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cc Jim Drummond  
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## IRAQ : WHETHER TO OFFER PACKAGE 3 TO THE US?

The Chiefs of Staff in the MOD are pressing for a decision in principle to offer the UK land task force (package 3) to the US military for use on the Northern front. While General Franks understands our present position, including the political dimension, he has directed that planning should proceed on the basis of US forces only operating out of Turkey. The 4th Infantry Division has been identified as the main combat formation. Franks has said that the UK's package 3 would still be welcome as an addition and could have the particular task of integrating other coalition members' contributions. The MOD argue that they are being excluded from detailed planning and their influence in discussing issues like the aftermath is diminishing.

2. There are a number of assumptions here which are fragile. First, the planning date for a US Presidential decision in early January is no more than a military assumption; second, the willingness of the Turks to accept a large US, let alone coalition land force is still in doubt. But the fact is that military planning is proceeding on the basis of these assumptions. That is how the military get on with the job of planning complex operations for extremely uncertain scenarios.

3. The MOD are intending to write to you later today to make the case for agreement in principle to offering package 3. They will argue that it is to the UK's overall disadvantage to be excluded from the Northern planning loop; that the Turkish dimension needs to be thoroughly explored if we are to be involved; that a commitment in principle does not lock us into commitment in practice; and that UK leadership of other coalition members' involvement could be prejudiced. I understand that they will concede that the notification to reservists of potential call-up could be postponed, on the basis that a commitment in principle would enable them to cause the US military to re-examine the assumptions with a view to negotiating a more realistic date for a Presidential decision.

4. You raised with me some of the implications of such a decision, eg was it realistic to think we could backtrack from a decision in principle and did we understand what we would be getting into in Southern

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Turkey/Northern Iraq in respect of Kurds and other liabilities. There is also the question of cost and the overall profile the UK wishes to adopt. And the fact that planning assumptions are not real life and that slippage in the timetable at the UN will have to be reflected in military planning, just as Turkish decisions will also have to be factored in.

5. It is helpful that the Americans have decided to earmark their 4th Infantry Division for the Northern front. That shows they are committed strategically and will take the lead. The indications are that a corps size force of at least two divisions will be required. It may be that nothing will come of the North because of Turkish intransigence. A way through this for the UK would be to make a commitment in principle to package 3, but on the basis that we cannot accept the current planning assumption date for a Presidential decision. That would force the US military to exclude us or have a serious discussion about the realism of their timetable. We would also need to make plain that the UK offer was dependent upon US leadership in the North and willing co-operation by the Turks in a coalition effort.

6. There is a wider point about the need to coerce Saddam Hussein into compliance with the demands of the UN and his own disarmament. Over the last few months we have seen extraordinary changes in Saddam's attitude, both towards the international community and to his own people. All of this, of course, is to serve his own interests but the reason that he is showing any flexibility is because he sees the real threat of military enforcement being visited on Iraq. It is important that the pressure is maintained. Continued planning together with activities that are necessary to prepare for action, including UORs, military training, repainting of vehicles, ordering of stores all play their part. Rather than being jumpy about whether this looks like warmongering, we need to be persuading the international community and our domestic audience that proper preparation for war is the best way to avoid it. Saddam will only react to pressure and the pressure needs to be built up and maintained, not in any way relaxed.

7. Overall, I fear we are enmeshed in a military planning cycle which operates out of synch with the political track. But it is only planning. Provided we enter the right caveats and get a realistic re-think about the timelines of the planning assumptions, I think there is advantage in our being involved in the planning for the North (unless the political view is definitely that we should confine ourselves to the sea and air packages).

  
**DESMOND BOWEN**

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