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IRAQ: WHAT WENT WRONG IN BASRA

We are working up a more detailed account of what went wrong in Basra over the last five years. But the executive summary is:

2003-June 2004: Period of the CPA

- **Delays in delivering economic progress** – owing to the poor organisation of the CPA, unrealistic direction from the CPA bureaucracy in Baghdad, and inability to match local expectations (themselves often unrealistic) with contract and accounting requirements from Washington and London;
- **Delays in delivering political progress** – reluctance of CPA leadership to countenance development of local democratic structures, partly because of constraints imposed by international law (particularly relating to occupied countries);
- **Failure to deliver security** – partly because of lack of clear direction from CPA and their failure, in particular, to deal with Sadr in Baghdad; partly because of unwillingness by MOD to use force in the face of a local (Iraqi) consensus that issues should be resolved by negotiation; sense that UK military and public opinion would not tolerate (potentially) significant losses arising from an all-out armed confrontation.

In this period, Islamist groups emerged as the main political contenders, not least because in many cases they represented the only viable political organisations. No secular parties with any significant popular support existed in Basra, and the CPA direction in Baghdad had no programme for fostering or developing secular political organisations. Secular parties represented in Basra represented very few people, or were fronts for tribal or other organisations.

July 2004 – September 2006

- Increasing fragmentation of power in Basra, and growing fighting among militias, with the rise in strength and effectiveness of Sadrist groups.
- Failure of Iraqi Government in Baghdad to pay sufficient attention to security situation in Basra;
- Failure of local government to take ownership of security issues – they failed to rise above factional differences to impose order, or give clear mandate to UK forces to do so;
- Recurrent problems of police recruitment and leadership not dealt with by Baghdad, despite frequent appeals from UK in Basra;
- Again, a local (Iraqi) consensus against use of force; and
- UK military reluctance to risk major losses, particularly if operating without a clear mandate from local or central Iraqi authorities which meant that British forces gradually withdrew to their bases and ceased patrolling the streets leaving the militias in control.
- UK military inability to control the borders, allowing smuggling of arms and people, as well as of fuel and economic assets.

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Rise of the Sadrists: from spring 2004 onwards, Muqtada al-Sadr, his followers and the Jaish al-Mahdi adopted an increasingly violent and confrontational attitude towards the CPA, coalition forces and rival Iraqi parties. Clashes in Basra were relatively limited, but there was fierce fighting between coalition forces and JAM elsewhere in MND (SE) and also in other major cities outside the British AOR such as Najaf and Karbala. A warrant for Muqtada's arrest in connection with the murder of a rival Shia cleric was issued, but with the end of the CPA and the advent of the Iraqi Interim Government, the Sadrists' fellow Islamist parties Da'wa and SCIRI pressed for this not to be executed. Without clear Iraqi political backing, the coalition's willingness and ability to contain the rise of JAM was undermined.

The Jameat incident: British acted in September 2005 against the Jameat centre following the detention of two UK servicemen. Although this police intelligence organisation had been terrorising the local community and other parts of the police apparatus, local Islamist parties united to support the Jameat against British forces.

September 2006 – September 2007: frustration and withdrawal

From mid-2006 onwards, intra-Shia rivalries and criminality in Basra led to increasing incidences of murder and kidnap; militia attacks against British targets (mainly the Basra Palace) also started to increase significantly.

In response Maliki declared a state of emergency and appointed an Emergency Security Committee – who turned out to be thoroughly ineffectual and generally predisposed to frustrate any firm UK interventions.

In August/September 2006, MND (SE) planned a major offensive against militia influence and criminality in Basra, code named Operation Salamanca. But the head of the Emergency Security Committee; Maliki's advisers; and Maliki himself, who had depended on Sadrist support for his appointment as PM in May, blocked the operation and demanded that it be heavily scaled down and recast as, essentially, a consent-winning operation and undemanding training exercise for the ISF. Renamed Operation Sinbad, the new operation had very little effect.

Even if Operation Salamanca had gone ahead it is doubtful whether we had sufficient military resources on the ground to regain effective control of the security situation. At a time when the US was surging we were ebbing. At no time was the ratio of military forces to Iraqi civilians higher than 1 to 370 –for a limited period in 2003 (c/f 1:50 in Kosovo and 1:65 in Northern Ireland).

In February 2007, despite (or because of) worsening violence in Basra, including massive ISF against the Palace, and against the background of general inability or unwillingness of the Iraqi authorities to grip the situation, the then-Prime Minister announced a reposturing of British forces away from city centre bases. Between March and September, UK forces were progressively consolidated at the Basra Air Station. The recognition that we were serious about handing over real security responsibility to the Iraqis engendered some improvements, such as the replacement of the head of the ESC and the police chief (with Mohan and Jalil respectively). It also allowed our engagement with al-Fartusi, which led to a major fall in violence against our forces from August 2007.

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Reflections on Basra and the lessons to be learned from the FCO's experience in Iraq

Summary

1. Planning for the UK's involvement in the invasion and occupation of Iraq started very late, both in the FCO and in UK government more generally. It did not take adequate account of "Phase 4" (the post-invasion phase) and in particular the commitments that would accrue if the UK did not take over, and there was a delay in establishing a viable Iraqi administration. (pp6-8).

2. The UK's objectives with regard to Iraq were neither clear nor consistent. The main one was to stay alongside the US. The principal subsidiary aim was to secure military withdrawal. Iraq-related aims flowing from the "Vision for Iraq" were progressively abandoned, but the road-map was not correspondingly refreshed. There was no formal agreement about what would be considered a satisfactory outcome, either between the UK and the US, or among UK departments. The UK civilian effort was consequently poorly tasked and inadequately resourced. (pp9-13)

3. Responsibilities were not properly clarified, even though the UK's hands were tied by international law and conventions. Security was not enforced by the coalition immediately after the invasion, particularly the physical security of Iraqi people and assets. Reconstruction was slow to take off, inadequately resourced, and cumbersomely administered. The Iraqis left after the purge of Baathists from senior levels of the administration were not psychologically capable of taking up the reins. (pp13-16)

4. Communication of Coalition aims was wanting, and poor security and intermittent reconstruction to alien standards dashed expectations, most of which, while high, were not unreasonable. (pp17-18)

5. In Basra, irritation with the Coalition and opposition to the prolonged occupation started to emerge during the time of the CPA. A high level of violence was allowed to become the norm, though Basra throughout compared favourably with other parts of Iraq. Militia activity waxed and waned, but after the handover of sovereignty in mid 2004 Iraqi politicians at the centre and in the provinces were disinclined to address it. When Coalition/UK forces acted, Iraqis responded with complaints and boycotts. Nevertheless, the UK continued with work on development/reconstruction whenever the security situation allowed, setting up the Provincial Reconstruction Team, initiating the Better Basra plan, and persisting with police training and capacity building. (pp18-20)

6. The British military continued plans to withdraw and draw down, causing friction with the US over the timetable for the handover of security to Provincial Iraqi Control. However, the Iraqi authorities gave them no clear mandate for maintaining security, criticising them for failing to maintain it, but blaming them when they tried to address particular issues. FCO officials and others tried to persuade Baghdad to pay more attention to the south, but with limited success. (pp21-23)

7. There was no failure by the FCO to see signs of mounting problems. There were differences with the Americans over tactics, and also about the importance of keeping a

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coalition military presence in the South in order to deter and counterbalance Iranian influence. Responsibility for security fell into a void, though some, including the UK's Parliamentary Committees, felt that the UK was not delivering what they thought it was committed to. The FCO, through its Ambassador in Baghdad, raised with London the possibility of a US-type surge, but the case for providing additional resources – in particular military reinforcements – to re-impose security was not given a hearing. Throughout, as the occupation continued, tolerance in the street diminished. The UK was held responsible for security failures even as Iraqis were trying to persuade them to leave. (pp23-25)

8. Baghdad was finally persuaded to pay more attention to the south in the early summer of 2006, when a state of emergency was declared in Basra and a new Emergency Security Committee put in place (which proved ineffectual). In summer 2006, MND(SE) planned a major operation (Operation Salamanca) to seize control back from militias and criminal gangs, but this was watered down at GoI behest. It eventually proceeded as Operation Sinbad (September to March 2006) which focussed more on short-term consent-winning projects and as an undemanding training opportunity for the Iraqi Security Forces. The security situation continued to deteriorate through the first half of 2007. (pp -)

Lessons already registered

9. Many of the lessons to be learned from Iraq have already been included in the findings of a survey of FCO officers with experience in post-conflict situations conducted in 2005. FCO specific and Whitehall-wide findings compiled by the Conflict Issues Group (CIG) are available on the FCO Intranet. This paper includes examination of the question of whether the UK could have done more to establish genuine security in Basra before the handover of responsibility for security to provincial Iraqi control (PIC); whether the ownership of security before PIC was clearly framed; whether the UK had taken adequate account of the gradual, but inevitable, erosion of consent; and whether the right people were deployed to wield influence most effectively where it was needed.

Recommendations

Many lessons have already been learned, key among them being the establishment of the Post Conflict Reconstruction Unit (now the Stabilisation Unit) to plan for and co-ordinate post-conflict work among Government departments and agencies.

- **Planning** and contingency planning, including across government departments (see also CIG study 2.2): We had seen Iraq coming, but did not feel able to plan for it. The FCO now has an increasingly sophisticated risk prediction and management mechanism. **The FCO's risk management system should enable long-term risks to be identified, so that risks can be staffed and resources secured at an early enough stage for proper planning to be undertaken.** Any planning group should have representatives from other relevant government departments. Where additional resource requirements are identified FCO must secure clear understanding on whether these resources will be provided from the central reserve, or from a reduction in core activities.

- **Objectives**. In Iraq the long-term objectives were rarely articulated, or rigorously reviewed. There was, and remains, a tension between staying alongside the US; withdrawing militarily at the earliest practicable moment; or committing whatever resources are needed to deliver a democratic, stable, tolerant and economically successful Iraq. This paper endorses the earlier recommendation that **it is essential to know why we are involved, what we are there to do, and how we are defining success.** (CIG paper 2.2)

- **Exit strategy:** in working up its objectives, the UK needs to be clear whether it is aiming for an end state, or an end date. The change of direction of the CPA in November 2003 (setting the end of June 2004 for its dissolution) was particularly damaging. The determination of the MOD to withdraw forces (with the accompanying erosion of its purported objectives) likewise has been unhelpful to the presentation of UK policy. **The UK's exit criteria must be clearly defined, and its partners need to understand which of these we are aiming for.**

- **Control/Influence** – including having enough weight where it matters. The UK signed up to an enterprise over which it had no control, and remained wedded to it even in the face of extraordinary errors of judgement in the early stages of ORHA and the CPA, the consequences of which we are still dealing with. **Conditions for UK participation should be established from the beginning, as well as the limitations on that participation.** The UK should be prepared to confront coalition partners if the UK is being drawn outside the agreed parameters of its involvement.

- **Resources:** The FCO was constantly scrambling after resources. **Risk management should ensure that realistic estimates of resources are made at an early stage, including worst case scenarios; Ministers should clearly understand the need to identify and secure those resources** before the UK takes on a similar commitment in future. (CIG paper 2.6)

- **Devolution of responsibility, and financial flexibility**. Sometimes the FCO will be forced to be reactive, but current accounting requirements can be cumbersome. **The FCO must be ready to devolve authority and substantial budgetary responsibility to its people on the ground.** Arrangements for RDTs may represent a small-scale example. (cf CIG paper 8.2)

- **Military/Civil interface.** In Iraq, the MOD's chief objective appears to have been to go in and then downsize and withdraw as soon as possible (because of overstretch and commitments elsewhere, such as Afghanistan) regardless of any broader policy of HMG. Cabinet needs in future to give clearer direction, and the FCO needs to ensure, through its SoS, that clear objectives are agreed by both MOD and FCO. **There should be political representatives at all levels of the military; and by the same token military representatives at all appropriate political levels**. Above all, **it should be clear, and agreed at Cabinet level, how political and military activities should combine to serve agreed, overarching objectives;** and departments should be resourced and tasked appropriately.

- **Staffing and HR issues**, including the duty of care. Iraq has raised a number of issues about the staffing of the various missions in Iraq. Two of the five Coordinators appointed by the FCO have raised the duty of care issue in published works, citing it as an unwelcome complication when deploying people to a dangerous zone. **FCO (and other civilian departments) need to build on the frameworks for risk ownership and management which have been put in place over the last five years to allow maximum operational flexibility on the ground consistent with our duty of care, including through the provision at an early stage in the deployment of protective assets eg armoured transport.**

- **Post-conflict responsibilities:** It is arguable that the FCO should not have become responsible for administering territory overseas without drawing, directly and indirectly, on the body of experience that should, theoretically, be retained on a practical level by OTD, and on a strategic level by ISD within the FCO, and by NGOs and international organisations with suitable experience outside. The FCO now works with other key Government departments through the Stabilisation Unit, but this does not seem to include **post conflict administration**. **If this task is not to be taken on by the FCO, it needs to be clearly devolved elsewhere.**

- **Background knowledge:** Commentators have asserted that the US (and UK) simply did not know enough about Iraq. Additionally, and perhaps more importantly, there was no formal pool of knowledge about post conflict administration. **Iraq highlighted the need to draw on broader historical and geographical precedents.** The repository for such knowledge is now the Stabilisation Unit.

