

GS/7/6/1/2/4 (CGS)

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SBMR-I CinC ACGS

CGS VISIT TO IRAQ 5-7 SEP 07

1. I have just returned from a short visit to Basra and Baghdad, which coming so soon after being in Washington, has reinforced the growing, albeit still modest, sense of optimism about the strategic opportunities that are now potentially being presented to the Coalition and specifically our own forces in South East Iraq.
2. This developing sense of optimism pervades through both MNF-I and MNC-I and has been bred by the joint factors of the surge, the Sunni engagement and the Sadr ceasefire. I will try to summarise what became apparent about each of these factors.
3. I have been as sceptical as many about the potential for success of the surge strategy, but at a low level the force levels in Baghdad are beginning to tip the balance. The 65,000 MNF troops deployed into a few districts has given the locals the confidence to engage with the Coalition and reconstruction has followed close behind from the PRTs – Op SINBAD on a massive scale. Ray Odierno's estimate is that 65% of the city is now firmly under control. I could see the success of the surge for myself, when I was flown forward to the West Rashid District to visit a Company Task Force of 1-28 Battalion, 4 BCT. They were deployed in a Joint Security Station with the INA, next to the IPS. The Battalion Task Force was now covering an area that a few months earlier had only been covered by a weakened infantry company. I was very impressed by their depth of understanding of their environment, and the manner in which they were tackling the task – the Iraqi forces I saw on the ground were a quantum leap from the Army of only two years ago, albeit underpinned by their US mentors. For an area that was one of the most violent in Baghdad - astride a key sectarian divide - the success was staggering: from a high of 71 IED attacks in May, the figure had dropped to only 16 in August; combined attacks dropped from a high of 368 in May progressively down to only 88 in August. Although I am sometimes wary of the US obsession with statistics, these facts are a stark illustration of change – the question is how sustainable are they?
4. The long term success really has to be linked to both the Sunni engagement and the development of clearer thinking on the Shia Strategy. Has the surge bought enough time for the political process? The Sunni

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engagement has obviously reaped huge benefits against AQ-I and the strategic impact of their set backs should not be underestimated. The Sunni groupings are obviously looking now to using their current stance to strengthen their position against JAM. The key question is how long has the Coalition got before the Sunni tribes lose patience and begin to turn against the Coalition once more? The US view of Shia engagement is also beginning to shift as the opportunity presented by the, probably unintended, Sadr ceasefire has become obvious. Ray Odierno has fully understood that they must now press forward with much wider accommodation with JAM after the realisation that the more radical elements can be isolated through government action.

5. All of this tailors into the developing US thinking on the longer term strategy. The Petraeus/Crocker report aside, the wider thinking is now turning to measuring the length of the Coalition "half life" in terms of how long they are seen as the guarantors of security. The long term regional policy is now the start point for their thinking and they will work backwards from this point. This presents some opportunities for shaping their views. Ray Odierno described their long term posture as being increasingly moving to HQ structures such as might maintain Key Leadership Engagement, whilst enhancing support for the ISF, including the use of enablers and sustaining a reintervention force. The model they use is Mosul that has already reduced from a Division in 2003 to a single Battalion today. It also means that they are looking to what is happening in Basra with interest rather than distrust, for by their own admission, if it works then it may present a model for the future basis of a long term strategy. What the US do next in Anbar is likely to be informed significantly by what we are doing in Basra.

6. Turning to Basra, I found that our own tactical thinking was beginning to reflect that in Baghdad – I found that we had far more in common than differences despite the best efforts of some of the US staff to confuse the situation. The situation in Basra is obviously tentatively quiet and the "Mohan Effect" appears to be delivering a form of security that may very well be sustainable. This sustainability, however, will only be possible if we now begin to deliver some results on the ground in terms of reconstruction and development. This effort cannot be delivered by the Army – the FCO and DfID must now be prepared to rapidly increase their overall effort, not draw it down. The Consul General was honest about the pressure from London to reduce numbers and the threat to his own position – this surely is counter intuitive, now is the time that these departments must be increasing their presence and contribution. Equally, unless there are the funds to produce effective and sustainable projects with quick results then we risk sliding back to conditions of instability.

7. It is my view that we must work on the assumption that the Mohan Effect is going to deliver results in the medium term and start to base our future thinking on this fact. However, we do need a Plan B for deciding what we would want to or be capable of doing should consent for our wider presence fail. The opportunities for our future strategy in Southern Iraq are

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now emerging and I believe it tailors exactly to the direction that the national campaign is taking. I would like to offer my observations for the direction I believe that we should be taking – conscious, of course, that I have no idea what the political direction will eventually be. I offer these comments in the context that David Petraeus is not willing to speculate beyond mid-2008 and that the current Campaign Plan takes mid-2009 as its objective date.

