

DECLASSIFIED**CENTCOM IRAQ PLANNING – A UK PERSPECTIVE****ADDRESS BY THE SENIOR BRITISH MILITARY ADVISOR
(MAJ GEN DAVID WILSON)****Introduction**

General Franks, Ladies and Gentlemen.

Thank you for having me here today and giving me the opportunity to speak to you. I know that my attendance here is a result of the close links between both our militaries and our Governments and I am very pleased to be part of that. I would also like to repeat the UK's continuing commitment to playing our part in support of Operation Enduring Freedom and the Global War on Terrorism.

Political context

I would like to begin by emphasising that the UK fully understands and sympathises with the US position on Iraq, and Saddam Hussein. We share your concerns about leaving him to develop his WMD aspirations and the potential threat he poses to the people of Iraq, the region and the international community.

We are deeply appreciative of the opportunity you have given us to understand and contribute towards the US military planning process. As I will outline, we have been working hard to identify forces that, in principle, we could make available to supporting your plan. We look forward to continuing to work with you on exploring military options.

That said, I am bound to reiterate what is the formal position of my Government. This is that the UK has made no decision in favour of action in Iraq, beyond our ongoing involvement in enforcing the North and South No Fly Zones. Any such decision would be a political one, and would need to take into account a range of international, regional and UK domestic issues, which are quite properly matters for Washington, London and other capitals.

Approach

Instead of talking to you about detailed force packages, therefore, I plan to take advantage of my very privileged position here in Tampa to make some observations about your plan, and draw from that some implications for the UK.

Please do not get me wrong, I have no intention of critiquing your plan – I would not presume to do that. But I will attempt to explain to you how your plan is seen through British eyes. I hope that you will find that helpful.

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Integration already

My first impression is that the greatest strength of the plan is that it builds on what has gone before. From a UK perspective, that means that once the necessary political decisions had been made, UK assets would be able to integrate very quickly into your Order of Battle. As you know, we already have significant maritime and air assets in place. Taken together with bases (such as Fairford, Cyprus and Diego Garcia) – that means that we could be in support of you from Day One.

Furthermore, we have a well-trying C2 framework, not to mention working relationships that have been honed over more than a decade in the Theatre. We are confident, therefore, that we would be able to build up to our fullest possible deployment of maritime, air and SF, and be operational, relatively quickly. No doubt some deconfliction will still be required - on plans for basing aircraft, for example. But most important, we could achieve that build up within your timescales.

As I made clear at the outset of my remarks, I say this without prejudging the Governments' position on the political and legal issues surrounding a decision. But at the military level, enhanced maritime, air and SF support to your Main Effort is certainly practicable.

- On the air side, this could include additional strike, recce, surveillance, AWACS and support aircraft, and airfield defences. Without being too definitive at this stage, these could certainly include Tornados, Nimrods, E3D AWACS, C-130s, and tanker aircraft (Canberra?).
- And on the maritime side, a package including CVS, MCM, TLAM and, possibly, our Amphibious Group.
- Separate discussions have identified a clear role for our SF and we believe they could contribute significantly in several areas.

Land options in the South

My second observation is that once the logistic in-load has begun, it is going to be very busy in the South. Until your planning is complete, it would be wrong for me to make any definitive judgements. But as I look at your planning, it is - frankly - difficult for me to see how the UK could contribute to the land component without adding friction to an already tight plan. Under current planning, and in the time available, integration would also be difficult.

The Northern options

I know, however, that you have been looking at how else land forces might be used, which raises the issue of Turkey and the so-called 'Northern option'. This brings me to the third observation on your plan. To maximise the military prospects of success, I can see that doing something in the North must be an

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essential part of your plan. Action in the North would both help sow a seed of uncertainty in the Saddam's mind, and it would also help prevent him from running North ahead of the advance from the South. The indications are that Saddam is expecting something to happen in the North. Why disappoint him and make his decision process easier?

Could the UK in practice fit into that? It would be wrong for me to under-play the difficulties of this course of action, particularly for the UK. Two spring to mind immediately. First, for the UK to operate through Turkey, we would need active Turkish support and engagement, not just acquiescence. Otherwise we would find all our logistic enablers used up on maintaining a line of communication, and unable to support further action. I have to say that at this stage, I think there may be scepticism in UK about whether active Turkish engagement could be delivered.

Second, we could probably not get there as quickly and in as such strength as you might want us. We do not have any pre-positioned assets in the region, aside from our aircraft supporting Op NORTHERN WATCH. This means that any movement of armour, from the UK or Germany, would have to take place at an early stage. Such activity would immediately become publicly visible, and could therefore only begin once a decision to commit forces had been made. On the timelines that you are currently looking at, you could be in Baghdad before we are ready to join the fight.

Developing Northern options

If you are interested in UK involvement in Turkey, therefore, there would be a lot more work to do. I think there are two things that will be required by my Government before agreeing to us exploring it seriously as a military option to which we could contribute:

- a much more refined mission, with a better understanding of the effects required; and
- a better understanding of the level of US support that will be available.