- **Local engagement:** There should have been complete clarity about what the Iraqis were expected to do and take charge of from before the beginning of military operations, and absolutely clear messages should have been delivered during them, by every means possible. Where Iraqis were expected or required to take charge, the Coalition should have ensured that they had the authority and resources to do so. Where the required resources were not forthcoming from Baghdad, consideration should have been given to providing them from London. This paper endorses the 2005 Whitehall-wide recommendation that a key requirement is to **encourage local leaderships to identify and commit to workable policies, rather than have the international community impose them.**

- **Legal and financial issues**: International law and conventions impose ever tighter constraints on what an occupying power may do, and properly give the inhabitants of occupied countries many more rights than they might once have expected. Financial

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accountability is also more stringent, nationally and internationally. The FCO might usefully draw up (and update as legislation evolves) **clear guidelines on the UK's obligations in war and in occupation** so that it is not drawn into a future situation where its objectives, however honourable, cannot legally be attained.

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Introduction

1. A growing body of literature about the occupation of Iraq and its aftermath highlights (with varying degrees of sensationalism) several common threads of shortcomings and failings in the conception and implementation of the operation.

2. The shortcomings noted include: inadequate planning; planning for the wrong eventualities; unreal expectations on both the Coalition and the Iraqi sides; poor or incompetent administration of reconstruction projects; inadequate co-ordination of the political and military strands, among many others. There were also mistakes: at the national level, the handling of de-Baathification and the dismantling of the armed forces have, rightly, been almost universally condemned; the inexplicable failure to deal with Muqtada al-Sadr in 2003 so that sheer longevity has made him not so much a challenge to the state, as – until the spring of 2008 - the head of a rival state within Iraq's territory. In Basra itself, the failure of UK forces to provide security for the Iraqi population for whom the UK had assumed responsibility; the failure to deal with local Shia militias and political challenges to the Coalition and later to the Iraqi state; and, more difficult to establish, a lack of information and clarity about Iranian involvement in instigating or, at the least, supporting opposition, often violent, against the Coalition and later against the legitimate institutions of the Iraqi state.

3. The role of the UK has come under criticism, within the UK, in Iraq and internationally, particularly as the city of Basra has fallen increasingly prey to what has been portrayed as armed warfare between militias, culminating with an Iraqi campaign, five years after the original invasion, to take on the militias militarily and to bring order to this troubled town.

4. Work has already been done on lessons to be learned from the UK's part in the Iraq episode: an FCO official was commissioned to do a study in 2004. Although this did not formally see the light of day (as far as it has been possible to ascertain) it was as a result of these early findings that the Post Conflict Reconstruction Unit, combining several government departments, was set up. A broader study was carried out drawing on the responses to a questionnaire completed by officials with experience of a number of post-conflict situations and issued in June 2006. Most of the long list of conclusions and recommendations were directly derived from the Iraq experience and recent post-conflict experiences elsewhere.

5. This paper aims to address what lessons should be learned by the FCO from the Iraq episode, focusing most specifically on what, if anything, the FCO might have done differently to assure a more favourable outcome in the area of southern Iraq for which the UK was made most directly responsible. It draws on published accounts, FCO reporting, Government and Parliamentary publications, and input from FCO officials who worked in Iraq from 2003 onwards.

Planning

Towards military action

6. The FCO's Iraq Planning Unit was established only 37 days before the opening of military hostilities in March 2003, though Iraq had been occupying increasing amounts of the time and resources of its parent Department, MENAD, for more than a year. This was in addition to the resource devoted to Iraq throughout the 1990s as the UK sought to persuade Iraq to co-operate fully with UN resolutions and to maintain the solidity of the international sanctions imposed on Iraq following its invasion of Kuwait and subsequent expulsion in 1990/91.

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7. During 2002 there was growing speculation, and to a large degree expectation, that the US would take military action, most probably with UK support, against Iraq. However, the FCO was not directly involved in planning for this. The possibility that military action might be used was a significant element in the broader strategy of both the US and the UK, ie to support the diplomatic effort by making it clear that they were ready to use force to secure Iraqi compliance with UN WMD resolutions if diplomatic efforts failed.

8. The UK recognised that such action would have to have a clear legal basis: the debate surrounding the legal opinions of the time has been covered elsewhere. No10 took the lead in developing the case and preparing the political ground for military action. The efforts of the FCO were focused on supporting HMG's publicly declared agenda, which was to secure Iraqi compliance with UN SCRs relating to WMD. This involved sustained diplomatic effort in the UN and internationally.

9. The FCO itself was reluctant to engage in formal planning for the aftermath of a military operation ("Phase 4") because it was felt that such planning would become known, and that that this would imply that military action was therefore an undeclared aim of the UK's policy[1]; furthermore, nothing in the thinking that began to emerge from Washington suggested that there would be any administrative role to be filled other than by Iraqis or the UN; and finally, planning for anything other than the traditional diplomatic tasks was taken on by No10.

10. Even into February 2003, FCO minuting referring to military action and the handling of its aftermath was couched in conjectural terms, though by now the FCO was focusing on legal issues, and attempting discreetly to gather together information on the area of Southern Iraq for which the UK might have some responsibility. The Iraq Planning Unit was set up in the FCO to bring together officials from across Whitehall to consider the likely outcomes of military action against Iraq.

As it became clear that military action was likely to prove necessary to enforce UN Security Council Resolutions, UK planning for the post-conflict phase was centralised in the Iraq Planning Unit (IPU), based in the FCO. The IPU was led by a senior FCO official and worked closely with the Government's central co-ordinating machinery in the Cabinet Office. It included MOD military and civilian staff as well as officials from FCO, the Department for International Development and the Treasury; and quickly became established as an integral element of the Whitehall process. The IPU played a critical role in supporting Ministers, CDS and the Chiefs of Staff in preparations for the post-conflict phase. ***(MOD – Operation in Iraq, July 2003)***

11. Once it became clear that military action was imminent, the FCO's Emergency Room was opened on Friday 14 March 2003, so that it could cover events over the weekend if required. It was to remain in operation until 2 May. Even so, there was a view that the military action, when it started on 19/20 March, had come early, before the diplomatic process that the FCO was engaged in had run its course[2].

Following military action

12. While much work had been done to clarify the exact legal basis for going to war with Iraq with or without a specific UN resolution, little work was done on the legal position that would apply after a military occupation. Planning was done on the basis that the situation would rapidly be handed over to the UN, but no contingency plan was made for dealing with the situation that would arise should the UN not step up to the line.

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13. This was not going to be post-war Germany. As the UK went into Iraq, there was inadequate appreciation that developments in national and international law, and the rigorous requirements of contemporary financial accountability, would tie hands from the beginning and make many democratic innovations unachievable. No-one seems to have considered whether the vision articulated by the Prime Minister (see below, p9) was actually realisable by an occupying force under international law.

14. Once the military campaign had begun, it was necessary to focus on handling the aftermath. US planners – reflecting fairly widespread views – expected that they might have to provide a major humanitarian aid effort, to deal with displaced persons and reconstruction following war damage. It was hoped, and believed, that it would be possible to get the Iraqi administration up and running again quite quickly, and that the UN would step in to manage those areas where the Iraqis were not yet ready to take over. In Washington the Department of Defense had already started to set up the Office of Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance (ORHA), headed by Lt Gen Jay Garner. In parallel it had recruited the nucleus of the Iraqi Reconstruction and Development Council (IRDC), expatriate Iraqis who would help restore the functioning of Iraq's administration. Neither No 10 nor the FCO saw a specific civilian role for the UK in this. The FCO's main task was to lobby for the required actions by the UN, and to recruit international support for Iraq's rehabilitation. The steps that might be expected if military action aimed at ridding Iraq of its WMD also led to the collapse of the regime and removal of Saddam Hussain were set out in an FCO brief dated 19 March

1 – in the immediate aftermath, the coalition military would take on responsibility for administration whilst locating and securing WMD;
2 - When conditions in Iraq permit, the US Office of Reconstruction and Humanitarian Affairs (ORHA) would move to Baghdad and take on the supervision of the civil administration of Iraq;
3 - After some weeks, the UN would appoint a Special Co-ordinator for Iraq and set out a mandate for the international community's presence in the country and, together with the Coalition, facilitate the establishment of an Iraqi Interim Authority (IIA).

15. In the event, the requirements, and the shape of UK involvement, changed over the next two months. ORHA was soon wound down, to be absorbed (in effect replaced) by the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) headed by Paul ("Jerry") Bremer. It became clear that the interval between the military operation and the emergence of an Iraqi Interim Authority under UN auspices in some form was going to be much longer than originally anticipated. The UK military, which had been given responsibility for four southern Governorates, including Basra, accounting for about 20% of the population of Iraq, was anxious to draw down its numbers from a peak of about 45,000 to 10,000 or 15,000 at the earliest opportunity.

16. The FCO's Iraq Planning Unit (now retitled Iraq Policy Unit) found itself called upon to identify and fund increasing numbers of secondees to support the CPA's civilian administration in Baghdad, and increasingly to staff the CPA's southern regional headquarters in Basra. A DfID/MOD team that visited Basra in early June 2003 reported that CPA (South), which at that stage was headed by a Danish Ambassador, lacked terms of reference, staff, security, communications and funding. The UK's 1 Div was carrying virtually the entire burden of civilian administration and reconstruction. It was against this background that the FCO started to place staff in Basra and the other southern governorates, to take on civilian administration and reconstruction for a period anticipated to be 18 months or longer.

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The UK presence in Basra and the South – Vision, Strategy and Objectives

17. The UK found itself responsible for southern Iraq. But what was it aiming to achieve there?

18. The UK's aspirations for Basra were a reflection of those for Iraq as a whole, outlined in the Government's "Vision for Iraq" paper unveiled by PM Tony Blair on 17 March 2003[3]. "a stable, united and law-abiding state within its present borders, cooperating with the international community, no longer posing a threat to its neighbours or to international security, abiding by all its international obligations and providing effective representative government to its own people."

19. If this was the visionary end-point, it was far over the horizon for those working on the ground in London and Iraq. It shaped the contributions in kind that the CPA sought and Coalition states offered, with what in retrospect was a surprisingly early focus on areas like women's rights, human rights and environmental issues[4]. But the "Vision for Iraq" was not articulated by the FCO in terms of specific aims and instructions, and the general consensus is that there was no overarching vision. Once No10 had committed the UK to supporting the US in taking military action in Iraq, the key government departments involved, ie the MOD, DfID and the FCO, worked together in their different areas of expertise to deliver the best possible outcome, though this outcome was nowhere specified in terms of targets or objectives. In this they were supported by a broad range of government departments and agencies such as the police, who provided experts to support training and reconstruction. The Iraq Planning Unit, which included representatives from the MOD, DfID and other government departments ensured that Whitehall departments shared the same view of the situation as it evolved.

20. The effort of those on the ground was directed towards the three post-conflict stages identified, for instance, in the MOD's "First Reflections" analysis in July 2003:

- STABILITY: To create a sufficiently stable environment to allow transition to follow-on forces and the engagement of civil agencies to begin recovery.
- RECOVERY: To develop a secure and stable environment that supports the process of national recovery in order to begin the transition to Iraqi self-government.
- TRANSITION: To complete the transition from coalition control to an enduring, peaceful, self-governing Iraq.

21. Knights and Williams[5] note that, for the UK military at least, a more limited agenda had taken its place by the beginning of 2006:

> By February 2006, the British Ministry of Defence announced less lofty conditions for withdrawal, comprising:
>
> - A manageable level of threat from insurgents;
> - The ability of Iraqi security forces to deal with the terrorist threat;
> - An effective local government; and
> - Coalition confidence in its own ability to provide backup for local forces.

This might imply that, three years on, the Coalition had barely moved beyond the first, stabilisation, phase.

22. By the time that the UK handed responsibility for security in Basra over to Provincial Iraqi Control (PIC) two years later it had been pared down to:

> "Our policy in Iraq consistently has been to get the Iraqis to a point where they can take control of their own destiny and security. To that end, in December 2007, we transferred responsibility for security in Basra province to the Iraqi authorities. Of the four provinces in southern Iraq for

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which we had responsibility, Basra was the last to transfer under Provincial Iraqi Control." (Des Browne, Secretary of State for Defence).

23. However, the Parliamentary Defence Committee was not fully persuaded that even this had been attained, reflecting the opinion that any diminution in violence was down to the actions of militias rather than to improvements in security secured by the Multi-National force and the Iraqi security forces[6].

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24. Even if the UK's local objectives were relatively short term and reactive, aimed at dealing with the situation as it evolved, this does not mean that there was a total absence of vision, on either the British or the Iraqi sides. From the beginning, Basra's history as a cosmopolitan centre long predating that of the states further down the Gulf offered the promise of renaissance as an economic and cultural centre, taking advantage of its oil industry and its air, sea and road links. But the CPA leadership in Baghdad refused to countenance progress in Basra – such as the re-opening of the airport to civilian traffic – if it showed up a lack of progress in Baghdad. This, coupled with persistent problems in establishing control of the ports, establishing security, combating crime and smuggling, and controlling increasingly confident militias during the year of CPA control, effectively pushed this dream into the far distance.

