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[By E-mail]

Refocussing civilian efforts in Basra in the run up to PIC

1. Tim Foy and [redacted] visited Basra and Kuwait to undertake the subject review between 8 – 13 December. Our visit report is attached.
2. With thanks once again for your support during our visit, please circulate the report more widely as you wish.

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Refocussing civilian efforts in Basra in the run up to PIC

Visit report by Tim Foy (PCRU) and

(DFID)

Summary

- Achieving PIC requires an "environment" in which the overwhelming majority of Baswaris see clear benefits from legitimate political process and so reject violence and the militia
- HMG has laid the foundations for an effective civil administration in Basra. This is central to achieving a stable and prosperous province. HMG must stay the course on this work but its benefits will only be fully felt in the future.
- Maintaining stability in the period preceding and following PIC is critical to HMG's near and longer term objectives. Stability requires security efforts to be matched by focussed and increased civilian activity to assist the Council to demonstrate early evidence that life is improving in Basra - particularly employment in the city's poorer neighbourhoods where militia influence is greatest.
- Military and civil actors appreciate the importance of the period between short term actions of Operation Sinbad, and the arrival of more enduring, substantial benefits from our longer term efforts.
- Apparent differences in theatre are essentially of degree rather than direction, and of language rather than substance, exacerbated by the split locations and unanticipated move from Basra Palace when military planning for PIC (Operation Zenith) began to take shape.
- Additional civilian emphasis is possible and desirable. This should be based on a revised PRT work plan nested within a refreshed Better Basra Action Plan. Both processes will be led by the CG.
- Efforts should focus on highly visible activities (projects) which are: valued and owned by Baswaris (ideally drawn from the Provincial Development Strategy); high employment generating and associated with the Council. Achieving the maximum impact from all our resources will require the PRT to provide technical assistance to J5, J7 and J9 on an agreed, predictable and reliable basis.
- These additional efforts must go beyond (but build on) the momentum achieved by projects delivered through Operation Sinbad. They can be designed and delivered without contradicting our efforts to build effective civil capacity and without digressing from the PRT's mission statement. US funding should therefore be secure.
- Additional efforts should also be given to improving the Council's ability to communicate its achievements, plans and commitments to Basra.

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- The CG's proposals to revitalise the SISG represent a sensible way maximise coordination within a framework of two Plans (Sinbad/Zenith and Better Basra) which seems likely to remain the case.

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1. The importance of the immediate pre and post PIC period in meeting UK objectives for Basra

1. HMG's priority for Basra is the successful transition of security to Provincial Iraqi Control (PIC). Achieving PIC – which may be achieved sooner than previously anticipated - requires the Iraqi security forces to attain a satisfactory level of readiness. But it also needs the maintenance of an "environment" in which the overwhelming majority of Baswaris see clear benefits and a positive future – particularly in terms of employment and improving services – from legitimate political process and so reject violence and are not coerced by the militia into acts of violence against the security forces.

2. Since 2003 the UK has worked hard to create these broader conditions for PIC through FCO's and DFID's work on rule of law, governance, infrastructure and economic development. Since early 2006, these efforts have been carried forward by the PRT, with additional assistance from the Danes and particularly the US. Despite the difficult operating conditions of 2006, the PRT has successfully engaged with Basra Council and the provincial directorates of key national ministries dealing with water, electricity, education, health and physical infrastructure.

3. As a result of these efforts, Basra (and the three other south eastern provinces) has a prioritised Provincial Development Strategy (PDS); a series of functional Sector Working Groups bringing together local officials and representatives of national ministries responsible for the provision of basic services to identify and implement specific projects, and a Provincial Reconstruction and Development Committee (PRDC) to approve projects. This investment is bearing fruit in an increasingly credible civil administration better able to articulate and deliver local priorities and to access and spend Iraqi money in a transparent and accountable manner. By way of example, the Basra PRDC has already approved and secured funding for 220 projects using the 2006 budget allocation.

4. It is vital that the UK stays the course on this work. An effective civil administration able, **without our support**, to provide services and to build and sustain the infrastructure necessary to encourage investment and support economic growth is fundamental to creating a stable, and in time, prosperous Basra. But the full impact of these efforts – **particularly in terms of employment generation** - will take some time to be felt and, like PIC itself, the success of our efforts at building a better Basra are themselves predicated upon a stable security environment. Any upsurge in violence, or a break down in law and order, will inevitably divert our counterparts' attention from building for the future and further reduce our already very limited access to them.

