestyn

M J WILLIAMS
Private Secretary

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ANNEX A TO

MO 6/17/15C

DATED 12 DECEMBER 2002

IRAQ: MILITARY PLANNING – AMPHIBIOUS TASK GROUP

The Amphibious Task Group

the amphibious task group 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 maritime 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. This represents about 1700 Royal Marines amongst a total of about 3500 personnel

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 – i.e., 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.

Concept of Operations

The operation would be conducted in 3 phases:

a. Phase 1 – Shaping. Phase 1 would run between P and P+16 – i.e., 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 (i.e., 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

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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.

Significance of the ATG role

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:

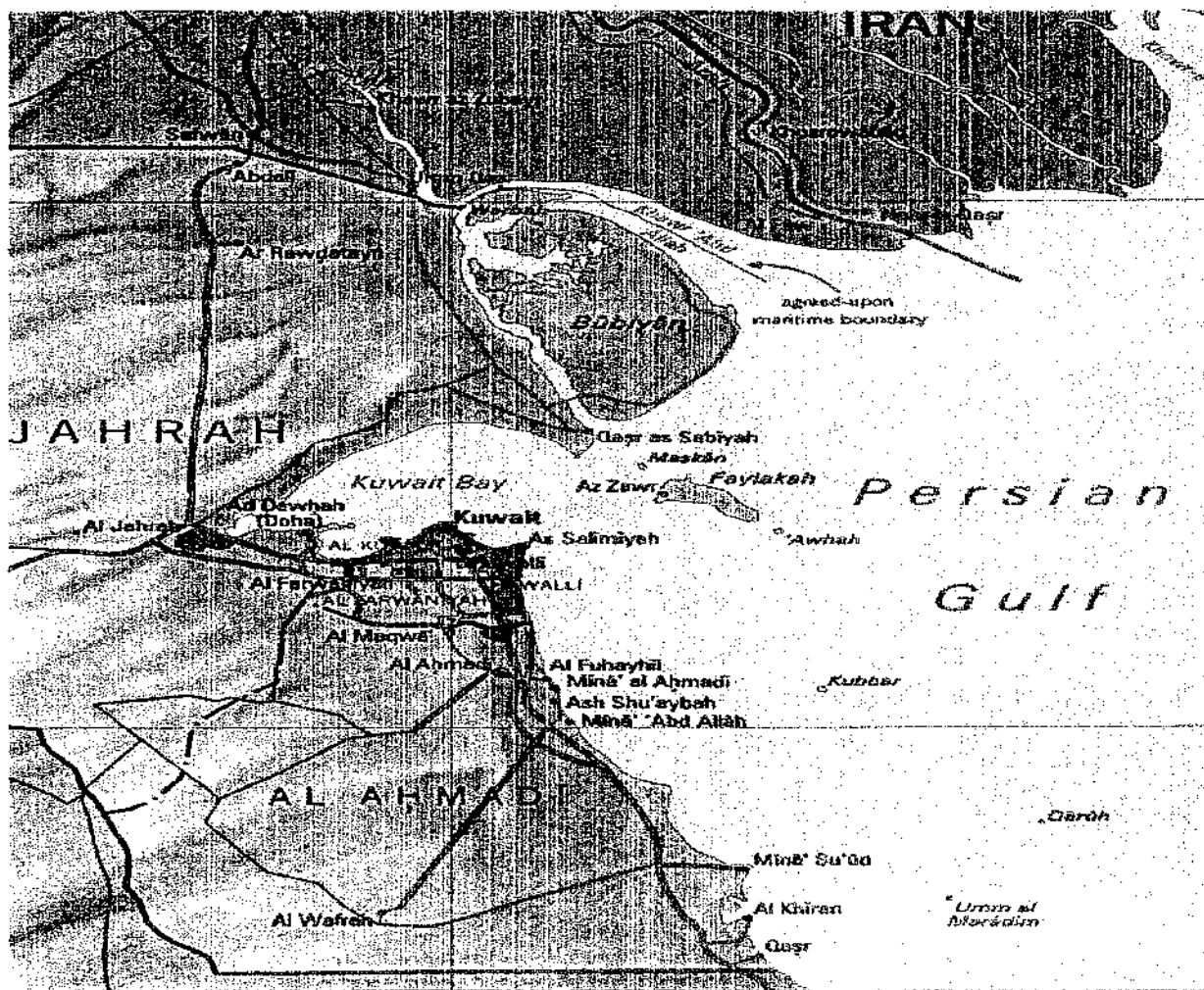
- a. Charter 4 ships from the commercial market by 19 December and once available load with equipment.
- b. Nominate and inform units and bring deploying elements' readiness to 5 days' Notice to Move from the beginning of January.
- c. Load and deploy elements of the ATG around 16 January.
- d. Conduct an amphibious training package in the Eastern Mediterranean from c.3 February, in combination with a long-planned

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naval task group deployment.

e. Transit Suez Canal by 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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