25. A more limited vision, for the British in the south, was more contentious in the context of the relationship with the US: that the British should manage its area in a way that could be termed "exemplary"[7].

26. As early as the end of the military phase, this was starting to appear ambitious[8]. The CPA in the South at this stage was barely functioning. Headed by the Danish Ambassador to Damascus, it was still an unstructured amalgamation of aid and reconstruction contractors from several countries on short, twelve-week contracts, with some secondees from the UK military. The IPU acknowledged the challenge in a minute of 9 June 2003:

> There is an urgent need to improve the performance of the CPA in Basra to provide the **exemplary** reconstruction effort the Prime Minister wants to see (see separate DFID/MOD paper).

27. The first FCO secondee to CPA (South) arrived just three days later. Her task was to support the Danish head of the operation, and to give it a structure that would enable it to work.

28. Exemplariness, in any case, could be expensive. A paper drawn up just before the military operation invited Ministers to put aside thoughts of an identifiably British post-military reconstruction operation, warning that it could be extremely costly, and that it was likely to be beyond the UK's means.[9] The UK therefore chose the path of making their reconstruction effort significantly dependent upon US and US-administered Iraqi funding.

29. The ambition to deliver exemplary results in the UK area might have been helpful presentationally in the UK, but it was less than helpful in the field precisely because of this dependence on US-controlled finance and support; and likewise the civilian effort was dependent on the continuing support of the military. Vying to be "exemplary" implied that others might be less so, and those on the ground felt strongly that this could damage the co-operation that was sorely needed[10].

30. A larger question is whether the UK and the US had a common vision. There is no evidence that the UK reached agreement with the US about the outcomes that might be regarded as satisfactory[11]. On the ground, aspirations to make Iraq a model democracy in the region seemed far from realistic. A Consul General in Basra commented

> I could not avoid the impression that we had been overly naïve in our assessment of the how Basrawis (and others) would respond in the aftermath of the invasion. Basra was a seriously dislocated society in 2003, having been in the front line of three wars in the previous fifteen years and repressed following the 1991 *intifada*. These problems were compounded by the local economy and by the influx of many Marsh Arabs following the draining of the marshes. In such circumstances, people do not tend to plan for tomorrow. They take what they can today. Expecting Western-style democracy to emerge was unrealistic – it hasn't in any other Middle Eastern Country even though the circumstances in many are far more propitious than in Iraq. In addition, we should have recognised that pre-invasion, in southern Iraq, much of the population looked to religious groups rather than the State to underpin local society. Widespread support for OMS (ie the Sadrists) and other more conservative religious groups should have been expected.

31. More seriously, there was a complete lack of agreement on the role of the Shia parties in a post-Saddam Iraq. In the FCO, a paper had highlighted the possibility that democracy might bring to power a conservative, religious regime that was not necessarily well disposed to the West. But there was strong opposition from the US-led CPA in Baghdad who insisted that

> "we had not invaded to create a Shia theocracy" (Stewart 257)

Specific UK Objectives in Southern Iraq

32. The UK's objectives in Iraq, subordinated to the overriding objective of supporting the US, and often working to a timetable dictated by US domestic concerns, were and have continued to be reactive. To this extent they have been short-term. Longer-term objectives and specific milestones have throughout been too vulnerable to factors over which the FCO has little or no control. In the early stages particularly, the objectives set out for individual senior officials clearly varied in quality, though not all felt that they needed detailed tasking[12]. Later on, detailed and realistic objectives were drawn up periodically, though they remained short-term, focusing on how to get the train back on to the track rather than reviewing the direction in which the track should lead.

Did No.10, MoD, DfID and FCO all have the same objectives?

33. While FCO officials may have been able to manage with more or less detailed objectives, there has been a constant undercurrent of frustration or irritation between departments about their perceptions of the other parties' objectives. The military had committed a substantial force of 45,000 to the military campaign, on the understanding that it could be rolled back to a third of that or less as soon as the fighting was over, and were dismayed that the civilian side – from FCO, DfID and other government departments – were clearly lacking in numbers and resources to take up the burden. The civilian side felt that the military had failed to deliver lasting security, and that military assets were deployed solely to meet military considerations and not to support the broader objectives of HMG.

34. DfID were reluctant partners in the early stages. Under Development Secretary Clare Short, who resigned in May 2003, in the immediate aftermath of the military campaign, the Department's political leadership was ideologically opposed to No10's Iraq policy. Post-conflict reconstruction was in any case not a part of the mandate of DfID, which was focused on the elimination of poverty. The relationship with the FCO became much easier with the appointments of Baroness Amos and her successor, and DfID provided effective support by

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identifying and resourcing contract employees to work on reconstruction in southern Iraq and elsewhere.

35. At the working level, the performance of No10 and Cabinet Office was disappointing. Whilst other government departments were expected to implement the Iraq policy that No10 had agreed with the US leadership, No10 did not ensure that government departments sang to a common hymn sheet. DfID was brought into line only after Clare Short's resignation, and no visible pressure at all was brought to bear on the Treasury to ensure that the Iraq campaign and its aftermath were properly resourced, though operational cooperation with HMT was good.

UK Resources

36. No-one has stated that the resources allocated to the UK's participation in Iraq were adequate or better, and the FCO in particular seems to have been unable to secure adequate backing, having instead to rely upon the MOD, DfID and the Americans in every area of its involvement.

37. In 1991 the US, UK and other members of the coalition that had liberated Kuwait secured substantial backing from regional states, and a very significant percentage of the UK's costs were recovered. The IPU recognised at an early stage that it might be much more difficult this time round[13], but over two years later, a senior FCO official commented

> HMG (and the FCO) took a long time to wake up to the scale of the task we had taken on. Demands from No 10 and Ministers for action have always exceeded the resources available. The Treasury have played hard ball, exploiting different Departments' own internal reasons for not wanting to make claims on the Reserve to kill off initiatives. No 10's unwillingness to intervene with HMT, except once, has compounded the problem, and undermined the morale of officials tasked with running an 'exemplary operation' without the resources to do so. (May 2005)

This was felt in Baghdad, too:

> The efforts were inadequate to match the scale of the problem. The FCO was asked to meet its additional commitments in Iraq within existing resources so it was inevitable that we would be making do whilst the MOD were able to benefit from supplementary funding. DFID were constrained by their 10% rule. (former HMA, Baghdad)

38. Resourcing issues were reflected in differing ways – difficulties in securing personnel and funds in the first place; inability to secure resources essential to the running of the civil operation; a constant shortage of funds that could be used flexibly and locally. The FCO was unprepared for the sort of operation that was to be undertaken, with the result that, in the early stages (but almost 6 months after the invasion) FCO staff were being sent into field without computers, communications equipment, satisfactory communications arrangements (personal e-mail accounts were used throughout, though some classified communications became available during 2004), and so on. Their military and DfID counterparts were better provided for. If the FCO and other UK government departments had not given this sort of eventuality a thought, it was clear that the US had not, either, though they were able to deploy the resources to make up for some of the shortfalls.

39. Had there been time to plan for the ambitious undertaking that Iraq became, it would have been found necessary to call for much more substantial resourcing, if only on a contingency basis. As it was, once it became clear that there would have to be a civil presence in each of the governorates, it became equally clear that there was simply not the manpower to cover them adequately[14].

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40. FCO officials complained of a mismatch between London's expectations and the resources available to meet them. This was particularly apparent because, while the military had the funds and the means to carry out quick-impact, tactical, projects, and DfID had very significant resources for longer-term strategic work, the FCO was somehow expected to aid the transition from reliance on the military by taking on areas of both, but with neither resources nor means[15].

41. Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee commented on more than one occasion that it was necessary and appropriate that the costs incurred by the FCO in Iraq (as in Afghanistan) that were additional to its mainstream diplomatic and consular roles should be funded from the Reserve. It is not clear whether the FCO itself formulated and presented a sufficiently strong case for extra funding to support additional work in the field[16].

42. But perhaps the answer was not to retain responsibility for reconstruction and development, but to give ownership to the Iraqis much earlier than we did:

> ... there was no level of resources that was ever feasible that would have been up to the task. It was important to get the Iraqis to take responsibility early on and to pay for it out of Iraqi oil. (former HMA Baghdad)

> I recognise the constraints, but if we had spent more on reconstruction and police training during the good times (when security allowed lower force levels) and less on maintaining a heavy military presence, we might have been more successful. (former CG Basra)

UK Role vis-à-vis Role of Basrawis: Security and Reconstruction

43. In large part the UK's role was defined by the responsibilities that it assumed when the UK agreed to become the key member of the US led coalition that invaded Iraq. Those responsibilities - and certain limitations – were set out clearly in the lead up to military operations and the immediate aftermath. The responsibilities were principally to establish security and to provide for the humanitarian needs of the Iraqi population. The limitations, set down in the provisions of international law governing belligerent occupation, notably the Fourth Geneva Convention and the 1907 Hague Regulations, would mean that no ambitious programme of reform and political reconstruction could be begun without a mandate from the UN.

44. The restrictions were eased (though not removed) by UN SCR 1483 adopted on 22 May 2003. This provided authority for the establishment of the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA), though in practice it had come into existence with the arrival of Bremer in Baghdad on 12 May.

Security

45. Responsibility for the control of security in Basra, as elsewhere, rested with the Coalition until it was formally handed over to the Iraqis. It was agreed with the permanent Iraqi Government (once it had been established) that this should be done governorate by governorate, as they were judged to be ready. (This process was referred to by the acronym PIC, for Provincial Iraqi Control).

46. Underlying the charge that the British abandoned Basra to the militias is the assumption that up to December 2007, when responsibility for security in Basra Governorate was formally handed to the Iraqis, the British, and specifically the British military, should have been responsible not only for control, but also for implementation. This has been the view of

both the Parliamentary Foreign Affairs Committee in 2006[17] and of the Defence Committee a year later (cited earlier). In the Government's response to the FAC report, the FCO sidestepped the recommendation to identify further steps rather than challenging the basis on which it was made[18], though it noted, significantly, that the Iraqis had set up a committee to oversee the implementation of a Basra security plan. The MOD who, by the time they responded to the Defence Committee, had handed security over to PIC (Provincial Iraqi Control), equally avoided acknowledging the Defence Committee's central allegation that they had failed to fulfil their initial goal, which was "to establish the security necessary for the development of representative political institutions and for economic reconstruction", stating that the "strategy of coalition and UK forces is to help improve security and build the capacity of the Iraqi Security Forces…"

47. If the MOD had been going to provide the level of security that Parliament, and indeed Basrawis, expected in the absence of a functioning police force and, until late 2007, a capable Iraqi military, they were clearly going to require more than the 5,500 troops who were in theatre at the end of 2007, or even the 8,500 who had been in theatre in mid 2004, to police a community of a million or so.

48. However, the nature and extent of the UK's security responsibilities seem never to have been properly agreed, and the notion that the UK should be responsible for all aspects of security, including work that would normally fall to the civil police, was not explicitly challenged or addressed in either London or Baghdad.

49. The Coalition should, arguably, have got a much tighter grip on security from the beginning and as long as the CPA remained in charge. Immediately after the invasion, Coalition forces in both Baghdad and Basra appeared to condone theft of Iraqi property by Iraqis during the initial frenzy of looting, and had an ambivalent attitude towards crimes committed by Iraqis against Iraqis. They could not, in any case, be expected to have the local knowledge and understanding that would enable them to operate effectively in such circumstances. Maintenance of security tended to be interpreted solely in terms of the threat that it represented to Coalition forces and their ability to operate without threat in the Iraqi cities and countryside.

50. Iraqis had higher expectations. *"You have occupied our country – it is your duty to protect us"*[19]. Rory Stewart's account of his time as Governorate Co-ordinator in Maysan (Amara) reports the Iraqi response to the ransacking of the (then) governor's office, cited by Knights and Williams:

> How many unarmed people were we prepared to kill to defend a ministry building?" Stewart's account of the conversation between the provincial governor Riyadh Mahoud and coalition officials is telling. When the governor asks why British forces allowed the mob to enter: *One of us replied, "Governor, maybe it is better that a little computer equipment gets stolen than more people get killed."And [the governor] said: "What are you talking about? Would you let the mob go stampeding into your office and loot your computer equipment?" We had no answer. Of course we would have shot anyone who tried to break into our compound.*

51. However, the provision of security for Iraqis presented a dilemma. If we were to protect the institutions we were trying to empower, such as the governorates, with a circle of UK military, it would to a large extent undermine their authority, and leave them open to the accusation that they were mere tools of the Coalition.

52. The responsibility of the Coalition for controlling and maintaining security changed with the handover of sovereignty to the Iraqis at the end of June 2004, and was redefined by CPA

order 91 (governing the presence of Armed Forces in Iraq) and UNSCR 1546 and appended letters. SCR 1546 authorised the continued presence of a Multinational Force in Iraq, and approved the establishment of a number of bodies to ensure co-ordination between multi-national and Iraqi forces. The multi-national forces would act in full recognition of and respect for Iraqi sovereignty but would not come under full Iraqi control. The continued need for the MNF was restated in SCR1637 of November 2005. SCR1723, was adopted in November 2006, after the first Iraqi governorates (Maysan and Dhi Qar, both in the "British" sector) had passed over to "Provincial Iraqi Control of security". Prime Minister Maliki's letter, appended to the SCR, explicitly acknowledged the Iraqi government's responsibility for the maintenance of security, but control remained split between the Iraqis and the MNF.

