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10 DOWNING STREET

PM

Iraq: Troops

The military are making an effort
to bring you into a decision on
option 3. You are being kept,
I think, at that point.

we do

not have to decide yet.

✓ L



DM
cc JPO
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2571

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SECRETARY OF STATE

Prime Minister
(Mr Jonathan)

MO 6/17/15C

29 October 2002

Further pressure from MOD on Package 3. This is based on
military planning cycle
the UN/political realities. There are huge uncertainties as to
whether the timing realistic anymore?
Dear David (i) Would the French have us?
(ii) Could we back track if we gave a formal commitment?

IRAQ: UK MILITARY OPTIONS

(iv) Can we afford Package 3? etc.
US military planning continuing, but increasingly assuming no UK land contribution. Option for significant UK land contribution can be sensibly kept open only by placing it on a similar, and more positive, basis as the air/maritime and Special Forces package. Preparatory work for Reserves will need to go forward soon in any case, unless the US change the timetables to which they are still working. Need to answer Oral Questions on Reserves on Monday 4 November.

The Defence Secretary's minute of 15 October explained why we needed to take decisions that week on our readiness to fit in with the US military planning to meet President Bush's direction for a capability to be ready from 6 January 2003. The specific issue was whether to tell the US that they could plan on the assumption of Package 3 (including our land contribution) on the same basis as Package 2 (air and maritime, incorporating in-place forces and Special Forces).

As Matthew Rycroft recorded in his letter of 17 October, the Prime Minister concluded that we should keep open the option of a UK land contribution to any action in Iraq, but without commitment. There should be no public announcements (for instance, any notices to reserves) until after the first UNSCR, and after further discussion with the Prime Minister.

Since a decision on Package 3 was deferred, it has become clear over the past few days that the US military have now begun to plan operations in Northern Iraq on the assumption that the UK does not contribute ground forces and, consequently, will not pursue the question of UK involvement with Turkey. They have also decided to commit their own 4th Infantry Division to the North, which would mean that the option of the UK commanding the operation from

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the North at divisional level has gone. This does not necessarily mean that we could not resurrect the option of a land contribution, especially should timescales change. But it does mean that the prospect of a significant UK ground role in the North, and our ability to influence that part of the US plan, is reducing daily as the more detailed battle plans are produced.

The Defence Secretary also noted that, if we were to remain in step with the current US planning timetable, we would need soon to make public reference to preparatory work on Reserves: by 31 October for Package 3 and by 8 November for Package 2. In the light of the continuing delay in the UNSCR and indications that the US timescale may slip, Mr Hoon has established that the first of these dates could be pushed back to Monday 4 November (Defence Questions) with some further risk.

Separately, we have been taking discreet soundings on whether the current US planning timetable remains realistic, given growing uncertainties. Apart from the complications over the UNSCR, the US need a political decision on basing of ground forces from the new Turkish government - which may not even be formed for several weeks. The sense amongst US military planners is that the realistic starting date for the current plan is now slipping. But this does not have political endorsement, and we do not know when or if President Bush will be prepared to signal a later timetable, given the importance of sustaining pressure on Saddam and US domestic political considerations. Nor do we know if any slippage in the US timetable will be a matter of days or something more substantial.

This leaves open two separate but related questions which we need to address:

- Land Contribution. Although start dates may slip, US military planning to produce a capability by early January continues. Because the potential UK land contribution has not been put on the same basis as the air, maritime and Special Forces contributions, it is for practical purposes being excluded by default. If we are to keep the option open, and continue to have the strongest military cards to underpin our political influence, the Defence Secretary believes that we should indicate to the US that they should plan on the assumption that the land contribution would be available, subject to final political approval to commit, on the same basis as Package 2. This can be done without publicity. It is also worth noting that, while Package 3 is significantly more expensive in itself than Package 2, making it available could significantly reduce our vulnerability to US requests to provide a substantial (and costly) contribution to post-conflict stabilisation operations.

- Reserves. As noted above, any significant UK military involvement will require a sizeable reserves contribution. The Defence Secretary faces two Oral Questions on this issue at Defence Questions on Monday 4 November. He could simply give an anodyne answer explaining the policy that any substantial military operation would

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require reservists. This risks seeming disingenuous if a specific announcement followed soon thereafter; it also prevents us from opening consultations with the NHS. Alternatively, he could refer to steps being taken, albeit on a contingency basis, "to clarify the potential requirement for and availability of Reservists". This would allow us to keep military options open and, importantly, permit wider consultation, including with the Department of Health to mitigate the impact on the NHS. These alternatives are shown at Annexes A and B respectively.

The Defence Secretary recognises that these issues, and particularly the question of Reserves, cannot be disentangled easily from the political climate and the fate of the UNSCR negotiations which are currently in the balance. But, equally, he is concerned that we should continue to contribute to maintaining the pressure on the Iraqis, which has so far shown some level of success.

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

Yours
Peter

P D WATKINS
Private Secretary

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