

DECLASSIFIED

From: Neil Crompton  
Head of Iraq Policy Unit

Date: 4 May 2005

cc: PS/PUS  
David Richmond  
Dickie Stagg  
Dominic Asquith  
Stephen Pattison  
Edward Chaplin, HMA Baghdad



NRD 011/002/05		
<b>RECEIVED IN REGISTRY</b>		
<b>- 9 MAY 2005</b>		
DESK OFFICER		REGISTRY
INDEX	PA	Action Taken
IRAQ: REFLECTIONS		

John Sawers

IRAQ: REFLECTIONS

1. I could write a book on the often surreal experiences of the last two years. You will be pleased to know, I do not intend to. Jeremy Greenstock's book will be published soon, and will analyse the policy options. But I wanted to record a few thoughts on the way the FCO handles post-conflict issues. While it is difficult to draw generic conclusions from Iraq, - domestic political and international circumstances have been unique and we have been fighting a war, rather than doing post-conflict reconstruction - I believe these ideas are applicable to other post-conflict situations.

#### Whitehall Co-ordination

2. The Strategy Group structure worked well in pulling the different parts of Whitehall together, once we settled on the different roles of the Strategy Group (horizon scanning) and Senior Officials Group (operational). I have an open mind on whether we missed a trick by not pushing for a dedicated Minister for Iraq, as favoured by MOD. Jeremy Greenstock thinks we did. My sense is we would have been better off with a dedicated Director General responsible for leading the Whitehall effort, under direction from the Ad Hoc Ministerial Group (thereby avoiding problems of who reports to Parliament). He/she might have sat in the Cabinet Office, PCRU or FCO. Ideally, he would have come from the FCO.

#### Reconstruction

3. MOD frustration with the pace of reconstruction has been a cause of much tension within Whitehall. The creation of the PCRU should help resolve some of the issues, but I doubt that it will solve the problem completely, HMG as a whole has lost the old ODA ability to 'fix things'. DFID no longer regard this as core business. Civilians and contractors have to operate under tight security rules which prevent them operating at the required pace in environments like Iraq.
4. Part of the solution is for MOD to regard post-conflict reconstruction as their core business. Only MOD come self-contained, with vehicles, comms and, crucially, the ability to defend themselves, allowing them to deploy in harsh security environments. MOD need to follow US practice and develop civil-affairs battalions, who can take more responsibility for reconstruction on the ground, as 1 Cav Div demonstrated successfully in Sadr City. I understand MOD doctrinal

DECLASSIFIED PERSONAL

**DECLASSIFIED**

### **MOD Assets**

5. In parallel, we need to sell the notion that military assets (particularly transport) belong to HMG as a whole and that decisions on how they are deployed should be determined by HMG, rather than MOD/PJHQ on the basis of military priorities. MOD define their own tasks and determine force levels, occasionally in ways which have not best served wider HMG objectives (part of the problem is that MOD does not have sufficient forces, particularly infantry, to meet HMG's ambitious foreign policy agenda.. In summer 2003, for example, MOD drew down too quickly and were desperately over-stretched when riots kicked off in Basra in August. We and DFID should be involved in the force level review process in a more formal way than our participation in Chiefs of Staff allows, so that wider considerations are taken into account. PJHQ will resist – but we should persist.

### **Resources**

6. HMG (and the FCO) took a long time to wake up to the scale of the task we had taken on. Demands from No 10 and Ministers for action have always exceeded the resources available. The Treasury have played hard ball, exploiting different Departments' own internal reasons for not wanting to make claims on the Reserve to kill off initiatives. No 10's unwillingness to intervene with HMT, except once, has compounded the problem, and undermined the morale of officials tasked with running an 'exemplary operation' without the resources to do so.
7. It is naïve to expect the Treasury to behave differently. But Ministers (and the FCO) need to recognise that in a conflict we cannot afford the luxury of ensuring expenditure is subject 'to the same rigorous criteria as anywhere else', as we have occasionally been told. There is a military maxim that '70% today, is better than 100% next week'. We should have applied this rule more often in Iraq. In future post-conflict situations, the Ad Hoc Ministerial Group, or equivalent, should be allocated a pot of money or 'war chest', which they can collectively draw on for immediate priorities not covered by regular departmental budgets or programme funds like GCPP, thus avoiding the need for extended negotiations with HMT.

### **Iraq Policy Unit**

8. The original IPU concept of a unit with cross-governmental representation has, I believe, worked well. It has allowed us to turn round policy advice quickly and ensured exemplary operational co-operation with MOD and HMT (DFID never really bought into the concept, being the last to deploy and the first to withdraw their secondees). In the run up to and immediate aftermath of -major operations we should second a diplomat to PJHQ so that we have visibility on what they are doing. PJHQ is a black-hole to most of Whitehall, including much of MOD.

### **FCO Staffing of Crises**

9. Much work has been done in this area. Staffing of emergency units now seems to

**CONFIDENTIAL AND PERSONAL**

**DECLASSIFIED**

# DECLASSIFIED

be a seamless operation. But it took much longer to put IPU (and then the Directorate) staffing on a regular footing. I offer two thoughts:

- In a crisis, the Board of Management needs to instruct that the issue of the day is the FCO's highest priority and volunteers should be reallocated immediately, if necessary adjusting posts' or Directorates' objectives to take account of absences. Edward Chaplin did this for MENA. There were plenty of volunteers from elsewhere, but persuading Posts/Directorates to release them was hard and wasted valuable time.
  - In the early days of a crisis, any unit needs a small bank of talented desk officers above and beyond the unit's long-term anticipated ADEST. The key grade is D6/D7 – officers who can draft a telegram or complex brief with only the minimum of guidance. These should be pulled out of other departments, with Directors being told to carry gaps if necessary. Again, this would require a clear instruction from the Board of Management.
10. The crisis also highlighted the FCO's inability (or unwillingness) to redeploy **senior staff** at short notice. In summer 2003 we carried short gaps in both Baghdad and Basra at critical times, absences which damaged our reputation around Whitehall (this is not a criticism of any of those concerned). If the FCO aspires to be the lead on post-conflict issues, it needs to be willing to redeploy senior staff immediately from other important positions, leaving gaps if necessary.

## Correspondence

11. Managing correspondence section was a constant challenge. Ministers and the Office were quick to say we needed to improve output, but gave little help in finding the right numbers and quality of staff to work in the Unit. Trying to put this right was a constant strain. Next time, I would recommend that correspondence be a Press Office responsibility, leaving the policy department free to concentrate on immediate policy and operational issues. Or we should be prepared to put more radical ideas to Ministers, including the option of not replying to letters from members of the public or simply referring them to our website.

## Communications

12. There is no substitute for the telegram system in reaching all parts of the Whitehall system at once. This should give the FCO natural leadership of the post-reconstruction process. For us to exploit this, we need reliable, secure, user-friendly laptops with which officers in the field can communicate with London. Quick Silver is cumbersome, so its users shun it. Chorus, a Confidential user friendly lap-top, may solve this. Providing them should be top of the list of priorities in any pre-conflict planning. Not having them from the beginning in Iraq was a significant handicap and cost the FCO influence.

*Neil Crompton*

Head Iraq Policy Unit

DECLASSIFIED  
CONFIDENTIAL AND PERSONAL