53. In conclusion, the UK had not planned for the possibility that it might have to take responsibility for policing a vast area (ten times that of Northern Ireland) with a population of some 5 million or so (about two and a half times that of Northern Ireland or Kosovo), 1000 km of porous borders, and no remaining civil administration. The military in particular faced the problem that there was no functioning police to work with. At no time were either the UK military or the Coalition civil authorities staffed or resourced to provide a level of security satisfactory to an increasingly beleaguered Iraqi civil population.

54. Despite this, MOD policy from the beginning had been to withdraw as completely as possible as soon as it was politically expedient in the UK and could be packaged acceptably for the US. The delivery of security was progressively negotiated out of their brief, as it was from HMG's overall ambitions for Iraq, as noted earlier.

55. This progressive abandonment by the UK of responsibility for the maintenance of security in Basra seems never to have been formally debated within HMG nor properly negotiated with the US or the Iraqi authorities, although it had been implicit in the MOD's draw down strategy since May 2003. This consequently enabled the Iraqi governments in Baghdad to avoid grasping this particular nettle (which would have meant asking or instructing MND(SE) to take decisive action where Iraqi security and police forces needed support), particularly while they were distracted by power struggles in Baghdad and insurgency elsewhere. It would have been equally untenable both in Iraq and in Coalition countries, for British or international forces to go on to the offensive after July 2004 without Iraqi political support at the appropriate levels. Oft-repeated instances where UK forces did take decisive action (the Jameat incidents, and the later one involving the NIIA office in Basra, for example), led to boycotts and complaints from the authorities in both Baghdad and Basra. Efforts to improve the security environment by getting key individuals replaced took too far long, or were dismissed on legal grounds.

Reconstruction

56. In the south a small number of DfID contractors arrived very soon after the invasion to support the British military and (insofar as it had a presence in the south) ORHA in work to rebuild an infrastructure shattered more by years of neglect and sanctions than by the military operations of March.

57. Progress had been desperately slow. An important sitrep was addressed on 12 May 2003 to the British GCO by his Civil Liaison Officer (CLO), the only FCO officer at that stage in southern Iraq. He reported that the military had done what it had set out to do, but that there was no civilian organisation to take over[20]. The point was fully registered in an IPU paper of 3 June 2003[21].

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58. The military (who in Basra city were the British) felt that their job had been done, but found themselves with no working civil institutions, either Iraqi or Coalition, to hand over to. Councils had been set up in the main centres of the south, and an over-arching one for Basra governorate itself, but they had neither powers nor budgets. Furthermore, the Basra Provincial Council had to be dissolved and reformed when it became clear that its head was abusing his position and using it to build up an exclusive power base for himself.

59. The CPA leadership – personified by Bremer – alone had the right to legislate, and controlled the purse-strings. Focused solely on managing the balance of power within Baghdad, and strongly influenced by the demands of former Iraqi exiles and later the Iraqi Governing Council to perpetuate a strongly centralised state, it ignored the need for administrative and economic progress to be made in the provinces.

60. In short, there was no plan. The UK had gone into Iraq expecting the Iraqis to go back to work and carry on much as before, whilst supporting them with technical expertise and resources to start repairing, restoring and improving their infrastructure. However, the CPA in Baghdad had more radical notions of dismantling the old structures, allowing self-starting free-market enterprises to take their place. This vision, insofar as it existed, was an economic one. Arguably the vision was realised in the emergence of militias and armed gangs following the collapse of the police and elimination of the armed forces, whilst it failed completely in the administrative and economic fields.

61. There was a further obstacle. Where the Coalition had hoped that Iraqis might do things for themselves, many had no concept of taking charge. Under the Baathists' strongly centralised system, no-one took initiatives, and no authority was devolved. If the person in charge was away, the second in command did not take over; work stopped. Once senior levels of the administration had been eliminated by the de-Baathification order, Iraqis in middle management waited for someone in a recognisable position of authority to give them an instruction and the means to carry out that instruction. At governorate level they were reluctant to recognise the CPA as the authority to which they could properly respond without risking retribution or penalty from a subsequent Iraqi authority. And on occasions where more motivated Iraqis did seek to take an initiative, the Coalition was unable or reluctant to provide the resources or the authority.

62. During the lifetime of the CPA it was impossible to be clear about what we – as members of the Coalition – expected to do and what we expected the Iraqis to do for themselves, for a number of reasons:

- Financial and political decisions made by the CPA in Baghdad were not discussed with or communicated formally to either the CPA in the south or to their supposed counterparts on the Iraqi side.
- Even when we were aware of an intent on the part of the CPA, its mechanisms for delivery were so defective as to make it impossible to communicate to the Iraqi community and their leaders in Basra.
- Where we expected the Iraqis to take a lead, the Coalition failed to provide the powers and the resources.

63. Lacking a clear view, the Coalition was unable to convey one. Furthermore, the mechanisms available to it were late, weak and sporadic, for all the effort that went into them. The criticism of an officer who was there in the early stages may be harsh:

> Our strategic communication effort from 2003 on has been short of what is required. This field is fairly widely recognised as one of the key areas where we need to develop better capacity and

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> approaches. The extent of our effort was a light media effort and individual messages passed by senior diplomats / military commanders (former CLO with the military)

but, try as one might, the voice of an occupier, however benign, is going to struggle to make itself heard above suq gossip and the likes of Al-Jazeera.

Expectations

64. Much revolved around expectations. The visionary leaders of the US and UK had painted a tantalising picture of a new Iraq, but with no detail about how it was to be achieved. By removing Saddam Hussain the Coalition created expectations: that tomorrow would be better than yesterday; that people would be able to go about their business without the threat of being targeted by the agencies of an oppressive state; that their children would have a better education and a better future. None of these could be said to be unrealistic. Likewise, when the Coalition created councils, their members expected to have powers, to be able to deploy resources, and to make their city a better place – though it is highly likely that some expected to bolster their own positions, whether socially, politically or economically. But time passed, and despite the very best efforts of numerous dedicated Coalition secondees, far too little happened[22]. The message in Wasit was the same as that in Basra:

> Whether or not we had ourselves created the unemployment, shortages, corruption and decay that made the lives of so many Iraqis a misery, we were now seen as responsible for them. (Etherington 113)

The Coalition found itself facing exactly the same problem as governments elsewhere.

65. But, in Basra in particular, the CPA itself perhaps added to the mismatch of expectations when it moved from its desperately cramped and hopelessly vulnerable downtown headquarters in the accounts office of the Basra Electricity Company to a custom-made camp in the Basra Palace compound, a small town housing some 300 people that was set up, by US contractors, in 45 days. The move was necessary, and the accommodation and living conditions far from luxurious, but it did not escape Basrawis that the Coalition had managed to create a settlement with piped water and 24-hour electricity in a month and a half. Meanwhile, six months after the occupation, the inhabitants of the squalid Hayyaniyah (Shia Flats) district, the breeding ground of Sadrist support, continued to live in squalid concrete boxes surrounded by raw sewage.

> A local Iraqi politician who had been in local politics in Sweden during a period of exile asked for a small sum of money from the Coalition as the winter rains set in to hire a lorry and pay labourers to build a dirt causeway across a pool of sewage to the Hayyaniyah flats. No quick funding was available from Coalition sources at that stage, but the British military thought that this was the sort of project that they could take on. However, the initiative was countermanded at a more senior level in the military, and the proposal was passed to the CPA's contract team. The plans for a dirt track grew into a two-lane road for vehicles, with a proper foundation, until it was judged too expensive. The military took another look and decided that this time they could probably manage a quick fix. By the time the track was completed the rainy season was over and the pools of sewage had dried up.

66. The UK, as the US's main partner in the Coalition, could hardly be unaware of Basrawi expectations. They crowded around the gates and marched in their hundreds (and occasionally thousands) to make their expectations – and their demands – clear. In this they were often encouraged by local politicians and rabble rousers with their own agendas, generally harmless in an embryonic democracy, who sought to discover what could be prised out of the occupiers with a show of local discontent.

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67. The general view among FCO officials is that these expectations were unrealistically high. Certainly, they were high given the inadequacies of the ramshackle organisation that had, in the CPA, been set up to meet them. And they were high given that little detailed thought had gone into post-war planning. But most expectations were not profoundly unreasonable.

68. Iraqis had been through a generation of war and disorder, particularly in the South, close to the Iranian and Kuwaiti borders, where towns and communities had experienced the Iran-Iraq war, the aftermath of the liberation of Kuwait, the putting down of the Shia uprising in the south, sanctions and now invasion by the Coalition. They were used to picking themselves up, patching up what had been damaged, and rebuilding a daily routine. The Coalition came in with grand ideas of doing things properly this time, rebuilding to European or American standards that would ensure that things would last for years, rather than patching up for months. To some extent this was, on the US side, ideologically driven. Quick but temporary fixes would have got people into work, and brought hope that improvement was on the way. Instead the Coalition found itself bogged down in contracting and accounting processes. There were few if any Iraqi companies who could produce bids, in English, to western standards and so the bulk of the work went to rather a small number of enterprises, rather than being spread around as would have been the case under the Baathist regime. Larger projects were kept out of Iraqi hands altogether.

69. There were genuine problems with the approach that might have seemed best to Iraqis – quick fixes might not always have been safe, for instance; some risk assessments needed to be made in the light of Western and international standards, for example the environmental aspects of raising sunken shipping, and dredging the Shatt al-Arab. Additionally, by 2003, many parts of Iraq's infrastructure, particularly in the neglected South, were so decayed as to be beyond quick fixes. Analysis of water supplies and drainage flows, for example, showed that in Basra there was little benefit in increasing supplies of potable water until the loss of most of it in the water-mains system had been addressed.

70. The fact that most expectations were not unreasonable meant that far greater attention had to be given by the Coalition to explaining what it was delivering and what it could deliver. It is possible that no information effort would have been adequate. In any case actions speak louder than words.

Evolution of the Situation in Basra from July 2004

71. Against this background of confused responsibilities and disappointed expectations the situation in Basra became more difficult. External commentators and critics of the war in the UK have highlighted the fact that the British forces in Basra were in the early stages able to go about without armour on foot patrols. Over time they were forced off the streets, and then out of their outposts in the city, and finally out of their HQ at the Palace compound to Basra Airport. The UK is blamed for allowing the civil administration of Basra to fall into the hands of Shia groups who are proxies of Iran, and for withdrawing its military forces to Basra airport, some distance from the town, leaving Shia militias to fight it out in the streets. In the meantime, Sunnis have faced remorseless persecution, and most other minorities, such as Christians and Mandaeans have been forced to flee. While there is much truth in this characterisation it has rarely seemed this stark on the ground.

72. The rise of Shia parties, and some degree of attendant Iranian influence, was foreseen from the beginning[23], and in the first six months after the invasion the various political leaders in Basra experimented with the different tools of influence that had suddenly been made

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available. Needing places to operate from, many occupied public buildings. A few resorted to armed violence. Others tested their ability to bring the crowds out on to the street. Yet others saw how they might use dialogue with the Coalition to see how they might advance the interests of their communities or of themselves. Some decided to test their mettle by confronting the Coalition and the authorities who had been put in place head on, by attempting to set up an alternative state, with an alternative army and, in places, alternative local councils.

> In early October 2003, the first units of the new Mahdi Army paraded in a graduation ceremony in Basra in the presence of Moqtada al-Sadr[24].... In Sadr City, (Sistani's) followers retook over the municipality building, but in Basra the reverse happened. Sadrists who had been evicted from their headquarters by British troops succeeded in taking back control of the building. (Allawi 211-2)

73. The British Regional Co-ordinator for the South Eastern governorates commented:

> Of course it is not all peace and tranquillity. Violence is endemic in the South, as it is in Iraq generally. Now that Saddam's yoke has been lifted, some new manifestations are becoming apparent. As in many developing countries, the irreducible level of violence could end up being quite high. (9 Oct 2003)

74. From late summer 2003 on, attacks on the military started to increase: a few CPA vehicles being escorted by the military were damaged, and, more regrettably, civilian employees injured. Perhaps more significantly, attacks on Iraqis, kidnappings (mainly for criminal ends) and crime generally started to increase. The British military, lacking any effective Iraqi police counterparts, were not able to act effectively against much of this.

75. However, the general level of violence in the South remained low by comparison with other parts of Iraq. Furthermore, there was a reluctance by both the CPA in Baghdad and by the local Iraqi council in Basra to see the UK military in a direct armed confrontation with either the groups who were occupying public buildings or organisations, like Sadr, using armed violence against coalition and armed Iraqis alike. Such challenges were one that Iraqis believed should be resolved by negotiation, and by Iraqis themselves. At the same time there was a failure to tackle the issue of Moqtada al-Sadr in Baghdad. On numerous occasions, from the Autumn of 2003 onwards, the CPA resolved that he should be arrested or brought into line. But no effective action was taken.