The reason why a mission is so important is because we need to see how the North is integrated into the wider plan. It is important because need to be able to reassure ourselves that we can deliver specific effects that you required. Again, we probably could not meet your timelines for certain tasks. For example, one task you might be considering is the defeat Iraqi forces on the way to securing the northern oilfields. For that a heavy Division would probably be required. But I very much doubt that that would be possible in your timescales. And what is more, it may not be big enough in itself.

That said, I believe that certain military effects in the North could be possible without pitched battles with the Iraqis. And this is where there is scope for more thinking.

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Depending on how the enemy reacts, troops (UK or otherwise) could well achieve military impact much earlier in a build-up. Simply by taking up position in Turkey, for example, they could begin to create strategic uncertainty – although it is difficult to judge what impact that would have on someone of Saddam's mind. We would have to be careful that we did not provoke him into action that we were unable to contain.

Nevertheless, however the Iraqis reacted, it would remain the case that the longer the time available, the more effect would be deliverable. There is a balance to be had between the effect required and the time available to deliver it. Until we develop the mission and the effects to be delivered it will remain difficult to say whether we can achieve that balance.

I also want you to be clear what I mean by 'US support'. In this context, I mean it as much in a political sense as a military one. For example, after the behaviour of the Turks during the discussions about the leadership of ISAF, I sense wariness in UK about UK leverage over Turkey. And more importantly, even when US became engaged on that issue, there were still problems and foot dragging from the Turks. The bottom line for the UK, is how much are your diplomats prepared to put into this? Because without the full assistance of the Turks, the risk factors quickly become unacceptable.

There are, of course, other military considerations. For example, we would need a better understanding of availability of US air, intelligence and logistic support that would be required to support UK land forces. The issue is complicated by fact that I suspect CINC might want to maintain some UK niche assets to support Main Effort in South. But once again without the politics squared away, that will be academic anyway.

Just to conclude on the Northern option, then: we have thought about North, but we have now taken our thinking about as far as it can go without more detail from you. What we now need from you is to know what you really want; and most importantly more on what effect you would want us to achieve.

Other important observations

I have three other observations that I think might be useful to feed in. In no particular order, they relate to the importance of achieving the right legal and political conditions, multi-nationality and planning for the 'day-after'.

The legal/political point first. I really do not want to labour the point, but I do think that it is important that you understand the constraints under which I and other UK officers are operating when we talk about this issue.

Very simply, unless political and legal issues are resolved, it will be difficult to even deliver basic support. The issues are being worked in London, and I fully understand that they should not necessarily be CENTCOM's business. But, I would also point out that if CENTCOM is in a position to impress upon

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Washington the need to engage on these issues, then we might be better placed to resolve them quicker.

The case for multi-nationality is also a pragmatic one. I believe that my Government would find it easier to engage politically if the campaign involved more than just US and UK troops. And if, say, a multi-national force was considered for the Northern option, I also believe that might be a role for the UK-led Allied Rapid Reaction Corps, the ARRC.

I know from experience, as former Chief of Staff of NATO HQ, that multi-nationality brings complications. But the use of ARRC HQ would bring some advantages too – especially to the Northern options. It would allow the span of Command required to multi-nationalise and, most importantly, because it has already been focused on the region for years it could actually help save deployment time. And it could achieve the combat power for certain tasks more quickly than a purely UK force. Also – and this would be important from a UK point of view – it offers a mechanism for provision of additional scarce capabilities.

Finally, I think it would be helpful for my colleagues in London to have a better feel for the 'post-conflict' thinking and aftermath management. We have been very grateful for have been given such a good insight into how the plan will develop toward Baghdad. But it is not so clear what happens after that – especially once the regime has fallen.

Again, with the experience of ISAF fresh in their minds, the UK Government is very interested in how the post-conflict piece is going to be managed. Afghanistan has shown that it is every bit as important to win the peace as is to win the war. That will be even truer in Iraq. I would not wish to over-state the case, but it is undoubtedly true that both UK politicians and my military colleagues would like to know what we are getting ourselves into in the longer-term. Again that is probably not a question for you here, but if you can help get London the answers, I think it will be in all our interests.

Conclusion

To finish let me put some cards on the table.

We in the UK fully understand that your plan is just that, a US plan. However, as I have said, if the circumstances are right, I think that we could make a very useful contribution in the air, at sea, and possibly SF elements - within your timescales.

The involvement of significant UK land forces is going to be more of a challenge. We agree that the most obvious option is through Turkey. If your finished plan fits, we might be able to make an important contribution to it. But, the extent of the effect desired will determine the troops required and in what timescale. That is turn will inform whether there is a practicable military role for the UK, or even the ARRC.

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Your plans have already given us plenty of food for thought – this Conference will give us even more to consider.

I hope having listened to me today you will have a better understanding of at least the military factors which we are considering and the need for further guidance on the political context as we move forward..

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