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J3/GOC/08

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CJO

GOC MND(SE) – IRAQ UPDATE

1. The main development this past week has been meetings with the governors of Maysan and Dhi Qar provinces to explain the consequences of 30 June, when the Coalition Provisional Authority ceases to exist, and authority is passed to a fully sovereign Iraqi Government. Patrick Nixon, representing the CPA, and the GOC plan to visit each of the four provincial governors twice to prepare them for the assumption of real and heavy administrative responsibilities.
2. It is clear from our two meetings so far that the provincial administrations have yet to understand the implications of the transfer of authority, i.e. that they will soon be fully responsible for provincial government. Inexperienced and uninformed in governance, the assumption of administrative responsibility makes them uneasy. They are unhappy that the support and advice that they have depended on from the CPA over the past year will end. Central government in Baghdad is unreliable, and cannot be depended on to provide uninterrupted finance and other support in the absence of the kind of mediation that CPA officials have provided. We are thinking of using MOD civil servants (policy advisers) to help fill the gap until FCO/DfID or US project personnel are available, as planned.
3. The GOC explained the security partnership that we envisage after the transfer. This would function through joint security committees in each province chaired by the governor. These committees would comprise police and military chiefs, including coalition, who would identify priorities, and allocate security tasks for Iraqi forces: they would also make requests for assistance from the coalition. The governors welcomed the ideas, but doubted whether there was enough time to set up the structures in the time available. We think that in MND (SE) at least these structures can be put in place in time, if the governors are willing and committed.
4. While the rest of the South East remained generally quiet, the cycle of violence continued in Maysan province. The Maysan battle group has borne the brunt of an intense and sustained campaign of violence, mainly from forces sympathetic to Muqtada al-Sadr. It has been attacked 282 times in four weeks, miraculously sustaining casualties but no deaths. They have inflicted numerous casualties on the insurgents. They are exercising considerable constraint in countering attacks and remain committed to retaining the consent of the majority of the population.
5. The cycle of violence in Maysan must be broken. It cannot be ended without a resolution of the Muqtada al-Sadr related problems in Najaf. Nevertheless, over the next month we are planning a twin track approach to the problem. First, where we can, we shall increase the number of "Quick Impact Projects" which restore the local infrastructure and improve local living conditions. (e.g. filling in mosquito infested cesspits, or refurbishing community facilities). Second, we plan to reinforce the Battle Group, with fresh soldiers. We are looking to see if we can reinforce from within our own resources in theatre. The requirement is limited but

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time urgent – recently announced reinforcements from the UK will be welcome, but will not arrive in time to help with the present problem in Maysan. The twin track approach should help isolate the violent extremists, by showing both our friendly intent to those who wish to live in peace, but also our ability to maintain an effective presence.

6. General Abizaid visited MND (SE) on 1 June. Our discussions went well. Abizaid declared that he was “not optimistic over the next 60 days”, expecting a surge of violence over the transition period. He was positive about the appointment of Alawi as prime minister. He agreed with my assessment that after 30 June, the coalition forces would have to stand back more, and help the Iraqi forces take the lead. He acknowledged that it would be more difficult to do so in the Centre, where US forces are facing the full force of the insurgency.

7. The handover of authority on 30 June is my top planning priority. The intent is to signal a step change in our military posture on 1 July. We will support and publicise the changes by an information campaign at local level. We expect to have the structures of security cooperation with the Iraqis in place in time to allow us to demonstrate that 30 June marks a real transfer of responsibility to the Iraqis and a real commitment by us to continue to help them when needed.

{Signed on JOCS}

POLAD MND (SE)

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