



DECLASSIFIED

PCRU

Post Conflict Reconstruction Unit

Paul Schulte, PCRU,
Phone:

20 Victoria Street, London SW1H 0NF
Fax:

TO

Jim Drummond
Martin Howard
Stephen Pattison

CC

19th December 2005

Valedictory Note

Dear Directors

I attach a valedictory note on my departure from the PCRU. It is intended to prompt discussion at the Directors meeting tomorrow, and I will also circulate it as an update to PCRU staff and to those who have shown an interest in the Unit. I had hoped to send it out last week, but I regret that I was unable to do so because of the prolonged failure of the IT server at 20 Victoria St.

Yours Sincerely

Paul Schulte
Head of the PCRU

DECLASSIFIED

DECLASSIFIED

A Valedictory Note: The First 15 Months of the PCRU: Progress, Obstacles and Observations for the Future

Summary

1. Major decisions face those responsible for the PCRU next year, in the context of the wider Whitehall approach to conflict work. But, after 15 months, the Unit is well ahead of international counterparts in devising and implementing an integrated and effective model for post-conflict stabilisation. Initial obstacles are being overcome. The Unit is actively in business, responding to HMG requirements as intended. Helmand has been the first test. Future success will depend upon demonstrated utility and value added. But there are worthwhile ways in which Departments can help.

Introduction

2. The PCRU needs to be understood as part of the overall HMG response to the new Conflict Agenda. Ministers set it up last year as an innovation to join up and improve UK planning and delivery capacity for specifically post conflict stabilisation scenarios involving British troops. Strategic decisions involving the PCRU are therefore likely to raise wider issues of UK objectives and priorities, the role of the Conflict Pools, interdepartmental lead, coordination, and sources of funding within Whitehall. These questions are complex and interactive. They may arise in the forthcoming DFID White Paper, and at greater length, in the Comprehensive Spending Review. Before then, a review is anyway planned in early 2006 of the PCRU's structure and function. Much will also depend upon near term HMG decisions about overall UK engagement in southern Afghanistan. At the time of writing it remains unclear what further, and quite possibly defining, decisions will be taken about the Unit's role there.

3. I see little purpose in trying now to predict these impending structured decision processes. But it does seem timely, before my own return to the Defence Ministry, to look at the progress the Unit has made to date, draw attention to the distinctive features of what it is building towards, set out some of the obstacles it has faced, and, finally, to point to factors which can contribute to its success.

DECLASSIFIED



DECLASSIFIED

PCRU

Post Conflict Reconstruction Unit

Building the PCRU Business Model

5. The overriding initial requirement has been to flesh out the mandate of the Unit to achieve Initial Capacity by April 2005 and Full Capacity by mid-2006, and to do this reliably, cost effectively and sustainably within existing Whitehall systems. Over the last 15 months we have progressively designed and implemented a capability whose key elements I identify, at this stage, as follows:

-A small full-time permanent core staff, largely drawn from Whitehall departments, who have each accepted a commitment to rapid deployability, who as far as possible offer specialist skills and previous conflict experience, and who are given opportunities to develop their own individual, and the Unit's collective, expertise in stabilisation work through secondments, consultative visits and short-term postings.

-A much larger potential international network of many hundred expert contacts (partly on an in-house database with registered volunteers, and partly through linkages with other provider organisations) intended to provide appropriate numbers of Deployable Civilian Experts, or contracting firms, to constitute a "flexible mix" of skilled people, alongside core staff. Some outside experts are being identified and cultivated as "first-tier" consultants, capable of providing additional team leaders or acting as Stabilisation Advisers to Commanders, Senior Officials or Heads of Mission.

-Constantly evolving planning methods, adapting state-of-the-art diagnostic, analytical, planning and implementation approaches developed in DFID, the UN and think tanks worldwide. This effort, shared with other departments, should provide a continuously improving ability to conduct stabilisation assessments, devise realistic plans, specify the optimum flexible resource mix to implement them, and propose the most effective methods to monitor their progress. All stabilisation planning should aim to merge seamlessly into UK development and political goals.

-Outsourcing of procurement, database management, deployment, logistics and life-support arrangements, to experienced private sector support contractors, to be called upon and scaled up rapidly as required.

DECLASSIFIED

DECLASSIFIED

-Rapid deployability, of trained personnel and small stocks of enabling equipment such as vehicles and communications, to support assessments and small-scale missions, including those on behalf of other UK official actors.

-A systematic concept of "expandability" designed to be capable (given expected warning times) of supporting a potentially large scale new UK stabilisation effort, but avoiding expensive stockpiles or continual training of unused pools of human resources.

-Continuously updated and overlapping contacts with potential partners and counterparts, in friendly countries and key international organisations, focused on the practical need to ensure rapid establishment of effective cooperative and liaison arrangements in real situations. These are complemented by even closer contacts with other parts of the UK's government and security apparatus.

-Maximum use of all opportunities to design and participate in exercises, to test concepts and practical arrangements, and to practice working alongside the UK military and other partners, with close attention to evaluation and systematic lesson learning.

6. The current PCRU model is the most sophisticated and integrated arrangement we know of. (Our US counterparts, the OCSR, share many perspectives but have no deployable capability) When briefing and exercising alongside potential partners, we hear consistently that the UK is seen as leading the international community in the seriousness with which it is enhancing its national capabilities for stabilisation. Even allowing for exaggeration, this presents a significant opportunity to influence international- and particularly American and EU.- thinking and practice. The benefits should come both in increasing global capacities for stabilisation and in facilitating joint planning for operations involving the UK.