76. By the time that the CPA was dissolved, the situation in the South was once again reasonable, though a certain level of violence remained[25]. However, Basra was far from falling into the sort of chaos that had been seen elsewhere in Iraq: the Sadr uprising in Kut that had led to the withdrawal of the CPA operation there, or the attack on the Italian military at Nasiriya and other Sadrist challenges, or the sustained mortaring of the CPA HQ in Maysan over several weeks.

Basra after the CPA – Summer 2004 to Spring 2007

77. With the winding up of the Coalition Provisional Authority in mid 2004 sovereignty was handed over to the Iraqi Interim Government and the role of the Coalition partners with respect to the Iraqi Government changed significantly.

78. The new, albeit temporary, Iraqi Government and its ministries were to assume full authority, with Coalition forces remaining in Iraq to maintain security whilst Coalition countries helped to build up the police and the armed forces. Development work would continue, overseen in the governorates by PCOs (project co-ordination offices) whose job was

to co-ordinate (foreign funding and expertise with Iraqi planning at the central and local levels), and the UK continued to support this with DfID-funded contractors.

79. Concerns were expressed in the south that the summary termination of CPA projects and delays in getting a successor body up and running might lead to breakdowns in fuel and electricity supplies during the heat of the summer of 2004. But this critical season passed relatively uneventfully.

More critical in Basra were the successive failures of the governments in Baghdad (the Interim Government of 2004, followed by ITG of 2005 and then the permanent government elected in December 2005) and of the new Basra Council, elected in January 2005, to take up their new responsibilities. With tight deadlines imposed from all directions Iraqis were poorly prepared[26]. In the Basra Provincial Council infighting among the Shia groups which (in the main) composed it, and the fact that the Governor was not prepared – or able – to stand up to the growing power of local militias meant that the council spent little time on the administrative and infrastructural challenges facing the Governorate. Budgets allocated for 2005 and 2006 were late or poorly used. Council-led reconstruction was disappointing, and the Coalition found itself being blamed for the lack of progress in areas that were no longer in its remit[27]. Trying to deal with this situation was far beyond the resources that the UK was willing to deploy, and all efforts to achieve an exemplary outcome in the south were effectively abandoned[28].

80. FCO officials in Iraq insisted that the Basrawis were in no doubt about the limitations of UK capabilities. But the invasion and the occupation had created high expectations, and it is not clear whether the UK had an information effort that would ensure that the broader community understood what the UK could deliver – or was even prepared to listen.

81. *The Jameat Police Station incident of September 2005 once again brought the spotlight on to the security situation in Basra, leading to a detailed policy review by FCO, MOD and DfID at the end of September 2005. The review reported that*

The media portrayal of Basra being on the brink of descending into chaos is wrong:
and continued

- While militia rivalry is a fact of life in the Basra police, the behaviour of the Jamiyat police station (where the two men were initially held) is not representative of the police service as a whole. Some 70 out of 240 Jamiyat officers are pursuing primarily a militia rather than IPS agenda. This should be set against a total southern police force of around 14,000. Police officers will continue to have dual loyalties to the state on one hand and militia/tribe on the other. [...]
- The much-publicised refusal by Basra Governor al-Waili and the Basra Council to do business with us is an irritant, but will pass. Al-Waili is not a forceful figure, unlike his predecessors; his party (Fadheela) is losing credibility; the Provincial Council members are discredited. We are taking steps to re-engage with the Council;
- Baghdad politicians share our understanding of the challenges and the need for Baghdad to exert greater control over the south-east region.

For the reasons above, while the impression of losing political consent in Basra (criticism by the Governor and the Provincial Council) is awkward, the effect is not significant. Nevertheless, the situation remains fragile (as it was before), with British influence for the time being compromised by this incident. As before, progress in reversing the legacy of the Saddam years, and countering the effects of religion, tribe and Iran will require sustained engagement.

82. The conclusion, based on the input of officials on the ground, was that the situation was not as serious as the media were reporting it, and represented the actions of a very small

proportion of the community. Furthermore, those elements of the elected Council who were in some degree favourable to the Sadrists were themselves losing credibility because of these confrontational tactics.

83. With hindsight this analysis seems flawed – much of the police force was infiltrated by Sadrist elements, or at best would not stand up to the JAM: a month later, attacks by the Mahdi Army led to a lock down by the Consulate and the aid operation in Basra and the South, and an Iraqi interpreter (who worked for the British military) was murdered. This was followed by a spate of kidnappings in Basra and elsewhere in Iraq. Reacting to a surge in crime, British forces in Basra made a number of arrests in January 2006, prompting a boycott of the UK, both civil and military, by the Provincial Council and further threats to Iraqis working with the British and others.

84. Looking back at this period, the British Ambassador in Baghdad at the time commented

> Our need to rid the police of militias and criminal elements pushed us into the front line and in conflict with armed groups. In the absence of any national Iraqi consensus on this the transition to armed conflict on the streets of Basra was inevitable.

85. If the British were to maintain order on the streets of Basra, it would have had to be done without the support or consent of the elected government in Baghdad and the elected council in Basra; and action would have to be taken against, rather than with the co-operation of, important elements of the Police. It would have amounted to a new occupation[29], and this time it would have lacked popular consent.

86. In May 2006 the British Embassy in Baghdad tried to focus Maliki's new Iraqi Government on the need for decisive action in the south, if only to allow major infrastructure renewal to go ahead. In mid year Maliki's Government set up a security committee for Basra, though this was resisted by the Governor of Basra, who saw it as a challenge to his own authority. A state of emergency was declared in Basra by Maliki at the beginning of June and the Iraqi army moved in to restore order in the streets, accompanied on some patrols by MNF (British) forces.

87. Meanwhile, in response to the establishment (driven by US Ambassador Zal Khalilzad, on the basis of a similar model in Afghanistan) of a national network of Provincial Reconstruction Teams under US coordination, the UK set up a Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) in Basra in May 2006 to expand and co-ordinate the development effort, particularly in the area of capacity-building[30].

88. While the state of emergency had some limited success, it failed to deal with the underlying problems of the city. In summer 2006, MND(SE) planned a major operation (Operation Salamanca) to seize control back from militias and criminal gangs, but this was watered down at GoI behest. It eventually proceeded as Operation Sinbad (September to March 2006) which focussed more on short-term consent-winning projects and as an undemanding training opportunity for the Iraqi Security Forces. This joint MNF/Iraqi operation had Baghdad's backing, though initially only lukewarm support from the Provincial Governor in Basra - though by November the situation had become sufficiently serious for the Provincial Council to realise that it would need to work with the Coalition to counter the growing savagery of the Shia militias who had slaughtered 17 Iraqi interpreters at the end of October[31].

89. In the course of the operation, in which the Iraqi military played the major part with MND support, further action was taken against the Serious Crimes Unit based at the Jameat

Police Station, and the building was itself destroyed. This led to a further breakdown in relations between British forces in Basra and the Governor and the Provincial Council, once again highlighting the ambivalence of the local authorities on security issues.

90. Concern over the local level of support was raised by British representatives with the Iraqi government, but Operation Sinbad was largely successful in meeting its now modest aims , and in particular showed that Iraq's 10 Div, which the British had been training and mentoring, had the potential to operate effectively. By this time MOD planning to reduce the number of UK outposts in Basra and to draw down manning from about 7,000 to about 4,500 was well in hand, and in British eyes at least, demonstrated that the Iraqis were close to being ready to take responsibility for their own security and maintenance of order.

2007 onwards

91. Some argue that operation Sinbad highlighted the failure of what was often portrayed as a British "softly softly" approach in the south. British officials on the ground who watched the situation evolving do not highlight UK military tactics or the numbers of military available for policing as the prime cause of the growing disorder that led up to Operation Sinbad. For them, key issues were the continuing inadequacy and criminality of the police; the failure of the Provincial Council to take a firm position on controlling the militias, sometimes because of intimidation, but also because some were involved with or sympathetic to the militias; and the failure of the Iraqi government to focus on either the security or the political situations in Basra.

92. What Operation Sinbad did highlight was the fact that the presence of UK forces was part of the problem – when the Iraqi army moved in to or patrolled a difficult area they came under attack much less often than when a British or a combined force moved in. This may in part have been because ISF pulses were more cursory, and less intrusive, than UK or combined ones; and perhaps because of the UK's more restrictive, and well-known, rules of engagement.

93. It also brought into stark focus the differences between the US and UK positions on the use of force that were to continue to be played out during 2007 as the British moved towards handing security control over to the Iraqis in Basra as they had already started to do in the other southern governorates. Since 2003 the British approach had been based entirely on the domestic political need to draw down troops from Iraq. The alternative, to draft in extra troops in order to carry out a US-style surge to regain control of the city unilaterally does not appear to have been considered. But neither does it appear to have been sought. The UK view was that the Iraqis themselves had to take responsibility for security. Until 2006, when the Iraqis finally showed that they could do so, the British aimed to hold out on the ground, reducing troop numbers when possible, and continuing ambitious programmes to train the military – achieved with some success – and the police, with much less success.

94. Though it achieved its immediate objectives, in terms of creating a lasting improvement in security Operation Sinbad had limited success. Although reporting suggests that there was general public support for it and its objectives, the militias showed that they could fight back – the Consulate General reported 50 direct hits on British Embassy Office in Basra between Sept 06 and April 07, and a heightened campaign of intimidation of Iraqis working with Coalition.

95. Nevertheless, British military planning pressed ahead with its plan to hand over responsibility for security to the Iraqis and to continue withdrawing the British military

presence on the ground. This worked to undermine both Iraqi and US confidence in the UK's commitment and to the accuracy of British assessments of the situation in Basra[32]. The British military received neither clear guidance nor support from the central and local Iraqi authorities. A raid on the Basra NIIA (Intelligence Agency) office on 3 March carried out jointly by MND(SE) and Iraqi Special Operations Forces (ISOF) led to another row with the authorities in Baghdad and Basra.

96. The Governor, whom the government in Baghdad and the Provincial Council in Basra had been trying to oust for the best part of 2006 continued to resist efforts to have him removed, and both the Emergency Security Committee and Provincial Director of Police (PDOP) appointed in summer 2006 had proven thoroughly ineffectual. FCO and posts devoted much effort in the first half of 2007 lobbying for the ESC to be wound up and the PDOP replaced, before finally succeeding in June. By May the Consulate reported:

> All of our contacts speak of a deterioration in the security situation more generally, and an undertow of increasing assassinations and kidnappings.

97. FCO officials continued to argue that the problems in Basra could <u>only</u> be addressed by Iraqi political and development solutions. At senior level this was done principally through calls from Defence Secretary Des Browne; FCO ministers were less engaged, and calls from PM Blair tended not to pin Maliki down on detail. Nevertheless it remained difficult to register with the government in Baghdad, that more attention had to be paid to Basra with its recurrent and growing security challenges. This was a reflection of the poor advice around the Prime Minister, and the agendas of individual players.

98. Faced with political paralysis in both Basra and Baghdad, MND(SE) could do little other than to wait it out in the Palace compound in Basra. A new Iraqi security team was finally appointed in June, and described a dire situation:

> Generals Mohan and Jalil (Basra's new security team) report on their first weeks in post. They paint a picture of a lawless, militia-dominated Basra, where corrupt, compromised and (in the case of the army) insufficient security forces can no longer enforce the rule of law. Maliki tasks the Crisis Action Cell (the security ministries and MNF) to look urgently at Mohan's and Jalil's findings and find ways in which their work can be supported. (Mid July 2007)

99. It is understandable that the US remained hard to convince that Basra was ready to take responsibility for its own security, and debate continued throughout 2007, with the Americans wanting to see results from Mohan and Jalil before agreeing to PIC, and also concerned that PIC would mark a precipitous reduction in the UK military commitment. The UK went forward with its plans for a military drawdown nevertheless, closing down its bases in Basra and handing over control of the Palace site in early September. Meanwhile, the Governor's role remained in the balance until September when, in court, he was successful in an appeal against a vote of no confidence by the Provincial Council. This at least consolidated his authority, though grave doubts remained about his probity.

100. Finally, the formal handover of security responsibility to the Iraqis took place in December, by which time the British force had withdrawn to Basra International Airport.

Could the British have prevented a collapse of security in Basra?

101. The portrayal of Basra as a town abandoned by the British to Iranian-backed militias and Shia politicians is an over-simplification. But a number of questions are raised. Did we see it coming, and fail to take appropriate action? Or, if we did not see it coming, should we have done so?

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102.It would be hard to argue that the warning signs were not read – from the periodic attacks on UK military and civilian targets; recurrent challenges to the Coalition and the local authorities from well-armed militias; repeated (but largely unsuccessful) attempts to get the Iraqi leadership in Baghdad to attend to the need to address political, security and policing issues in Basra.

103.However, it is arguable that the significance of the periodic outbreaks of militia violence was underestimated. By early 2008 there had been several cycles of challenge from militias, most particularly from ones acting in the name of JAM, but not necessarily under the direct control of Moqtada al-Sadr. The numbers of armed activists who periodically took control of the streets or terrorised various sectors of society with impunity was small, but their ability to disrupt reconstruction work, normal daily business, education and the maintenance of services was absolute. Over the previous five years Coalition and Iraqis alike had grown used to a fairly high level of violence in Basra, and it may have come to be regarded as the irreducible level of violence foreseen by Synnott in October 2003. Had this simply become the environment in which the Coalition and Basrawis expected to work, rather than an environment that was now long overdue to be cleansed?

