

21 July 2006

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ENHANCED PROTECTED PATROL VEHICLE: PRESENTATIONAL ADVICE

ISSUE

1. Presentational advice on Protected Patrol Vehicles (PPV).

RECOMMENDATION

2. The Secretary of State is invited to note that:
 - a. If additional funding to meet the PPV capability gap is approved by the Chief Secretary an opportunity exists for an announcement to be made on Monday 24 July in a Written Ministerial Statement. A draft statement is at Annex A;
 - b. It is recommended that this be accompanied by a press release to be issued on the same day (at Annex B)
 - c. Work on this issue is not sufficiently mature for further briefing to be provided to journalists but that such briefing would fit well into the wider presentational strategy on force protection which was the subject of DGMC's submission (DGMC_14-08 dated 14 Jul 06)

TIMING

3. **Priority.** You requested advice by 1300 on 21 July.

BACKGROUND

4. Min(DP) was briefed yesterday on progress with regard to identifying a strategy to

meet the PPV capability gap. Following this briefing he wrote to the Chief Secretary requesting £89.2m additional UOR funding to enable the Department to pursue a three strand approach to meeting the capability gap. This comprises an additional purchase of 106 VECTOR PPVs funded by the Department plus an additional 72 uparmoured FV430 Mk3 for Iraq and 108 medium PPV (Med PPV), based on the Force Protection Inc Cougar vehicle, for Iraq and Afghanistan as UORs. On current plans VECTOR will be delivered to Afghanistan from January 07, uparmoured FV430 Mk3 to Iraq from October 06 and we are pursuing an ambitious programme, which would require flying vehicles to theatre, to deliver the first Med PPV to either Iraq or Afghanistan by the end of November 06.

5. If the additional funding is approved by the Chief Secretary there is an opportunity for the Secretary of State to make an announcement in the House of Commons on Monday 24 July by laying a written statement in parliament. A draft statement is at Annex A. Draft letters to opposition Defence spokespersons in the Commons and Lords and to MPs who have shown an interest in this subject are at Annex C.

6. It is recommended that a press release be issued following the announcement. A draft and lines to take are at Annex B. An appropriate military spokesman should be made available for broadcast interviews on the day of the announcement. He will be able to demonstrate that the military is involved in the acquisition process, and to offer an operator's perspective of the benefits the new vehicles will provide to troops in theatre.

(EC GM-AD CC) is a suitable spokesperson; he has intimately involved in the review of our protected vehicles, commanded a Formation Reconnaissance Regiment and has recently returned from operations in Afghanistan.

7. The press release trails the idea of a formal briefing for journalists to take place once work on this issue is more mature. Such a briefing would fit well within the wider force protection presentation strategy submitted recently by DGM¹.

8. The key messages to be portrayed, both in the announcement and press release, are that the Government will be spending an additional £137m on the procurement of VECTOR, Med PPV and the up-armouring of FV 430. With current vehicles, including SNATCH (which will remain appropriate for some tasks) this provides a coherent package of vehicles, offering a range of protection, mobility and profile. Commanders will have a significantly increased choice of vehicles to be used as they see fit to best meet the mission and counter the threat. No one vehicle is appropriate for every task.

8. It will be important to make clear that while we are confident that the Med PPV being procured offers significantly greater protection against the key threats in both Iraq and Afghanistan than the SNATCH, as with any other vehicle, it cannot be guaranteed to offer absolute protection. Improvised explosives devices vary, by their improvised nature, in performance and the threat is developing all the time. In the short timescales that the Med PPV programme has been developed there has not been time for the full testing of the protection system we would usually complete, but our confidence is based on US use of the same base vehicle in Iraq, what examination our experts have been able to do and the additional armour we will add. It is our layered system, including intelligence and surveillance, operations to disrupt insurgents, tactic, techniques and procedures, electronic-counter measures, as well as armour, that, enables us to provide overall protection and with a range of different vehicles allows commanders to balance protection

¹ DGM_C_14-08 dated 14 Jul 06

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against the requirements of the mission.

9. We must also reiterate that SNATCH is still an appropriate vehicle for some tasks. The additional vehicles we are now buying will not mean SNATCH is not used at all.

