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DCG/MNC-I/Update/09

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MNC-I UPDATE - 16 NOV 06

1. The Transition Bridging Strategy (TBS) has gained considerable momentum in the last week, and has now been briefed by General Casey to General Abizaid. It has been further refined and will be briefed again to the Force Commander and his staff tonight, prior to being issued as a FRAGO to OpOrd 06/03. Central to the plan are a baseline assumption that we and the GoI still have reconcilable versions/visions of a shared Endstate, and a Bottom Line Up Front (BLUF) statement that "the Security Line of Operation is indispensable to mission success, but it cannot, and never was intended to deliver the Endstate on its own". The TBS therefore acknowledges the growing imperative to empower the GoI with the trappings of a sovereign state, including increasing control over the ISF, but does so in a manner that helps sustain the IA as a competent, national organization, but puts constraints on them being hijacked for sectarian purposes.

2. To my mind the key elements of the strategy fall into three categories. Firstly those areas where we Stay the Course. This implies: continuing top-level CF political and military commitment to the future of Iraq; sustaining broadly similar CF force levels and lay-down until the middle of 2007, drawing down quite substantially after that; and broadly extant UNSCR and ROE. Secondly, those areas where we Step Back. This encompasses: the intention to hand over battle space to the Iraqis, particularly in the urban areas, as we transition the divisions to under command IGFC; the guarding of fixed sites and GoI buildings; the prosecution of anti-murder and EJK operations. Parallel to this are the areas where we Step In. Principally, for the Corps, this entails: the selective, but substantial reinforcement of the MiTTs and NPTTs; greater control of infrastructure security and repair; and border security. Although not all a Corps responsibility, it also means accelerating the reform of the structures, mechanisms and processes of the MOD and MOI; and taking steps, including the threat of withdrawing CF support, to ensure the sustainability of the IA logistic capability to prosecute operations. The construct is not one of "one size fits all", nor would Corps look for a big bang solution, although the CG expects commanders to actively push ahead with actioning this plan. Each divisional AO has its own particular circumstances and dynamics. Some will demand the increased size of MiTTs, in order to ensure continued ISF capacity to stay in the fight, other IA units and formations may need no reinforcement, indeed some may lend themselves to the withdrawal of CF support all together.

3. The proof of the pudding, in terms of the potential for success, is in MNF-W's AO, where, on paper, there are two of the weakest IA divisions, the 1st and the 7th. They are short of officers, NCOs and soldiers, their logistic support is paltry, and their life support contracts are dismal. In addition to this, they are largely Shia formations operating in full-

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blooded Sunni-land. Despite all this, West are confident enough to begin handing over battle space to IA battalions in such towns as Fallujah and Ramadi, that hardly classify as by-words for law and order. The key to this paradox is that in the last year the USMC have had to compensate for Iraq military deficiencies by raising the size of their battalion-level MITTs from the mandated 11 personnel to around 25, thereby already acting in line with the proposed Corps-level Commander's Intent. In short, what this model offers us, and the Gol, is the opportunity to transition *with the Iraqis*, and thereby set much better conditions, in due course, to transition *to the Iraqis*. This concept and model, however, is critically dependent upon substantial support from the other Lines of Operation, notably those of Governance and Economics. Hence the BLUF statement that Security cannot deliver on its own. We will need to identify when best formally to bring the Gol in on this plan, although all informal discussion points to their enthusiasm for the idea.

4. Elsewhere in the forest, the news continues to both hearten and discourage. Increasingly hardening sectarian attitudes, due to the bombing campaign in Baghdad and on the Sunni-Shia interfaces, increasing levels of EFPs (30 so far this month, an all-time high), the IDF situation in SE, glacial political progress and the continuing stately dance between Maliki and Muqtada al Sadr. However, the US divisional RIP/TOAs are now complete, the increasing experience and parallel expansion of the IA is a fact, the NP are firmly in the Numeniyah training cycle, progress in important areas of contracting and funding for reconstruction projects goes forward, Maliki is looking to reorganize his cabinet and confront the militias, Gol revenues rise. On the latter point we have to hope that the Government behaves in the manner of one of my ancestors who was described as "becoming so rich, that he was compelled into expenditure". Little of this good fortune has trickled down the generations. The CG is trying to find a "reconciliation" model that more accurately matches the realities on the ground in Iraq. I have suggested that some of our experience in NI may be helpful, particularly ideas such as ceasefires by the main Iraqi armed groups, supporting a parallel political process, prior to fuller reconciliation and a peace plan. In this model we can, at least, identify those who have actively chosen to be outside the law (AGIZ, Rogue JAM etc), and against whom we can "act".

5. The adoption of the TBS has put new life into the outgoing Corps (TOA 14 December). The CG and staff, at the end of a tough year, were looking tired, and a shade disappointed that their tour was looking to end, in their minds, unsatisfactorily. The opportunity to set in place a coherent operational framework for III Corps in 2007 has been welcomed, and this offers a military posture that recognizes the changing political landscape both in Washington and Baghdad. It is not a panacea, and it critically depends on the Gol acting as a proper government. In this regard, I cannot emphasise enough the requirement for political "supporting fires". The violence will continue, and so will CF casualties, but the TBS gives us the opportunity to keep on the front foot, certainly in those areas where we still have the capacity to do so, and for which the military, CF and IA, have responsibility.

Signed on JOCS

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