104.On the ground, and at the time, it was not clear (or not as clear as it might be with hindsight) that a much earlier confrontation with the Sadrist militias would be the right course of action. The options had been considered from the earliest days:

> Faced with the emergence of the firebrand cleric Moqtada al-Sadr and his Mahdi Army militia, Bremer was in no doubt that such groups [...] should be stamped out. [...] In the South we took a more nuanced view. There seemed to be no absolute need to oppose all such groups head on. To do so could prove militarily impossible and politically unwise." (Synnott, 183)

A senior official who was in Baghdad in 2005 reflected:

> I suppose with hindsight if the US had pursued Muqtada al Sadr and crushed the JAM in the early days we would not have this problem. But it seemed a perfectly reasonable decision at the time...

He went on to question whether a head-on confrontation would in any case have solved the problem of democracy being held to ransom by armed groups, rather than postponing it[33].

105.Baghdad and the Americans were inclined to take a much stronger view of the significance of Iranian involvement than people on the ground in Basra. Basrawis themselves were tended to mistrust the Iranians far less than the Iraqi political groups and militias who used Iranian support, finance and arms to challenge the developing political process and undermine economic progress. They knew who the Iranians were, were suitably suspicious of their agenda, and were not inclined to pick a fight with them. With regard to the militias they were ambivalent. They saw them as a problem that should ideally be resolved by negotiation and compromise rather than by the use of force by the Coalition or Iraqi forces from outside the south. The authorities in Basra did not, under any circumstances, want to be seen to be taking the lead in disarming or eliminating the militias. Some were too close to them; most were afraid of the ruthlessness with which the militias would respond to any challenge.

106.With the UK military drawing down numbers and withdrawing to the airport and the lack of any clear pressure from the provincial Iraqi leadership to take on the militias, it was difficult for the Consulate in Basra to make a stronger case to Baghdad for Iraqi action to deal with growing violence than was already being made. A proposal from the British Embassy in Baghdad that the MOD should be looking to boost troop numbers in order to address security issues in the South was summarily dismissed by the MOD, understandably, perhaps, given the

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hostility with which earlier attempts to re-impose order and address specific security issues had been received in both Basra and Baghdad.

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The erosion of consent

107. The Coalition, in Basra as elsewhere, found itself operating in an environment that became progressively less politically permissive, and, when it was, only grudgingly so. This had been foreseen from the time of the invasion (if not before)[34], but was difficult to counter.

> We entered a vicious circle. While politicians recognised that we were trying to do some good, they could not be seen politically to be supporting what much of the population saw as an infringement of their sovereignty. High profile incidents such as that at the Jammeat in September 2005 only enflamed feelings further as did the internment of individuals without trial. (Former Consul General in Basra)

108. There was a second vicious circle. Even though the Coalition presence and its activities were regarded by Iraqis as an infringement of Iraqi sovereignty, its very presence encouraged Iraqis to avoid taking the responsibility that sovereignty implied.

How did Basra compare with elsewhere?

109. The UK commitment to Iraq was limited and poorly defined. Iinadequate provision was made for a long-term occupation, the need to provide a significant level of administrative support, and an increasingly hostile security environment. In these circumstances, the UK had to employ methods appropriate to its resources:

> Our response had to rely on fewer resources and lesser firepower [than the US]. This required more time and negotiation. Despite some US criticism there were no other parts of Iraq (with the exception of Kurdistan) any better off. The US was having a worse time in Baghdad, Mosul and Anbar. It is only latterly since they took our advice and engaged with the Sunni tribes that they have been having more success. [...] When we were on the streets in Basra there were few no go areas unlike Sadr City. (former HMA Baghdad)

> The situation in the south of Iraq was different to that in much of the rest of the country. Many Basrawi politicians viewed fighting against Sunnis as being part of the insurgency (and therefore a legitimate task for MNF), while the problems in Basra (mainly Shi'a on Shi'a) were an internal dispute and not our concern. Given this, we needed to rely more heavily on Iraqi involvement to tackle the problem than was the case further north if we were not to alienate the population. In my time, this support, for various reasons, was not forthcoming. I do not believe that a more heavy-handed approach by MND(SE) (as advocated by some Americans) was an option. We did not have the resources to take responsibility for all security in the city. Nor was there the political will to accept the increased casualties that this would have involved. (former CG Basra).

110. Both of the above views rightly question whether a significantly larger UK military presence and the use of considerably more force by non-Iraqi forces would have led to a better outcome than the one that was actually obtained. However true this may have been, it was not properly articulated as the UK strategy for Basra and the south. The drivers for the UK's strategy were principally the need to withdraw forces as soon as possible, and to avoid the domestic political damage that would have resulted from a large scale confrontation with local militias in the absence of support and consent from the Iraqi authorities in Baghdad and Basra.

Could things have been done differently in the South?

111. From the start, the UK had no control over the US Department of Defense's Iraq project, and likewise, at no time from the beginning did the Coalition control or have the means to control all the pieces on the Iraqi board.

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112.In reality, key decisions taken in the lead up to the invasion and in its aftermath, during the lifetime of the CPA, were outside UK control, and outside the control of the FCO to an even greater extent. Former Iraqi Minister Allawi's comment is harsh, but perceptive:

> The British ... did not, and would not, play Athens to America's Rome. Prime Minister Tony Blair believed that Britain had to be seen as a staunch American ally. .. He saw himself as a bridle to Bush's wild horse, however, he was simply dragged along in whatever direction the horse led. (Allawi p2)

113.The UK might have hoped to influence decisions at this stage, but there were only two viable channels – between the Prime Minister and President Bush; and between the UK Special Representatives in Baghdad and the US heads of ORHA and then the CPA. In Baghdad, it was hard to get a hearing, partly because the UK's military participation was so much less than that of the US[35], but perhaps more might have been made of the importance of the British political contribution[36]. Ill-placed to direct or control events, the FCO, and the UK generally, found itself responding to events rather than acting strategically[37].

114.After July 2004, attempts by the UK to persuade the Iraqis in Baghdad to pay more attention to the south also had limited success until mid 2006. FCO officials disagree over whether the UK exerted enough effort to persuade the Americans in Washington and Baghdad that more attention and resources had to be devoted to Basra. Some felt that the Embassy held back from demanding more attention from the US, and that the US were in any case unreceptive[38]; however, one former UK Ambassador in Baghdad challenged robustly the assertion that not enough was done to seek the support of the US military, but noted that they were preoccupied with the insurgency in the north, and their resources were deployed elsewhere. In any case

> we were, in their view, militarily retreating in the south; why should they assist us to abandon ship?

115.The UK may not have understood the US perspective fully, either. An official noted that the US had a key concern in the South that was not fully incorporated into the UK's civil or military planning:

> For our part, we had a poor understanding of how the US saw MND(SE)'s role. In particular, we were unaware until late in the day of the importance they attached to securing the border with Iran and to protecting Route Tampa.

Did the FCO deploy the right people to the right places to influence events?

116.Many have raised the question of the FCO's staffing of its Iraq involvement, both within the FCO and in published works: would the FCO have done better had different people been deployed, or people deployed differently. Issues raised in particular included: the relationship between the civil and the military; the duty of care; posting lengths and the consequences of short postings;

> ... officials have drawn up copious lessons from past practice. But it is not clear that the lessons have in fact been taken to heart, and still less that they have been implemented. Until they are, and so long as Britain continues to deploy civil and military resources in pursuit of the stabilisation of fragile states, civil-military relations seems set to remain scratchy.(Synnott, 149)

117.In his book, Mark Etherington, the FCO-appointed Governorate Co-ordinator in Kut for the CPA offered a number of observations and recommendations:

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- In retrospect it is clear that we were spread thin... We were not properly configured as an occupation force... Civil-military command arrangements in theatre were opaque, and distances large.
- Britain needed firm and resolute leadership in the country and this should properly have come from a political appointee tasked to mould the British effort and fashion a united strategy from disparate political and military considerations.
- what we needed was someone capable of satisfactorily combining diplomatic and military strategies. I was not persuaded that the British Foreign Office could do this alone.

118.Etherington had a UK military background, but was mainly working with US and Ukranian forces. Others saw the issues from the other side:

- We should have been clearer on the relative roles and responsibilities, for example between Baghdad and Basra, the US and the UK, military and civilian, British and Iraqis (FCO official formerly working alongside military)
- - the decision to separate the military and civilian efforts at the start (not co-locating, not having daily co-ordination meetings), was a massive error, although individuals on the ground did their best; (FCO official who worked as CLO with the British military)
- A lesson for the future. If we ever do this again we must make sure that the civil planning teams are embedded into the military structure from the start. There is a false expectation that the military can cope. This is bolstered by military bravado and overwhelming self confidence. We must get it through to them clearly that they may be good at war fighting but building a civil society is best left to bureaucrats and diplomacy. (FCO official in Baghdad, April 2003)

119.At the heart of the problem, as far as the UK was concerned, was the fact that neither the MOD nor the FCO had planned for extended occupation with the attendant requirements for state-building, administration, and capacity building. They did not share a common task – or even a common understanding of what their tasks were. None of the roles and the need for appropriate resources were thought through before the occupation, and, as ORHA changed into the CPA, and the CPA was prematurely disbanded, the solutions worked up later were ad hoc and temporary. But there was no clear way in which, in the absence of a common task, the co-ordination between military and civilians might have been made more effective. On the ground, the co-ordination between UK civilians and the military in Basra developed effectively, though it was hampered by short tour lengths and unit rotations.

With frequent changes of personnel it was difficult to achieve any continuity or for there to be time to learn from experiences. Too many people had to make it up as they went along. (former HMA Baghdad)

Staff quality and numbers

120."The greatest single deficiency of our civilian operation was the shortage of human resources and expertise" (Synnott, 252). Sir Hilary puts this partly down to "the excessive priority … placed on the security of civilian public servants" which "leads managers to take a very cautious approach to deploying staff for whom they are responsible, even if they are volunteers". Etherington similarly commented:

The British government, among others, found it more difficult to find people of the requisite experience for the task and felt unable to order its diplomats to take part, relying instead on a 'trawl' of the Civil Service for its volunteers.

From the outset the British national requirement to carry out efficiently the tasks of political re-structuring and physical reconstruction in Iraq, and of ensuring the safety of the staff dispatched to do so, created an important systemic tension that was never fully resolved ... Britain was clearly a key political partner in Iraq ... but the country seemed to shy away from the responsibilities this role logically conferred. ... taking risks with their civilian staff was anathema to the British government. (Etherington, 8,9)

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121. It may be true that the "systemic tension" was never fully resolved, but as Etherington concedes:

> The build up of our team remained slow, though the FCO were generally able to fill British team slots faster than the Americans. (Etherington 100)

and the British did rather better for their staff than the Americans:

> [Britain] was the only member of the Coalition that insisted that its nationals … travelled in armoured civilian vehicles. […] In insisting on these provisions the British Foreign Office had made a sensible and courageous decision. It is not often that the average British citizen in such circumstances is better looked after than his or her American counterpart. (Etherington, 17)

122. Nevertheless, the inability to exercise judgement locally on the basis of the prevailing requirements and circumstances clearly chafed, and it is possible that more of the responsibility for managing risk might beneficially have been devolved to those in the field.

123. On the other hand, this policy, which might be characterised as risk avoidance rather than risk management, was undeniably effective in ensuring that (to date) there have been no UK based staff fatalities in Iraq. This will have played a significant part in ensuring that there has been a good number of volunteers to fill the 40 or so UK based positions in the three posts in Iraq.

124. Etherington also questions whether FCO expertise was deployed as it should have been:

> And ... the British had not sent their Arabists. Of the four GCs only one, Henry Hogger in Basra, had obvious Middle Eastern credentials." (Etherington 28-29)

This charge can, at least be largely dismissed – a large number of the FCO's Arabists did pass through Iraq in various capacities, and continue to do so, though many were on very short attachments.

125. Almost all of the staffing issues were raised in the FCO's broader "lessons learned" exercise of 2005. Nevertheless, the FCO continues to impede its ability to deploy Arabists (and others with relevant qualifications or experience in other areas) through its continuing failure to replace the misleading[39] "golden ticket" incentive with a scheme that would properly compensate for the hardships and dangers of postings to a war zone; and by its rigid application of the "home posting" rule, which means that staff with appropriate qualifications are barred from applying for such positions until they have spent at least three years in the UK.

The achievements

126. This paper has focused on areas where the UK in general and the FCO in particular might have done better. This is not to undervalue the very considerable amount of good work that has been done by the UK on its own, or through organisations like the Provincial Reconstruction Team under UK leadership; or through its support for the establishment of the International Compact.

127. Particular areas of achievement to highlight include:

- We have trained an entire Iraqi Army division and thousands of members of the Iraqi Police Service;
- We have facilitated UK civilian-led Provincial Reconstruction Team work, building governance capacity in Basra and across the south of Iraq;

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- We have generated employment and similar opportunities through both short and long-term projects, including one to reinvigorate the date palm-based agriculture in the region.

The UK has also worked to

- promote political reconciliation between the different parties
- build capacity in the Iraqi security forces
- support the legal and criminal justice system
- increase co-operation between Iraq and its neighbours and
- promote the regeneration of an Iraqi-led economy.

