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10 DOWNING STREET
LONDON SW1A 2AA

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From the Private Secretary

21 January 2005

SUBJECT
MASTER
Filed:

Dear Chris,

IRAQ: FUTURE STRATEGY

The contents of this letter are extremely sensitive. No further copies should be taken and it should only be shown to those with a real need to know.

Mr Hoon met the Prime Minister at No.10 this morning. CDS, Jonathan Powell, Margaret Aldred and I were also present.

Mr Hoon said there were two immediate issues to address. The first was the possibility that the US would ask us to extend our area of operations in Iraq beyond MND(SE). There was a real risk that MND(CS) would collapse as the Romanians, Ukrainians, Bulgarians and Portuguese withdrew. The second was that we might find ourselves having to backfill for the Dutch when they withdrew from Al Muthanna.

CDS said the US campaign against the insurgency had stalled. The review by General Luck would likely urge a redeployment of troops and new operational boundaries. We were doing our own analysis, and there was still time to feed into the US conclusions, but we needed to recognise that if our voice was to count with the US we would have to offer to play a part in the plan that emerged. The alternative was to say that we would take care of MND(SE) but not engage further north, but this would reduce our influence in the discussions. CDS said that his view was that we should engage with the American discussions but he could not advise that there was at the moment any coherent plan we could participate in. Mr Hoon said that to date he had held back from making any commitment to the US on this issue. But this could not last much longer. There was a conference on deployment issues in Washington on 20/21 February.

The Prime Minister said that his primary concern remained that the Iraqiisation programme was not working. CDS conceded that it was certainly not

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happening as fast as we had hoped. All of Gen Petraeus' timelines had been missed. The latest US plan was to embed MNF forces with the ISF through MATs and PATs - but this was not the answer. The problem with the ISF was that numbers were up, but command and control and resilience were non-existent. Another real problem was the lack of
This was just not developing. Overall we still faced a crucial need to accelerate the Iraqiisation programme to advance the date when the ISF could take over security. Without this dealing with the insurgency, whether by containing it or destroying it, would require many more MNF troops. Casey currently had seventeen brigades, CENTCOM said they wanted to draw down to seven. There was no sense of coherence in US tactics.

The Prime Minister asked whether the insurgency was growing. CDS said he did not believe the insurgency itself was growing but the level of popular support for it was. In terms of Sunni participation in the political process, Mr Hoon said there were four areas (half of Baghdad, Mosul, Nasiriya, and Al Anbar) that would not take part in the elections. Four or five others would be patchy. The key would be Sunni reaction after the elections. Margaret Aldred noted that our latest assessment was that there would be a 30 per cent Sunni turn out. Mr Hoon said that as we knew intimidation was the main problem. Intelligence suggested that we could expect a series of spectacular terrorist attacks between now and the election. But low Sunni participation did not necessarily mean the Sunnis would be under-represented in the new Assembly as they were sprinkled throughout many of the main party lists.

The Prime Minister said that the real risk was that the population would support the insurgency because of the US presence even though if the insurgency ended the US would leave. CDS said one problem was that it was not clear what future US intentions were. Many suspected that they had long term aspirations for remaining in Iraq, and maintaining bases there. The Prime Minister said he believed that the President would want to leave when possible. Basing was very much a secondary consideration.

The Prime Minister said the bottom line was that we had to complete the mission. The key question was when we could hand responsibility for security over to the ISF. CDS said it very much depended on the environment. Al Muthanna and Basra were reasonably calm. But it was not clear that they would stay that way without any MNF presence.

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The Prime Minister said we needed urgently to address the problem that the insurgents felt that they were close to being able to tip the population into supporting them. He believed the elections would have a beneficial impact but we needed a revised plan to develop the capability for the Iraqis to take control. The numbers on paper at present were meaningless. The Prime Minister said he was only prepared to redeploy UK forces beyond our current area of operations if there was a viable plan or product. But he was not prepared simply to follow along with US wishes. We needed to have a coherent plan to do the job. We could play our part on that basis. Simply asking us to take over MND(CS) was not a plan.

CDS said that he had developed some lines to take with the US on our military posture (attached). The Prime Minister said the basic posture was right, but we needed to start with a viable overall plan.

The Prime Minister asked about the position with the Dutch. Mr Hoon said that our current assessment was that they would start to leave in March and be gone by May. He had spoken to the Australians who had not ruled out being able to contribute to Al Muthanna but would not be able to get there until May. The question was whether we could persuade the Dutch to stay until May if we could say that the Australian decision to take over was an "unforeseen circumstance". But we needed to take a decision soon. UK forces were already putting in some of the necessary infrastructure. CDS said that the Iraqis were certainly not ready to take over yet and Mr Hoon noted that the Japanese forces would only stay if they had MNF protection. He had already rolled out plans to redeploy UK troops to the region, which would lead to an increase in our complement in Iraq of 150/200. Hopefully we could reduce these when the Australians took over.

The Prime Minister asked about progress on reconstruction in the South. Mr Hoon said this was extremely frustrating. Things never seemed to change. The US still saw Baghdad as the top priority, and events in Baghdad were putting them off focussing on the South.

Action: The Prime Minister would like to meet General Luck when he passes through London on his way back to the US from Iraq (MoD/Baghdad to liaise with Luck's party).

We will be arranging an ad hoc meeting, chaired by the Prime Minister, to consider our reaction to the Luck plan and discuss our strategy for Iraq post the

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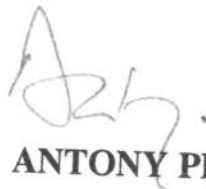
Iraqi elections. We will advise on timing and participation. We will need a paper from OD Sec for this meeting covering what needs to be done to get the Iraqiisation process back on track; our military options (covering the various means by which we can support the US including increasing training for the ISF within MND(SE)); and a gameplan for contacts with the US in Washington and Baghdad.

I would be grateful for advice from MOD/FCO on the likelihood of the Australians taking over in Al Muthanna in May. And, if the Australians are prepared to do so, whether we could then return to the charge with the Dutch.

Please can I also have an updated assessment of the membership of the coalition in Iraq, and their future intentions.

I am copying this letter to Sir Andrew Turnbull, Margaret Aldred and William Ehrman (Cabinet Office), CDS, CGS, Desmond Bowen (MOD), Geoffrey Adams (FCO), Sir David Manning (Washington), Sir Peter Ricketts (UKDel NATO), Sir Emyr Jones Parry (UKMis New York), Edward Chaplin and General Kiszely (Baghdad), Simon Collis and General Riley (Basra).

yours,



ANTONY PHILLIPSON

Chris Baker
Principal Private Secretary
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