5. Maintaining stability - particularly in the period immediately preceding and following PIC - is thus critical to our immediate and longer term objectives. Partly this will be achieved through our support to the Iraqi security forces. But it will also require a concerted effort by the Council, assisted by UK and coalition players, to demonstrate to ordinary Baswaris its growing competence, and above all its ability to deliver tangible evidence (particularly employment) that life is improving.

2. Military and civilian perceptions of the immediate pre and post PIC period

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6. Both military and civil actors in theatre appreciate the importance of this **middle piece** – the period between the end of the short term (largely consent winning) actions of Operation Sinbad, and the time when more enduring and substantial benefits from our longer term efforts begin to be felt.

7. Apparent differences in civil and military views in theatre appear to be:

- of degree rather than direction
- of language rather than substance
- a reflection of the split location of MND SE and the PRT

all exacerbated by the impact of the drawdown from Basra Palace at a critical time when military planning for PIC (Operation Zenith) began to take shape.

8. In terms of differences in degree it is now accepted that the UK has neither the resources, nor the time (given the likely timing of PIC) to undertake a massive programme of civil effects within a single coordinated plan under a unified command. But equally, there is scope (as discussed below) for civilian actors (principally the PRT) to provide additional momentum to produce effect focussed on areas and issues important to maintaining stability around PIC.

9. In terms of language the use of the terms "iconic" and "gap," that has caused misunderstanding and misapprehension, has largely ceased. These terms have been generally replaced with a shared understanding of the need for action that goes beyond short term consent winning measures, but which still generates rapid benefits – **particularly employment** – through visible projects that Baswrais readily identify with the Council.

10. The PRT's move to Basra Air Station (see below) is now underway and the benefits of co-location of civilian and military teams are already visible. The PRT enjoys better access to partners in J5, 7, 9 and the COG which has gone some way to overcoming the problems caused by the lack of a common secure communication system between the civilian and military which split location working highlighted. Co-location is also enabling informal contact which helps to build a mutual understanding of objectives and aims.

3. Achieving a balance between short term effect and longer term institution building

11. Achieving the maximum effect from an increased effort around PIC will require a focus on supporting the Council to visibly demonstrate its ability to deliver things that matter to Baswaris, **primarily in the poorer neighbourhoods of Basra where militia influence is greatest**. This suggests a focus on activities, which:

- improve public services and the general quality of life in Basra
- directly create jobs through labour intensive public works
- indirectly generate employment through supporting the growth of small local businesses

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- raise awareness of the Council's achievements, plans and commitments to Basra and its people.

12. To be effective in meeting this medium term stabilisation goal, efforts should be focused on activities (projects) that go well beyond (but build upon) the momentum achieved by projects delivered through Operation Sinbad - they should generate early benefits, but are not short term consent winning measures. Actions can and should also be designed and delivered in a way that does not contradict or frustrate our longer term efforts at building effective civil capacity. Recognition of these principles should:

- satisfy concerns about diverting resources away from capacity building to support short term consent winning projects
- minimise any adverse impact on nascent Iraqi capacity by working with (as far as possible) Iraqi structures rather than by-passing them. The need for rapid results need not put back efforts at encouraging the Iraqis to stand on their own feet
- provide a high degree of local ownership and an opportunity for the Council to demonstrate its growing capability (particularly ahead of provincial elections)
- provide opportunity to better coordinate available resources and skills (Iraqi, coalition military and civilian) to a common purpose without: digressing from the PRT's mission statement; losing civilian leadership; absorbing the PRT (in total or part) into military structures; creating over elaborate coordination structures

13. Achieving this will however require a closer alignment of the PRT's work programme to the needs and timelines of Operation Zenith. It will also require the PRT to be pragmatic and to work with the military in helping to them identify key projects and to fast track their approval through the Council's structures so that available (Iraqi and coalition) resources can be deployed quickly to achieve the stabilisation impact.

4. Making this happen – sharpening up our planning, coordination and oversight mechanisms

14. The October revision of the Better Basra Action Plan (BBAP) provides the core planning document for HMG's effort in Basra, and the Southern Iraq Steering Group (SISG) the primary mechanism for coordination, monitoring and reporting to London. Maintaining momentum in the months running up to and following PIC suggests both should be revisited to ensure they remain fit for purpose.

