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23 June 2004

*Dear David*

**ALLIED RAPID REACTION CORPS (ARRC): DEPLOYMENT OPTIONS**

**Summary**

Case for early deployment of ARRC to Iraq now receding. Defence Secretary supports planning instead for a 2006 Afghanistan deployment as providing best combination of global pol/mil effect and evening out commitment burden on armed forces. Would not preclude an in-extremis deployment of ARRC to Iraq during late 2004 and 2005, should the security situation deteriorate dramatically. MOD will in any case look at other contingency options, focussed mainly on possible use of existing or planned forces in Iraq to deal with any security threat to elections in Dec 04 or Jan 05. Further urgent work needed on presentation to the US, tactics for Istanbul and public handling in the light of SR04.

We have discussed on several occasions the options for further support to the coalition effort in Iraq. We shall need to provide some clarity on our intentions at or around the NATO Istanbul Summit.

The case for deploying HQ ARRC to Iraq is that it would provide a highly visible expression of UK commitment to success in Iraq and of support to the US, and provide certainty within NATO where currently there is speculation. It might also increase UK influence over the direction of the overall campaign, and have a role to play during the election period. The downside is that it will involve the UK taking on increased risks and responsibilities; it will be difficult to present domestically (at a time when we are arguing for the Iraqis to take on more responsibility for their own security); and it does not provide any military effect until well into the Autumn. It is also the case that the security situation in Iraq, which prompted our consideration of this option, has for now at least, shown some signs of improvement. Against that background the Defence Secretary believes that the case for an early deployment of the ARRC to Iraq has receded.

David Quarry Esq  
10 Downing Street

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The alternative would be to plan to deploy the ARRC to Afghanistan, probably following on from the Italians, in mid-2006. This option would help to build stability in Afghanistan; yield considerable political capital for the UK within NATO, specifically at Istanbul; enhance NATO's credibility at a crucial point in the organisation's development; and send a clear signal of UK support to President Karzai ahead of this Autumn's elections. It would provide a good opportunity to combine command of ISAF and the US led Operation Enduring Freedom – a long standing military aspiration. With current and planned deployments in Iraq and the Balkans, and the potential for picking up a NATO Response Force rotation in a longer timeframe, it would also give a good geographic strategic spread and a wide contribution to International Security Structures. Finally, such an approach would allow us to plan on a sequential rather than concurrent series of deployments in support of our major areas of overseas operational commitment, in the Balkans, Iraq and Afghanistan and thus ease pressure on the armed forces.

Against that background, Mr Hoon would favour not pursuing the Iraq deployment option for now and, instead, plan for an ARRC deployment to Afghanistan in 2006. This would be strongly welcomed in NATO, though we would need, formally, to delay our commitment to NATO Response Force roster. This would not, however, preclude deployment, in extremis, of the ARRC to Iraq in late 2004 or early 2005 if the security situation were to deteriorate dramatically. In any event MOD is considering alternative contingency arrangements, primarily making use of existing or planned in theatre forces, with some command and control re-enforcement from the UK, to help deal with any major security threat to the elections planned for December or January in Iraq. We will provide further advice on these options in due course.

If the Prime Minister agrees with this approach we will need urgently to address handling of:

- a. the US, though all the indications are that they are currently not pressing the ARRC for Iraq option;
- b. NATO and in particular the Istanbul summit;
- c. public handling, not least given the likely proximity of broader announcements on the size and shape of the Armed Forces, in the aftermath of SR04. The extent to which we should play up further commitments for the Armed Forces will be affected by the nature of the SR04 settlement and how it will be perceived both externally and, more importantly, by the Armed Forces themselves.

I am copying this letter to Kara Owen (FCO), Moazzam Malik (DfID), and (Treasury).

M P NAWORYNSKY  
Private Secretary

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