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*I still am not  
convinced as the Iraqisation  
programme. Do they yet  
have the equipment  
they need, for example?  
We can discuss on  
Monday.*

PRIME MINISTER

From: Nigel Sheinwald

Date: 22 July 2005

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cc: Jonathan Powell  
David Hill  
Antony Phillipson  
David Quarrey

## IRAQ: A COMPREHENSIVE STRATEGY

You ask how alarmed you should be about Iraq. Of course we should be concerned – about the continuing high level of violence; lack of grip of the ITG; slow pace of reconstruction etc. It is difficult to see these things being remedied quickly.

At the same time we need to make a hard-headed calculation: are we headed for strategic failure? I do not think we are, principally because the political process remains on track and, so far, the insurgents have not succeeded in fomenting any widespread sectarian conflict. Those are the bottom line strategic risks.

So, over the next few months, the sort of things we need to watch out for include:

- Whether the scale of sectarian attacks increases, and in particular if it draws in the likes of the (Shia) Badr Corps – this would be very serious.
- Whether Moqtada al Sadr abandons the political path he is now on and returns to violence. As we have discussed many times, it is the combination of Sunni and Shia insurgencies which would present an enormous strategic threat to the MNF across the country.
- Whether key Sunni constituencies withdraw from the constitutional and electoral processes. At present the signs are that they want to participate, but there will be unprecedented levels of violent intimidation in the months ahead.
- Whether the foreign fighters and the nationalist insurgency join together in a unified command.

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But this continues to be intermittent. It is not clear that, even if this co-ordination were to continue, it would deal a fatal blow to the political process and the MNF's role; but more successful and better co-ordinated violence would obviously increase the pressure.

It is quite possible that some of these dangers will materialise in one form or another. But our present analysis is that the political process will continue without a major sectarian breakdown. Would that be enough? In my view, no. Our objective over the next six months must be to build the right political and security platform so that:

- (a) the elected Iraqi Government after the December elections can really take charge and govern the country; and
- (b) the MNF can begin a substantial withdrawal next year, and leave the country in the hands of the ISF, without precipitating a civil war. At present there is no doubt that the presence of the MNF contains the sectarian violence.

All this requires a comprehensive political strategy. The elements were, I think, those in the FCO paper (attached) which yesterday's meeting discussed. I do not think there are any missing elements. The key requirements to my mind are:

- An ITG political outreach strategy which (a) takes account of Sunni grievances and (b) is visible, ie communicated to the Iraqi people and particularly to the Sunni population, along with an image of an Iraqi Government capable of making and implementing decisions
- A security strategy agreed with the Americans and ITG.
- A delivery mechanism: close co-ordination between the UK and US Ambassadors and military in Baghdad; Jack and Condi in charge of the political process; John and Rumsfeld engaged on the security strategy.

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- On security, I think we need a forcing event such as another Commanders' Conference in Baghdad - this worked in the Allawi period. On our side this would mean sending Mike Walker or Rob Fry with Kevin Tebbit or Desmond Bowen to Baghdad. If you wanted, I could also see whether Steve Hadley was interested in visiting Baghdad in the autumn; we could make it a joint visit. (I'm not sure that a visit by you to Baghdad is going to be desirable/manageable before the elections; but a visit to the UK troops in Basra is another matter.)

I attach a draft note from you to President Bush, drafted by David Quarrey and incorporating comments from the FCO (attached) and Charles Heatly. This covers all the areas, and you may want to be more selective in what you send across. The aim should be to get this off on Monday and speak to it at Tuesday's VTC. Steve and I can then follow-up.

NIGEL SHEINWALD

Nigel Sheinwald

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you  
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I agree strongly with your analysis  
My concern is delivering the strategy