Written Statement by The Secretary of State for Defence,31/03/09

Coalition forces providing support to the Iraqi Security Forces in the area south of Baghdad have to date been organised into two multi-national areas: Multi-National Division-South East (MND-South East) under UK leadership covering Basra province, and MND-Centre under US leadership, covering the other eight Iraqi provinces. In the future however only a single multi-national divisional headquarters will be required south of Baghdad.

Due to the improved security situation and the continued demonstration by the Iraqi Security Forces that they are able to deliver security in southern Iraq with only minimal Coalition assistance, the anticipated change in Coalition command structures has taken place today. MND-South East and MND-Centre have been merged to create a new Multi-National Divisional area, MND-South. The headquarters for MND-South will be located on the site of the Contingency Operating Base outside Basra, and will provide support to the Iraqi Security Forces under US leadership across all nine provinces in southern Iraq.

UK forces from 20 Armoured Brigade will complete their remaining military tasks in southern Iraq as part of MND-South and then withdraw before the end of July. We have also deployed logistics specialists in order to support the withdrawal. US forces in southern Iraq will continue to focus on their training of the Iraqi Police and Department of Border Enforcement and on supporting the overall coalition mission in Iraq, including through the protection of key supply routes.

We are currently discussing with the Government of Iraq the precise scope of the military training that they would like the UK to provide as part of the enduring, broad-based bilateral relationship with Iraq. On current plans, this would see fewer than 400 UK Service personnel remaining in Iraq beyond 31 July 2009. Details of the specific military units that will be involved will be made available in due course on the MOD's website, www.mod.uk.