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THE LEVEL OF OPERATIONAL RISK ON CURRENT OPERATIONS

The pace and changing dynamics in theatre have brought into sharp relief the concerns that you and I have about support to current operations. In addition, Ministers have recently faced difficult questions in the House. Given that there are some important discussions in ECAB, PPSG and DMB in the next few days I thought I should set out now very clearly my view of the unacceptable areas of risk.

I have 4 major concerns as the Force provider. They are consistent with the Army's Review of the Equipment Programme, which ECAB will be considering shortly, and with our STP priorities. My concerns are:

Protected mobility and protected patrol;

ISTAR;

Effective communications;

Battlefield Helicopters.

My first and overriding concern is protected mobility and protected patrol vehicles, an area in which Min DP's intervention is most welcome. In the short-term, the use of VECTOR as an enhanced Protected Patrol Vehicle (PPV), WMIK, up-armoured FV430 Mk3 and Warrior will provide a balanced capability which can be tailored to meet the different demands of TELIC and HERRICK. Whilst it is accepted that VECTOR will not provide full protection against all threats, it will increase survivability compared with SNATCH (improved protection, greater mobility and larger capacity) and I believe there is no immediate or practicable alternative. Therefore, there is an urgent need to complete the buy of VECTOR now. The DEC GM Phase 1 measure should achieve the immediate goal (a total of 166 x

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VECTOR for HERRICK), but leaves us with SNATCH for TELIC for the foreseeable future. How the remainder of the PPV capability shortfall should best be addressed will require further consideration. If a better PPV than VECTOR can be developed, and delivered in the right timeframe, then clearly we should pursue this line. However, I reiterate the need for a balanced capability and a systems approach that includes ISTAR, ECM, situational awareness and tactics, techniques and procedures. In parallel, and as part of this balanced approach, there is also an urgent need to complete the upgrade of FV 430s to Mk3 and the procurement of sufficient armour packs. In the slightly longer term, Hard Kill DAS clearly has significant potential and I see this as a key capability which requires continued investment now.

Secondly, I share VCDS's concern about ISTAR support for the Land component on both TELIC and HERRICK, and have welcomed his personal engagement. LAND are sighted on DJtCap's work and I gather that the shortfall paper may be considered by COS(I) this week. Nonetheless, there is an urgent need for a full estimate process to ascertain the requirement to provide a breadth of capabilities that provide reliable, available and, critically, timely ISTAR to the Land tactical commander in order to achieve our missions on the two operations and to contribute to force protection. It must consider this in terms of gathering information, in processing and dissemination and with emphasis on the surveillance and reconnaissance elements of ISTAR. I judge that such an estimate would identify the fundamental need for an easily deployable UAV capable of operating beyond the line of sight, under the control of the tactical ground commander, and responsive to his information requirements. I see this as complementary to the more immediate re-allocation of current resources and longer-term EP solutions. Such a capability was always within the original vision for the WATCHKEEPER programme; the need is now acute.

My third key area of concern is ensuring that we continue to provide effective tactical communications; I see this being put increasingly at risk given the shortfall in Bowman support funding, which I understand may be on the DMB agenda this month. LAND has managed successfully to introduce Bowman, and the situational awareness it provides is a key component of operational success and force protection. However, the support solution is not adequately funded – by Jul 07 it is assessed that 25% of 1 (UK) Division's command and control and situational awareness capability will be unserviceable, thereby jeopardising 4 and 7 Brigades' training for programmed operations and the Bowman operational field trial. Furthermore, by mid 08 we will have the equivalent of one manoeuvre brigade and one logistic brigade with unserviceable Bowman equipment. The increased demand for Bowman in 2007¹ is such that the inability to repair equipment and return it to the user will leave us dangerously short of radios and ancillaries; this is simply not sustainable and will add significant, possibly unacceptable, risk to our ability to conduct operations successfully. This issue must be addressed now.

Finally, while I appreciate VCDS has already tasked ACDS(Ops) to consider options to address the escalating requirement for Battlefield Helicopters (BH), and that COS(I) will take the paper this week, I would be remiss if I failed to stress the importance of resolving this issue as a matter of urgency. Operational experience continues to drive home the inextricable linkages between ISTAR, Protected Mobility and BH. When the two former capabilities are under stress as I have described, we invariably place a higher call on the latter, a call that we find increasingly difficult to meet, given the limited resources at our disposal. The issue is one of flying hours as well as the provision of sufficient numbers of aircraft and their spares. The key and developing role of AH on operations in Afghanistan, coupled with significant shortfalls in support funding, brings this into even sharper focus.

¹ 1 Mech Bde will be deployed on TELIC 10, 3 Cdo Bde on HERRICK 5, 12 Mech Bde on HERRICK 6, 4 Mech and 7 Armd Bdes will be training and then deploying to TELICs 11 and 12 respectively. 20 Armd Bde will have been uplifted to the next software capability – BCIP 5, and will be conducting Operational Field Trial 3 (OFT 3), and 19 Mech and 16 Air Asslt Bdes are both due to be converting to Bowman.

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In conclusion, these four areas pose significant risk to continued operations and, therefore, are causing me very real concern. Action is needed urgently if we are to continue operations and minimise casualties to our soldiers. Process must not be allowed to stand in the way.

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