



MINISTRY OF DEFENCE  
MAIN BUILDING  
WHITEHALL LONDON SW1A 2HB

SECRETARY OF STATE

MSU 4/5/2S

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*Jean Dargatzis*

**DOP(I) 20 OCT: MEDIUM TERM PAPER**

Ahead of our next meeting I thought it might be helpful, to shape our discussion, if I set out some of the issues raised by the paper and which we will need to consider ahead of decisions on our strategy.

**It is difficult to plan the medium to long term force posture (and wider security relationship) without a clearer sense of the UK's medium to long term foreign policy interests in Iraq. I look to FCO, supported by DfID, to lead such a discussion including detailed plans for engagement over the medium-term.**

- As part of those considerations we must ensure that the outcomes put forward in the paper are in line with our ambitions for our long-term relationship with Iraq, both in the capital but also in the south where traditionally we have had political and economic influence. What are our enduring interests in, and aspirations for, a (possibly autonomous) southern Iraq and Basra, bearing in mind that we have poured so much resource and

The Rt Hon Margaret Beckett MP  
Secretary of State for Foreign  
and Commonwealth Affairs

effort? What should our legacy be for the south and how do our plans for development and reconstruction match that legacy?

- Consequently, when looking at the medium-term positioning we should do so with an eye to our future long-term contribution. For example in the past we have looked at increased air and maritime components and a reduced land forces commitment as part of a long term coalition package.

**I will be using my next visit, hopefully next month, to get first hand a feel for the momentum behind PM Maliki's reconciliation process and to get my own sense of what is achievable by the current Government.**

- We promised ourselves a judgement on the performance of the Iraqi government. Colleagues will need to anticipate, towards the end of the year, a UK/US assessment on whether the current Iraqi government realistically can hope to deliver on security. US noises on this may be aimed at producing a forcing event.
- It appears unlikely that the coalition will be told to leave but in order to maintain the UIA and the GOI; and possibly even UNSCR negotiations there may be pressure for a timetable as part of Maliki's negotiations on reconciliation. Should we be talking to Maliki about the art of the possible including discussing what the minimum tasks to maintain stability are and explaining the associated force levels?
- The US 'mid-terms' may produce some interesting developments, as may the Baker/Hamilton report which is rumoured to advise a course of accelerated federalism and some other interesting proposals. Again we will need to take such possibilities into account before making planning decisions.

**I am keen to explore a scenario that has a more ambitious drawdown plan linked to political developments and PM Maliki's reconciliation initiatives.**

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- PM Maliki's developing initiatives on reconciliation may produce a formal balance of power that relies on sectarian divide (possibly partition) backed by the threat of a descent into civil war. Hardly the basis for long-term stability and well short of a liberal democracy. Such a scenario does not have to assume an unacceptable level of Iranian influence over Iraqi politics but it does assume some. Therefore the implications for the coalition presence will need examining in the broader regional context.
- We will also need to make the judgement whether it will be this government or the permanent institutions that deliver stability for Iraq. The first has the opportunity to do so more quickly with its imperfect political compromise, the latter more likely to achieve conditions for lasting stability. Do we have the appetite significantly to increase our support for the institutions – for example the crucial security, energy, and finance Ministries?

**We will of course have to take forward our plans in all these areas – political engagement, development, and military – with a view to making some interesting decisions towards the end of the year. But we should acknowledge that in all the scenarios we can envisage, these decisions and the transition process will become increasingly political – and we may have to be prepared to accept a larger degree of risk.**

I am copying this letter to DOP(I) colleagues and Sir Nigel Sheinwald.

  
DES BROWNE

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