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14th Oct 2002

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Pus office



SECRETARY OF STATE

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PRIME MINISTER

IRAQ: UK MILITARY OPTIONS

We need to decide this week whether to tell the US that they can assume a predominantly air and maritime contribution or an air, maritime and land contribution from the UK to any military operation in Iraq. In either case, we will need to be more robust in our public posture about the need for essential preparatory steps as these become more visible.

1.

Indeed, Saddam has conceded ground so far only because diplomacy has been backed by the credible threat of force. We must maintain and reinforce this effect.

2. Attached is a short paper describing the options for UK participation in such an operation. As before, there are essentially two possible force packages: "Package 2" (a predominantly air and maritime force) and "Package 3" (a significant land force on top of the air and maritime elements). Both packages would subsume UK (air and naval) assets already in the Gulf area and a Special Forces contribution.

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3. The US military are aware of both possible packages. As previously agreed, "Package 2" was presented to the US as a feasible UK military contribution, subject to final political decisions to participate in a US-led military operation. The land element in "Package 3" was presented as a possible additional contribution – for use in an attack launched into Northern Iraq from Turkey – which is not be confirmed, even for planning purposes.

4. There are three reasons why we need to tell the US military this week whether or not they can now assume Package 3:

- A week-long planning conference starts today during which the US military want to finalise their plans for a major command exercise that will be, in effect, a 'mission rehearsal'.
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- while I recognise the delicate balance between the UN negotiations and the military planning process, we need to start taking soon increasingly visible preparatory steps if we are to retain the option of deploying a land force in time. In particular, we will need to announce on [redacted] that we are making preparations for the potential call-up of reserves (although the formal mobilisation process can be delayed until at least mid-November).

This minute highlights some of the key decision factors.

5. First, and whatever is decided with regard to Packages 2 and 3, we could provide a [redacted] Special Forces contribution.

Our Special

Forces are highly regarded by the US.

6. Either Package 2 or Package 3 would be a viable military contribution:

Package 2. This would be a very significant air and maritime force – about 90 front-line aircraft and 20 warships, with 13000 personnel all told.

Risk of casualties would be relatively low. But the number of visible British "boots on the ground" would be small. This could lead to some criticism here and elsewhere that UK support for the operation was half-hearted. The US military may be disappointed that we are not offering more; the likely political reaction is more difficult to judge (see below).

Package 3. Our land force – over 300 tanks/armoured vehicles and 28,000 personnel, including logistic support – would be a major element of the Northern line of attack

In its

The availability of our land force could therefore help both to shorten the campaign and to secure a more decisive outcome. But the risk of casualties among British Forces is much higher than for Package 2.

The provision of either package may encourage other countries to contribute forces and thus help build a broad coalition of support. But Package 3 would have more impact (and it might provide a framework for integrating elements from other countries into a land force).

7. There is likely to be a substantial and continuing post-conflict stabilisation task in Iraq. If we do not contribute Package 3, we may be more vulnerable to a request to provide a substantial force for this potentially open-ended task.

*vulnerable
but anyway.*

8. In terms of visible preparation, both packages require us to get on now with a range of Urgent Operational Requirements (UORs), inevitably fuelling media speculation about a military operation in the near term. In addition:

Package 2. If we are to be sure of identifying the 1100 reservists that will be needed, we will need to announce **no later than** that we are consulting reservists, although statutory mobilisation would not start until (with the first reservists reporting to depots some two weeks later).

Package 3. We will need to announce the start of consultation on to find the 7500 needed, although statutory mobilisation would not be enacted until (again, with the first individuals reporting to units some two weeks later).

9. In terms of wider impact, the paper sets out the available cost information: broadly, Package 2 is likely to cost in the order of £1 billion and Package 3 between £1.5-2 billion. The key short term impact will be the effect of the reserve call-out on the NHS:

Package 2. 130 medics (of whom 30 are consultants), with the first departing in mid-December.

Package 3. 1800 medics (of whom 100 are consultants and 800 nurses), with the first departing in early December.

The aim would be to minimize the impact on the NHS by spreading the call-out as widely as possible and by taking into account local factors.

10. A critical – and the least quantifiable – factor in weighing the two packages must be the impact on our strategic relationship with the US.

*fuelled
because
not almost
certainly
avoided
great expenditure
only on -
without political
authority
A.*

*CDS is
worried
about this.*

11. A further factor which cannot be entirely discounted is the negative reaction of many of our own military personnel – particularly in the Army – if we do not provide a land contribution. This could find its way into the media which would be quick to draw unfavourable comparisons between our contributions to this campaign and the Gulf Conflict in 1990/91.

12. If we do confirm the availability of Package 3, it must be subject to conditions



- We must be fully involved in developing the military plan on which a final decision to deploy would be based.
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13. I am copying this minute to the Foreign Secretary and the Chancellor of the Exchequer, and to the Cabinet Secretary.



Ministry of Defence

(G H)

15 October 2002