

Prime Minister

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I think we have too few troops on the ground. This discussion (which I rather had with John Sayers in my absence, confirms me in my view). I think you should discuss with Geoff Hone.

From: Matthew Rycroft

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DAVID MANNING

cc:

Jonathan Powell

Nick Cannon

IRAQ: JOHN SAWERS' VIEWS

John Sawers rang back on the secure line while you were in a meeting with the French Ambassador. I asked him for his real assessment, as the PM had requested, on the issues in his telno 64.

John's main points were on military numbers. He is just back from a visit to Basra where he thinks we are badly stretched. General Wall's answer to several of John's questions was: we don't have enough troops to do that. For instance, John had asked whether they were providing security to the office that will shortly be paying stipends to Iraqi military veterans. The mixture of lots of money and potentially thousands of ex-army Iraqis seems to me to require significant security, but "we don't have enough troops to do that".

John's main security concern is over Maysan province, on the border with Iran. He fears that if we remain stretched there, we could end up being seen as the soft underbelly, and therefore at risk of even more attacks. John is convinced that at the very least we need to go back to having a full brigade, and crucially the HQ that goes with it, rather than the battalion it now has.

I told John that the MOD view was that more troops weren't the answer and that what was needed was progress on the political track. John agreed that political progress would help - indeed the Governing Council would be up and running as

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from next week, and helpfully it (rather than the CPA) would be able to take tough action against those who damage electricity pylons etc. But just as there could be no purely military answer to the security issue, so political progress would need to be underpinned by the military.

On precise numbers, John thought that the total number of UK troops was going to go below 10,000. That is not now the case. The MOD will be writing to set this out, but in a nutshell:

- We currently have 13,000 UK troops in our two-province sector.
- They are reducing to between 10 and 11,000.
- The foreign troops are going into our two new provinces, replacing Americans who are moving out from there.
- So in answer to the PM's other question, yes we can leave over 10,000 Brits in our sector, but no the foreign additions won't help bolster them.

On John's other points from his telegram:

- Policing: now in hand.
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- Atrocities: he thinks INFORCE are best placed to provide the information we need in pulling together the full picture over the Saddam regime's atrocities – Nick is pursuing with the FCO.

Conclusion. The PM's view, I think, is that across the board in Iraq we should be asking: "If we had more resources, is there any more we could be doing?" or "Is there anything we are currently not doing because of a lack of resources?"
John's clear answer in the military field is yes.



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