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From: Nigel Sheinwald
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PRIME MINISTER

cc: Jonathan Powell
Ivan Rogers
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IRAQ: STRATEGY

You asked for a note setting out a strategy for dealing with the range of problems we face in Iraq.

The last week has seen the most serious challenge to the coalition since the main conflict; and has shown the fragility of our efforts on both the political and security fronts.

The main symptoms have been:

- - lack of coordination with coalition partners; inadequate risk management with the result that the Americans were handling two major sets of opponents simultaneously at an extremely sensitive time (the Arba'in Festival);
- Disproportionate US military tactics - what they did in Fallujah looked on Iraqi TV screens
- Loss of support in the IGC, and among local political leaders;
- A good number of the recently recruited police and other Iraqi security personnel evaporated as the trouble began;
- Criticism of the 1 July deadline and lack of clarity over the role of the UN (and an increasingly difficult environment for the UN to operate in);
- Apocalyptic media treatment.

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The situation today is marginally better (see attached telegram). The ceasefire in Fallujah is shaky but holding. Sunni IGC members, assisted by local leaders, are negotiating with the insurgents and making some progress (telegram attached). Meanwhile intermediaries are, with the agreement of the IGC and Bremer, putting out feelers to Moqtada al-Sadr (MAS) to try to find a way to restore coalition control in Najaf and other areas in which the Mahdi army are active without the Americans having to capture MAS himself. Over Iraq as a whole, there is less fighting, though that is a relative judgement – it is still more intense than, say, a month ago. We remain vulnerable to another major act of terrorism.

We need a comprehensive strategy to deal with the present situation. I see the following elements:

- (i) Military: we are starting to see, and need to entrench, a more measured US military approach.

Above all, we must avoid fighting simultaneously on two fronts. We cannot afford to lose the consent of the majority Shia population. The role played by the UK forces in the south east therefore has a strategic value. Following this logic, we should aim to settle the MAS problem first – he does not have significant support, but the moderates will not publicly back the US and condemn him. So our strategy for dealing with MAS should be a combination of military operations around the country to regain control of buildings occupied by the Madhi army, close down MAS offices and so on, and a political effort to persuade him to surrender Najaf in some sort of overall deal. This would mean MAS accepting a subsequent, but perhaps delayed Iraqi trial, or (less likely at present) exile in Iran; and disbanding the Mahdi army.

The US needs to make an effort to re-cement the coalition. There have been some strains with us, but also with others more averse to offensive operations. You heard Berlusconi's comments on Saturday. The Americans are planning a conference of contributors, and we need to help them to be more transparent.

- (ii) Iraqisation: we need to revisit this and our old friend de-Ba'athification. The key to Fallujah and Najaf will be the insertion of Iraqi forces, rather than a heavy and overt American presence on the streets. But this is not

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straightforward given the lack of capacity of the newly formed Iraqi forces. So we will need a new and quick effort to identify officers to provide operational leadership. Since many will be Sunni, this will be difficult for the IGC and will take some time.

- (iii) Inclusiveness: the coalition needs to involve the IGC and local sheikhs in resolving these problems. Above all we cannot afford to lose the IGC. They are the only political interlocutors we have, and we need them if, with the UN, we are to construct credible interim political structures between 1 July and the elections at the end of January 2005.
- (iv) Deal with the causes: there are many deep sources of discontent, and we cannot hope to deal with all of them. On both the Shia and Sunni sides, we need programmes which (a) increase jobs, particularly for the young and (b) increase personal security. Neither is easy in the present situation, but we will need a new push by the coalition, working with local leaderships. With the Sunni too we need to show that they can have a bigger stake in the political process. All this needs to be re-packaged and explained again to the Iraqi population.
- (v) The political future: this needs to be set out more clearly: elections at the end of January, prepared by the UN; interim government structures in place by 1 July when we hand over sovereignty, with the UN again playing a key advisory role; and better consultation on how to get there. Brahimi will leave Iraq in mid-week. He is developing a package which we and the Americans are encouraging him to unveil at least in general terms before his departure, in order to show that progress is being made.

First, he has some proposals on releasing detainees, de-Ba'athification and recalling army officers which are consistent with other ideas in play (see above) but perhaps betray his Sunni leanings too obviously. On the political side, the basic Brahimi concept seems good - a Shia Prime Minister chairing a technocrat cabinet, reporting to a three-person Presidency; a Consultative Council of maybe 100 persons overseeing at least part of the Government's programme; and a major national Conference to select the Consultative Council. There is much to debate- Brahimi wants the Conference to meet after 1 July (this does not make much sense); and he sees the Council active only in economic areas of government, with the Cabinet working mainly to the three-person

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Presidency - this looks insufficiently accountable even allowing for the makeshift nature of these institutions.

But the key point is that we are fleshing out the details of the interim system of government, with full elections to look forward to next year.

- (vi) UN role: we need to clarify and promote the UN role: electoral support and political advice on the ground now; new UNSCR in May/June; clear UN coordinating and political role from 1 July. You will be able to discuss this with Annan.
- (vii) The deadline: we must stick to the deadline of 1 July, but need to make a better job of explaining ourselves. The date is right because it remains important to make an early transfer of sovereignty to the Iraqis, which they themselves want. We would face problems in maintaining the necessary level of consent on a more relaxed timetable. At the same time the US and UK will not quit, but will continue to provide security and economic and practical help for a long time to come.
- (viii) Communication: if we can agree a strategy like this, Bremer and the IGC should promulgate it in a media offensive in Iraq.

We need to emerge from your meeting with Bush on Friday with the message that you have an agreed, comprehensive strategy covering the handling of the immediate crisis, Iraq's political future leading to elections in January, and the role of the UN.

It would be helpful to have your thoughts on the approach sketched out above. I will need to discuss objectives for Friday's discussion with Condi.

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