10. The target, set by Ministers, to deliver the first Med PPV to either Iraq or Afghanistan by the end of November 2006 can only be met by transporting the vehicles by air. This will incur an additional cost to the operation, compared to our usual practice of sending vehicles by sea, which may not be acceptable to the Treasury. This leaves some uncertainty as to whether the November 2006 target can be met and, therefore, we recommend publicly stating only a broad date range.

11. By Monday 24 July contracts will not have been signed for any of the three strands of work. The initial batches of VECTOR and FV430 Mk3 (Uparmoured) are on contract but not the additional vehicles we intend to announce. On Cougar, [tender action will be underway/a letter of intent will have been signed.] In announcing our intention to purchase the Cougar to meet the Med PPV requirement before we have signed the contracts, there is a risk that the company will gain commercial leverage over the Department. SUV IPT's view, however, is that on balance the announcement will assist their commercial position.

12. The Department may be open to criticism that it only took action on this issue when forced to by the media. Defensive lines are included in Annex D.

13. Previous PQ answers on this subject are at Annex E. The initial answers in June were that our requirement was for a small, light, highly mobile vehicle that could operate in the narrow streets and tight spaces for urban areas and vehicles such as RG-31, Cougar etc would not meet this requirement. At that time the ECC was considering whether there was a long term answer to the need for a small, mobile but better protected patrol vehicle. Later answers reflect that the review into protected vehicles was ongoing. The review established that there was no small but better protected vehicle available now and the only immediate options for better protection were vehicles such as Cougar.

14. DGMC have been consulted and are content with the approach proposed above.

[DII Signed]

Annexes:

- A. Draft statement and line to take for announcement
- B. Draft press release
- C. Draft letters for MPs and Lords
- D. Supplementary Q&A

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DRAFT WRITTEN STATEMENT

Protecting our servicemen and women is a key concern but we must remember that military operations are a risky undertaking and there is no such thing as absolute protection. In the continual battle between the evolving threat and the development of counter measures armour is only the innermost layer in our force protection system. This system includes intelligence gathering, surveillance, operations to disrupt the insurgents, tactics and our world-leading electronic counter-measures. Maximising armoured protection is often not the best way to enable the armed forces to do their job. We must provide a range of vehicles for Commanders to use as they see fit to best achieve the mission and counter the threat.

The House will be aware that, on 26 June, I announced a review into the provision of protected vehicles for operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. That review has now concluded and, [as we all expected] has confirmed that, in the light of the evolving threat in Iraq and Afghanistan, there is a requirement for a protected vehicle between our heavy armour such as Warrior and lighter patrol vehicles such as SNATCH. We had already identified this potential gap and were working to address it, but, importantly, the review highlighted that there are feasible options to address the gap in the very short term. We have now completed a very rapid assessment of those options and have identified three, complementary, ways forward, two of which build on work already on-going in the Department.

The first is an additional buy of around 100 VECTOR, our new Pinzgauer based protected

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patrol vehicle, for Afghanistan on top of the 66 already on contract. VECTOR provides good protection and, importantly, increased mobility and capacity compared to SNATCH which makes it very suitable for the rugged terrain and long patrol distances in Afghanistan.

The second is to provide around 70 additional uparmoured and upgraded FV430 to equip a Mechanised Infantry Battlegroup for Iraq by the Spring of 2007, again on top of the 54 we already have on contract. Significantly smaller and lighter than Warrior, the uparmoured FV430 will provide a similar level of protection while being less intimidating and having less impact on local infrastructure. Able to carry out many of the same tasks as Warrior, it will relieve pressure on heavily committed Warrior vehicles and armoured infantry battlegroups.

The third is the Cougar manufactured by Force Protection Incorporated of Charleston, South Carolina, a vehicle which can meet in full our requirement for a well protected, wheeled patrol vehicle with a lower profile than tracked vehicles like Warrior or FV430. [Tender action is underway/A letter of intent has been issued] to procure around 100 vehicles and thanks to outstanding cooperation from the US government, military and industry – an example of the special relationship really delivering benefits for our soldiers on the ground – we expect to be able to deliver the vehicles, in batches, during the next six month rotations of Iraq and Afghanistan. The fitting of additional armour will make them one of the best protected wheeled patrol vehicles available.

