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PRIME MINISTER

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## IRAQ: UK STRATEGY

The purpose of this note is to comment on the way forward following the **Red Team Report**; suggest some specific priorities for the next 3/6 months; and propose new UK/US and internal structures. This follows discussion with Whitehall colleagues, William Patey, and informally with US contacts.

### Strategic Aims

There is an underlying conflict here. The Red Team objective is "to break the back of the insurgency in one year and to defeat the insurgency in three years". This is different from the Coalition's objective, which is to hold to the political timetable (constitution, referendum, elections in 2005) and build up Iraqi capabilities so that the Coalition can begin a progressive withdrawal, starting next year.

This involves a concept of "sufficiency", ie we accept that the insurgency will go on for some time, but aim to contain it sufficiently for the political and security transition to be credible and for us to be able to draw down without appearing to cut and run dishonourably.

There is a further connection – a belief that in order to win over Sunni opinion, we need to show that we will honour our commitment to withdraw and are not going to occupy Iraq indefinitely. One of the problems with the "ink spot"

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strategy favoured by the Red Team is that it implies (a) an increased US effort and (b) no withdrawal for three years. This runs counter to our current strategy, and (still valid) political assumptions. It would also need a massive Iraqi coordination effort, of which they are at present incapable.

In other ways, the ink spot concept is an attractive one. In many ways, the Red Team Report describes what we have been trying to do for the past eighteen months. In Fallujah, Samara, Talafer etc, our concept of operations has been very similar: kinetic military activity, followed by a handover to Iraqi military and police forces, establishment of a representative local council supported by central government, and an economic reconstruction programme which would help the good guys to consolidate their power.

But there have been no success stories in Sunni areas. The key impediments have been poor MNF coordination; a lack of central government engagement; absence of local political leadership; mass intimidation by the terrorists; inadequate Iraqi police and military leading to the return of insurgents.

It is not obvious how this would change quickly. Indeed, the extent of MNF intervention and US political control implied by the ink spot strategy could inflame, rather than subdue the insurgency. Arguably, this strategy comes two and a half years late. It might have been possible to try something like this immediately after the invasion, but to do so now, fifteen months after the occupation formally ended, and with the definitive government about to be elected, is - to put it mildly - counter-intuitive.

There is also the question of resources.

The Red Team strategy implies a significant increase in US troop numbers (beyond the 145,000 at present), and an increase in the overall political and reconstruction effort.

Does the Administration have the stomach for this, given competing domestic priorities? In the latest poll 90% of those surveyed, including the majority of Republicans, disapproved of cutting spending on domestic programmes to pay for Iraq. Support for the war is at an all-time low. A majority want US troops to leave as soon as possible, whatever the conditions in Iraq. Khalilzad, sensing the mood on Iraq and Katrina, seems deliberately to have pulled his punches in Washington over the Red Team Report.

All that said, the Red Team Report is to be welcomed because:

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- It is realistic in its assessment, and comprehensive in its scope;
- It insists on an integrated campaign (security, political, economic);
- It specifies actions that need to be taken, and demands active follow-through.

All this is exactly what is needed and (although it is not rocket science) exactly what has never happened on the US side so far.

There are, however, some weaknesses:

- we still have a long way to go in understanding and being able to act against the different strands of the insurgency.
- The Red Team is absolutely right to leave behind the *laissez faire* approach of the Negroponte era. But does it represent too big a swing in the other direction ie too big a focus on US political and military activity? My own view is that the key variable over the next six months will be the authority, resilience and communication capacity of the Iraqi government which comes to power after the December elections. We need to help and fund them to run the economic reconstruction programmes; lead the international donor effort; and link up with local political leaders. The Red Team Report does not comment on any of this.

## Priorities

### (a) Political

We face two distinct phases of activity. Over the next three months, the bottom line requirement is to keep the show on the road, ie provide an environment in which the referendum and elections can take place. This is probably not the time for major new initiatives, not least given the defunct ITG. But we should use this period to plan for the second phase, after the elections, when a new government will be formed. At that stage we need our new strategy in place, incorporating the best parts of the Red Team recommendations.

Our main political achievement so far has been to keep the process on track, against predictions by many. The problem is that this is a necessary, but not

sufficient condition for success. The January elections produced a useless government. For the future, we have to focus on outcomes, not just process.

What we

need is a centrist government capable of (a) executive effectiveness and (b) political inclusiveness or at least a government with a strong centrist/non-religious component. In present circumstances the only person capable of fitting this bill, for all his faults, is Ayad Allawi. I see it as a legitimate aim of British policy to buttress him and others in the centre of Iraqi politics, and that we should explore:

- ways of helping (and funding) centrist and secular groups;
- continued Labour Party/Allawi contact and advice, as in the run-up to the last elections.

Charles Heatly will continue his role as the Government's point of contact with Allawi.

We will need to get the Americans to take a more active posture on this -

But the alternative is to allow a pro-Iranian, Shia majority to dominate Iraqi politics, with the risk of sectarian conflict increasing as a result - as it is now.

#### Other political priorities:

- Be very firm in public and private in the remaining months of the Jaffari government over the need to stamp out corruption and sectarianism within government; and the need for outreach (this will play well with the Sunnis even if Jaffari and co do nothing about it themselves).
- Put a systematic effort into identifying Sunni figures we would like to see in the next government and other Sunni opinion-formers;
- Press the leaders of Iraq's neighbours to intervene with the Iraqi Sunni to participate in the political process.

