

DECLASSIFIED
SECRET UK EYES ONLY

J3015/2

28 August 2006

PSO/CDS

Copy to:

CJO
DCDS(C)
CDI
Policy Director

ACDS(Ops)
DCJO(Ops)
SBMA CENTCOM
GOC MND(SE)

DCG MNC-I
DG Op Pol
CDSLO Washington
HMA Baghdad

SBMR-I END OF TOUR REPORT

Summary

1. Hubris and nemesis in the early part of the US campaign, but they now have a firm grip on COIN operations under Casey's leadership. MND(SE) in good shape though complications may arise as UK forces reduce and concentrate on Basra, probably in mid 2007. The immature ISF is being pushed into the lead when it may not be ready; we are playing for high stakes if it fails. The Maliki government is less than a band of brothers, but it's what we've got and it deserves our support. Violence reached a crescendo in July before decisive US intervention; the level of sectarian ambition may be changing as the Shi'a are tempted to think they can win. Casey regards the battle for Baghdad as the battle for Iraq and identifies the period to the end of the year as decisive. The fall out from Lebanon intrudes into Iraq and makes national and regional issues indivisible. Parts of the current campaign show us how future Global Counter Terrorist (GCT) operations might look.

2. This report will cover the major institutions involved in the Iraqi campaign, the current situation and a projection into the near future, and the pointers for Global Counter Terrorism which operations in Iraq have provided.

3. The **US Armed Forces** conducted a dazzling conventional campaign in early 2003 and then promptly abandoned the doctrine which had brought them victory. Slick transitional procedures created an irresistible tempo throughout the conflict phase, but when the operation was required to transition between rather than within phases it ground to a halt and it is this failure to adapt tactical doctrine to operational level usage that is the main cause of the protracted campaign we are fighting today. As a result of the initial hiatus, an enemy completely shattered by the speed and elegance of conventional manoeuvre was able to regain confidence by the conduct of an insurgent campaign to which US forces had no

DECLASSIFIED

DECLASSIFIED
SECRET UK EYES ONLY

immediate response. When they did respond, they turned to what they knew best and so applied the techniques of high intensity warfare to a low intensity environment; this served only to encourage the insurgency by concentrating overwhelming and frequently less than discriminate force against elusive targets concealed within the Iraqi community. This self-evident doctrinal mismatch provoked the sort of critical self-examination at which US forces have historically excelled and marks the point at which they began to get COIN operations. They have subsequently covered an enormous amount of ground, and now possess a competence at high register COIN which is second to none; certainly we can no longer claim to be in sole possession of the philosopher's stone of this form of warfare. In many ways I suspect US warfare practitioners have outstripped their doctrine and training centres, with deep specialists in micro-financing, oil infrastructure and commercial legislation giving the lie to the pre-invasion slogan: "we don't do nation building". They will eventually reconcile practice with theory and it will be well worth reading when they do. In the large-scale application of the instruments of national power, particularly military and political engagement simultaneously applied with a judicious and responsive cheque book in intimate support, they leave us for dead.

4. Lest this seem like a eulogy to the American profession of arms, this process of self-revelation has only been necessary because of the initial failure of intellectual curiosity to look beyond the combat phase and they are yet to entirely climb out of the hole they dug at that point. That said, Casey brings to this new sureness of touch a Churchillian stamina and a military imagination which is quick and subtle enough to stay ahead of the game, most of the time. He is not irreplaceable but he is emblematic, and it is difficult to imagine the American people, let alone the US Administration, easily contemplating anyone else in charge. In order for him to leave, I suspect a substantial change in the campaign will need to occur – maybe provincial elections or the corps/force amalgamation – and, in his case, the relief of a single individual may have become conditions based.

5. In Basra, **MND(SE)** is commanded vigorously and to the entire satisfaction of Casey and Chiarelli. Richard Shirreff's intent for Op Salamanca is completely congruent with the Baghdad Security Plan and may provide a model for the security plan franchise which the corps commander intends to apply progressively to the remainder of the nine key cities, once Baghdad is secure. In the medium term, we should be confident of PIC in Maysan later this year and the consolidation of a brigade-sized force in Basra by mid 2007. This, however, may mark the beginning of the most difficult phase of the campaign as we will be required to maintain operational overwatch across a large area, for which we will have little tactical feel, for an unspecified period and against an uncertain political backdrop. At the same time, we will have to deliver a recalcitrant Basra Province to PIC with a limited force confronting, potentially, a series of concurrent liabilities within the extended AOR. It will be for my successor and the CJO to establish

DECLASSIFIED
SECRET UK EYES ONLY

DECLASSIFIED
SECRET UK EYES ONLY

some synchronicity with US staffs on this, the mature phase and endstate of the campaign.