Together with Warrior and SNATCH these three will provide commanders with a broad suite of vehicles to deal with the variety of rapidly changing situations and threats that they face. Warrior provides the capability to deal with the most demanding threats but its profile and weight makes it unsuitable for some operations and situations, such as Afghanistan.

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SNATCH, with a much less intimidating profile, enables troops to interact with locals and promotes a sense of normality and will remain a key tool for building and maintaining consent. The uparmoured FV430, the Cougar medium PPV and VECTOR fill the requirements for varying degrees of protection, mobility and profile between these two extremes.

In total this represents an additional investment of £137m in our servicemen and women's protection and operational effectiveness. It will be funded by resources from my Department and additional funding from the Reserve for which I thank my Rt Hon Friend, the Chancellor and his officials.

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DRAFT PRESS RELEASE

Defence Secretary, Des Browne, today unveiled a £137m package of new equipment to help protect UK Forces in Iraq and Afghanistan following an armoured vehicles review.

This will include: the purchase of around 100 additional Pinzgauer 'Vector', on top of the 66 already on contract, with deliveries to Afghanistan to begin early in 2007; the provision of around 70 extra uparmoured and upgraded FV430 troop carriers, in addition to the 54 already on contract, a sufficient number to field a mechanised infantry battlegroup by Spring 2007; and the acquisition of around 100 of a new medium weight vehicle, 'Cougar', which is manufactured by Force Protection Incorporated of Charleston, South Carolina, and is expected to be delivered to Iraq and Afghanistan around the end of the year.

Des Browne said:

"The protection of our Forces is a top priority. I am delighted to be able to provide commanders on the ground in Iraq and Afghanistan with more options to deal with the threats they are facing. These new vehicles will supplement the Warrior and Snatch vehicles currently in service.

"Military operations are inherently risky, force protection is a complicated area, and armour is only the innermost layer in the force protection system. With this package of new equipment, however, I am doing everything possible to provide troops on the front line with some of the best protection available.

"My review of vehicles in Iraq and Afghanistan highlighted that there was a requirement for a medium weight vehicle between our heavily armoured Warriors and lighter Snatch patrol vehicles. The uparmoured FV430 and the Cougar are the right vehicles for this role. May I take this opportunity to congratulate all those within the MoD for their excellent work in the past few weeks in responding so quickly to the challenge of assessing the available options and sourcing an excellent solution to our soldiers' requirements."

DRAFT LETTER TO MPs

I am pleased to inform you that I have today announced the investment of £137m in the protection and operational effectiveness of our servicemen and women on operations in Iraq and Afghanistan.

You will recall that 3 weeks ago I demanded an urgent review of the protected vehicles available for operations. It has recommended three complementary ways to improve the range of vehicles available to commanders and we will be pursuing them all.

The first two expand on work already in progress in my Department. In addition to the previously announced purchase of the VECTOR, Pinzgauer based protected patrol vehicle, which is well suited to the tough conditions in Afghanistan, we will now be more than doubling the number we are buying for that theatre. We will also be increasing the number of uparmoured and upgraded FV430 to enable us to equip a full Mechanised Infantry Battlegroup for Iraq by Spring 2007, helping to relieve pressure on the heavily committed Warrior fleet and armoured infantry battlegroups.

The third strand of work is to buy the Cougar, manufactured by Force Protection Incorporated of Charleston, South Carolina. Our assessment is that this vehicle meets our requirement for a well protected, wheeled patrol vehicle with a lower profile than tracked vehicles like Warrior or FV430 in full. I am pleased to say that the special relationship has proved a reality and, with outstanding levels of assistance and cooperation from the US government, military and industry, [tender action is now underway/a letter of intent has been signed.] We plan to deliver the vehicles, in batches, during the next six month rotations of Iraq and Afghanistan. With additional armour, designed by our own experts, our Cougars will be one of the best protected wheeled patrol vehicles available.

We must always remember, however, that no one vehicle or amount of armour is a panacea against the threats our soldiers face. Maximising armour protection will often hinder the armed forces doing their job so we must provide commanders with a range of vehicles to enable them to balance protection with the threat and their task. Armour forms only part of a layered system of protection which also includes intelligence, surveillance, tactics and our world-leading electronic counter-measures. While protecting our servicemen and women is one of our highest priorities, military operations are a risky undertaking and absolute protection cannot be guaranteed.

