

Sec(O)/2/37/8

10 December 2002

PS/Secretary of State

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This does, I think,
rather underplay
the issues surrounding
the amphibious force
and the point that they will
probably be their earliest
highly than ground forces.

IRAQ: MILITARY PLANNING - BRIEFING FOR MEETING WITH PRIME
MINISTER ON 11 DECEMBER

As requested (item 4e in your MO 6/17/15C of yesterday), I attach bull
points on "ugly start" and options for UK land forces if Turkey is closed.

DAVID JOHNSON
Head of Sec(Iraq)

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• OPTIONS FOR UK LAND FORCES IF TURKEY IS CLOSED

Key Points

- If we cannot secure Turkish cooperation in the near future, our options are:

(a) **Tell the US that we want them to fit UK forces into the South as part of the main effort.** This would mean significant changes to US plans, and would probably need US assistance with sealift to get UK forces there in time. We would also need US help to secure basing.

(b) **Tell the US that we will provide follow-on forces in the South, coming in after the main effort.** Easier to manage, though we would still need help with basing. But it would be a significantly less prominent role. In practice, this might slide into the next option....

(c) **Tell the US we will provide ground forces for the aftermath only —** ie, we would lead an ISAF-type force taking responsibility for a sector of Iraq. Again there is less kudos in this. And the US assume we will do this anyway, in addition to contributing in the conflict phase. The state of US planning for the aftermath remains a concern. We could inherit a mess not of our own making.

(d) **Tell the US that we will not provide ground forces at all.**

- Only option (a) provides the sort of high-profile UK role in war-fighting on the ground which we have previously judged important. This option would become easier if the focus of US planning shifted to the autumn. If we want to keep it open as a fallback for February/March, we need to come to a clear view on the Turkey issues asap.

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HANDLING AN "UGLY START"

Key Points

- Our options depend to some extent on how an "ugly start" comes about.
- If the regime suddenly collapsed, without conflict, there might be a need to deploy stabilisation forces as rapidly as possible.
- PJHQ are looking at options for this. In practice, we would have to rely initially on light forces. If there was a need to follow up with heavier forces, that would take a lot longer.
- If the "ugly start" followed a trigger for conflict – and assuming that we were satisfied with the political and legal basis for committing forces – we would have to go initially with whatever forces were ready at the time.
- In the short term, that means SF and the air and naval forces already in theatre. If basing issues were sorted out, we could deploy our additional air and naval forces within weeks.
- Amphibious and ground forces would take longer, as you know. But the further preparations we have now agreed will progressively improve the readiness of these forces: by February we will be much better placed.
- There are limits to what more we can do to improve readiness until we have a clear political decision. We could call out reserves early, try to secure extra shipping capacity, or deploy some force elements and equipments as soon as they are available. But we would then be starting to use up some of our one-shot capabilities. That would cause us problems if it turned out that the campaign was not going to start until later in the year. Deploying early also runs the risk of finding later that we're in the wrong locations.