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10 DOWNING STREET
LONDON SW1A 2AA
www.pm.gov.uk

From the Private Secretary

22 May 2007

Dear Ian,

IRAQ: MEETING WITH CHIEF OF THE GENERAL STAFF

The Prime Minister met General Sir Richard Dannatt at 10 Downing Street yesterday.

The Prime Minister began by welcoming the impressive work that British troops were doing. He had found morale and determination high during his conversations with troops in Basra.

They discussed the situation in Iraq, with CGS noting the need for time properly to test the effectiveness of the Baghdad Security Plan. On Basra, CGS described the underlying competition as essentially intra-Shia, and motivated by the desire for financial gain, rather than ideology. He set out the likely effect of PIC and withdrawal from Basra Palace on our ability to operate over the medium to long term. He argued that, although there would remain an important training and mentoring role in Iraq, there was a robust case for the redeployment of forces to Afghanistan in the medium term.

The Prime Minister agreed that we would have to take close account of the situation on the ground, and remain only so long as there was real utility in our doing so. He noted, however, that we would have to be very careful about potentially leaving, or appearing to leave, the field open to the Iranians.

The Prime Minister noted also the importance of getting the political situation in Basra right, for example by setting out a path to provincial elections and therefore greater political stability. He thought that the US accepted that Basra was a different case to Baghdad, but would also worry about the Iranian situation in the South. To be able to judge that we were succeeding, we needed to secure a wider political deal in the country, which showed that Iraq was uniting. That would make it easier for both ourselves and the US to step back, confident that the Iraqis could deal with the security situation themselves.

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CGS agreed that it was important to ensure that we, and the British army in particular, came out with our reputation intact, and that this would require a perception of strategic success in the South.

CGS noted the very positive feeling within the army on the mission in Afghanistan. There was a clear belief that the challenge of the Taliban could be met and overcome. Both Afghanistan and Iraq were understood by the army to be key aspects of the battle against radical Islamism.

I am copying this letter to Sir Gus O'Donnell, Sir Richard Mottram, Margaret Aldred and Tim Dowse (Cabinet Office), Stephen Hickey (FCO), Howard Taylor (DFID), James Bowler (HMT), Sir David Manning (Washington), Dominic Asquith and Lt-Gen Graeme Lamb (Baghdad), and Richard Jones and Maj-Gen Jonathan Shaw (Basra).

Yours,



NICK BANNER

Ian Forber, MOD

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