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Policy Director

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12 April 2002

PS/Secretary of State

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N.B. MOD ADVISED THAT THE "THINK PIECE" REFERRED TO IN PARAGRAPH 1 OF THIS DOCUMENT IS THIS 4-PAGE DECLASSIFIED DOCUMENT. THERE WERE NO FURTHER ATTACHMENTS IN THE ORIGINAL DOCUMENT.

"BUSH AND THE WAR ON TERRORISM"

Issue

1. As requested I attach a 'think piece' on Iraq, to give context for specific work post Crawford.

Recommendation

2. For discussion.

Timing

3. For the weekend box.

Iraq

4. The Prime Minister's speech in Texas contained a commitment to regime change ("if necessary and justified"). Commitment on timing has been avoided, and an expectation has developed that no significant operation will be mounted while major violence continues in Israel/Palestine.

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End States

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5. Both Crawford and contacts with the Pentagon confirm that US thinking has not identified either a successor or a constitutional restructuring to provide a more representative regime:
- a. Various ideas for replacements have been aired over the years and none so far look convincing. But another Ba'athist or military dictator from the Sunni/Tikriti minority might be found with whom we could do business.
 - b. A real stable democracy has not been achieved in any Middle East country, even where clerics are not dominant. We cannot assume that local countries would necessarily support that ambition (lest it prompted questions about their own structures).
 - c. The idea that anyone would be better than Saddam is unconvincing: we could be stuck with whoever emerged, and even perceived responsible for his performance. The major ethnic divisions within Iraq - Kurds, Shias and Sunni (and many others) - create a risk that a power vacuum would lead into at best a federal and at worst a fractured Iraq (which would then be liable to lead to an involvement by Iran and Turkey to secure areas of concern to them).
6. Overall therefore the prospects for finding a stable political solution are poor in the short term. If an acceptable replacement dictator was found, then there would still need to be a longer-term project to move towards a representative systems. So we face the prospect that an operation might leave a coalition holding the ring for a significant period: this would be almost inevitable if Saddam survived at some fastness within Iraq. There are, of course, holding solutions: A UN mandated interim administration (vide Kosovo, under external leadership, or Kabul): but securing a mandate could be tricky. So we should also need to cater for some kind of sponsored interim administration.

Military Effort Required

7. Without proper access to US planning, UK scaling must inevitably be speculative, with key issues such as dependency on host-nation support unclear. Potential US scenarios could embrace:
- A. A clandestine/Special Forces operation on limited scale (eg to put in a new figure).
 - B. A local revolution, possibly supported by SF and a major air campaign (on a Northern Alliance analogy, though the circumstances are very different).
 - C. A major military operation to secure centres of power such as Baghdad: this would have to cater for opposition from Iraqi armed forces (even if they might, as in 1991, roll over relatively easily). Previous estimates have put this at 1 or 2 Corps with a major air component, some sea-based.

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8. To secure the country subsequently would depend critically on the extent of popular support: but without it how could we justify staying? It is possible that forces would be needed only sufficient to secure a new popular figure from being dislodged by dissident remnants. But we have to be ready for a longer job against an uncertain background of host nation support and regional instability.

UK Contribution

9. There is no doubt that the US have sufficient forces to undertake a military operation, even on the scale of Option C above, without anyone else's help. But their capacity to manage a successful long-term outcome is less clear:

To achieve a successful regime change, the UK would need to be actively involved (one might also argue that the Prime Minister has effectively committed us). If planning leads to one of the smaller options at A or B above our involvement only with SF, TLAM or air support might be sufficient. But if Option C is selected - as it might well be if others do not materialise - then contributions of that kind would be seen as only token: they would confer no significant influence on US planning (and would be adversely contrasted with Britain's contribution during the Gulf War).

10. The fundamental building block for a major US ground force operation is a division. Only on that scale (requiring 3 brigades as our planning base) would UK have significant influence over how the operation was developed and conducted: an independent brigade does not fit into the US structure and would in any case need substantial divisional scale enablers in order to be safe for high intensity operations. Similar issues arise over air packages where a wing of 60 aircraft with supporting package is the minimum component in a US force. The naval component would similarly need to include a CVS with Harriers and supporting group; TLAM submarines; and an amphibious group: probably eight major warships in all.

11. Such a deployment would be at the extreme end of the UK's capacity after the SDR: it was the scenario against which the 'large' option was scaled. It would require present plans to reduce numbers in Sierra Leone and Afghanistan to be realised radical scaling back of those in the Balkans (beyond current intentions); and substantial preparation time for augmenting of stocks and sustainability and training/deployment. Additional costs could be expected in small £billions, including early UOR expenditure to achieve interoperability with the US. Preparation times are not yet clear, but key elements especially long-lead equipment items and initiating training for high-intensity warfare could be needed before US planning is opened to us. That said, we should seek only to make a respectable large contribution that we can sustain properly: there is no need artificially to accelerate major capability enhancements that might cause the problems if they give problems on deployment.

12. In parallel there could be advantage in the MOD doing some discreet internal strategic estimating. This should help us think through what would be the key strategic objectives and end-states and the "centre of gravity" of the situation we need to tackle; and give better shape to redefining potential force packages (within the large option). When the time came for discussion with the US, our pre-thinking and ability to offer a well thought-through force contribution (up to a division, though

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obviously less if possible) would give us clout: and also a respectable position from which to judge whether their proposals offer an adequate return for risk.

Priorities

13. Despite the massive scale of commitment, there are arguments that preventing the spread of WMD should be given the highest priority in coming years. As set out in earlier advice on the 'Axis of Evil' it remains the greatest risk to Middle East and international stability in the medium-term: and in the long-term countries like Iraq and Iran are on course to threaten Europe and the UK direct. It is arguable that preventing this spread by making an example of Saddam Hussein would do more for long-term stability than all the displaced activities combined. Britain's distinctive roles of early intervention in Afghanistan, Sierra Leone and the Balkans are mostly completed and continuing tasks could be taken over by others with lesser military capacity (we only have the capacity for a single rotation of JACANA).

Deterrence

14. By demonstrating our capacity for high intensity warfare at large scale the UK would also send a powerful deterrence message to other potential WMD proliferators and adversaries.

Presentation

15. Actively to prepare for operations on Iraq would obviously attract interest and possibly reactions. There is a long-standing (and useful) convention by which MOD indicates that it plans routinely for a wide range of contingencies without acknowledging any one specifically. Force preparation activity may become public, though some of it could be covered as Saif Sareea lessons. There would come a point at which preparations could apply some valuable pressure on Saddam; or be seen as a natural reaction to prevarication over inspections. In general, however, until that point - say in the summer - we should keep a low profile, confining ourselves to the items that timeline analysis shows need to be got underway to preserve the ability to contribute on time later.

Handling

16. Even these preparatory steps would properly need a Cabinet Committee decision, based on a minute from the Defence Secretary. The FCO are content for activity to be centred on MOD to preserve the best prospect for dialogue with US DOD. All scoping activity would be confined to the minimum number of named individuals.

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