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From: John Dodds
Date: 24 March 2003
Extn:
Room:

CHANCELLOR

cc: As e-mail distribution
list.

**IRAQ: UK MILITARY CONTRIBUTION TO POST-CONFLICT
IRAQ**

Issue: Jack Straw and Geoff Hoon's minute to the PM of 19 March and the PM's response of 21 March.

Recommendation: Urge caution at Cabinet in taking on post-conflict commitments without assurances from the US on a further UN resolution and about military support to any UK-led post-conflict command.

Timing: Immediate. Relevant to the PM's discussions at Camp David on Wednesday.

Details:

The Foreign and Defence Secretaries wrote to the Prime Minister on 19 March, copied to you and Clare Short, with the following propositions on the scale of the UK military contribution for post-conflict Iraq:

- a) The maximum size of task that UK forces would contribute to in the early days should not exceed our overall military capability. A focus in the south east of Iraq would be reasonable;
- b) The UK contribution to such a task in advance of a Security Council resolution would be limited to the facilitation of humanitarian assistance and a secure environment and the elimination of WMD;
- c) We therefore need to agree urgently with the US a realistic authorising Security Council resolution for post-conflict Iraq;

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- d) We should agree urgently a plan with the US to help us find military partners to enable us to draw down and, in due course, design and exit strategy.
- e) In broad terms the MOD will need to draw down its scale of effort to nearer a third of its current commitment by the Autumn.

2. The Prime Minister's Office responded on 21 March saying

"The Prime Minister agrees with the Foreign and Defence Secretaries' proposals, provided that there is a satisfactory resolution of the following issues: (a) the size of any UK sector; (b) the length of time of our commitment and the exit strategy; and (c) agreement on an authorising UN Security Council Resolution. He would be grateful for urgent advice on points (a) and (b)."

3. We have had further discussions today with MOD on post-conflict issues. The picture looks rather different to that presented in the correspondence between Mr Straw, Mr Hoon and the Prime Minister. You may want to feed into this decision.

4. MOD officials say that they had intended the Foreign Secretary/ Defence Secretary Minute to prompt a political choice about the size of UK military commitment in the aftermath. The Defence Chiefs say that a "medium size" deployment (ie 10,000-15,000) is the most we could sustain in the medium term without lasting damage to our forces. MOD officials tell us they had intended the submission to pose the question "do you want us to do as much as we can (ie this medium size deployment) or as little as we can get away with (ie less)?" The question is not posed in that form and hence is not answered. **The choice is essentially political, but it is essential to note that the cost of a deployment on this medium scale is about £1 billion a year.**

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What is happening to Sectors

5. MOD tells us that the concept of sectors has now moved on in US military planning. Until a few days ago the plan was to divide Iraq into seven sectors plus Baghdad. The plan now appears to have four "2-Star commands (ie Divisions)" outside of Baghdad, focusing more flexibly on the tasks that need to be done, rather than being tied down to specific narrow locations.

6. The MOD ambition is to have a UK-led "2-Star command". However:

- the scale of military effort needed will depend on the permissiveness of the environment (whether opposition has been fully overcome and whether the coalition is seen as liberators or occupiers etc) and the relationship between the military and civil powers;
- it is unlikely, except in the most benign scenario, that the maximum envisaged size of UK force would be able to deal with all the challenges presented to a "2-Star command" on its own;
- without an appropriate UN Resolution to legitimise the aftermath, MOD believe it unlikely that any significant coalition partners will come forward to share our burden (apart from ourselves and the US, the "coalition of the willing" is largely of limited military capability – Spain and Italy would appear to be the most credible sources of military assistance);
- therefore we could find ourselves heavily stretched to deliver a "2-Star" commitment.

7. All this places vital importance on securing the necessary UN Resolution (and we have been there before!) In this context, the Prime Minister's questions about the size of the UK sector, the length of time of our commitment and our exit strategy are excellent questions, they are not questions that can be easily answered. The more relevant questions are how to ensure a permissive environment as quickly as possible, and how to maximise the number of militarily-capable coalition partners to share our burden.

8. And given past experience, while going all out for a suitable resolution, it would be wise to ask what our Plan B would be if we couldn't get one. MOD currently don't have an answer to that!

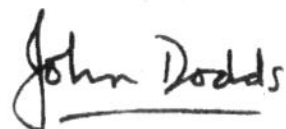
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Conclusion**DECLASSIFIED**

9. Where does this leave us?

- First, we should emphasise in our discussions with the US that a further appropriate UN resolution is vital – among all the other reasons – because it provides the key to delivering credible coalition partners for the aftermath.
- Second, we should stress to the US that our support in the conflict itself has stretched our military capability to the limit, and there is a limit to how much we can take on in the aftermath. If we took on a “2-Star command” in the aftermath, we would need guarantees of US support, if no other coalition partners came forward. MOD today painted the possibility that – without a UN resolution – the UK may end up carrying a larger share of the post-conflict military burden than we are actually carrying now!
- Third (and this is an issue on which we differ with MOD where, if you agree, your input could be invaluable), we should not be too ready to take on a “2-Star command” in the aftermath without the necessary guarantees. The military will balk at this – a “2-Star command” would provide a seat at the top table in the aftermath. But the risks that it brings of costs that we cannot afford both militarily and financially, mean that it comes at potentially a high price.
- Fourth, you may have a view on whether to press for a smaller commitment than the £1 billion “medium” scale deployment that MOD/FCO have offered.

10. We are reflecting these thoughts in our comments at official level on the briefing the FCO are producing for the PM's meeting with president Bush on Wednesday. It would be useful if you could make an input at Cabinet. If you wish to write we can supply a draft letter.



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