8. We probably now have a very narrow window of opportunity to reinforce the success that has been achieved on the ground, but we must not become the victims of that success by believing that because it is quiet that we have done all we can – the emphasis must now shift away from the military line of operation. Graham Binns's thinking is now beginning to move towards shaping towards the effects of Military Assistance and Reconstruction and Development – I sense that these are the right terms for us to start using. Specifically the effects we probably need to be achieving would be a command and control structure that would enable both military support and economic development; the continued mentoring of the ISF, but with an increasing focus on supporting through the use of enablers: Offensive Support, ISTAR, planning support; continued leadership engagement and intelligence gathering for our own situational awareness; and support to the political and economic development of Southern Iraq. Perhaps it is even time to consider whether we should be pushing the FCO or DFID into a more leading role? On the task of reintervention, I sense that there is the potential for great confusion about what we actually mean by this widely used term. I believe that it is unrealistic to think that we could reintervene in Basra without considerable cost, indeed to do so would be a massive retrograde step in campaign terms. The focus should be perhaps to enable ISF reintervention in the city with the Coalition enabling this task. If the ISF are unable to succeed, there is a highly efficient – and highly effective – Corps Reserve in the form of the Stryker Brigade that we must also bear in mind. If this is the direction that we would like to take, then I believe that there is an opportunity to move to a new mission during the course of the 4 Armd Bde tour over the winter in resetting the force. Reintervention would become either an Iraqi or US task and our residual focus for a time-limited period would be on capacity-building within the ISF and the wider Basra economy.

9. From an Army perspective, if this were to be the direction we take then a possible force structure might start to become slightly clearer. The US – both in Washington and Baghdad – are firmly of the view that we should provide a two star HQ as a focus – and, if all are being honest, as an important flag on the map. I think that this would be sustainable, but only from an ad hoc commander and staff rather than from one of our formed Divisions, and the opportunity for this transition would be either during HQ 3 (UK) Div's or HQ AMPHIBFOR's tour in the course of 2008. I would be very much against using a brigade HQ in this role, the armoured and mechanized one star HQs must be one of our earliest savings back into contingency. I also would agree that we could sustain a suitably tailored Task Force structure under a Battlegroup HQ that would be able to conduct force protection, convoy support, ISF mentoring and the enabling of ISF operations. I think

that we also need to be prepared to take a fresh and hard look at exactly what enabling forces will be required for this smaller force and where it is based – for example could we reduce the medical support to Role 2+ and then rely on the US or Kuwaiti medical system? To be specific I see our deployed footprint on the ground in MND SE being in the 1000-1500 bracket, which combined with other UK forces in the wider JOA would represent our ongoing contribution to the Coalition in Iraq.

10. These force structures, size and tasks chime exactly with not only those mooted by Graham Binns, but also by Ray Odierno. Whatever the final force structure and size we need to start with a clean sheet of paper and look forward to any long term commitment and work backwards. It may be that within a few months we will need a very different force structure to that which we have deployed now. What we cannot do is simply salami slice our current forces. The opportunity for any changes to structure must be over the winter of 2007/08. 4 Armd Bde should train at the current size but be prepared to deploy with 3 + 12, at about 5000, and we must look at this as the opportunity to drop to any longer term structure during this tour. I am keen that we do not subsequently deploy much of 7 Armd Bde for, what would be, their third rotation of Iraq. Whatever happens we must keep the deployed force to the absolute minimum required to achieve the effect. The new Task Force, post the 4 Armd Bde deployment, must be function-oriented, and built up from that premise, not just a slimmed down version of the status quo.

11. Any changes are, of course, closely related to the timing of PIC in Basra. I made the point very widely in Baghdad that if the decision on PIC were to be made within the next few weeks then it would give the maximum amount of flexibility. Ray Odierno was very supportive and stated that he had already made the recommendation for PIC in November. David Petraeus was not going to take any decisions prior to his report, but his understanding was that this should be entirely achievable, and therefore something that the Prime Minister could either announce, or at least comment on, when he addresses Parliament next month.

12. I know that there have been a number of options considered for future basing and for my own view I think the COB, but with a greatly reduced footprint, is our only feasible option. While we are still conducting key leadership engagement, we have to be able to travel to work and Tallil will be just too far away to allow situational awareness and support to the other lines of operation. If the Airport is to be made fully operational and made into a wider zone of economic development, it would be the natural location. If it is to be the main site, then we must speed up the timings of the reduced amount of Tier 3 hardened accommodation that would be required – 2009 is just too high a risk, and morally unacceptable.

13. At a tactical level, I spent time with 1 Mech Bde, including 1 RHA – in all their tasks – and the 4 RIFLES BG. 4 RIFLES are buoyant after their return from Basra Palace and their morale is extremely high – they know that they have achieved great things and are positive about having created the

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conditions for the Mohan Effect to take shape. There was certainly no talk of defeat, in fact it was extremely heartening to see the strong rejection of any talk about them being the first troops to go home, they want to go back into the field again at the earliest opportunity. They were concerned about some of the adverse coverage in the press, but were more concerned that they were not going to be recognised by the military. There is a discrepancy in the distribution of honours and awards between the two theatres that is seen by them as a lack of understanding of their actions, and I know that CJO is on the case to bring this back into balance.

14. In summary, I found a campaign that is at a major crossroads and facing a narrow window of opportunity. The opportunities are time sensitive – we must be seen to be reducing our forces, we must be prepared to engage with all parties and we must follow up military operations with effective political and economic development. We must base our thinking on the fact that we only have a limited amount of time to change tack before the tentative consent for our presence in Basra and Sunni areas before we out stay our welcome once more. I would also like to see any staffing of any plans to be as rapid as possible to allow the force generation process to be as agile as possible. I am conscious that we have not yet received any political direction, but from an Army viewpoint I can see a definite way forward on the ground in Iraq, consistent with any plans for greater investment in Afghanistan and in a modest return to contingency.



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