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FROM: John Sawers
Political Director

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cc: PS/PUS
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Edward Chaplin, Baghdad

Neil Crompton

IRAQ: REFLECTIONS

1. Many thanks for your thoughtful minute of 4 May. I agree with many of your points, and we should have your note to hand when the next major crisis descends upon us. (You may be dealing with that too!)
2. On the specifics:

Whitehall Co-ordination: The difficulty with any single figure, whether a junior Minister or a DG level official is that they need to have a means of influencing each department's decisions. Once Nigel Sheinwald arrived in No10, the Whitehall co-ordination improved significantly and was driven harder. A full time DG figure would inevitably sit at the centre. He/she would be a useful extra resource, including as a travelling envoy, but I think it is more important that each department has the right senior level figure with real expertise in the area. And I'm not sure we would have wanted to pass the lead on the political process to No10/Cabinet Office. My instinct is the opposite of yours – that there is a case for identifying a junior FCO Minister whose primary job is Iraq. We should arguably have done that 18 months ago.

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Reconstruction: I share your scepticism about the PCRU, but we will have to test it in a real crisis. The MOD's resistance to doing civilian reconstruction has been a problem and I am attracted by your proposal that they should develop civil affairs battalions who can actually restore basic services in a post conflict environment. With DfID's near exclusive focus on poverty, and as you say their inability these days to "fix things", it is always going to be difficult to get DfID to wholeheartedly commit to underpinning the political objectives of HMG. MOD is more resource constrained than DfID but this is an area worth exploring with the new Defence Secretary.

FCO Response: I agree with your recommendations about the need for a much higher priority to be given within the Office when one issue prevails over all others. We did this in the pre-conflict phase in Iraq, but it was less apparent in the post conflict. And it needs to cover money as well as people.

Correspondence: Your points are well taken. Whether this should be a Press Office responsibility I'm not so sure but the right level of attention needs to be paid to correspondence where IPU had a particular problem.

Communications: You're right that we need instant communications, and with a flexible system – the one I took to Baghdad in May 2003 was very clunky. CHORUS might help, though it does rely on an analogue landline. Whatever system we develop needs to be able to be used efficiently by SAT phone.

3. Once again thank you for the thought that you put into your minute. Stephen Pattison might keep a running file on all this so that it can be pulled out when we next face a crisis approaching the scale of Iraq.

John Sawers

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