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16 April 2003

Prime Minister
I know you will have
6 pm for direction.
My own view is
that we should
accept the earlier
lead a regional off
to cover area for which
we have
military responsibility

HC JB
MR
NC

17/4

IRAQ: SUPPORT FOR ORHA REGIONAL OFFICE

At this morning's meeting of the Ministerial Group on Iraq Rehabilitation the Defence Secretary, who chaired the meeting, asked for a note on whether the UK should lead a regional office of ORHA. As Ministers need to take an urgent view on this, he proposed that the Prime Minister's meeting on Iraq tomorrow should consider.

2. I chaired a meeting of Officials this afternoon, and the IPU has drafted the attached note. Its clear recommendation is that if Ministers wish to pursue this there should be a rapid visit by an inter-departmental team to sort out the role that such a regional office might play, the resources required and the risks, before Ministers make a final decision.

3. I am copying this to Private Offices of Ministers who usually the Prime Minister's meeting and to C. CDS, John Scarlett, Desmond Bowen and Laurie Bristow.

Jim Drummond

JIM DRUMMOND

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IRAQ: ORHA REGIONAL OFFICES

Issue

CENTCOM's plans for military and ORHA sectors are continually evolving. We have an opportunity to influence them. **Should we agree to lead one of ORHA's four (or more) regional offices?**

Options

1. We should defer making a commitment until a scoping study has been carried out (within 7 days), to determine what the practical implications would be, including costs.
2. Decide that we should not agree.

We recommend the first option.

Timing

Events are moving rapidly. ORHA will deploy into Iraq within days of cessation of hostilities. If we wish to influence the shape of ORHA's regional arrangements we need to act very quickly – before the US make their own dispositions.

Background

Ministers agreed last week that we should increase our support for ORHA as it assumes its post conflict responsibilities in Iraq. **Work is in hand on the nature and scope of the UK's overall commitment to ORHA.**

The Coalition Provisional Authority (i.e. ORHA) will, within days of cessation of hostilities, administer Iraq on a country wide basis. **The central authority in Baghdad will be supported by three or more regional teams, each responsible for one region of Iraq.** These offices will act as ORHA's eyes and ears on the ground. They will not be responsible for execution of policy at the local level: they will perform a co-ordinating role in the delivery of centrally managed ORHA resources.

Earlier US plans had envisaged three regions – North, Central (including Baghdad) and South – each headed by a senior US military officer or official. Consideration is now being given to a different arrangement involving more than three regions, primarily to avoid creating an artificial division along existing ethnic or religious lines, but also partly for practical reasons and to get away from a structure resonant of arrangements under the Ottoman Empire.

Ideally the US would like a regional office in each of Iraq's 18 provinces. But ORHA does not yet have the resources to do this. So the US are considering a four-region structure - Baghdad, Northern and Eastern border provinces, Central, and Southern. Other structures might also be feasible.

We continue to have concerns about the potential for US policy in Iraq being conducted in a fashion which goes beyond our understanding of an occupying

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power's rights and responsibilities. This concern arises both from potential activities by ORHA within those areas for which UK forces are responsible for security, and from the possibility that we might be regarded as responsible for coalition actions in areas where there are no UK forces present. We are negotiating an MoU with the US and Australians to regulate the decision making and consultation process within ORHA.

If a UK-led ORHA region included within its areas occupied by US forces, we could end up taking on legal responsibility for the actions of forces that were not under our control in practical terms and whose understanding of these obligations was different from ours. The proposed MoU – which deals with the activities of ORHA – would not extend to possible actions by US forces.

We need therefore to decide whether in principle we wish to offer to lead a regional office, covering a region coterminous with that in which 1 Div is responsible for maintaining security.

Arguments For

- We want to influence the way ORHA is run at the operational level as well as the policy level. Leading a regional office would enable us to demonstrate in practice how we think the coalition should handle the civil administration of Iraq.
- If the UK-led ORHA region corresponded with 1 Div's area of responsibility, it would enable the UK to promote an exemplary approach to the relationship between the civil and military arms of the Coalition in the area in which UK forces are the occupying power.
- This would not involve the UK taking responsibility for ORHA's costs, e.g. paying Iraqi public servants or providing humanitarian relief. ORHA will resource its activities in Iraq on an Iraq-wide basis. But see below.

Arguments Against

- This proposal would create a region of Iraq in which the UK would have a very high profile. If the Coalition Provisional Authority ran into difficulty – locally or nationally – this would impact on the UK's standing in Iraq to a greater degree than if we remained a (junior) partner in ORHA without a clear regional responsibility.
- Our resources are limited. There is an opportunity cost to focusing resources on one region of Iraq that could be used to support our objectives in other ways. Although we envisage a multinational office led by a UK appointee, we would need to commit perhaps 15-20 people to ensure its proper functioning. The costs of providing logistical support to these officers would almost certainly fall to us (at present ORHA funds the in-country costs of UK secondees).
- If ORHA (i.e. the US) failed to resource those activities needed to fulfil the coalition's obligations in the UK-led region, we could be faced with the choice of doing so ourselves or being seen to fail to deliver in the eyes of the local population and more widely.

Next Steps

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If Ministers wish to pursue this option, we need urgently to resolve a number of fundamental questions:

- The region for which an ORHA regional office led by a UK appointee would be responsible.
- The role of the individual(s) appointed.
- The resources we would need to commit to support this operation.
- The likely duration of our commitment.
- How the UK-led regional office would relate to UK forces; to ORHA's Baghdad HQ and to the coalition chain of command; to UN and other agencies operating in the region.

This is best done through a joint scoping study by interested departments: this would need to be completed within the coming week.

We would need also to think through the link between our commitment to ORHA and our commitment of forces. ORHA's role as the Coalition Provisional Authority will be short-lived. But it will have a longer term – and evolving – role in support of an emerging Iraqi Interim Authority. We would not wish to lock in an open-ended commitment either to provide support to ORHA's civil functions or to deploy substantial military forces in Iraq.

Iraq Planning Unit
16 April 2003

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