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TB 26/05  
2 October 2005

NOTE

Essentially I agree with the NS note to me, subject to these points.

1. I don't think the Red Team report is advocating a different strategy; just a means of implementing the existing one. We do need to have a posture of wanting to withdraw; but when the job is done. We should be able, on either case, to get some troops withdrawn next year but right now I don't think that is the key. The key is effective implementation.

2. This may seem inconsistent with what I've just said but isn't: we must set out clearly for the Iraqis a perspective of handover.

IE before the December election, we should be in the position of saying, along with both Jaafari and also Allawi and the key players in the election: our strategy provided that the Iraqi force capability is built up as planned and the insurgency can be reduced, is for substantial troop withdrawals next year. We must make the insurgency clearly and plainly, the obstacle to, not the pretext for, withdrawal.

The subtlety of this, in communication terms, is acute. But it can be done, with proper planning.

3. Meantime, we need a total political commitment to Sunni outreach. This should compromise:

(a) the Arab contact group which must start functioning now;

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- (b) a political as well as military outreach by the US and UK;
- (c) a renewed UN focus, if necessary with Brahimi;

There should be no more hesitating here. We need to pull as many as possible over. If necessary (and this may seem wild) I would meet some of them.

4. The 'ink spot' strategy is right. It isn't what we've done so far. What we've done is to take a city, give it back to the Iraqis and hope. The 'ink spot' strategy is to take it and then only when the Iraqi civilian capability of governance is properly established with necessary military back-up, do we withdraw. This needs to be articulated, planned and followed through.

5. We cannot afford a repeat of January where we ended up with ineffective government. We must, however, 'behind-the-scenes', help Allawi. We are totally underestimating the degree to which the present problems are the product of a bad government.

6. We must reach out to MAS and try to bring them and his people, at least into some sort of understanding with us.

7. The police. We need someone put in charge of sorting out this mess.

8. Our own system needs a lot of improvement. I should chair a bi-weekly meeting; or if not me, in my absence, JoP and NS with officials. This must be constantly tracked. I also favour giving JR the lead as much as

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possible. We should split it up. JR on security, Iraqiisation and to be out there defending the case. JS on political outreach.

9 I will need to go back into this, in a speech that sets out the whole argument, end to end. It could be the Mansion House but that's a long way away. I favour something sooner and at greater length, like Sedgefield in March 2004.

10. We need to re-launch our strategy with the US and with the UN fully behind it. The al-Zawahiri paper could be played into it. The timing would be when we can agree the strategy set out in 2. above with the Iraqis. But we need a comprehensive programme fully co-ordinated with the US over the coming two months.

And let us not forget the Constitution in October.

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