



## SECRETARY OF STATE

MSU 7/4/3N

25 June 2008

**APS/Min(DES)**

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**PROTECTED VEHICLES**

## Reference:

A. COML/1/1.3 dated 19 Jun 08, "COML Assessment of Options to Accelerate Delivery of RIDGBACK and other PPV"

1. The Secretary of State was extremely grateful to CDS, DCDS(EC), CJO, CofM Land, CFA, DCD and DJtCap for meeting him and Min(DES) at short notice to discuss future plans for the protected vehicle fleet, particularly in Afghanistan.
2. SofS opened the meeting by stressing the importance of developing a clear plan for improving protected vehicle capability in Afghanistan. While the meeting had in part been prompted by the recent fatal incident involving a Snatch Landrover, he recognised that the issue ran wider than just Snatch, and that there were vulnerabilities associated with Vector, Pinzgauer and GS Landrover – these were stories waiting to happen. SofS made clear his intent: namely, to deliver as quickly as possible a balanced and sustainable protected vehicle capability in Afghanistan, with all patrol vehicles<sup>1</sup> mine-protected, commensurate with their weight. This might infer the removal from theatre of Snatch, Vector, Pinzgauer and GS Landrover.

<sup>1</sup> Discussion was limited about Viking, Jackal and RWMIK, which derive their protection primarily through their superior off-road mobility, although SofS was concerned about the very rapid decline in Viking's popularity in Afghanistan.

3. CDS said that we needed to start by testing the operational requirement for the use of lighter vehicles in Afghanistan and Iraq. What would be the operational impact of ruling out future use of protected patrol vehicles in a weight and protection class below that of RIDGBACK? If we decided that the continued use of lighter vehicles was mission-critical, whether to secure access, increase flexibility or avoid the erosion of popular consent, then the second question was whether Snatch was the best vehicle available on the market to fulfil any of that requirement. If it was, then we could collectively stand behind its continued use; if not, it should be replaced. **ACTION: CJO to review critically the continued requirement for the use of light armoured vehicles in Afghanistan; DCDS(EC) to assess whether vehicles are available on the international market which could meet this requirement more effectively than Snatch.**

4. In discussion, it was agreed that all vehicles had their vulnerabilities, and there was no such thing as perfect protection. However, if we were able to demonstrate that we had replaced, or had clear plans to replace, all sub-optimal vehicles, then that would allow us to build a convincing narrative around our intent, which should also give confidence to deployed servicemen and women that vehicle vulnerabilities are being addressed. DCDS(EC) outlined a series of opportunities which offered scope to replace in full the fleet of light armoured and unarmoured vehicles in theatre. It was agreed that these should be pursued. Specifically, discussion focussed on the following areas, with a number of actions arising [N.B. further detail is available in COM(L)'s submission (not to all) at Reference A]:

- a) RIDGBACK. The deployment of RIDGBACK into theatre was Ministers' first priority, and it was agreed that the money should be found to purchase as soon as possible up to 30 USMC Cougar 4x4 vehicles within the existing FMS case to accelerate the training of drivers, on the proviso that this will enable a deployment of RIDGBACK by the end of the year. We should also do further work on how we might increase through-put at NP Aerospace from early 2009. **ACTION: COM(L)**. At DCDS(EC)'s prompting, SofS asked for a rapid assessment to be produced to confirm whether there was a requirement to buy 70 further spare Cougar vehicles and to identify a source of funding. If there is a requirement, Ministers would support buying them and SofS would be able to engage on the FMS issue during his visit to Washington in the week commencing 7 July. **ACTION: CJO/DCDS(EC)**
- b) Panther. It was noted that recent desert trials had gone well and that, subject to consideration of the final report on 9 July and PJHQ confirmation that there is a role for it in theatre, there looked to be scope to deploy Panther to fulfil some of the role fulfilled by Snatch/Vector. It was agreed that this should be taken forward as rapidly as possible. We needed to assess how many Panther could be deployed, and how quickly. **ACTION: CJO/DCDS(EC)**
- c) Vixen. It was agreed that Vixen offered somewhat better mine-blast protection than Snatch, and that we should proceed with the deployment of 20 vehicles to Afghanistan in August 08, and thereafter assess the utility of the vehicle on its merits. However, SofS instructed that we should in future refer to it as 'Snatch Vixen' as he did not wish to be

accused of being disingenuous, or of passing off an old vehicle as a new one.

- d) Tactical Support Vehicle (TSV). SofS agreed that further work should be done to consider the scope to bring forward, in the context of the Equipment Examination, a quantity of the Operational Utility Variant System (OUVS) programme to replace the unarmoured Pinzgauer and GS Landrover vehicles. We should look at buying the best possible off-the-shelf vehicle solution to meet this requirement, and should explore any opportunities to accelerate delivery. **ACTION: DCDS(EC)**
  
- e) Sub-Systems. COM(L) identified that there was a critical shortage of key ancillaries, such as Bowman and ECM, due in part to the strictures of the UOR regimen which encouraged a hand-to-mouth procurement mentality. He observed that we needed to reach an accommodation with HMT which allowed us to build up stocks of equipment which we know we will use on operations over time, and that this would almost certainly lead to an approach which delivered better value for money. It was agreed that this was a key issue, which required focussed effort. Ministers should be informed if it looked as though officials were reaching an impasse, and SofS asked for further briefing on the issue, so that he could raise it informally with the Chief Secretary, should a suitable opportunity present itself. **ACTION: DCDS(EC)**
  
- f) Training. Ministers were assured that lessons had been learned, and were being implemented, to ensure a robust stock of vehicles in the training fleet, but that a shortage of trained drivers remained a key constraint on our ability to deploy new vehicles quickly. COM(L) observed that DVLA and EU regulations relating to 'Category C licences', to which the Armed Forces are subject, led to a sub-optimal training regime; SofS asked for a legal analysis of the scope for an interpretation of the regulations which might enable an argument for an exemption. **ACTION: CFA/DGLS**

5. Finally, SofS emphasised the need for a clear and coherent public narrative on what we have already achieved, and what more we are doing, to enhance the robustness of our protected vehicle fleet. He asked for a written Ministerial statement to be produced, similar to the recent one on helicopters [*Official Record, 20 March 2008, Cols 15-18*], ahead of the Parliamentary recess on 22 July 2008.  
**ACTION: DCRS, supported by DJtCap**

EDWARD FERGUSON  
PS/Secretary of State

DII: SOFS-Private Office  
SOFS-Private Office-S