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MINISTRY OF DEFENCE
ROOM 205, OLD WAR OFFICE BUILDING
WHITEHALL LONDON SW1A 2EU

SECRETARY OF STATE

MO 6/17/15K

12 September 2002

Dear David,

IRAQ: CONTINGENCY ACTIONS 13/9

In his letter of 6 September, Peter Watkins outlined the military options for UK participation in potential action against Iraq. Following discussions with the Prime Minister on Sunday 8 September, the Defence Secretary has now taken a small number of decisions necessary to keep these options open. These relate to preparing for possible UK participation in Exercise INTERNAL LOOK; UK participation in a US reconnaissance visit to Turkey; and attendance at a US planning conference.

INTERNAL LOOK 03

INTERNAL LOOK 03 is a CENTCOM command post exercise designed to simulate the running of a headquarters leading a major military operation. The UK participated in a similar exercise in Tampa in 2000 which simulated a major operation in defence of Kuwait. INTERNAL LOOK will culminate in December focusing on a CENTCOM HQ deployed to Qatar from Tampa (as has already been noted in the media). The exercise will form an important element in US preparation for possible future operations against Iraq and UK involvement in it will be essential if we are to take part in any future operations against Iraq.

Although no final decisions on UK participation have been taken, the Defence Secretary has agreed that UK training for the exercise should begin (as it did in advance of the previous exercise); that UK personnel should participate in a site reconnaissance visit to Qatar this weekend; and that we should explore the letting of a contract to provide UK national infrastructure at the deployed US HQ in Qatar. A final decision on participation would be needed in mid-October.

Sir David Manning KCMG
Foreign Policy Adviser to the Prime Minister

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Reconnaissance Visit to Turkey

As part of US planning for potential operations in Northern Iraq, the US have invited the UK to take part in a pre-deployment site survey in Turkey. No date has yet been set, but it is expected to take place in the next few weeks. The purpose of the survey will be to examine basing options. In essence, it is this survey which would determine who goes where (and in what order) during any build up for operations from Turkey into Iraq. As failure to participate would severely prejudice our ability to take part in any operations in the North, the Defence Secretary has agreed that the UK should participate in this visit.

US Planning Conference

Finally, Mr Hoon has agreed to UK participation in the US planning conference which Peter Watkins mentioned in his letter. The conference will take place in St Louis from 23 September to 6 October. The purpose of the conference will be to lay down the detailed US movements plan, and failure to attend the conference on our part would seriously compromise any possible UK involvement in future operations. It will be necessary at this conference to define, without commitment, the detail of any UK military involvement. I will write with details closer to the time.

Presentational Issues

We continue to minimise as far as possible any UK military activity which could be publicly related to planning or preparation for action against Iraq, in advance of political decisions. Of the actions which the Defence Secretary has now agreed, commencement of the INTERNAL LOOK training package is internal to the MOD and will be downplayed as routine training. The letting of a contract for the provision of communications equipment could arouse interest in the UK, but this would not occur until the end of this month. The survey visit to Turkey will involve talking to the Turks, but we expect this to be a low-key affair. Participation in the planning conference would, at least initially, be an internal UK/US issue.

I hope to write next week with a forward plan of further key decision points.

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

Yours,
Martyen

M J WILLIAMS
Private Secretary