6. The key indices of the development of the **Iraqi Security Forces (ISF)** are regularly reported and show steady progress. There are some structural problems which, in the IA, will require an additional 52,000 soldiers to be trained, and, in the IPS, will require the process of internal reform to be seen through. But these are regarded as running repairs to structures which are fundamentally sound in design and institutionally well-conceived. Given this positive background, the successive IA battalions which have disintegrated when placed under orders or actually deployed to operations outside their divisional area is disappointing. Disappointing, but probably not surprising. The month on month increase of numbers trained conceals organisations which remain very immature. The physical component of fighting power may be well established by an industrial scale process of training and equipping, but the moral and conceptual components lag some way behind. The result is a rather adolescent structure where the body has grown faster than the brain has the maturity to direct, or the sinews have the strength to sustain. Seen from MNSTC-I, this is entirely predictable at the 18 month point of a three year process and Dempsey would assert that the ISF project is on track, so long as too much is not asked of it too soon. I have every sympathy for this view, but it will be tested over the coming months as Iraqi forces are fed into Baghdad and the IGFC assumes progressive tactical control of the IA fielded formations. This will lead to a series of transitions to an Iraqi lead which are central to the prosecution of the campaign. If the precocious ISF can pull it off, the campaign will have negotiated a tricky period and the IA, in particular, will have firmly established its credentials as a national institution. But the stakes are high and failure would have implications for campaign progress, the place of the ISF in Iraqi society and the authority of the Maliki government. It is difficult to predict the outcome and the only thing I can be entirely confident of is that these events will mark decisive points in the campaign.

7. The **Government of Iraq (GOI)** has felt its way through three months in power, but has yet to impose a clear impression on public life. Indeed, the title is something of a misnomer, implying as it does a body unified by common purpose and animated by an agreed manifesto. More accurately, it is an accommodation of political factions held together by access to power and little else.

DECLASSIFIED
SECRET UK EYES ONLY

There is also a view that the intense focus on the political process (three elections in a year; drafting a constitution in a few months) has entirely absorbed the energy of the political elite over the last year. This has made the competition for power, rather than the application of power, the key outcome within the political arena and the impending provincial elections and constitutional referendum will only compound this point. The overall impression can therefore easily be of a lash-up government drifting in power while the political sharks circle in the water around it.

8. But this does Maliki, in particular, less than justice. He has led his loose affiliation of ministers with more purpose and vigour than we could reasonably have expected. His recent rejection of Casey's military advice also reveals some steel beneath his rather pre-occupied public persona. He certainly rose in Casey's estimation by making a judgment which placed political gain above military utility: exactly the calculation required, and expected, by military commanders of political leaders. There is also a caucus of ministers around him, including Rubai'e, Abdul Qader and the increasingly impressive Boulani, that looks like it means business. The admirable Barham Saleh continues to play a blinder in support and the avuncular Talibani has perfected his Father of the Nation act. But above all, the fall of this government would return us to the political paralysis of the early months of this year, where power seeped away from the central institutions of the state towards the street and the profoundly undemocratic militias that occupy it. In addition, what guarantee is there that this immature and fractious political society could come up with anything better? Our first political objective must therefore be the preservation of the Maliki government in power and all instruments of Coalition power should be deployed in support of that aim.

9 Maliki also needs to help himself, and he could start by addressing the legislation which will define the final stages of the constitutional process. The issues which the existing constitution kicked into the long grass for subsequent review are the most divisive in Iraqi politics and have the capacity to bring about sectarian political confrontation; with that comes the risk of another round of inter-confessional violence. So there are good reasons to be circumspect, particularly for a Prime Minister yet to feel entirely secure in office and operating within a political system with no proven record of successful legislation on complex issues. But, equally, there are compelling reasons to push on and perhaps the absence of a political narrative which defines Maliki's vision and

drags Iraq into the next stage of its political development is the strongest. The key issues will have to be taken on at some stage and, in the absence of strong political leadership from the centre, it

He will certainly be pressed to get on with it by Casey and Khalilzad, and the ambassador's eight point unified state manifesto¹ identifies the key issues to be addressed by the constitutional review committee, for subsequently ratification by referendum. In Casey's design, the referendum should coincide with provincial elections, giving a convenient job lot of political process next spring.