In Basra our work helped deliver some notable successes in December 2007 including:

- the hand-over of security responsibility to the Iraqi authorities
- the launch of the Basra Development Commission, which aims to help develop Basra's economic potential and
- a joint declaration by all political parties supporting the rule of law and the Iraqi security forces.

128. These are all genuine and significant achievements in a difficult and often harrowing working environment. But we need to be cautious, and realistic, about what this really means. Even after the handover of security responsibility and the effective "Charge of the Knights" operation to regain control of Basra from the militias, the current Consul General in Basra has commented that the situation remains fragile; that

> "the streets are full of rubbish; sewage and water systems are inadequate; electricity supplies are still frequently interrupted" ... "Real efforts must be made to reduce unemployment, running at 85% amongst young people." "we consistently get the message that the UK has not done enough. Successful, eye-catching short-term projects will, however, help create an environment in which the PRT's capacity-building efforts can flourish".

129. In part, this takes us back to the issue of expectations, in both Basra and London. But the failure of five years of work to persuade people in Basra that the UK has done enough highlights other issues. Rathmell has set out clearly the challenges of reforming the police, and the need for training and capacity-building to be accompanied by institutional change, and a change in the mindset of the community and their attitude towards police and the state. Rathmell also points out the need, overlooked for too long in Iraq, to look at the quality of the trainees rather than simply the quantity. In this the FCO and MOD may have been too narrowly focused on measurable outputs, to the detriment of longer term, and less measurable outcomes.

130. DfID appears to have recognised for some time that in a high risk environment

> Many high risk projects may be designed to be worthwhile even if successful in only a limited number of their aims. Therefore, an "unsuccessful" PRISM score for a high risk project does not necessarily indicate that it is having a low impact or represents low value for money. A portfolio with many projects that are high impact as well as high risk can afford a number of "partial failures" yet still achieve an acceptable impact and represent good value for money.

131. On the other hand, Etherington judged that:

> The Foreign Office in Iraq, lacking operational experience was, at heart risk-averse, while their military counterparts were trained to accept risk and manage it

132. It is beyond the scope of this paper to revisit what might have been done under FCO auspices; but it could well be worth while for the Stabilisation Unit to consider, if it has not already done so, whether there is scope for the FCO to be readier to support potentially high-risk quick-impact projects that may provide political benefits, but may not offer sufficient developmental or security benefits to carry weight with DfID or the MOD. As an example, in

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2004, Rory Stewart mentions that he used CPA funds to finance the construction by a local Iraqi craftsman of an enormous reed meeting hall in Nasiriya. It was a powerful political gesture on several levels, without developmental or security significance. Meanwhile, in Basra – closer to the accountants – a project to build an extension to the lecture hall of the main hospital as a gesture of thanks to the hospital management and the community was pared down from a meeting and media room, a cafeteria, and provision of modern sound and projection systems to an improved toilet facility.

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Conclusions

133. To a large extent, the course that events took in Basra in the five years from March 2003 was determined during the lifetime of the CPA, in the period up to June 2004. The failure of the Coalition to impose strict order at the time of the invasion made it virtually impossible to recover later, whilst in Basra the very rapid draw-down of UK troops whilst there was no viable police service or alternative Iraqi security force meant that the city was effectively unpoliced.

134. Outside Iraq, the FCO took on the role that fell naturally to it – working to maintain an international environment that was favourable, or at least permissive. This included managing the US and combating the strong tendency of its leadership to ignore the international consensus and the UN. In Iraq, the FCO obviously had much to offer, including area expertise, language capability, and historical background. But it also ended up taking on responsibilities that did not fall naturally to it in the 21st century: quasi colonial administration, state building and reconstruction.

135. Once the CPA had been dissolved there should have been much greater clarity about who was responsible for what, in Whitehall, between the UK and the US, and in Iraq. It was difficult, as time went on, to counter Iraqi accusations that we had (in part) made the mess, and now it was our responsibility to clean it up. This was arguably the view put forward by the Parliamentary Committees in London. If the responsibility was for the British to maintain security in Basra until Iraqi forces were sufficiently capable to manage on their own, a number of things should have been done: a much tighter security regime should have been established before the dissolution of the CPA; and the policy of drawing down troop numbers without adequate Coalition or Iraqi substitutes to step in should have been reviewed. Even then, the task would have become increasingly challenging.

136. After the elections of the Basra Council and of the permanent parliament and, with the latter, the formation of Maliki's government, the main challenges to security in Basra came from elements closely linked to the coalitions backing both the government and the provincial council. Given the requirements – embodied in the UNSCRs – for the Multinational Force to co-ordinate with the Iraqi authorities and to respect Iraqi sovereignty, it would probably have been impossible to impose lasting security except through unilateral action, and against the opposition of local and central Iraqi authorities. Given such realities on the ground, the situation could have been reviewed more rigorously in Whitehall incorporated in policy

137. The FCO and the Cabinet failed to identify clearly where the UK's real interest lay in its involvement in Iraq. The UK Special representatives were despatched to Baghdad to stay alongside the US command and to be players in the big game. It seemed to staff on the ground that Basra was low on Baghdad's priorities, a subordinate post that was constantly complaining about its lack of resources and, apparently, unable to get on with its job. And yet Basra has been central to the real British political interest – HMG would be judged severely if it was seen not to have delivered a successful outcome there; and a successful outcome was essential if British forces were to be withdrawn without leaving chaos behind. Baghdad could not be ignored, because Basra and the other southern governorates could not be isolated from what was going on elsewhere in Iraq. However, it is possible that the UK should have been more candid, with itself, with the US and with the Iraqis about what it believed it was committed to. A clearer analysis should have led to a more strategic understanding of what the UK expected to achieve, and at what point it expected to disengage. This might usefully have been articulated, both in the UK and in Iraq.

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138.There was an additional policy dilemma: even if the UK no longer felt committed to imposing security in Basra, abandoning security to an ineffectual or even obstructive provincial authority would, in all probability, have created a security void that could be exploited by terrorists, or could have allowed small-scale but disruptive militia warfare to spread unchecked. It would also have signalled the abandonment of key objectives implicit in the "Vision for Iraq", such as the observance of human rights and the establishment of democracy.

Operational conclusions

139.Planning and contingency planning, including across government departments were late and inadequate. We had seen Iraq coming, but did not feel able to plan for it, and the Iraq Planning Unit never, in reality, did much planning. A great part of its work was keeping up with developments as they unfolded, so that they could be in a position to plan when the situation - and the requirement - became clear. It was able to provide briefings on the situation as it developed. But it had neither the mandate nor the command of resources to plan in any meaningful way. It was nevertheless a useful co-ordinating body.

140.Objectives. In Iraq the long-term objectives were rarely articulated, or rigorously reviewed. It was never clear whether the top level objective was to stay alongside the US; to withdraw at the earliest practicable moment; or commit whatever resources were needed to deliver a democratic, stable, tolerant and economically successful Iraq.

141.Control/Influence. The UK signed up to an enterprise over which it had no control, and remained wedded to it even in the face of extraordinary errors of judgement in the early stages of ORHA and the CPA, the consequences of which we are still dealing with.

142.Resources. The FCO was constantly scrambling after resources. If it was to act as the bridge between the military campaign and associated quick-fixes on the one hand, and a long term support and development programme, it required the resources to do so.

143.Military/Civil interface. No-one seems to think that this was right, though there is little agreement on what was wrong. The MOD's chief objective was to go in and then downsize and withdraw as soon as possible (because of overstretch and commitments elsewhere, such as Afghanistan) regardless of any broader policy of HMG. Ultimately, Cabinet must ensure that the end of a military operation is followed up appropriately, either by other UK government departments, or by external parties.

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1 The record of an Iraq meeting held on 18 February 2003 notes: "The Secretary of State plans to make a speech focusing on humanitarian issues. We need to make sure it does not undermine our position that the objective of our policy is WMD disarmament, not regime change."

2 "On timelines of political decisions, we were never really sure what the PM's position was until just before the start of the military campaign. Nor did we know what the Attorney's view would be on the legality of military action. Right up until the last moment, we thought military action would come later because:

- the diplomatic timetable would not be shoehorned to fit the military one
- the more forthcoming Iraqi attitude, particularly when they started to destroy the Al Samoud missiles, would buy the inspectors more time

[...]

All along we were on a military planning timetable, more or less. Once our hand was in the mangle, through the integration of our planners and the support given to the US at the highest political level - albeit we were supposed to be aiming at a different objective - there was only one result.
Diplomacy became an exercise in providing the best international conditions for war. Rather than one in which we genuinely tried to find a way to disarm Iraq short of war." (Head of Iraq Planning Unit, March 2003)

3 Vision for Iraq statement: http://www.number10.gov.uk/output/page3280.asp

4 An example that has attracted criticism both from outside and within is the emphasis on bringing in experts on women's issues in the earliest stages.

5 Michael Knights & Ed Williams, The Calm before the Storm: The British Experience in Southern Iraq, Policy Focus #66, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, February 2007

6 "The reduction in the number of attacks on UK and Coalition Forces in South Eastern Iraq since August 2007 is significant. However, the fact there has been no corresponding reduction in the number of attacks against the civilian population of the city is a matter of concern. Violence in Basra Province continues to undermine the development of civil society. The relative security of Basra is said to owe more to the dominance of militias and criminal gangs, who are said to have achieved a fragile balance in the city, than to the success of the Multi-National and Iraqi Security Forces in tackling the root causes of the violence. Although the reduction in attacks on UK Forces can only be welcome, this alone cannot be a measure of success. The initial goal of UK Forces in South Eastern Iraq was to establish the security necessary for the development of representative political institutions and for economic reconstruction. Although progress has been made, this goal remains unfulfilled." (Commons Defence Committee Dec 2007)

7 This was reflected in the briefing given to UK officials attending a "rock drill" alongside US counterparts in the US about a month before the military operation began:
"UK Area
UK will have, in the very short term, to administer the area where its forces are at the end of hostilities. No commitment to administer divisional size area in the medium to longer term. More likely a small area around Basrah.
No commitment to administering any part of Baghdad.
Where we are involved in administration, will want to be so in an exemplary fashion.

If the UK-led ORHA region corresponded with 1 Div's area of responsibility, it would enable the UK to promote an exemplary approach to the relationship between the civil and military arms of the Coalition in the area in which UK forces are the occupying power. (IPU 16 Apr 2003)

8 "The Prime Minister has said that he wants the UK AO to be "exemplary" but, in contrast to the detailed planning for the military phase, planning for phase 4 has appeared to lag and serious problems remain which are well beyond the capability of the military." (FCO CLO, 12 May 2003)

9 "As the UK Division's likely area might contain up to 20% of the Iraqi population, and somewhere between $400m and $2.4 bn be needed for the first year. This is well beyond the financial and implementing capacity of DfID and MOD. And there is a risk that the UK could end up becoming responsible for a large and expensive commitment, potentially in the medium term, if the local population became dependent on UK assistance.
[...]

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Do Ministers agree that the UK does not have the resources to make an 'exemplary' effort in providing for basic humanitarian needs in the area controlled by the UK Division?"

10 "Self-congratulation and implicit criticism of American methods had done nothing to encourage American paymasters to provide the South with resources themselves, as I had quickly found out." (Synnott, xii)

11 Ali Allawi, an Iraqi exile who served some time as an MP and as a Minister in the post-Saddam administrations highlighted differences of view between the UK and the US.
"The Foreign Office was hugely sceptical about the possibility of democratic change in Iraq, and while not explicitly saying so, was cynical, if not contemptuous, about the more rosy prognoses of the neo-conservatives regarding a post-Saddam Iraq. MI6, on the other hand, stuck close to the CIA, and had early settled on the INA as its most suitable opposition partner." (Allawi 82)

12 "Never in my experience had the breath-taking scale of our responsibilities and the paucity of our strategic direction been so acute. " (Etherington 117)

"I did not agree with the governorate coordinators in neighbouring provinces who felt fatally wounded by poor planning, ill-defined missions, insufficient resources and little support. I believed that our small teams, fluid identity and relative isolation were an inevitable consequence of the invasion and, indeed, an advantage." (Rory Stewart 274)

"When I got to Baghdad in June 2005 our objectives were to set Iraq on the path to constitutional Government and create the conditions that would allow British troops to withdraw from Basra. This involved building up the police forces, playing our part in standing up and capacity building for the local government. " (HMA, Baghdad)

"While I received a very good pre-posting briefing on my personal objectives from Dominic Asquith, I was struck by the reluctance of all interlocutors (MOD, SIS, FCO, No 10) to define specific UK objectives to me before my departure. The one thing everyone agreed on was the need to move to tactical overwatch in the southern provinces as soon as possible." (Consul General in Basra)

13 "But without UN authorisation the prospects are that we would get very little burden-sharing. On the multilateral side, the IFIs and the EU would probably claim that they could not operate. Many major donors such as the Japanese have also said that UN authority is essential. So the huge bills would be likely to be left with the US and UK. In terms of peacekeeping, most of those who have expressed willingness to contribute have made this conditional on a UN resolution. So our exit strategy from the military commitment would also be much more difficult." (Iraq Planning Unit, 24 March 2003)

