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MO 6/17/15C

27 May 2003

*US has been very slow
to get the Iraq Survey
Group up & running -**Dear David**one reason for this
P.R. difficulties - along**IRAQ WMD: UPDATE with Thompson.**cc MR
NC
DFH
Prem*

Work on Sensitive Site Exploitation (SSE) continues in Iraq, and will become enhanced with the formation of the Iraq Survey Group, to which the UK will be making an important contribution. Although timelines for the establishment of the Group are still fluid, it is important to get the organisation and running right. This will not hold up work already underway to detect and eliminate WMD but we need to keep the pressure on. We need to do more work on public handling.

*Very slow***Background**

We wrote to you on 28 April with information on the US proposals for an Iraq Survey Group, which is intended to address Iraqi WMD and other post-conflict issues such as terrorism and war crimes. Further details have become available as US thinking has developed, and we have been firming up the contribution that UK plans to make.

At present, Coalition Forces are working from a list of over 500 sites potentially linked to the development, production and storage of WMD, overwhelming concentrated in the US area of operations. As at 22 May, coalition forces had initiated investigations into 122 of these sites, plus a further 55 sites identified since the conflict began. The most promising finds so far relate to mobile facilities. The Cabinet Office is receiving daily updates from the DIS ROCKINGHAM cell on all SSE activities.

US Plans

The US is planning to expand and provide better co-ordination of the existing coalition effort by bringing the current WMD activities, together with a range of other post-conflict activities, under the Iraq Survey Group. The proposed mission of the ISG is attached. The US Commander of the ISG will

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be Major General Keith Dayton, currently Director for Operations at the US Defence Intelligence Agency.

The total strength of the ISG when fully operational is expected to be around 1500 - 2000. In addition the military operational personnel, these will comprise Scientists, Analysts, Linguists, Document/Computer Exploiters, ex-UN Weapons Inspectors, Interrogators/Debriefers, Military Material Experts, CW/BW Intelligence Support Teams and Disarmament specialists. General Dayton has made clear his intent to conduct "intelligence-led" operations, which would have a very different character from the current SSE activities. The issue of independent 3rd Party verification of its findings has yet to be resolved.

General Dayton intends to establish an initial ISG operating capability in Qatar by 1 June, and to move the ISG Command Group to Baghdad by 10 June, after which other ISG elements will be activated on order. While the first few weeks are likely to show some problems and bottlenecks, we believe that the essential plans are coming into place to get the ISG up and running, although we regard the timescales as still being fluid.

UK Involvement

The UK will be providing the 1st Deputy Commander (Brigadier John Deverell) who plans to deploy to Baghdad on 10 June. Brigadier Deverell will be running all ISG operations, with General Dayton addressing external and higher level ISG issues. We will also assign to the ISG the UK WMD related units already in theatre or about to arrive, including:

- The DIS Battlefield Intelligence Recovery Team
- The Joint Forces Interrogation Team
- 7630 (HUMINT) Sqn RauxAF
- A Document Exploitation Team.

We are also investigating the most effective use of the Joint NBC Regiment and other assets in theatre, including EOD and the Defence Science & Technology Laboratory/Atomic Weapons Establishment's "silver" mobile laboratory. DIS Liaison Staff in Washington will be reinforced to support ISG work, with a view to providing a UK presence in the ISG Fusion Cell in Washington. The DIS is also providing individual reinforcements to ISG in theatre.

We are also actively recruiting a cadre of UK ex-UNSCOV and ex-UNMOVIC inspectors and others whom we believe will be useful to the inspection effort. We intend to establish by 1 June a team of four inspectors who would be at short readiness to deploy to theatre when the ISG makes the order. The bulk of inspectors would be available to the ISG Command from around the end of June. Both General Dayton and DoD have been briefed on our plans, and they fit in with their intentions.

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in the meantime, we will continue pro-actively to ensure that WMD detection gets the priority it deserves. A good deal of attention is currently being placed on the suspect mobile BW lab where invasive testing is about to begin – and should be complete within about a week. And we will continue to press the US to share information. Our ISG related presence in theatre and in Washington will help, but there remain problems of IT connectivity to solve. Martin Howard is visiting Washington in the week beginning 9 June and will use that opportunity to keep up the pressure.

Presentation

✓ The public handling of all this needs to be carefully considered. There continues to be considerable media interest in efforts to find Iraqi WMD. There have also been numerous PQs on this and on the functioning of the ISG. There is growing pressure for the Government to provide an assessment of how the WMD findings match the statements made in the September 2002 Dossier, the US are understood to be undertaking their own post-mortem in this area. There have been problems that US briefings in theatre and/or in Washington are not properly cleared with us, and we have taken steps to ensure the best co-ordination we can. More generally, there is a need for Whitehall to develop a coherent and proactive PR strategy for the ISG work. We will be looking at this in consultation with colleagues as a matter of urgency.

I am copying this letter to Simon McDonald (FCO), John Scarlett and Sir David Omand (Cabinet Office) and Tony Brenton (Washington)

Yours
Peter

P D WATKINS
Private Secretary

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Organise, direct and apply capabilities and expertise in Iraq to discover, take custody of, exploit, disseminate and disable, eliminate information and material on individuals, records, NBC samples, weapons systems, materials, facilities, networks, and operations relative to:

- Terrorism
- Iraqi intelligence
- WMD (Main Effort)
- Individuals associated with the Iraqi regime/leadership with WMD
- Individuals detained by the Iraqi regime
- War crimes and crimes against humanity"

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