10. This establishes a very ambitious timetable, but it may give a glimpse of something more: an urgency which owes as much to US as to Iraqi politics. The recurring theme which emerges from this brief review of both the ISF and the Iraqi political process is an American ambition to test the capacity of immature Iraqi institutions by pushing them aggressively forward. This is easy enough to explain – momentum along the security and governance lines of operation will have the mutually sustaining effect which will deliver the campaign plan; in turn, this gives the Coalition its ticket out of Iraq. It is also necessary if the internal chronology of the original 2+2 year campaign design is to be met. But, in addition, it may reflect a lack of certainty at the grand and military strategic levels of US planning. In grand strategic terms, there is no guarantee of US policy beyond the two years of the current presidential term; while in military strategic terms, there is no guarantee of the congressional funding which sustains the campaign in Iraq beyond the beginning of next year. So best to push on, while the going is good. This is a simplistic paraphrase of a complex equation; it also implies that the design of the campaign is influenced by more than its internal military logic, which I am sure Casey would refute. However, both he and Khalilzad are sophisticated operators with backgrounds inside the beltway, and I suspect that their time horizons take into account events in both Washington and Baghdad.

11. In order to catch the **current situation**, I will trace developments in the Sunni and Shi'a communities over the recent period of increasing sectarian violence, as well as the response from Coalition and Iraqi forces. Within the Sunni community, we have found the relationship between insurgency and terrorism² profoundly confusing. It was easy enough to track the early resistance and then the superimposition of terrorist violence on top of it; far more difficult to establish where the changing alliances and enmities between the two existed.

¹ Reconciliation, Militias, Fighting Terrorism, Federalism, Constitutional Review, Hydrocarbon Law, Kirkuk and Coalition Roadmap.

² For the purposes of this report, the insurgency (or resistance) is defined as a nationalist response to the Coalition invasion which uses violence as a means to the end of finding an accommodation with the new political reality in Iraq. Terrorism is defined as a response by trans-national groups, primarily AQ, to an opportunity to exploit chaos which uses nihilistic violence in pursuit of global aims and is unbiddable by any political process.

This relationship spawned a cottage industry as we tried to devise strategies of how and where to drive a wedge to keep the two separate, deal with the insurgency and defeat terrorism in detail. And, indeed, it looked at one stage that it might work, as successive groups and individuals came forward, claiming to represent the resistance and seeking a way out of what looked like an increasingly futile fight. In parallel to this, AQI launched the series of provocations which caught everyone's attention with the Samarra bombing and continued with a steady drumbeat of atrocities designed to precipitate a Shi'a response, intended to culminate in civil war. The success of this campaign can be measured by the emergence of the Shi'a death squads and the exponential rise in sectarian killings for which they have been responsible. This in turn led to a situation where the previous divisions between insurgent and terrorist became increasingly less relevant, as both were confronted by what began to look to them like a war of confessional survival. Unsurprisingly at this point, engagement with the resistance entirely dried up and at least part of AQI began to look increasingly like a Sunni nationalist organisation³. The high point of sectarian violence in July therefore found the insurgency and AQI unified in defence of the Sunni community.

12. In the Shi'a community a sense of manifest sectarian destiny was surprisingly slow to take root. A sense of "our time" was obvious early on, but it was only after the AQI provocations started that this developed from a broad political ambition and into an escalating campaign of violence. To some extent it was encouraged by the asymmetric application of US military force against Sunni terrorism, with no equivalent impact on the Shi'a death squads. As the relentless TF 24 campaign against AQI continued, it had the effect of partially neutralising the prime offensive arm of the Sunni community at the same time as the Shi'a death squads were beginning to find their range. In turn, this led to a Shi'a attempt to exploit a relative advantage and try to dominate the sectarian battlefield.

