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Martin Howard
Director General Operational Policy

DG OP POL/IRAQ (83/06)

Margaret Aldred
Defence and Overseas Secretariat
Cabinet Office

12 July 2006

Dear Margaret,

IRAQ: MEDIUM AND LONGER TERM UK MILITARY INVOLVEMENT

As we discussed at last week's Senior Officials Group, I attach a draft of a DOP(I) paper covering our military posture in Iraq during the period 2007-2009. This has been agreed at senior official level within MOD but has not, as yet, been exposed to Ministers.

2. I suggest we have a preliminary discussion about this at the Strategy Group meeting on Friday. We would very much like to see this debated at DOP(I) before the Summer break should that occur! I recognise however the particular difficulties of fitting in a meeting in that timescale.

3. I have copied this to Nigel Sheinwald and Nick Banner (No 10), Nigel Casey(FCO), Michael Anderson (DFID), [SIS3] and interested parties in the MOD.

[signed on original]
MARTIN HOWARD

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IRAQ: MEDIUM AND LONGER TERM UK MILITARY INVOLVEMENT

Paper by the Secretary of State for Defence

ISSUE

1. As the process of security transition in MND(SE) reaches a conclusion in early 2007, Ministers need to reach a view on the likely posture, size and shape of UK military engagement in Iraq over the period 2007-2009. This needs to take into account the intention of the Iraqi government, US military plans, wider international involvement and an assessment of our longer term security interests in and around Iraq.

RECOMMENDATIONS

2. DOP(I) should **note** that:

a. on current plans the process of provincial security transition should be complete in MND(SE) during the first quarter of 2007 and for Iraq as a whole by 2008.

b. there will still nevertheless be a requirement beyond that for substantial coalition military support for the Iraqi Security Forces both in terms of training and mentoring and direct support for more demanding operations against the insurgency and for security support to UK political and reconstruction effort.

c. there are uncertainties about US longer term plans and assumptions for a military end state in Iraq but in the meantime it is clear that:

(1) US military engagement with the Iraqi government will, during 2007, be focused through a State Department led Office of Security Co-operation (OSC). We will need to decide soon on the extent of UK involvement in this.

(2) although US military forces will decline substantially during 2006/2007, a significant capability will remain for some time after that.

(3) the US will continue to see Iraq through the broader prism of the "Global War on Terrorism".

(4) the US will expect the UK scale of military investment to remain in proportion to their own.

d. plans for our military and security involvement need to take into account the evolution of the international compact for Iraq, the involvement of other multinational organisations including NATO and the plans of other non-US coalition partners.

3. Against this background, DOP(I) should **agree** that:

a. we have an enduring national interest in a stable and secure Iraq and that our medium and long term military engagement should reflect that.

b. once security transition in MND(SE) is complete we should plan on a continuing UK military presence in the area amounting to around 3,500 personnel certainly through 2007 and, depending on conditions, very probably through much or all of 2008. Tasks would be focused on:

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- (1) continuing mentoring and training of Iraqi forces in MND(SE).
 - (2) the provision of security for UK and other civil political and reconstruction activity.
 - (3) providing a capacity to support more demanding ISF operations.
 - (4) supporting broader coalition activity (e.g. protection of logistic and commercial supply routes).
- c. at the point when these functions are no longer required (illustratively by the beginning of 2009) UK military engagement should switch towards a longer term mentoring and training role for Iraq centred on Baghdad and coherent with UK non-military engagement, US and NATO involvement. Numbers would be much smaller, measured in tens and hundreds rather than thousands.
- d. we should assume that in the longer term the UK contribution to underwriting Iraq's security (strategic overwatch) should be focussed on maritime and air forces rather than land forces.
- e. we should share this thinking with US political and military interlocutors as part of a comprehensive handling strategy.
- f. additional costs of UK military activity (estimated at £500M - £1Bn for 06/07, £500M for 07/08 and £200-500M for 08/09) should continue to be met from the Reserve. [To be refined. Discussions MOD/PJHQ/HMT 12 Jul 06]