We want to promote his idea of a Steering Group (US, UK, Saudi Arabia and other regional countries, probably meeting at National Security Adviser level). We should also consider a tour by eg Liz Symons to promote support for Iraq, leading to a further meeting of the International Conference which first met at Sharm el Shaikh, ie Neighbours, P5, G8, international organisations.

- We should see whether we can get the UN more involved politically, whether through Brahimi ( ) or someone else.
- We need a serious upgrade of our political effort in Basra and a clear demonstration that we are taking our legacy seriously.
- We need to continue contacts with the fringes of the insurgency  
The Americans only undertake these contacts as part of their military strategy. We see it as part of our political outreach. We need to get the Americans on to this more fertile ground.
- We need to establish a political channel to Moqtada Al Sadr and Sistani. We have no contacts with the former; but some indirect links to the latter.
- Above all, we (ie Khalilzad and ourselves) will need to ensure that a new Iraqi government is formed quickly after the December elections and has the best possible composition from the point of view of our objectives.

(b) Security

There is a continuing debate, revealed in the Red Team Report, over the make-up of the insurgency, between (crudely) those who think the key issue is the foreign fighters and those who concentrate on the indigenous Iraqi elements. The UK view remains that the bulk of the insurgency is home-grown, a mixture of irreconcilable Saddamists and a larger number of disaffected, particularly young Iraqis, with range of motivations, who might in principle be won over to the political track.

At the same time, there is no doubt that Zarqawi is important to the insurgency as (a) a source of inspiration and motivation for the terrorists (b) an international rallying point and (c) an operational co-ordinator between the different groups, as he showed again last week in Baghdad. This is definitely not to be overlooked.

At the same time we have to recognise that, if Zarqawi and his group were wiped out, the insurgency would continue, though initially without the spectaculars for which Zarqawi is notorious.

On the security side, there is a sense of fatigue in the MNF; and whether we adopt the ink spot strategy or not, a need for General Casey to define his short and medium term counter-insurgency objectives more clearly. The MNF need to get the right balance between (a) ISF training and counter-insurgency and (b) within the latter, action against foreign fighters vs home-grown Iraqis.

Meanwhile we have arrested two Sadr militia leaders in Basra, who are implicated in recent attacks on our forces. This has provoked a local backlash, but is essential if we are to control this activity and send the right political messages, including to Iran.

The key new point over the past few months has been increased and vicious sectarianism. Some of this is coming from the insurgents; some of it is coming from Shia elements within the police and armed forces, and from the Shia militia. This not only risks an escalation into a much bigger civil conflict, it is also changing the political climate, and eroding even further Sunni trust in the new political institutions. We have to come down very hard on the Iraqi government on this.

Specific priorities for ISF development are:

- Logistics
- Command and Control
- Policy and executive capacity in the Ministries of Defence and the Interior
- Iraqi police.

(c) Economic

There is nothing new to say here. There will be no serious reconstruction effort for as long as the security situation remains bad, and political engagement at

national and local levels remains poor. Bad security forces out all but the most determined. Each DFID person in Iraq costs nearly £3/4 million each year.

There is little point in talking about a new surge of economic reconstruction until we see the shape of the next Iraqi government.

### Structures

In the UK, we already have an active work programme at senior official level, with weekly meetings and coverage of individual sectors. You should hold monthly meetings of DOP (Iraq) – the next one is on 20 October. Between those meetings, there should be fortnightly Ministerial meetings chaired alternately by Jack Straw and John Reid. These should aggressively chase progress against our strategy.

As for UK/US structures, Khalilzad is now the key player. We need to build a UK-US structure centred on the two Ambassadors and their teams in Baghdad, with Generals Casey and Brims. There should be regular meetings and joint work.

You have already agreed with Bush to hold a VTC including the two Ambassadors and Generals. We should try to do this every month (you would need to surrender a normal VTC – worth it, I think). Ahead of each VTC, Khalilzad/Patey should send you and Bush a joint report on progress.

I don't know whether the Americans would sign up to something as formal as this, but you could try it out when you next talk to Bush and I would follow up with Hadley (better that way round, I think).

We also need to strengthen the London/Washington lines. The problem on the American side is that we have moved from excessive Pentagon control

It ought to be the State Department,

The NSC in theory co-ordinates everything,

In the circumstances I suggest:

- Steve Hadley and I should hold a VTC with senior officials from both administrations present to discuss the overall strategy following the Red Team Report. This should be after Khalilzad's return to Baghdad later this week, when he will discuss it with the US military, William Patey and others.

- There should also be contacts at lower levels between the Cabinet Office and NSC.
- There should be a political working group covering the elections and outreach. The best people to chair this would be John Sawers on our side and Philip Zelikow on the US side – he works in State for Condi, and has been asked by her to take an interest in Iraq. He is creative, and politically astute and we should pull him in.

### Conclusion

In short, we have to cut our strategic cloth according to the environment we are now in and our resources. We cannot turn back the clock to May 2003. Overall, and in a rough and ready way, our best chance is to ensure that we prop up the centre in Iraqi politics, do all we can to get an effective government after December, focus on key improvements meanwhile to the ISF, and ensure an integrated political and security campaign in Iraq. On that basis we stand a reasonable chance of securing the political and security transition we want, including starting the draw-down of our forces next year.

Do you agree with these comments, and this approach? If so we will write out on this basis to Whitehall Departments. Or do you prefer the Red Team approach of delaying the transition until the insurgency is significantly reduced?

Happy of course to discuss.

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