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Copies to:

Rt Hon Tony Blair MP, Prime Minister
Rt Hon James Arbuthnot MP, Chairman HCDC
Dr Liam Fox MP, Conservative Shadow Defence Spokesman
Nick Harvey MP, Liberal Democrat Shadow Defence Spokesman

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Copies to:

Lord Astor of Haver, Conservative Spokesman on Defence

Lord Garden, Liberal Democrat Spokesman on Defence

Baroness Dean of Thornton-le-Fylde

Lord Guthrie)

Lord Vincent)

Lord Boyce) – Previous CDS

Lord Craig)

Lord Inge)

Lord Brammall)

SUPPLEMENTARY Q&A

Q. Why have you done this now, not a year ago?

A. As recent events have shown, the situation in Iraq and Afghanistan changes rapidly and the threat is constantly evolving. In response, work was on-going within the Department to examine options for the procurement of a medium protected patrol vehicle. The review announced by the Secretary of State for Defence on 26 June enabled the acceleration of this work including by securing additional funding.

Q. Why did it take a newspaper article to spur you into action?

A. It did not. Work was on-going within the Department to examine options for the procurement of a medium protected patrol vehicle. The review announced by the Secretary of State for Defence on 26 June enabled the acceleration of this work including through securing additional funding.

Q. Does this mean SNATCH is inadequate?

A. No. Commanders need a range of vehicles to be used as they see fit to meet the mission and counter the threat. SNATCH provides one part of that range and will remain appropriate for some tasks.

Q. Will the new vehicle[s] you are buying replace SNATCH?

A. Not entirely. SNATCH will remain an appropriate vehicle for some tasks but the procurement of new vehicles will give Commanders a significantly increased choice of vehicles to be used as they see fit to meet the mission and counter the threat.

Q. Will Cougar/FV430/VECTOR protect against EFP IEDs?

A. We must remember that no vehicle will provide a panacea. Protection is not only provided by armour but through a variety of layers including intelligence, surveillance, tactics and electronic counter-measures, and commanders need a range of vehicles to balance protection with the threat and their task. With our current vehicles, the additional £137M we are spending on the procurement of VECTOR, Medium PPV and the up-armouring of FV430 will provide a coherent package offering a range of protection, mobility and profile for Commanders to use as they see fit to best meet the mission and counter

the threat.

(If pressed on EFP) Cougar/FV430/VECTOR offers enhanced protection against the key threats in both Iraq and Afghanistan, but we are not prepared to comment on detailed levels of protection in order to safeguard our troops.

Q. What will you do in the interim until Cougar/FV430/VECTOR is delivered?

A. We must remember that Cougar/FV430/VECTOR is not a panacea. Protection is not only provided by armour but through a variety of layers including intelligence, surveillance, tactics and electronic counter-measures, and commanders need a range of vehicles to balance protection with the threat and their task. Commanders already have a choice of capable vehicles but we have decided to deploy an additional 12 Warrior to Iraq now to provide better protected transport.

Q. Does this extra investment mean less money for helicopters/explosion suppressant foam/other important capabilities?

A. No. This investment is split between funding from the Reserve, and we are very grateful to the Treasury for their cooperation in making the funding available, and programmed MOD resources which have been brought forward to accelerate delivery.

COUGAR

Q. When will these vehicles be in theatre?

A. On current plans we expect deliveries of VECTOR to begin early in 2007 and the first uparmoured FV430 to be available this Autumn with the battlegroup complete in the Spring of 2007. Against an ambitious plan we are aiming to get the first Cougar protected patrol vehicle to theatre during the next 6 month rotation of Iraq.

Q. The US have had Cougar in service for some time, why has it taken us so long to do the same?

A. As is clear even in media reports from Iraq, the situation in the US area is not the same as in our. As recent events have shown, the situation in Iraq and Afghanistan changes rapidly and the threat is constantly evolving. In response, work was on-going within the Department to examine options for the procurement of a medium protected patrol vehicle. The review announced by the Secretary of State for Defence on 26 June

enabled the acceleration of this work including by securing additional funding.

