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**MATTHEW RYCROFT**

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**IRAQ MINISTERIAL MEETING**

I have talked to Desmond Bowen and David Manning separately about opportunities to get Ministers to focus on policy decisions on Phase IV for Iraq. We agreed that the morning Ministerials should aim to cover not only the military and other updates and the day's events, but also focus on longer term policy decisions as well. As the meetings will be short these will need to be rationed carefully. Dominick Chilcott and I are preparing a list of outstanding decisions and when they are needed. I will send this separately.

2. In the meantime, we need Ministers to decide on sectors. A joint Foreign and Defence Secretary minute is coming to you. David Manning thinks this should go on the agenda for tomorrow, but with Clare Short given a chance to comment on her return on 21 March. We will put sectors on tomorrow's agenda.

3. I think Ministers will want to agree the proposals, provided they are satisfied that:

- UK forces will be capable of providing security for an area around Basra including about 20% of Iraq's population.
- How long we will have this responsibility, and what is the exit strategy (benign security environment created, UK forces replaced by others). Will we be able to limit 'our area' to say Basra by the autumn, when we want to withdraw two thirds of our troops?
- That the assertion that the transitional administration will handle civil administration including humanitarian reconstruction issues is correct. This is clearly the plan, but it must be doubtful that ORHA will have the capacity, and therefore the troops on the ground may be called on to help. The UK certainly doesn't have civilian capacity to help govern 20% of Iraq.

4. Copies to David Manning, Desmond Bowen, and Tom Dodd.

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