13. This crescendo of violence through the early summer was reported as evidence of civil war in the media and forced Casey to concentrate force in Baghdad in order to prop up, and then re-vivify, what had become the moribund Baghdad Security Plan. It was only this timely intervention of US combat power which prevented a sectarian showdown in Baghdad. It has become conventional wisdom to refer to recent violence as a competition for the wealth and power of Iraq. But this is only a partial explanation of recent events which, unchecked, had the potential to become a contest *for the monopoly* of wealth and power, with the Shi'a tempted to make the calculation that the winner could take all. For the time being, US forces are holding the ring, but any resolution of this sectarian

³ There is a view that the previously monolithic AQI has now split into two: the first a traditional Salafist extremist organisation which owes its allegiance to AQ senior leadership and is dedicated to fighting the West wherever possible; the second an Iraqi based Sunni group which has found common cause in adversity with the resistance.

confrontation has probably only been deferred. Taking all this together, it is unsurprising that Casey regards the battle for Baghdad as the battle for Iraq.

14. However improbable it may sound, Baghdad is virtually a moated city. The existing canal system provides a peripheral boundary which will be improved by a series of blocks to form an 88 kilometre obstacle belt. This will meet the requirement to prevent infiltration into the city while the Baghdad Security Plan proceeds and I have no doubt that, under US stewardship, the Plan will succeed. But American competence is not in question and the real issue is whether the ISF can accept, and sustain, an Iraqi lead for Baghdad security. If they can, then it is possible to see the most virtuous of circles coming into play with a US led operation on the main effort handed to competent Iraqi military leadership; with further large-scale sectarian violence avoided and Maliki consolidated in power as a result. It would also set the stage for the decisive confrontation with JAM in Sadr City, [redacted]

[redacted] Alternatively, and again from a basis of strength, he could negotiate concessions from the Sadrists and avoid anything beyond the contingent threat of military action. However if the ISF cannot accept the baton, then Casey will have to consider either the running on of 15 US brigades (5 above the planned total and a task which would be a salutary test of the US force generational capacity, [redacted] or allow the benefits of the Baghdad Security Plan to slip through Iraqi fingers. This would re-open sectarian conflict, perhaps with re-defined monopoly objectives, retard the development of the ISF and fatally damage the Maliki government. It could also lead to a reassessment of US strategic objectives. The outcome will unfold after Eid al Fitr and will represent a defining moment in the conduct of the campaign.

15. Sunni-Shi'a confrontation is an emerging theme in regional as well as national politics. [redacted]

[redacted] and raised the fears of what King Abdullah of Jordan has described as the Shi'a Crescent which runs from Lebanon, through a compliant Syria and on to Iran; an area containing the bulk of the 150 million Shi'a living in the region. This, of course, now includes Iraq as an Arab nation under Shi'a leadership, a situation with few precedents in the region. The position and orientation of Iraq is vital to all sides. If what King Abdullah also describes as a "coalition of moderate Arab states" (aka: the Sunni) can seduce Iraq then there is an automatic buttress to Iranian expansion. If, on the other hand, Iraq turns towards Iran as part of what has been described in academic circles as an "historic Shiite revival"⁴, it will confirm Iran as a regional power; a status which may require entirely different handling by the international community. My greatest fear is that the confessional tensions within Iraq become conflated into a wider regional confrontation, and that a return to large-scale sectarian violence has implications within and beyond the boundaries of Iraq. Within Iraq, it could imply the break-up of the unitary state into its constituent parts, which would be disastrous. [redacted]

⁴ Vali Nasr, *When the Shiites Rise* (Foreign Affairs, July/August 2006)

DECLASSIFIED
SECRET UK EYES ONLY

... a southern Shi'a confederacy would advance the western border of Iran by several hundred kilometres, as seen from Riyadh or Kuwait City; and, Anbar would look like available strategic depth, as seen from Amman or Damascus. The disintegration of Iraq could establish the start lines for regional conflict.

16. My final point is preparation for the **War after Next**. At the present time we are part of Coalitions fighting conventional COIN campaigns within the defined international boundaries of Iraq and Afghanistan. This is unlikely to be the shape of the enduring Global Counter Terrorist (GCT) operations which will continue after the geographically specific campaigns are complete. The outcomes in Iraq and Afghanistan will go a long way to define how much or how little we want of the future fight, and with which partners. Leaving aside the level of inalienable responsibility we wish to accept, it is possible to glimpse what the techniques of future GCT might look like today, in Iraq.

... The Task Force also illustrates some of the tensions of superimposing a trans-regional JOA on an existing regional command structure and the difficulties of retaining political access and compliance across a politically diverse area. While we consider our strategic position, we may wish to note the tactical, procedural and operational level challenges we might have to face in the future.

R A Fry
Lt Gen
SBMR-I

9 of 9
DECLASSIFIED
SECRET UK EYES ONLY