14 Wasit was outside the area specifically allocated to the UK but was headed by an FCO appointee, and was to include more FCO staff. The shortcomings there were felt everywhere:
"In any post-war deployment of this kind one would expect to have a civilian presence in each major town, with its own transport and local staff..... six months after the war, CPA Wasit consisted of four international staff and two pairs of cars, dealing with ... a population of just under a million." (Etherington 98,99)

15 "[There were] vastly differing levels of resources. The expectations placed on the FCO were crazy given the differing levels of resources available to MOD and DFID. No 10 were often impatient with the slow rate of progress on the ground. What could be conceived in Whitehall was not necessarily deliverable on the ground." (Official in Baghdad)

"Given expectations we raised in Basrawi minds, the resources HMG were prepared to deploy in southern Iraq were far too small. The Basrawis were looking to us to guarantee security and provide basic services. During my time, we did neither satisfactorily." (former CG, Basra)

"The military devoted twenty times as many resources to southern Iraq than other Government Departments combined. MND(SE), for example, had more than three times the number of POLADs than I had political officers (even on the rare occasions when the Consulate was fully staffed.) It also acted as the principal channel for US funds for reconstruction and police training. Inevitably, in such a situation, the military considered they had the right to take the lead role." (former CG, Basra)

16 "THE COST OF OPERATIONS IN IRAQ
(44). Also in our Report on the FCO's Annual Report for 2003-04, we noted that the FCO is carrying significant extra costs arising from its expanded operation in Iraq. In its response, the FCO told us that "To date HM

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Treasury has responded favourably to our reserve claims for additional resources for Iraq. We agree with the Committee that HM Treasury should continue to meet such claims, given the unique nature of our activities there involving numerous departments across government." The point made by the FCO in its response is an important one: the FCO is effectively the delivery service for a wide range of the Government's policies in Iraq and it is entirely appropriate that the large proportion of its activities there which are additional to its mainstream diplomatic and consular roles should be funded from the reserve." (Foreign Affairs Select Committee) http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200405/cmselect/cmfaff/112/11208.htm

"We are very concerned that almost half of the total budget for the Global Conflict Prevention Pool was spent in Iraq and Afghanistan in 2006-07. We conclude that the FCO should not have to direct funds away from long-term conflict prevention into crisis management. We recommend that the FCO should receive funding from the Treasury contingency reserve for the civilian costs of crisis management in Iraq and Afghanistan." (Paragraph 53) (FAC Report on FCO Annual Report 06-07)

17 "We conclude that the deterioration in the security situation and the continuing difficulties in relations with the local communities in Basra are deeply worrying. We commend efforts that have been made to build bridges and repair relations. We recommend that the government set out in its response to this Report what further steps it is taking to improve the situation in the four southeastern provinces of Iraq and to bring about a resolution of the differences between Shiite groups" (2005-6 FAC report)

18 "We share the Committee's concern about the security situation and the quality of local governance in Basra. Our military and civilian representatives continue to work hard with the Iraqi Government in Baghdad, the Basra Provincial Council and the local Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) to secure improvements in the security situation for all Basrawis.
(78.) We welcome the priority which Prime Minister Maliki and the Iraqi Government have attached to resolving underlying local political problems and thus address security concerns in Basra. The recent appointment of a 3-strong Committee to oversee the implementation of the Basra Security Plan is a welcome step forward."

19 Etherington, 155.

20 "We are beyond "quick fixes" and have reached the limit of what the military can do... The paucity of planning for Phase 4 is beginning to show. The military have won the war and have used their resources (logistical, intellectual, physical, financial and infrastructural) to do the quick fixes and to prepare the way for others to take over responsibility for the more sustained programme of re-structuring and development that it now required. This has always been predicated on the assumption that the US and UK, either bilaterally or through ORHA, would be entering Iraq not far behind the troops. This has yet to happen. ... Iraqis are becoming impatient and there is a real risk that unless we can sustain the momentum of progress, coalition forces on the ground will be seen as part of the problem rather than the solution."

He added that "the newly appointed Danish head of the local ORHA office does not, as yet, have access to either financial or personnel resources nor has he been given any strategic guidance, or information on financial resources available, or the procedures to access them."

21 "There is an urgent need to improve the performance of the CPA in Basra. The main problem has been the slowness of CPA HQ to begin disbursement of central funds (caused in part by very poor communications between Basra and Baghdad). Ministers agreed on 15 May that UK forces and DFID should agree measures to achieve a step change in rehabilitation in the south. This is happening through further spending on quick impact projects, but military capacity on the ground is reducing as forces are withdrawn from theatre. "

22 "The real problem was the city itself, the poorest and most neglected in Iraq. The city was rundown and squalid, with high unemployment. There was resentment that the governorate's economic wealth had been continually drained away to Baghdad. With the fall of Saddam and the return of sovereignty, the people of Basra were expecting faster improvements. Electricity supply at three hours on, and three off was worse than last year. The water supply was fragile. On top of this, Basra faced a funding gap as it went into the summer with CPA projects winding down to September, money not flowing from Baghdad and the PMO not now expected to make any impact until late autumn." (21/6/04 telegram from Basra)

23 A Confidential telegram to Washington in April 2003 stated:
"Since Saddam's regime crushed any opposition within Iraq, the first step in establishing democracy must be to allow new power bases to arise. Given that 60 per cent of Iraqis are Shias, it is bound to be the case that many of the new Iraqi political leaders are clerics or religiously minded people. Saddam Hussein suppressed the Shias'

political rights for many years. It is to the coalition's credit that we have created the conditions in which these can begin to flourish.
We agree that the Iranian hand has to be carefully watched in this but, again, it comes as no surprise that the Iranians should be in contact with Iraqi Shia leaders. We have seen nothing, however, so far to cause us to question our assessment that the majority of Iraqi Shias will maintain a robustly national perspective on their political future." (TELNO 180 of 221625Z APRIL 03)

24 It is not clear that Moqtada al-Sadr was in fact in Basra. This may be an error of Allawi's.

25 "In light of the impending handover and the earlier drawdown of CPA, we have been considering the security of personnel in southern Iraq. The general security situation in the four southern governorates has improved since April. [...] Basra is quiet for now. Local Sunni and Shia rejectionist cells continue to target CF on a sporadic basis with mortars, small arms, IEDs and RPGs. Non-military vehicles have not been targeted for several weeks, although in a worrying development the airport has been mortared in daylight. [...] There is evidence of continued political intimidation." June 04

26 "Because the CPA insisted on running everything, Allawi's government was wholly unprepared on 28 June 2004 to run even a country at peace. The US could not leave alone thereafter. "Taking the stabilisers off the bike" as the US patronisingly called it. But there were too many Iraqis trying to ride the bike at the same time in different directions. One can opine about the importance of getting Iraqis to take responsibility early on - but with no civil service (because de-baathified) and sectarianism rife (because the Islamist exiles were allowed free rein), to which Iraqis were we looking to take responsibility?" (Former HMA, Baghdad)

27 "By 2005 and after local elections the Basrawis were still blaming the British for inadequate local rubbish collection. There was a tendency to think that because we were responsible for security we were responsible for everything. Local politics were driven by sectarian rivalry, which paralysed good government. The Iraqis were simply not used to taking their own decisions through dialogue and compromise that we take for granted." (FCO official based in Baghdad)

28 The then head of the Consulate commented:
"Whatever might have been the case after the invasion, by the time I arrived in Basra (Sept 2005), we were very much in damage limitation mode. It was clear that plans for a grandiose "legacy" were absurd, and that the least worst outcome was for us to withdraw with honour. I made clear early in my time that, given the resources we were prepared to devote to the problems of Basra, both for reconstruction and security, only the Iraqi Government could solve the underlying problems in the city."

29 The Independent reported:
"Although British troops have carried out a number of arrests of militia and police officers, including Ahmad Majid al-Fartusi, one of Mr Sadr's lieutenants, there is little chance of regaining control of security. A senior British officer in Basra said recently that "to do so we will have to effectively retake Basra, and that will take 10 times the forces we have even if there was anything like the appetite for that". (Independent, 7 May 06)

30 "The PRT reached full operating capability on 17 July 2006. The broad aim for the PRT is to maximise the impact of international assistance in the region. Through the combined application of UK civilian and military effort and wider US and Danish programmes, the PRT serves to act as a hub for multinational capacity building; the exchange of best practice; and the promotion of coherent and efficient use of resources as part of a comprehensive approach. The PRT's work is focused on Governance, Rule of law, and Economy/Infrastructure." (DfID)

31 "Most Basrawis are increasingly angry about the activities of militias but feel powerless to do anything about it. The murder of 17 Iraqi interpreters working at the Police Academy at Shaibah on 29 October caused widespread shock. Ordinary Basrawis are alarmed by the increased tempo of IDF attacks in the last few months. Rockets are fired at Basra Palace and other MNF sites from the heart of urban areas, usually from about 4-5 kilometres away. The sound of rockets exploding can be heard right across the city night after night. There have been a number of reports of civilian casualties and damage to local houses caused by JAM rockets and mortars. In the last week two mortars intended for Basra Palace have hit the Teaching Hospital up the road. Anyone who tries to stand up to the militia or challenges an IDF team is threatened or killed.

Most of the Basra JAM are no longer under Muqtada al-Sadr's control. There is a large "militant JAM" element who want to continue to attack the MNF irrespective of Muqtada's instructions. There are also Iranian secret

cells who conduct many of the anti-MNF attacks and criminal gangs who are willing to attack us for money or use JAM as a cover for their own criminal activity." (19/11/06 brief)

32 Baghdad reported at the beginning of the year:
"Unfortunate as it may be, the US view is deeply entrenched that we will continue to make the facts fit our timelines, a view reinforced by our argument that "Basra is different from Baghdad"
It also reflects (as we have detected - and reported - before) a broader difficulty (i.e. not specific to the Basra case) in letting go of the reins to the Iraqis, an instinct reinforced by the perception that this is the last chance to make transition work."

33 "They have simply made a tactical retreat, which they are very good at. Some day someone is going to have to go all the way with JAM and MAS if they are to be prevented from taking over or forever holding democratic governments to ransom."

34 Within a month of the military operation, and only two weeks after its end, the Director of MENA noted:

> The theme of "thank you for liberating us; now please go home as quickly as possible" is common to our contacts with most Iraqi parties, whether exile or internal. (Director MENA 25/4/03)

Three weeks later, the UK's Special Envoy made a similar comment:

> Four days in Iraq has been enough to identify the main reasons why the reconstruction of Iraq is so slow. The Coalition are widely welcomed, but are gradually losing public support. (11 May 03)

From the beginning, no-one doubted that a prolonged stay would be unwelcome.

> In the immediate aftermath of the invasion, coalition forces were hailed as liberators (although the people of Maysan province argued that they got rid of Saddam themselves). The overthrow of Saddam also left a political vacuum which it took time to fill. For both reasons, attitudes to MND(SE) were reasonably positive. But it did not take long for attitudes to change. No one likes foreign soldiers on their streets.
> [...]
> The main factors outside our control were that people do not like foreign troops on their soil and that they prefer to govern themselves badly rather then be governed well by others. (Former Consul General in Basra)

35 "Within the CPA, the British were treated with respect, but sometimes there was a feeling that they would be consulted and then totally disregarded, and to some crucial meetings they were not even invited. They would often observe sanguinely, "We mustn't forget that we're only supplying seven per cent of the troops" – but certainly there were times when they wished they had more than seven percent of the say." Andrew White 112

36 A similar point was made by the British Governorate Co-ordinator in Kut:

> "the Foreign Office, for all the demonstrable calibre and intellectual ability of its staff, was out of its depth in Iraq.... we, the British contingent, needed to carry our share of the burden and be seen to be doing so. The Foreign Office was liable to greet such arguments with the undeniable fact that our input in Iraq was dwarfed by the American preponderance of soldiers, materiel and money, as if somehow our principles and moral courage should be commensurately reconfigured to match this relative insignificance." Etherington 202,3

37 "In my time, we tended to react to individual events rather than to plan an overall strategy to [manage] the deterioration in the situation. With hindsight, a more coherent approach might have been more effective. In particular, we should have remained more engaged with local politicians on a regular basis, and taken more account of their views." (former CG, Basra)

(Comment: The last point, about engagement with local politicians, perhaps reflects the wish rather than the reality, given the frequent boycotts by the Provincial Council of both the Consulate and the MND).

38 "The US until they decided to go ahead with PRTs left Basra to us. We were shy of asking for any help in case it seemed as if we were failing." (former Ambassador in Baghdad)

"I was left with the impression that there was a reluctance by the Embassy to engage the Americans in Baghdad seriously on the situation in the south of Iraq or to defend our position." (former CG in Basra)

"Despite our briefing of the Regional Embassy Office on a regular basis, the Americans in Baghdad appeared to have little understanding of the situation in Basra or what we were trying to achieve there. There was a knee jerk

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reaction to say that we were not taking a hard enough line (without appreciating the different environment in which we were working)."

39 "misleading" because it purports to offer an advantage in otherwise "objective" appointment boards, but actually confers little benefit on the recipient, who may in any case find him or herself in competition for a job with many other candidates with a similar golden ticket. The practice was criticised in an internal FCO study in 2004 or 2005 as an inadequate substitute for proper compensation for the risks and stresses of service in a war zone.

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