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NR
We discussed with the PM.
You are writing out.

From: Nigel Sheinwald

Date: 5 January 2007

PRIME MINISTER

cc: Jonathan Powell
Liz Lloyd
Ruth Turner
David Hill
Antony Phillipson
Nick Banner
Kate Gross

IRAQ: WEEKLY UPDATE

I have done a separate note (attached) for your conversation this evening with President Bush. This gives the latest on the US Review.

We need to decide how to handle the UK reaction to Bush's speech, expected on Wednesday (but could slip). We expect pressure for a major statement of UK policy at that time. Ruth, Kate and I believe there would be value in your offering to make a Parliamentary statement about Iraq and wider Middle East policy. The best timing might be Monday 15 January (ahead of your press conference on the following day). The alternative would be to do something immediately, but (a) this might look panicky, (b) would disrupt your preparations for the defence lecture and (c) would not give us much time to gauge the right response, given that Bush will only be speaking the day before.

If your statement was on 15 January, we would then give any preliminary comments on Thursday, by Tom at lobby and by Margaret and Des who are appearing before the House Foreign Affairs and Defence Committees on Thursday afternoon.

Grateful for your views. We can discuss on Monday morning.

I attach (for you only) the weekly intelligence update.

I also attach a note on Basra. In the time available, the MoD have not been able to give much information on how successful Operation Sinbad has been in holding the ground they have cleared, but see Paragraph 3 of the note, which

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suggests a pretty patchy picture. The MoD are putting a positive gloss on Operation Sinbad because they are desperate to get down to 4,500 by May/June for Afghan reasons. I asked them at my Whitehall Strategy Group meeting today to be clearer about the conditions which would need to be met for security transition to take place. This is a mixture of the security situation on the ground and the level of capability of Iraqi Army and Police forces.

The US decision to put extra combat forces into Baghdad could have repercussions in Basra. If, for example, there are major operations in Sadr City, the JAM will react badly in Baghdad and possibly in Basra. This could lead to a deterioration in the security situation in Basra just as we are trying to re-posture. It could at the very least delay our plans. This is one of the reasons why the UK Chiefs of Staff are so nervous about US plans, but it is not the only one: their main concern is that this surge will simply be a re-run of the first two phases of the Baghdad security plan.

You will need to agree with Des the right public handling strategy for our decisions on Basra. There will need to be an assessment after the last pulse of Sinbad, which should enable decisions to be taken and an announcement made in February (but probably not before). We need to show that our re-posturing is based on the success of Sinbad rather than because we have set an artificial timetable. Des will write to you on around 15 January.

Major General Shirreff has written to you with his ideas for a Joint Inter-Agency Task Force in Basra, led by himself/his successor. I have discussed this with Whitehall colleagues. Shirreff's views represent his frustration, shared by the MoD, that the civilian reconstruction effort is uneven. We all agree that we need to make sure that we have an effectively led Basra operation for the next year (at least). Co-location of everyone (Army, Consul General, Provincial Reconstruction Team) at the Basra Air Station will help enormously, from the beginning of February. We need all three to meet regularly.

I have asked the Departments concerned, led by the Post Conflict Reconstruction Unit, to put their heads together and come up with the right structure. The balance of opinion at present is that it should be civilian led, with strong military input and follow-up.

We will come back to you with advice.

~~Put Shinnett in
charge - the Army
get things done~~

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I should mention that both DfID and the FCO are very fed up with Shirreff's disparaging comments about the civilian effort. The MoD think that there is a personal element in this, and that his relationship with Ros Marsden is not good. But the fact is that there have been constant problems between the military and civilian people in Basra from the start. We must make a last effort to get a joined-up operation.

I also attach an MoD note on **ISF capability**. As have other such documents, this presents a mixed picture, but suggests that – at least in quantitative terms – the Iraqi Army 10th Division in the South is well above average.

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BASRA

1. The 14th 'pulse' of the 16 planned in Operation SINBAD took place on 28 December in the low consent areas of Al Tuwaysa, Hay Al Zharnar and Al Fursi. Although well received by local Baswaris, the operation was curtailed after the Basra Security Committee directed the Iraqi Police Service to withdraw its cooperation. This was as a result of the operation to close down the Jameat Police Station and disband the Serious Crimes Unit (SCU) on Christmas day. There remain concerns that some SCU members not detained during the operation may transfer their activities to other police stations in Basra. The operation also highlighted the need to reform the Basra Security Committee following their claims of being unsighted on an operation on which they had been fully briefed. The problem has been raised with the Ministry of Interior and Maliki's office.
2. Weak leadership in the Iraqi Army's 10th Division was also highlighted during the Jameat operation when General Latif refused to deploy some of 10th Division to their pre-assigned tasks. Latif has since been removed and the implications of weak leadership in the 10th Division are currently being assessed. The performance of the Iraqi Army throughout Operation SINBAD has been mixed, and remains a key UK and US concern.
3. Operation SINBAD will conclude with pulse 15 on 7 January and pulse 16 in mid-January. A comprehensive review of the impact of the operation will take place in February, but initial signs are that although some progress has been made, such as with reforming the Iraqi police service, in other areas, such as the Shia flats, militia presence has returned and consent for MNF activity remains low. Despite these problems, MOD still assesses that we are on track to achieve Provincial Iraqi Control in Basra in May 2007.
4. UK transition plans (Operation ZENITH) are designed to deliver transition in Multi National Division (South East) in support of moving to Provincial Iraqi Control in Basra in May 2007. The resultant UK force posture would be 4,500 troops by June 2007. They will increasingly move towards a Military Assistance Mission, operating from a consolidated base at Basra Air Station. UK forces will gradually withdraw from locations in Basra city, handing them over to Iraqi units, although Military Transition Teams will remain embedded to support the Iraqis, and provide situational awareness. The principal risk to the timetable in the plan is a delay in

but how
are we doing this
if we have
not secured
Basra?

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engaging in detail with the Iraqis, which will not occur until full consultation with the US has taken place. There is also a potential delay to building the new detention facility in Basra Air Station.

5. There is an Engagement Strategy in place to handle the presentation of these transition plans with the US, Iraqis and other key allies. The US are acutely sensitive to UK plans and announcements, and some suspect of us of pursuing our own agenda or wanting to withdraw as quickly as possible. Engagement with the US continues at all levels, with the key messages: we remain committed to the conditions-based approach, the handover will flow from success and is not a withdrawal, and the UK will continue to support Iraqi security forces through embedded teams to train, mentor and support them. Although the potential surge in US forces in Baghdad presents an optical problem for both the UK and US, this can be explained by pointing out that Operation SINBAD was the equivalent UK surge, taking place in Basra sooner because of the different security situation there. Consultation will continue with the Defence Secretary meeting the new US Secretary of Defense on 15 January.

Cabinet Office
5 January 2007

But the issue is not
up. withdrawing troops & the US. unwise
them: it is whether in Basra the
conditions for draw-down have been met.

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