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SECRETARY OF STATE

MO 6/17/15C

26 July 2002

Dear Matthew,

IRAQ

US military planning still evolving: our Chiefs of Staff not yet able to judge whether there is a winning concept. Three options for UK involvement: an "in-place support package"; an "enhanced support package"; and a "discrete UK package". Question marks against timelines and availability. Greater clarity about US plan required before any UK option could be recommended.

The contents of this letter are extremely sensitive. It contains operational information, much of it of US origin, which must not be divulged more widely here.

1. Following the Prime Minister's meeting on 23 July, your letter of the same date asked for details of the proposed military campaign and options for a UK contribution.

US Military Planning

2. US military planning is in full swing but it is still evolving. The concept is for an attack on Iraq launched by forces deployed in Kuwait and other Gulf states and from ships in the Gulf and elsewhere. There are two variants:

- the "generated" start which involves a build-up of forces over months in theatre before the start of the invasion; and
- the "running" start which assumes the early initiation of hostilities (triggered perhaps by some Iraqi provocation), with attacks being launched by in-place forces followed rapidly by the commitment of further forces up to the level of the "generated" plan.

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4. The UK Chiefs of Staff are not yet able to judge whether this is a winning concept. The plan is neither fully developed nor finalised.

UK Military Contribution

6. In considering the options for a UK military contribution, it is clear that the US plan of attack from the South does not need British land forces. The Chiefs of Staff judge that, in the time available, there is very little scope for the preparation and integration of British land forces into the US order of battle; moreover, the logistic space available in Kuwait, with five divisions worth of equipment and logistic support entering through only one airhead and a single port, would already be very confined and

7. The Chief of the Defence Staff has recommended to the Defence Secretary that we consider three options, two involving support to US forces and a third with a discrete UK character. These can be described as: the "in-place support package"; the "enhanced support package"; and the "discrete UK package".

In-Place Support Package

8. This is derived from existing forces deployed in theatre and bases in the UK and on British overseas territories. We have aircraft in Turkey and the Gulf for the No Fly Zones and for Operation ENDURING FREEDOM (OEF) as well as ships on the Armilla patrol and in support of OEF, including TLAM.

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All these could be harnessed quickly for operations against Iraq. Additionally, the US want to use RAF Fairford in the UK.

All of these assets are available immediately and amount to a substantial contribution which would have to be integrated into US activity.

Enhanced Support Package

9. A further option would be to enhance the above package by adding substantial maritime and air capabilities. These would be tailored to the tasks identified, but could include a Carrier Group, the Amphibious Ready Group, additional submarines, escorts, mine counter-measure vessels, and support ships. On the air side, this could include additional strike, reconnaissance, surveillance, airborne early warning and support aircraft as well as airfield defences. Assuming overflight and basing clearances for aircraft, and passage of the Suez Canal for ships, all these assets could be in-theatre within **about** of a decision to deploy. Some could arrive sooner.

All these assets would be in direct support of US forces and would not have a discrete UK role.

10. While there is no conventional land force option which can meet the timescales for deployment of the maritime and air elements indicated above, Special Forces could be deployed very rapidly to match US timescales and priorities. This is likely to be very attractive to US planners, and their contribution to success would be significant. Briefing on their potential role can be arranged separately.

Discrete UK Package

11. Since the integration of our conventional land forces into a US land action from the South would be impractical (see paragraph 6 above), we have looked at whether we could provide forces to give substance to the exploitation of the "Northern" option (if US planning develops in this direction). This approach also offers the possibility of a discrete role for UK forces (perhaps with other European allies) within an integrated US-led campaign.

12. The size and shape of any deployment to the North will depend upon the effect the CENTCOM strategic commander wishes to achieve. The capability of the force and the timelines of its deployment will both play their part. Even to create uncertainty in the mind of Saddam will require a force that is credible. We are examining the contribution of a division. That would probably require command and control at Corps level. The UK might consider providing an armoured division either as part of a US-led Corps or as part of a larger coalition force, possibly led by the UK using the framework of the NATO Allied Rapid Reaction Corps (ARRC).

13. The start of any movement of armour, from the UK or Germany, would immediately become visible publicly. Such activity could only begin once a

decision to commit forces had been made. From that point, an armoured brigade of limited capability could be in theatre within [redacted] of a decision to deploy. But it would take **six months** for the whole division to be in place and then with such limited sustainment and reach that it would be unsuitable for a deliberate attack on large scale Iraqi forces. An optimum capability for a sustained campaign inside Iraq could take about [redacted] to achieve.

14. An additional possibility is the deployment of a light brigade with an air mobile capability; this could be in the theatre [redacted] It would have the task of securing the deployment area in Turkey ahead of the arrival of the full division and preparing for operations short of armoured war fighting. These could involve a role in the Kurdish Autonomous Zone if it were subject to the threat of Iraqi attack and/or post-conflict operations following the defeat of Iraqi forces. The actual deployment of forces, even their preparation, should have an impact on the Iraqi regime and prevent its single-focus attention on the US forces in the South.

15. If this option were developed, maritime and air assets would need to be associated with the deployment, with offensive air being vital should the division have to fight. While it would be preferable to absorb the "enhanced support package" into this UK activity, actual force dispositions would be decided by the CENTCOM strategic commander.

Discussion

16. The Defence Secretary attaches two large caveats to all of these options:

- The timescales indicated are the best planning estimates we can make at this stage. They make sweeping assumptions about satisfactory basing, transit routes (e.g. through Turkey) and overflights. Above all, they assume that, as soon as a decision in principle is reached to participate, funding will be available to improve sustainability (ammunition, etc) and implement urgent operational requirements (UORs) to optimise forces for the theatre and for interoperability with the US. The ability of industry to respond to our demands can only be estimated at this stage.
- There is a possibility that the Armed Forces will be required to provide an emergency fire service during a nation-wide fire strike (Operation FRESCO). This would involve around 18,000 service people from across the Services, and draws on trained fire fighting expertise, logistical personnel and unit command elements. Assuming a fire strike starts in October and US action in the winter of 2002/03 and that dealing with the former takes priority, none of the above options bar the first would be available. In other words, only the "in-place support package" could be considered, together with the deployment of Special Forces.

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17. The Defence Secretary has commissioned more work in respect of sustainability and UORs with a view to expediting what would need to be done once a decision in principle had been taken, with what visibility to the public eye and at what cost. Rather than being a generic exercise, this work can now be related more closely to the units and assets outlined above. It will involve a widening of the net of knowledge about this contingency planning within the MOD, although we will not yet contact industry who will have to be involved at some stage to determine actual lead-times for procurement of UORs.

18. The Defence Secretary has directed that these options should be refined as US planning develops and begins to gel. He has also asked for more information about the effect on existing deployments and operations which these options would have. In the absence of specific political decisions here (or in Washington) and to protect our position with the US, we will instruct the MOD representative at the CENTCOM planning meeting next week to set out our options positively but without committing us to any specific ones.

19. I will write again as soon as there is greater clarity about the US plan, such that the Chiefs can update their assessment of it (and the risks involved) and the Defence Secretary can make recommendations about the best option to pursue.

20. I am sending a copy of this letter to Simon McDonald (FCO) and Ian Fletcher and John Scarlett (Cabinet Office).

Yours
Peter

P D WATKINS
Private Secretary

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