BACKGROUND

4. We expect the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) to assume responsibility for domestic security by 2008, but they will not be completely self-reliant in this timescale. The ISF will continue to rely on coalition forces to provide key capabilities, such as surveillance, air and logistical support, and precision guided weapons. These may be employed as part of a wider contribution to the Global Counter Terrorism (GCT) campaign, and UK participation) may be sought.
5. Development of the Security Ministries, the Iraqi Air Force and Navy is also fundamental to safeguarding the country's economic and political interests. There is considerable scope for continued UK engagement in these areas, specifically in continuation of our work with the Iraqi Navy, contributing to the long-term security of essential oil infrastructure in the southeast.
6. From the autumn of 2007, continued development of the ISF and security ministers will be delivered through an inter-agency Office of Security Cooperation (OSC) with an emphasis on ISF restructuring and procurement, creating balanced and sustainable forces capable of meeting Iraq's long-term defence and security needs, including, but not exclusively, the counterinsurgency campaign. Initially, we expect the OSC to be a coalition enterprise and the principal conduit for international military assistance during the transition to normalised defence relations. It may also present opportunities to influence the delivery of US-funded assistance, with UK involvement increasing the chances of investment in Basra and the southeast.

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US plans predict that OSC activity will necessitate the presence of over 10,000 US personnel for some time. There is no desire for a significant 'stay behind' land combat force, and there will be little or no political or military appetite for large scale re-intervention once the majority of Coalition land forces have left Iraq or indeed individual provinces post-transition.

8. The US views Iraq in its regional context. US military objectives for Iraq for the medium to long term reflect this and include: safeguarding the supply of strategic resources; building confidence against Iran; and demonstrating air and naval power. Our plans are compatible and envisage a naval and air contribution to the residual coalition force; reinforcing strategic infrastructure and border security, providing a degree of deterrence, and continuing to build ISF capacity.

9. There is a US expectation that the down-scaling of the UK military commitment in Iraq will remain broadly consistent with their own. Early drawdown below Brigade level (3,500 troops) in MND(SE) would invite a 'compensating investment' elsewhere in Iraq. While maintaining momentum towards provincial security transition, UK military drawdown should be measured and consistent with US expectations and plans and providing support OGD political, development and reconstruction activities and encouraging inward investment.

10. The balance of the UK's commitment between Basra and Baghdad will hinge upon a number of factors including: the wishes of our Iraqi hosts; our own future strategy for engagement in Iraq; the extent of US predominance in Baghdad; and a recognition that Basra, as Iraq's economic gateway, is as important to campaign success as Baghdad. Whatever our strategic focus, longer-term engagement will need to be orchestrated from the capital, where our senior representatives can operate alongside the Iraqi Government and its international partners.

Presentation and Handling with Allies

11. There are no immediate presentational issues regarding our plans for 2007 and beyond. Our media line will continue to be that we will remain in Iraq until the Iraqi Government is confident that the ISF are capable of providing security without assistance from coalition forces and that decisions on withdrawal will be based on achieving the right conditions, not a particular timetable.

12. With the US end-state in Iraq still unclear, particularly in relation to GCT and Iran, we need to continue close engagement with US interlocutors, if we are to avoid divergence in UK and US interests in Iraq. US expectations are that the UK will continue as the lead coalition partner in the four southern Iraqi provinces until 'Strategic Overwatch' in order to guarantee security there. Despite reassurances to the contrary, some in the US Government remain convinced that handover in the south heralds the beginning of a complete UK withdrawal from Iraq over the next 12-18 months. We should now take steps, both in Baghdad in Washington, to reassure the US about our plans for 2007/2008 and indicate that, subject to further work and developments in Iraq, we currently expect some form of UK military presence to remain in Iraq until the majority of coalition forces withdraw.

13. While the US has not stated an intention to retain long-term bases in Iraq, there may be a necessity to do so, particularly if invited by the Iraqi Government. This position has

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It has been declared and as intentions become clearer, a united public statement on drawdown would send a timely message on coalition long-term intent.

Resources

14. Over the next year, our force level is expected to reduce from 7,200 to 3,500 personnel deployed in Iraq (remaining a medium-scale operation), with an estimated reduction in TELIC operational costs from £1Bn to around £500M per annum.

15. Beyond 2008, our force level is expected to reduce from 3,500 to around 1,000 personnel deployed in Iraq (an enduring small-scale operation), with an estimated reduction in TELIC operational costs from £500M to around £200M per annum. The deployed force will then be configured for defence relations activity, largely centred on Baghdad, and military support to OGD activity in the southeast will come to an end.

16. In the longer-term, we should finally drawdown to an in-country military staff of around fifty personnel. TELIC operational funding should be replaced by dedicated funding for defence diplomacy. This will cost around £10M per annum and is not currently provided for, but with successful economic recovery, Iraq should eventually be able to cover these costs, reducing the level of UK expenditure even further.

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