Refreshing Better Basra

15. The BBAP defines HMG objectives across seven pillars measured against December 2006 and March 2007 benchmarks. The Consul General (CG) intends to review and "refresh" Better Basra in early January 2007 through an expeditious consultative process with key players: DFID, FCO, MND SE and the PRT. This

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exercise will identify any required changes in focus and define new benchmarks in the light of:

- an assessment of progress made to date
- the imperative of providing visible impact around PIC
- the need to reflect the impact of Operation Sinbad and to incorporate planning for Operation Zenith.

16. Within the refreshed BBAP, the CG intends to formalise joint working between civilian (including PRT) and MND SE efforts in a **specific set of shared objectives for the immediate pre and post PIC period**. This will specify expectations and mutual obligations including ways and aims of joint working. This process will have implications for the PRT (specifically its work plan and skills set) as it is responsible for four of the Plan's seven strands. This issue is considered below.

The Southern Iraq Steering Group

17. The Southern Iraq Steering Group (SISG) was established in mid 2006 to achieve greater coordination of military and civilian efforts around the BBAP benchmarks. The SISG has met on a number of occasions, but has not fully achieved the anticipated levels of enhanced coordination. In large part this reflects the fact that BBAP and Operation Sinbad are different plans, delivered and monitored by separate organisations with their own command chains which have not been co-located.

18. It is unlikely at this stage that HMG will move to a single fully integrated plan bringing military and civilian efforts together under a unified command. The likelihood is that there will still be two plans – Operation Sinbad (and then Zenith) and a refreshed Better Basra. The existence of two plans does not preclude improved coordination, but argues the case for making greater efforts towards it in the pre and post PIC period, in order to:

- ensure all available synergies between civilian and military led efforts are identified and fully exploited to support PIC
- interpret and act upon direction from the ISG and DOP (I) in theatre
- advise the Iraq Strategy Group (ISG) on progress.

19. The most pragmatic approach to achieving improved coordination is to implement the CG's recent proposal for a revitalised SISG. This proposes a **core executive SISG membership** of the CoG and CG, with a supporting membership comprising the Head of DFID Basra, the PRT's Head and a representative each from the Danes and the US REO. The SISG would in turn be supported by two "working groups" (not the sector working groups established with the Basra Council) responsible for taking forward the SISG's Executive's direction and reporting progress back to it.

20. The SISG's will focus on improving coordination and building links between activities and actors in the refreshed BBAP, which includes elements of Operation Zenith. It should take a directive approach to identify areas where joint work between

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civilian and military actors is needed to support the achievement of HMG's objectives and the actions required to overcome (either in theatre or by referring back to London) barriers to this. The recently established Cross Departmental Working Group for Afghanistan provides a useful model of how this can work,

5. What this means for the PRT

21. The PRT is an international effort bringing together UK, US and Danish resources (particularly US money provided through the Economic Support Fund and CERPs). But while international in composition, and recognising its links to the National Coordinating Team (NCT) in Baghdad, the PRT is UK led and so HMG – not the NCT or the PRT itself – is responsible for setting its objectives and monitoring performance.

22. This point accepted, it is important to maintain US support for any change in direction or emphasis in the PRT's work plan around PIC. This will require the PRT to remain within the bounds of its agreed mission statement, which is to build Iraqi capacity through civilian led teams. Any change to the PRT's mission; change in its function, towards becoming an implementing or project executing agency on behalf of the military; shift in focus towards short term consent winning projects; or switch from civilian to military leadership, risks our relationship with the US on PRTs generally, and more immediately and practically, access to the ESF (about \$40 million). Notice should also be given to the NCT of our intent to revise the PRT's work plan, to maintain harmony.

23. But within these parameters there is scope for the PRT to contribute more to achieve the increased visible effect described above through four main routes all of which fall squarely within its mission statement and are, in some cases, already underway:

i. Providing technical support to MND SE as it takes forward planning for Operation Zenith

24. Discussions with MND SE (specifically J5, J7 and J9), the CG, DFID and the PRT have identified areas where the PRT could provide technical expertise to MND SE to help it identify and design projects for CERP funding in a way likely to maximise impact, **particularly high levels of job creation**. Recent experience on Date Palm provides a good illustration of this in practice. In addition, the PRT's relationship with the Council's structures, especially the sector working groups and the PRDC, puts it in a position to help ensure that projects identified for CERP funding match local priorities (i.e. those in the PDS) and to help fast track them through local governance structures.

ii. Identifying activities consistent with PDS and PIC objectives to be funded under BBAP

25. Working with the Council and the CG, the PRT should identify highly visible, locally valued, ideally high employment generating initiatives for funding with unspent BBAP balances. Consideration should also be given to identifying any joint funding options for BBAP and CERP resources.

