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To: Iraq Policy Unit
From: Swift Incoming Telegrams (Machine 2)
Subject: LEAD: OO FCOLN/IRAQR 42: NOSEC: IRAQ: BASRA: FIRST
IMPRESSIONS AND WORK IN HAND
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TELEGRAM FROM SIR HILARY SYNNOTT, HEAD CPA SOUTH, BASRA

SUBJECT: NOSEC: IRAQ: BASRA: FIRST IMPRESSIONS AND WORK IN HAND

Summary

1. The Southern Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA(South)) operation is not well thought of in Baghdad. Much of this is due to poor communications. Remedial action in hand. Greater prioritisation of activity is needed - only possible if Basra and Baghdad are more attuned. Living conditions are not appropriate for sustained effectiveness and will be changed.

2. Illustrative current issues. Developments in prospect. Little point in speculating about outcomes: just need to get on with the job.

Detail

3. A week is not the usual period on which to base a first impressions report, but the situation does not allow for delay. A recce quickly turned into operations. The nature of the task to be done on my return to Basra at the end of the month is already pretty clear.

4. When I called on Ambassador Jerry Bremer, the US supremo in Iraq, on 4 August, he politely told me that CPA South had some way to catch up. Andy Bearpark, the British Director of Operations in

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Baghdad, said that it was the least effective of the regions by a long way, suffering from a siege mentality. Bremer's financial expert declared that it simply didn't work. Feelings in Basra about the Baghdad headquarters are similarly negative. Both sets of attitudes are to a great extent unfair although, for historical reasons which are not relevant to this report, they are understandable.

5. On meeting the 113 members of the multinational team in the South, of whom a good half are British civilians or reservists, I believe that they have accomplished remarkable things in a very short time while working and living, at least initially, in near intolerable conditions. There has been real progress, including the establishment of one of the most promising interim councils in the country, and covering a wide spectrum of issues: power generation and distribution, health, prisons, customs (a Dubai-Um Qasr ferry service has just started and the international airport will start operating this month), finance (managed by a former director of Lazards with the TA rank of major), and much more. The British military role in the civil context has been magnificent (far more politically sensitive than their American counterparts), but the results have truly been the result of a cooperative effort.

6. The mutual misperception has largely been a result of poor communication, in both directions, exacerbated by a wish in the South to act autonomously - misguided if only because Baghdad holds the purse strings. I have no secure communication at all with Baghdad or with London (both deficiencies are now on the way to being rectified, although I may yet call for a push from the FCO); emails are usually by means of free Yahoo or Hotmail ISPs; there are no telephone landlines; mobile phone coverage is sketchy; which leaves a few sat phones. All of this should have improved by the end of the month. Meanwhile both Baghdad and Basra are experiencing major roulements of civilian personnel as their three months contracts expire and handovers are, perforce, either rapid or, in many cases, non-existent as gaps are carried.

7. So I had reason to say to Bremer that I felt that Basra was at a transitional phase, in which responsibilities had to shift, from the military to the civil arm and to the Iraqi people, which called for some changes of process on all our parts.

8. Bremer was content with my three procedural priorities, on each of which, I told him, progress was under way. First, to improve information flow and consultation between Baghdad and Basra: addresses and lists of functions would be exchanged, physical communications improved and visits increased. Bremer agreed I should meet him monthly and added that he would get the other two regional coordinators along too (I shall try to hold him to this). Second, having become better informed of Baghdad's actions and intentions, to prioritise the South's work, on the basis that we could not do everything. To this end I agreed with alacrity to General Graeme Lamb's proposal to create a Joint Coordination Board involving the British Division, CPA(South) and the UN: we decided to keep it to the three principals only and our first two hour meeting revealed a heartening commonality of approach and attitude. Third, to upgrade the living and working conditions in Basra which are quite inappropriate for people trying to sustain effective work for the longer (6 month to one year) timescales which are now necessary (it is no complaint to observe that CPA (South)'s living and working

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conditions, food and sanitation are orders of magnitude worse than the Palace in Baghdad, the Divisional HQ at the modern airport in Basra, the Brigade HQ in Basra and the FCO's British Office Baghdad).

This is now well on the way to change and, as I write, Andy Bearpark has promised extra funding and, crucially, to expedite expert security advice.

9. There is little value now in outlining either the particular challenges or the steps forward: they will all change soon. But some illustrations may give the flavour of the tasks. Progress includes the aforementioned ferry and airport. Challenges are constantly intriguing. 420 tons of new non-Saddam banknotes are soon to be delivered to Basra. But the banking system does not work and the bank vaults have holes in them - literally. The Army is understandably appalled at the prospect of having to provide security for such tempting prizes. A solution must (and will) be found. Saboteurs and looters are downing transmission lines, smelting the copper and selling the product in Iran: not good for enhancing power supplies and hence reducing the blackouts which are looters' playtimes. The Army recognise that this is a high priority. The politically sensitive Maysan Province now has no power generating capacity of its own and Baghdad HQ turned down our proposal to provide two 1 Megawatt generators without offering an alternative idea (that decision is now being reversed). In the wild tribal area of Al Muthanna, the fiery American unit Commander declared himself Governor and appointed a Sheikh as Council leader. The Sheikh's roguish brother, his deputy, caused so much trouble that the CO took steps to sack him, which risked alienating the potentially important Sheikh. And so on.

10. Meanwhile it is essential, as mentioned, to maintain clear, although flexible, priorities. Security, infrastructure, governance and the perceptions of the Iraqi people are inextricably linked. The main challenge will be to make sufficient progress on all of those fronts to offset the dissatisfaction caused by deprivation, adversity, criminality and subversion. It is impossible now to divine how it will turn out in the this part of Iraq, whose predominantly Shia population was victimised by Saddam. So the Coalition can only try its best, in the knowledge that the effort must be worthwhile.

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PS MR RAMMELL	0
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