FV430

Q. Isn't spending money on FV430 throwing good money after bad?

A. Although the FV430 family has been in service for a considerable time, the upgrade to the Mark 3 version effectively makes it a new vehicle. Following a complete base overhaul, the Mark 3 FV430 upgrade includes a new engine, gearbox, braking system, suspension and track which provides significantly improved mobility and reliability. With the increased protection provided by uparmouring, the version of the FV430 that will be deployed to Iraq will be a significantly more capable vehicle than the current FV430 allowing it to be used for a much wider variety of tasks and in more situations.

RG-31

Q. Why are you not purchasing RG-31?

A. Although it has potential the RG-31 would need further development to meet our requirement and would therefore not be deliverable in the timescales we are seeking.

MINE PROTECTED VEHICLE

Q. Doesn't the UK already have some Cougars in service?

A. We have some very early versions of the Cougar, known as the Mine Protected Vehicle, in service with explosive ordnance disposal troops. The Cougars we intend to buy are the 6x6 variant, not the 4x4 like those already in service which are very different vehicles to the current Cougar.

Q. What are the MPV/Cougars in UK service used for?

A. The Mine Protected Vehicle, based on a very early version of the Cougar, is used by explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) teams for specialist tasks such as EOD reconnaissance, mine field rescue and recovery and route proving.

Q. Where are the MPV/Cougars in UK service deployed? Where have they been deployed?

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A. The Mine Protected Vehicle, based on a very early version of the Cougar, was deployed to Bosnia in 2004 and Iraq in 2003-4. A number are currently in Afghanistan.

Q. When did we purchase the MPV/Cougars currently in UK service?

A. The Mine Protected Vehicle, based on a very early version of the Cougar, was bought in 2002 from Supacat. Technical Solutions Group, a subsidiary of Force Protection Inc, supplied the base vehicle.

Q. Why has it taken us so long to decide to buy more?

A. The MPV is used for specialist explosive ordnance disposal tasks, not as a patrol vehicle. It is a very different vehicle to the current 6x6 version of Cougar we intend to buy and would not meet our requirements.

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ANSWERS TO PREVIOUS PARLIAMENTARY QUESTIONS

Lords Oral Answers, 12 Jun 06

Lord Astor of Hever asked Her Majesty's Government:

When they expect to bring into service further patrol vehicles armoured to provide protection against improvised explosive devices.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Ministry of Defence (Lord Drayson): My Lords, I am sure the House will wish to join me in expressing our sincere condolences to the families and friends of the soldiers killed and injured in Afghanistan yesterday. We do not comment on the level of protection of specific vehicles, for obvious reasons. Protected patrol vehicles are only one of a range of vehicles available to commanders to allow them to balance mobility, protection and profile based on the threat, the terrain and the task. PPVs offer a level of protection commensurate with their weight, size and role, together with good mobility and a low profile.

Lord Astor of Hever: My Lords, we on these Benches, too, extend our condolences to the family of the soldier killed in Afghanistan yesterday. Our thoughts at this time are also with the two soldiers who were seriously injured yesterday, and we wish them a speedy recovery. I thank the Minister for his reply and understand completely that any answer that he gives must not prejudice troop protection, but the Snatch Land Rover is not remotely adequate for patrolling areas where insurgents use landmines. Can the Minister assure the House that the Government will provide our soldiers with equipment that is fit for this role? What assessment have the Government made of the RG-31 which, with its V-shaped undercarriage, has a greater resilience to IEDs and which the Americans have bought in large numbers just for this role?

Lord Drayson: My Lords, I do not accept that Snatch Land Rovers are not appropriate for the role. We must recognise the difference between protection and survivability. It is important that we have the trade-offs that we need for mobility. The Snatch Land Rover provides us with the mobility and level of protection that we need.

We had 14 RG-31s in Bosnia, which we took out of service some time ago due to difficulties with maintenance. We have looked at the RG-31 alongside a number of alternatives for our current fleet and concluded that the size and profile did not meet our needs. Size is important in the urban environment. The RG-31 cannot access areas that Snatch Land Rovers can get to.

Lord Garden: My Lords, from these Benches we also join in sending condolences to the family of the soldier who was so tragically killed and to the two soldiers who appear to have been seriously injured. What is the progress on the refurbishment of the FV430 vehicles? They are more than 40 years old. The Government have put in an order for £85 million to refurbish those vehicles. Will they provide adequate protection against IEDs? As it is a two-and-a-half-year programme starting in August, when will they be delivered?