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iii. Supporting the Council follow up recent commitments made by Deputy PM

26. In coordination with the CG and the Baghdad Embassy, the PRT should energetically follow up Deputy Prime Minister Barham Salih's promise to rapidly release central funds for unfunded local Basra priorities. This provides an ideal opportunity for the Council to demonstrate its growing self confidence and commitment to champion Basra's cause with the national government.

iv. Communicating a confident, competent and honest administration

27. Building on existing PRT work, and responding to a recent request from the Council, the PRT should develop a programme of strategic communications in the run up to PIC, emphasising both security transition and the Council's success in delivering improvements in Basra. In addition, following up on the recent PRT sponsored Luxor workshop, the PRT should work with Council counterparts to quickly develop and implement a charter and code of conduct for officials, and to publicise this widely as evidence of its commitment to transparency and probity in public life.

28. The CG should lead the revision of the PRT's work plan. This should be undertaken as part of the exercise to refresh BBAP, with the support of FCO and DFID in theatre and London, taking advice from the PRT and consulting with coalition colleagues. This "recalibration" may result in a reprioritisation of current work streams, including the possibility of individual elements being deferred or dropped (with possible changes to staffing) reflecting an evolving BBAP, and **the practical limitations of staffing and accommodation**. The CG will be responsible for approving any revised PRT work plan, and should lead on discussions with coalition partners and the NCT.

6. Oversight of the PRT

29. Achieving the best effect from the PRT requires clear reporting lines, regular progress reporting and effective technical backup and support.

30. Primary HMG responsibility for the PRT lies with the FCO, which (in conjunction with DFID), provides overall policy direction to the PRT. Lead responsibility in theatre lies with the CG and the PRT Team Leader should take instruction from and be fully accountable to the CG.

31. Regular reporting by the PRT to HMG is required to enable the CG to provide timely strategic direction, and to ensure a smooth relationship between the Consulate, MND SE and the PRT. This has been an area of weakness in the past and should be addressed by the provision of weekly progress reports from the PRT Team Leader to the CG, set out in terms of those elements of (a refreshed) BBAP for which the PRT has responsibility. This should be in addition to existing reporting to the NCT. Furthermore, beyond whatever formal briefing the CG requires of the PRT Team Leader, the CG must have complete visibility of the work of individual PRT team members, and opportunity to discuss progress and developments with them whenever required.

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32. Assistance to the CG in ensuring effective oversight and responding to any future emerging policy direction comes from DFID in theatre and IPU in London, drawing upon DFID in London. IPU may wish to explore the possibility of PCRU providing assistance to IPU and the CG in delivering these responsibilities.

7. Relocation to BAS

33. The dislocation caused to the PRT's work plan from the relocation from Basra Palace was significant, but not catastrophic as it occurred at a time when much effort was focused on the Luxor workshops and Iraq based work streams were relatively self sustaining, and not dependent upon face to face contact with Iraqi counterparts. This will not be the case for much longer, and there is an urgent and recognised need to consolidate as much of the PRT as quickly as possible in BAS. While parts of the PRT could be located separately this risks losing important synergies and cohesion within the team.

34. It is worth noting that the rapid (unavoidable) draw down from Basra Palace did raise concerns amongst MND SE partners about civilian commitment and the physical move to BAS has required considerable time and attention to be devoted to it. Current living accommodation at BAS is cramped, uncomfortable and not fully hardened. The resilience of the PRT's staff through this period is commendable.

35. Construction of hardened accommodation on the FCO site at BAS is underway and will represent a very significant improvement on the current situation. But the pace of the build may slip and the PRT must accept that its claims on accommodation must be seen in the "round" of a total demand which exceeds supply. Limited living accommodation on site consequently represents a significant risk to the delivery of the PRT's work plan and will require flexibility be built into the PRT's work plan, with PIC priorities being given primacy over all other elements, which may be deferred, or dropped, at the CG's discretion.

36. Working accommodation is similarly scarce but the situation is improving with MND SE generously providing space. As noted above, co-location has already led to a significant increase in interaction between the PRT and MND SE.

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