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SBMR-I WEEKLY REPORT (226) 10 SEP 06

- **First Impression – damaged not broken and the Iraqi way is not necessarily our way.**
- **Baghdad Security Plan is working – long term impacts more difficult to assess.**
- **Not surprised at behaviour of the IA National Guard battalions.**

1. Three days hardly qualifies me to comment, but I will. My first impression is cautiously optimistic - a sense of limited progress on most fronts, as seen from this my fourth active engagement with Iraq (2 wars and a Counter Insurgency campaign). And while it would be an understatement to suggest that there is still some way yet to go, there continues to be a forward momentum since my first visit to Baghdad in April 2003. Most stark may be the difference from doing business from a Bradley armoured fighting vehicle supported by Abrams main battle tanks to the more genteel arrival this time. However, other less obvious, but nonetheless very important, examples include increased levels of 'normal' domestic activity being undertaken, trade, markets, a record number of marriages, and people getting on with a less than perfect but nonetheless, and for most, a manageable existence.

2. That said, my feeling is that we collectively need to re-calibrate our expectations. The Government is woefully immature in governance (albeit a UK Government would be in a pretty challenging position to achieve the same results that the Coalition is demanding from Maliki) but the individuals are sophisticated manipulators of people, ideas, facts and are ultimately this country's future. The Iraqi political leadership is a new phenomenon; historical leadership, religious, sectarian and tribal are of course not, and provide a stability for both good and infinite mischief that is part, whether we like it or not, of the future model. More to follow in the weeks ahead.

3. The Baghdad Security Plan (BSP) appears to remain on track, albeit early days yet, and is likely to do so long as the US continue to 'work it'. Indicators of, at least limited, success so far include the strength of the insurgent Counter

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Information Ops campaign. The US senior military leadership is rock solid; not always right, but they demonstrate a professional competence that is truly noteworthy, and early indications are that they are prepared to sustain the pain on higher force numbers possibly into the Spring. Too soon to elaborate but two early observations on the military piece:

- a. **Sadr City.** The timing of the entry to Sadr City has yet to be finalized, but the sense is that without it the BSP falls short of a meaningful conclusion. Pressure on the US due to the Relief in Place and the ability to concentrate force, including the 172nd Stryker Brigade (who are expanding overt reconnaissance operations in Sadr City now in order to set the conditions for subsequent entry in strength), favours earlier engagement, possibly during Ramadan. The implications to Prime Minister Maliki, the level of violence during Ramadan, and the outcome for Sadr and the Shia, are difficult to judge even with more information. However, it could be significant, notwithstanding the potential to sour (even permanently if it was against their wishes) the Gol relationship with the US led Coalition. This said, rogue elements of the Sadr movement (not necessarily Sadr himself) are in my view a 'clear and present danger' to this nation and reconciliation.
 - b. **Non-security Elements.** Coordination of the Iraqi Ministries to deliver the non-security elements that need to follow seamlessly from the MNC-I activity is occasional, and on face value lackluster. The work of my predecessors has taken this almost unmanageable problem forward in leaps and bounds, but there is still some considerable way to go, and progress will not be eloquent, nor I sense Western in its final form.
4. There has been much reporting of the Iraqi Army failing to live up to our expectations. It is worth highlighting that those units who have singularly failed are the (ex) National Guard units taken up from the reserve and into the regular army - the so called 'even' number Divisions. Comparisons might be drawn to our own Reserves, where intelligent mobilization is required to build up sufficient unit strength for overseas operations. Whereas when they operate in their local patch, such as 8 Division for the Shia pilgrimage to Najaf and Karbala, they have (to date) been successful. Likewise those regular Divisions are currently engaged in a series of 'tough fights', an American phrase, and doing well.
5. Final impression - more successful than we might imagine, more complex than we can imagine, and an outcome likely to be more Iraqi than we have imagined.

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