Lord Drayson: My Lords, yes, we are working on upgrading the FV430 vehicles to improve their armour, engines and drivetrains. That work is going on now. I am not prepared to get into the details of numbers and timescale, but the timescale is sooner than that which the noble Lord mentioned. In the short term, next year we will introduce a new

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protected patrol vehicle to supplement our Snatch vehicles. In the medium term, our FRES programme will introduce a range of armoured vehicles designed to incorporate several new protection systems.

The Earl of Sandwich: My Lords, I wonder whether the noble Lord could clear up confusion in the media. Are we in Afghanistan as a fighting force and not there to back up the Afghan army for reconstruction?

Lord Drayson: My Lords, our troops are in Afghanistan in support of a UN-authorised mission as part of an international coalition to provide the security framework to enable a democratic government to be established in Afghanistan.

Commons Written Answers, 16 June

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment his Department has made of the suitability of the Nyala RG-31 armoured vehicles for use in (a) Afghanistan and (b) Iraq. [76502]

Mr. Ingram: The Ministry of Defence considered the RG-31, alongside a number of alternatives, to supplement our current fleet of vehicles, but concluded that its size and profile did not meet our needs.

Commons Written Answers, 22 June

Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what evaluation his Department has made of the RG31 vehicle; and what assessment has been made of the possible advantages of this vehicle compared with the Snatch armoured Land Rover. [78216]

Mr. Ingram: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 16 June 2006, *Official Report*, column 1528W, to the hon. Member for Aldershot (Mr. Howarth). Compared to Snatch, the RG-31's size means it cannot access areas of the urban environment that Snatch is able to.

Commons Written Answers, 17 July

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to purchase mine-protected RG-31 vehicles, or variants thereof, for the Army. [81602]

Mr. Ingram: As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence announced on 26 June we are conducting a review of the options for protected patrol vehicles to determine what can be done as soon as possible and in the longer term.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the wheelbase dimensions are of (a) the Snatch Land Rover, (b) the RG-31 and (c) variants of the RG-31; and if he will make a statement. [81603]

Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the dimensions of the (a)

Snatch armoured Land Rover, (b) RG-31M and (c) Tempest Truck, Mine-Protected Vehicle are; what is the time for each vehicle to accelerate from stationary to normal cruising speed; what their maximum speeds are; and what their turning circles are. [80572]

Mr. Ingram: The information requested on SNATCH, the Mine Protected Vehicle and RG-31 is:

Vehicle	Length	Width	Height	Max Speed	Acceleration	Turning Circle ⁽¹⁾
SNATCH	4.80m	1.69m	2.37m	100km/h ⁽²⁾	Not measured	12.8m
MPV ⁽³⁾	6.28m	2.75m	3.04m	80km/h	Not measured	17m
RG-31 ⁽⁴⁾	6.40m	2.47m	2.84m	100km/h	Not stated	16m

⁽¹⁾ Kerb to kerb distance. ⁽²⁾ For SNATCH 2; SNATCH 1 and 1.5 are slightly less. Since high speed is not a requirement for SNATCH, its maximum speed has not been tested precisely. ⁽³⁾ The vehicle chosen to replace Mamba as the Mine Protected Vehicle (MPV) was initially called TEMPEST but this name is no longer used and the in service vehicle, based on the Cougar vehicle produced by Force Protection Inc, is known simply as MPV. ⁽⁴⁾ RG-31 is not in service with the UK armed forces, but this data was obtained from BAES during the ongoing review of our patrol vehicle capability.

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the cost per track mile excluding crew costs is of operating (a) a Warrior MICV and (b) a RG-31M in Iraqi conditions. [82495]

Mr. Ingram: The full capititation cost for the WARRIOR Armoured Fighting Vehicle (all variants) based on peacetime usage is calculated for financial year 2006-07 as £154.04 per kilometre. Specific operational track mile data is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. The Ministry of Defence does not own any RG-31M vehicles.

Commons Written Answers, 18 July

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many (a) RG-31 vehicles, (b) mine-protected vehicles and (c) Cougar vehicles, and variants thereof, are in service; and where they are based. [81599]

Mr. Ingram: There are no RG-31 vehicles currently in service with UK forces. There are eight of the current Mine Protected Vehicle in service, which is based on an early version of the Force Protection Inc. Cougar, including a number in Afghanistan.

