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*I agree with
all of this. You will
have to speed much
pushing it thru.*

From: Jonathan Powell
Date: 21 September 2005

S 106 /05

PRIME MINISTER

IRAQ: STRATEGY

Nigel has done a serious piece of work for you on Iraq strategy. He makes some good points about the political difficulties – difficulty of securing new US resources, pressure to withdraw – but I disagree with his dismissal of the red team approach.

The red team concludes – and no one seriously contests this – that we are in danger of strategic failure in Iraq, with the situation degenerating into civil war or even victory for the terrorists. If this is the case then we have to rethink our strategy and – as important – how we deliver it. The fundamental choice is between continuing as we are with the principal aim of getting our troops out and handing over to the Iraqis next year even though we do not believe that the Iraqi government and security forces will be able to survive alone in the face of the insurgent threat, or alternatively aiming at success (defined below) and making getting our troops out next year a subsidiary aim. Once you think about it, I do not think we can responsibly do anything other than aim at the latter. The whole terrorist strategy is based on the belief that they can out-wait us and that our public opinion will force us to pull out prematurely so they can take over. Giving in to that strategy has far more serious implications for the West than just failure in Iraq.

Nor do I think muddling on is an option. We are losing the support of even those who supported the war, because they can see no light at the end of the tunnel. They think we are incompetent and have no plan to succeed in Iraq. We need a new strategy that people can see and believe is leading to success if we are to maintain public tolerance. That is why we should build on the red team analysis and – to a certain extent – their recommendations.

The recommendations we should accept

The paper is right to distinguish between reconcilable and irreconcilable elements in the insurgency. We cannot succeed unless we split the two. In Mao's words we have to deal with the water they swim in. So we have to reach out to the

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Sunnis in a serious way.

The reason the insurgents have an infinite pool of supporters is that all the young men are unemployed. So we need to give them jobs. That does not require lots of DIFD staff. It requires the Iraqi government to lead in creating jobs through micro-economic stimulation, re-starting state enterprises etc as recommended in the paper. We should of course continue to go after Zargawi and his people. But if we pin our hopes on capturing or killing him we may be waiting a long time - look at UBL's success in avoiding capture - and even when we capture him the insurgency will not be over. But if we can win over the Sunnis (less the irreconcilable Saddamites) we will make it very difficult for him and his foreign fighters to continue operating with impunity.

We need to integrate the military, political and economic strategies and operations. At the moment they are running on separate tracks with separate commands. We need a joint taskforce, as the paper recommends, with one person in charge. That person should be Khalizad and he should be reporting back to you and Bush regularly. It is worth devoting a good deal of your and Bush's time to getting it right. We need to reduce the length of the command and control system and make it more flexible, so that if you and Bush give an instruction something actually happens on the ground.

As Nigel says, we are already - sort of - implementing the ink spot strategy, but it is not working. US forces go into Tal Afar, have a fire fight, drive the insurgents out and then withdraw. The insurgents actually cross US lines during the battle to escape without the US knowing how, and leave to fight another day. And when the US withdraws Iraqi forces are incapable of keeping the insurgents out. So if this is our counter-insurgency strategy we need to rely on Iraqi forces in the fighting who will be better able to tell the insurgents from the population. And we need effective Iraqi forces, particularly police, who can keep order after the Americans leave the area (as Bush said not Shia or Kurdish police in a Sunni area, and reliable police). And we need some way of restricting movement and isolating one area from another - that probably means more US forces. The key difference from what we are doing at the moment is going for a sustained process of reclaiming territory not surge and withdraw, and it will only work if we couple it with the Sunni outreach strategy outlined above.

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Linked to this is the fundamental need, that you have been banging on about for ages, to have properly trained Iraqi armed forces and police. We still don't have either. Why not? The Iraqis have made perfectly effective soldiers in the past. What is wrong? There is no point in carrying on doing what we are doing at the moment if it is not producing what we need. In particular we need to be able to announce a new initiative on the police within the next month. And what are we going to do about the armed militia? (I do not think the red team proposal of paramilitary groups is a good idea)

ourselves, have failed. But we shouldn't give up. Saddam had effective intelligence agencies! While we wouldn't want to replicate his means, there are Sunnis there willing and able to set up a decent intelligence service.

We have to do something to help rebuild civil society. At the moment we face rampant corruption and an ineffective government. We need to take capacity building seriously and reinforce the judiciary, ministries etc. You should demand to see a plan.

And we need to make the Iraqi government more responsible. At the moment they get a free ride. From December they need to be in charge, even if this is difficult for us. We cannot count on Allawi winning, and indicating we support him is probably the kiss of death. But we do need a strong national unity government that puts an end to sectarianism. I am very uncomfortable about the secret guarantee we appear to have given the Kurds and Shia on federalism (see attached). This could come back to haunt us in a big way.

We should stick to our political timetable of elections in December whatever happens on the Constitution. It is essential we have a fully legitimate government by then. And we need to get the international community properly involved again. We haven't really made an effort to do this for ages. We need to make a real drive both in the UN and with the neighbouring countries.

And finally you need to start making the argument again both internationally and domestically instead of keeping silent. We have to explain why this battle matters, and why it is not in the interest of the rest of the world to watch Iraq going down the tubes. You need to convince both audiences that there is light at the end of the tunnel, and that we have a plan for stabilising Iraq. You should define success. It does not mean an end to all terrorist attacks, any more than it does in NI or Palestine. But it does mean that we split the reconcilable from the

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irreconcilable insurgents, that the Iraqi government and security forces can control the situation, that jobs are being created and that something resembling civil society is beginning to emerge under a democratically elected government. (Sometimes the Americans forget that real democracy cannot exist in a vacuum - it needs to be underpinned by the rule of law, uncorrupt police forces and judiciary, a functioning capitalist economy etc).

Next steps

I basically agree with Nigel on the next steps:

- Get the contact group of neighbouring states up and running in next two weeks, and a meeting with Sunnis before the end of October.
- Schedule the videoconference with Bush and Casey and Khalizad - and make it a regular occurrence with Khalizad in the lead and with a checklist prepared by Nigel and Steve every fortnight - economic, intelligence and police as well as security and political.
- Announce a revised strategy.

But we have lost credibility and you have to reassure people that there is a plan that will work. It could be linked to the December elections and announced as a new step to coincide with the new government. The strategy doesn't need to refer to ink spots.

- Actually get something done about the Iraqi police and army rather than talking about it. If that requires getting into the detail of it yourself, then do it.
- Make your speech on Iraq - Lord Mayor's Banquet - and then get a real debate going in the country and internationally rather than trying to stay silent. People have to understand why it matters to them. And challenge the UN and international community to play their role.
- Make the Iraqi government genuinely responsible after the December elections. It is no longer interim. If it asks us to go, then we should go.
- A new strategy for Basra. Our forces are in a difficult position and it is a one way bet for Muqtada al Sadr's forces to mount more attacks on

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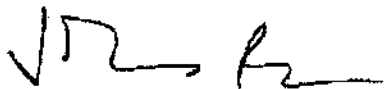
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us. We need to have a new approach, to be set by the military on the ground with stronger political support in the consulate.

Postscript

The people dealing with Iraq, particularly in the front line, are not surprisingly tired and discouraged. Nothing seems to work, and they have given up trying to come up with new ideas. A weary cynicism and feeling that it is all inevitable has sunk in. It always does in wars. The job of leadership is to raise their sights, inspire them with a vision of how the war can be won, set a new strategy, and then ensure it has public support. If we can't do that, we are sunk. But it is doable, and we should not give up.

A meeting right after Confue with JR, JJ, A. L. H. & R.



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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