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SECRETARY OF STATE

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*As David***IRAQ: POSSIBLE ROLE FOR THE ARRC**

As discussed this morning, we have had informal indications of a possible US request to deploy the headquarters of the Allied Rapid Reaction Corps (ARRC) to Iraq in about three months time. HQ ARRC would replace the US Land Component Commander's headquarters which has just moved to Baghdad International Airport. Such a request would be consistent with other indications that the US is looking to withdraw forces rapidly from Iraq.

The Defence Secretary is clear that the deployment of HQ ARRC would have significant military and political implications which need to be worked through in detail. Some initial thoughts on these are set out below. Mr Hoon has therefore asked the military staffs here to engage cautiously on this issue with their US counterparts, impressing upon them the need to think through these implications – and, in particular, to ensure that there is both a clear concept of operations and a robust process for relieving the ARRC in due course – before making a request.

**Military Implications**

From a military perspective, use of HQ ARRC would impact upon the size of role we could play in Southern Iraq. We have already used UK assets assigned to HQ ARRC in order to support HQ 1 (UK) Division, and we would need to do the same if, as currently planned, we replace 1 Division with HQ 3 (UK) Division in the summer. Even if this problem could be resolved – and we would in any case need significant US support to make the ARRC work, notably in communications – for the UK to attempt to run HQs in Iraq at Corps, Divisional and Brigade levels simultaneously would be, to say the least, a very ambitious undertaking. It is unlikely (at best) in these circumstances that we could command at Divisional level more than one brigade in addition to our own, and this would limit the number of provinces we could supervise. Even

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then, recuperating from such an effort would be a major challenge, and it would be years before the Armed Forces recovered the "steady state" capability which our planning assumptions say they should provide. Finally, we could not enter into such a commitment without having absolute certainty about who would replace us and when: in practice, the only option would probably be another US Corps HQ.

### Political Implications

It is unclear what form of political control the US might envisage (a direct line to CENTCOM?). In practice, we would need to inform NATO before detaching HQ ARRC.

it seems unlikely that the US would be prepared to pay such a price. But losing those ARRC contributors (some 20% of the total) who say they need a UNSCR would be a blow. And, of course, we do not need another fractious debate in NATO over Iraq. Finally, there is the question of what lies behind US interest in using HQ ARRC: although there might be benign motives – and there are arguments for reducing the US profile in Iraq – we suspect that the overriding factor is Rumsfeld's determination not to get "bogged down" in a long-term commitment. It would not be in our interests to encourage a "cut and run" mentality.

These are only initial thoughts. We are conducting a fuller analysis of the implications, and will provide further advice in due course. In the meantime, as discussed, it would be helpful if you could mention this issue to Condi Rice, pointing out that many prior questions need to be resolved before any proposal is put on the table.

I am copying this letter to Simon McDonald (FCO) and Desmond Bowen (Cabinet Office).

*Yours*      *Peter*

P D WATKINS  
Private Secretary

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