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From Major General ARD Shirreff CBE



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The Right Honourable Tony Blair MP  
10 Downing Street  
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29<sup>th</sup> December 2006

*Dear Prime Minister,*

During your visit to Basra, you asked me for some thoughts on how a Joint Inter-Agency Task Force would deliver concentrated British effect in SE Iraq and improve the prospects of achieving strategic success in this mission.

As we briefed you, my approach is based on the premise that this operation depends on more than the application of just military effect. If we are to isolate the militant militia leadership from the mainstream of the population, we need to regain the hearts and minds of the majority. This requires economic effect, hence the efforts we have put into reconstruction projects under Operation SINBAD. We have achieved much: some \$77m has been spent with short-term employment created for over 23,000 Baswaris. This has not all been short term 'papering over the cracks'. We have kick started long term economic prospects with the regeneration of the Date Palm industry in SE Iraq (ably assisted by the PRT's Danish agricultural adviser without whom the project would not have got off the ground), while our last mile electricity distribution and water mains pipe laying projects will have a lasting effect on Basra's infrastructure. Meanwhile, the kinetic effort has been maintained through intelligence led detention operations and the disbandment of the Serious Crimes Unit as seen by the destruction of the Jameat.

We have had some effect. Our surveys indicate that we are regaining the hearts and minds of the Baswaris through SINBAD and there is a definite economic effect through generating jobs and the reconstruction projects. However, SINBAD can do no more than create a window of opportunity that must be filled by mass economic effect, a Rooseveltian New Deal for Basra. Only thus will the militia be defeated. This requires the mass injection of Iraqi Government funds, with the means to ensure that it is properly spent to achieve a decisive security and stabilising effect which will, in turn, lead to prosperity.

The question then is: how best can this be done? It needs two things. First, the GoI must establish a reconstruction committee for Basra with the authority and the capability to spend central government money on appropriate mass employment projects. This needs big ideas.

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big money and capable, honest people. Second, it needs to be underpinned by a coalition organisation capable of providing the right advice and planning capability.

What we have now is inadequate because it lacks unity of command and unity of purpose. HQ MND(SE) has the planning muscle, the energy, the staying power and the unity of command to execute an overarching plan to set the conditions for PIC in Basra, hence SINBAD. However, it lacks the expertise needed to advise and assist the Iraqis implement the big ideas (such as port reconstruction, town planning or salvage in the Shatt Al Arab). The PRT, currently operating below strength and without a leader, out of a hotel in Kuwait, prefers to focus on long-term capacity building. Without adequate security, the PRT has found it almost impossible to implement projects on the ground. Mal-location has made integration difficult and it will be easier to achieve in the New Year when the PRT is collocated in HQ MND(SE), but we should not pretend that collocation will solve the fundamental, underlying problem. Only when there is a single organisation, capable of integrating planning and execution of both security (and, in due course, military assistance) and reconstruction will the UK (and our coalition partners) be capable of achieving decisive strategic effect. In Guderian's words, we need to 'clout, not dribble'. At present, we are dribbling and we are likely to fail. Only if we are capable of clouting have we any chance of strategic success. Britain's failure to coordinate its efforts in SE Iraq is epitomised by DfID's project to build water towers in Al Hyaniyah, the Shia slum district of Basra. An inadequate contract with contractors, rather than civil engineers, has led to \$12.1m being spent on three water towers which have not been connected to the water supply, added to which the towers are in danger of collapse through faulty construction. The project has been saved from ignominious collapse by HQ MND(SE) providing water connections with an injection of \$1m worth of US taxpayer's dollars through the flexibility and agility of the Commander's Emergency Relief Programme funding provided by my American Corps Commander. The towers are unlikely to be completed before September 2007.

So how do we get it right? The answer, in my view, is to establish a single organisation capable of planning, executing and commanding both security/military assistance and reconstruction operations. It needs to be capable of providing the same support to a reconstruction committee for Basra as HQ MND(SE) currently provides for the Basra Security Committee. It needs a single point of command. As to who should command, military or civilian, I can put it no better than one of my predecessors as GOC MND(SE), Maj Gen Bill Rollo did in his post tour report over two years ago: '...the centre of gravity should remain where protection and advice can most flexibly and effectively be provided, i.e. by the military until there is sufficient security for other government organisations to work independently of our support.' Add to unity of command, unity of purpose with a single headquarters combining both military and civilian capabilities in planning, integrating and executing activity. The necessary expertise in reconstruction will need to be bought in from outside. They will need to accept the same risks that our MOD civil servants do on a daily basis and be prepared to work under the same conditions. Apart from anything else, it is this mutual acceptance of the same risk that will breed the 'all of one company' team spirit so critical to success in the complex, dangerous operations that characterize SE Iraq.

In summary, only by the application of a truly comprehensive approach will Britain be able to achieve mission success in SE Iraq. Time is running out and there is a short window of opportunity in the first half of 2007. Success depends on unlocking Iraqi money to generate

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<sup>1</sup> Hitler's foremost armoured forces thinker and commander

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mass employment projects and truly big ideas. The GoI should establish a Reconstruction Committee for Basra to channel central funding into the City. To support it and provide the necessary support and expertise to achieve concentration of effort, Britain should establish a Joint Inter-Agency Task Force (with its coalition partners) combining military and reconstruction expertise under single military command.

Yours sincerely,

Rupert Shiner

Copy to:

Secretary of State for Defence  
Chief of the Defence Staff  
Chief of the General Staff  
Chief of Joint Operations

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