

VTC RESTRICTED
DECLASSIFIED



0004/02/01

CABINET OFFICE

70 Whitehall London SW1A 2AS

Telephone

Fax

Email:

@cabinet-office.x.gsi.gov.uk

Defence & Overseas Secretariat

George Fergusson

5 January 2006

IRAQ: PRTS

I chaired a London/Baghdad/Basra/PJHQ VTC this morning to take forward discussion on operationalising the PRT concept. The meeting drew on a draft discussion paper on PRTs prepared in theatre over the Christmas period (thanks again to all those involved for their hard work). This paper is being revised overnight for distribution at tomorrow's Iraq Senior Officials (SOG) meeting. This letter seeks briefly to summarise (drawing from the paper and discussion during the VTC): the key elements of the latest proposals for operationalising PRTs in MND(SE); and some of the key questions that remain outstanding and the next steps in relation to those questions.

The PRT proposal

With the US in disarray over PRTs, and following further UK scoping work in theatre, a 4-2-1 approach to PRTs no longer appears to be either a necessary or best solution. There is a fundamental mismatch between: the timelines for military transition in Muthanna and Maysan (assuming that expat civilians can not be deployed in a province in the absence of a permanent UK military presence); the resources available (civilian and military); and the time needed recruit/ train/get operational value from staff posted into a new PRT. The theatre there also recommends that we should seek

DECLASSIFIED

DECLASSIFIED

ministerial agreement to focus our PRT efforts on Basra and Dhi Qar (where we hope to press the Italians to staff the PRT). Baghdad, Basra and Washington judge (although a definitive view is difficult given the fractured US position) that this is sellable to the US.

The VTC also discussed the importance, particularly in the face of US vacillation, of being clear what outcomes the UK would seek to deliver through operationalisation of the PRTs. The PRT paper helpfully defines PRTs' purpose as being to "act as a physical and information focal point for international civilian effort to support each local province government. Even had the PRT initiative not appeared at this stage, UK ministers would want to know what the UK's legacy would be in the South in relation to governance and reconstruction. We could therefore usefully fuse the two by ensuring that any proposal on PRTs made clear to ministers:

- In Maysan and Muthanna - what outcomes we would have achieved by transition and what structures (not UK-led but possibly including some limited support from a regional centre such as the Basra PRT) would be in place to take forward that work in the medium-term;
- In Basra and Dhi Qar - what outcomes we had so far achieved, and what more we would want to achieve using the revised PRT structure to prepare for military transition in due course and to ensure the best possible prospects of governance and reconstruction in the medium-term.

In terms of standing up PRTs, assuming a decision was made to move to a focus on Basra and Dhi Qar, a basic PRT structure could be put in place relatively quickly (e.g. in February). However formally announcing its creation should reasonably be subject to achieving a number of minimum conditions (as described in the PRT paper).

DECLASSIFIED

Outstanding Questions and Next Steps

- The proposed approach to PRTs, necessarily, makes a number of assumptions. Critical among these is the **timing of transition** in Muthanna and Maysan, and the impact this will have on civilian deployments in those provinces. We need to ensure Whitehall has a clear collective understanding of what is planned. ***For initial discussion at the Iraq Senior Officials meeting;***
- It was not yet clear **where the Italians would come down on leading a PRT in Dhi Qar**. We need to push them to take on the Dhi Qar PRT and explain our own thinking (encouraging them to consider their own legacy issues) as quickly as possible. ***FCO to pursue the scope for working level discussions*** in London or Rome in advance of the US/UK/IT trilateral on 19 January;
- **How, and when, to present our revised approach first to Ministers** and subsequently to the US. For ***initial discussion at Iraq Senior Officials with a view to ministerial correspondence*** as quickly as practicable;

There are also a wider range of issues that are being taken forward in parallel with consideration of the fundamental questions above, but which ultimately depend on a view being taken on whether we are now prepared to move on from our initial 4-2-1 approach. These include:

- The practicalities of operational implementation (e.g. command/management arrangements, accommodation, recruitment);
- handling/modifying the US reporting requirements on PRTs and engaging with US-led PRT co-ordination structures in Baghdad; and
- seeking to engage other donors in PRTs (e.g. the Danes have expressed interest and we need to ensure the Japanese have been fully consulted and the scope any contribution fully explored).

~~RESTRICTED~~
DECLASSIFIED

I am copying this letter to those who attended the VTC, William Patey (Baghdad), Sir David Manning (Washington), James Tansley (Basra), Sir Nigel Sheinwald, David Quarrey and Nick Beadle (MOD).

[Signed]

DECLASSIFIED