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MINISTRY OF DEFENCE
1, MAIN BUILDING
WHITEHALL LONDON SW1A 2HB

SECRETARY OF STATE

MSU 4/5/2C

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Reid - PM

Review of UK force levels

Tony

The results of the most recent review of UK forces in Iraq shows that considerable progress has been made in training the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) since the last roulement in May. Consequently, an overall reduction of about 500 troops will be possible in the next roulement of UK troops (due to take place in October/November). I intend writing to Opposition Defence Spokesmen and the Chairman of the HCDC in lieu of a written parliamentary statement.

Broad UK force requirements in Iraq are managed through a six-monthly review process. The results of each review guides the composition of the UK force package deployed at the next roulement. Over the last six months, the security situation in MND(SE) has been mixed. Incident levels have remained much lower than in other parts of Iraq, but attacks on UK forces have grown in sophistication.

The Rt Hon Tony Blair MP
The Prime Minister

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Against that background, the focus on Security Sector Reform work since the previous roulement of troops in May has delivered a significant improvement in the capacity and capability of the ISF in MND(SE). Building on this progress has allowed an overall reduction of around 500 personnel from those that deployed in May. As a result, the next roulement in October/November would see the number of UK troops deployed in Iraq reduced to about 8000.

It should be emphasised that agreeing to the roulement does not trigger implementation of our transition plans in MND(SE). We need, however, to allow MND(SE) to proceed with creating the conditions within which the transition plan can proceed, once the Iraqi Joint Committee to Transfer Security Responsibility (JCTSR) pronounces and if the right security conditions pertain. It is intended to instruct MND(SE) staffs to prepare for transition on this basis. This will involve issuing detailed orders, but reserving authority to implement transition plans. Any force adjustments beyond those implemented during the roulement in November will be the subject of further advice and agreement by ministers.

Notwithstanding the reduction in troop numbers, I propose that the roulement in October/November should be handled as routine in presentational terms. It should take the form of letters to opposition spokesmen, the HCDC Chairman and a press release, setting out the roulement in standard terms.

On the timing of the release of these letters, I intend to make an early announcement on the roulement to counter speculation, particularly in the Scottish press, and to allow the usual proactive publicity of pre-deployment activity by the brigade.



JOHN REID

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