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of whether the improvised explosive device attack at Haditha, Iraq in 2006, on the amphibious assault vehicle operated by the US Marine Corps has implications for (a) the design of British armoured personnel carriers and (b) other British Army force protection measures. [82513]

Mr. Ingram: We have established links with coalition partners in Iraq to exchange details of terrorist incidents, successful or otherwise, in order to identify lessons for tactics,

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platform design and capability development. We do not comment publicly on specific incidents or conclusions for reasons of operational security.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps have been taken since September 2004 to enhance the provision of electronic counter measures for military vehicles operating out-of-base in Iraq or Afghanistan. [84534]

Des Browne: The threat from Improvised Explosives Devices is constantly evolving and responding to it is one of our highest priorities. Over the past two years we have spent £120 million on protection for ground forces in Iraq, including on electronic counter measures. In addition, the British Army constantly reviews its training, tactics and procedures to minimise the risks to which our troops are exposed. It would not be appropriate to comment on the details as disclosure would, or would be likely to, prejudice the effectiveness and security of the armed forces.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps have been taken since September 2004 to enhance ballistic protection to side doors, footwells and forward bulkheads of Snatch vehicles deployed in Iraq and Afghanistan. [84542]

Des Browne: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 7 June 2006, *Official Report*, column 624W.

Commons Written Answers, 19 July

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will reconsider the purchase of the armoured Pinzgauer vehicles on order for troops in Afghanistan; (2) what the performance specifications are of the new patrol vehicle Vector; what type of vehicle it is; and how its armour protection compares with the (a) Snatch Land Rover and (b) TG-31; (3) what assessment he has made of the level of protection afforded to troops by the (a) RG-31 vehicle and (b) Snatch Land Rover.

Des Browne: Vector is the name of the programme to buy a new, Pinzgauer based, protected patrol vehicle to supplement the current Land Rover Snatch vehicle. The programme is on contract for delivery of vehicles in 2007. The key performance requirements for Vector are improved mobility, payload and capacity compared to Snatch. We do not comment on levels of armour protection, as disclosure would, or would be likely to, prejudice the security of our armed forces.

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SECRET UK EYES ONLY

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HOUSE OF COMMONS DEFENCE COMMITTEE, 11 JULY

Q44 Mr Hancock: Secretary of State, you promised an urgent review of the use of Snatch Land Rovers. What are the terms of reference that you set out for that review? When is it expected to be completed and when will you be prepared to announce the findings? As a supplementary to that, in response to a point put to you on June 12 you said, "It is open to commanders to deploy vehicles that have heavier protection than the Snatch Land Rover. Other vehicles are available to them; there is a choice." Do you still stand by that statement that in the deployments we have where our troops are in harm's way, seriously, in Afghanistan and in Iraq, that commanders really do have a serious choice here?

Des Browne: Yes, I do stand by the fact that commanders have a choice. Commanders have a choice of whether they travel on the ground at all in the first place in certain circumstances and in some cases the commanders' choice will be to send out forces walking in relation to the particular task that they have charged them with, and these decisions need to be made by commander. I said that because the decision as to how to deploy troops, whether in a particular vehicle, whether by air or whether in walking is a matter of assessment by the commanders against circumstances where force protection in terms of travel is only part the nature of the vehicle and quite substantially about tactics, about intelligence and about related issues, which are within the knowledge of the commanders to make those decisions. Turning to the particular review that I have requested, that is ongoing. I have accepted in the House and repeat today that the development of improvised explosive devices has generated a set of circumstances where, in my view, we need to look at whether there is a need for something between, in Iraq, Snatch Land Rovers as a form of land transport and the Warrior, and I have accepted in principle that there is a need to look at that to see if we can identify resources that can be procured and deployed in the timescale that would provide that level of protection while we wait for other armoured options becoming available such as, for Afghanistan, the Vector, which will enter service in 2007; and the fact, of course, that we have already upgraded the Armor and the Warrior and the Saxon and the CVRT and that we are upgrading FE430 vehicles. That essentially is what I have asked our officials to do, to review the availability of such resource to be procured and an appropriate timescale to do that, and I am awaiting a response to that imminently. I am not in a position to say, just now, when I will be able to report that, but I will keep the Committee and indeed the House of Commons updated on any developments.