Progress

7. The PCRU Progress Report for December shows that, in addition to taking on the considerable additional Afghan related effort required in the last few months (initially to assess the extent of knowledge within Whitehall on Helmand, and then to send out a fact gathering and planning team) we are well advanced along the work plan to achieve full overall Unit capacity. Most of our progress indicators so far have been quantitative, and, as you will know, numbers of permanent staff, personnel available on various databases, and key equipments have indeed all grown encouragingly. But it is important to avoid an obsession with simple measurable numbers. Quality and coherence are likely to matter most in future operations and it will be a continuous effort to build up and maintain such standards. These qualitative



DECLASSIFIED

PCRUI

Post Conflict Reconstruction Unit

issues are already being emphasised within the Unit and I would envisage that they will assume an even greater priority for the next stage.

Obstacles- and their solutions

8. Setting up a new entity on the Whitehall landscape, unavoidably located at the junction of Defence, Diplomatic and Development concerns, could not be uncontroversial. We have never expected to be readily accepted until we had proved that we could add value. A major resultant difficulty has, until very recently, been in finding sufficient people with conflict experience and appropriate skills, willing to join an unproven organisation which was out of departmental mainstreams, and might suddenly send them to unattractive and dangerous places- and then getting the right volunteers released quickly enough from their current jobs.

9. Apart from these staffing delays (mitigated by judicious use of consultants), we have also, perhaps inevitably, faced unclear expectations about our future role, and proper rate of progress towards it, departmental sensitivities over responsibilities and boundaries and, almost everywhere, initial unfamiliarity with our existence and purpose.

10. Participation in Exercise Joint Venture 05 in May was a step in overcoming such perceptual problems, particularly within MOD. But Helmand has been our first significant opportunity to prove the utility of our special contribution of integrated civil military planning. The PCRUI team deployed rapidly at Cabinet Office direction, with its own vehicles, communications and support, into a dangerous environment, and worked closely with colleagues from DFID, FCO and ADIDU, as well as PJHQ. The reception of the joint final plan within the Afghan Strategy Group on 16 December showed that Departments recognised the importance of this advance in joined- up working. It will set expectations for the planning of future UK involvements. Correspondingly, with increasing credibility and familiarity, we see signs in everyday working relationships that many of the difficulties mentioned above are beginning to diminish.

11. Some complexities, such as bringing together the (valuably)

different organisational cultures within the Unit and juggling workloads to cover new requirements and maintain relationships with a variety of possible partners, will be permanent features. This will never be a simple Unit to manage. But the difficulties should not be insuperable, especially as PCRU activities become better practiced and more widely understood.

Observations for the future

12. I have emphasised that, although we remain open to learn from others, we have so far encountered no major alternatives to the key elements of the current PCRU business model. Our own initial consultation process and subsequent international contacts have not suggested changes that would better suit the UK context. As far as governance, ownership and funding are concerned, I think it likely that the key features of the PCRU model which I set out above could operate within a variety of different arrangements. But I leave those issues to be studied, in the context of wider examination of Whitehall boundaries, as part of the CSR.

13. Operationally, the Unit's activities in each theatre will be intrinsically cross-departmental. They need to be coordinated by a comprehensive Whitehall mechanism, capable of resolving disputes. The Helmand Steering Group, set up and chaired by the Cabinet Office, representing all concerned Departments at approximately 1 star level, using secure video links with Kandahar, and with clear lines of responsibility to Ministers through the permanent Afghan Strategy Group, has been an effective arrangement. Its advantages should be borne in mind for the future operational direction of the Unit.

Brigadier

*1 by
Peacekeeping
Yemen
W Balkans*

14. There is now evident background demand across Whitehall for our people, expertise and resources. (We have been asked so far to assist UK efforts in Southern Iraq, Palestine, Aceh, Rafah, Yemen, and two organisations in Kabul, as well as evaluating UK activities in the Western Balkans funded by the Global Conflict Prevention Pool, and carrying out rapid in situ integrated civil- military planning for Southern Afghanistan) All this benefits the Unit, since it keeps the right kind of staff, who want to work in real situations, and builds their individual and collective skills. But it will also require continual choices about how and where we use our capacities.

15. Conflict is, notoriously, not a simple linear process. Conflict prevention frequently overlaps with post conflict reconstruction efforts. Consequently new PCRU involvements seem likely to be decided case-by-case against specific emerging requests, according to the priority of the country concerned and the comparative value that the Unit could add there, rather than by any simple categorisation of scenario types. (There was no early indication of the pattern of our



DECLASSIFIED

PCRU

Post Conflict Reconstruction Unit

actual engagements this year.) Nevertheless, given the complexities of stabilisation, the longer the PCRU has to assess and plan, the greater its probable utility and cost effectiveness. This principle has been corroborated by experience in Helmand.

16. For all these reasons, it would be sensible to intensify advance consultation between Departments and PCRU next year to help determine and prioritise possible commitments facing the Unit in good time. But since new stabilisation requirements are unpredictable, we should not attempt to set up any rigid process. We should instead build upon the existing arrangement of advance consultation through circulation of concept notes from requesting Departments for proposed activities.

17. More strategically, PCRU needs to be involved in the Whitehall debate about the evolution of the conflict agenda, in relation to the CSR and beyond. It has its own, circumscribed, but increasing expertise. This gives it a distinctive policy perspective, bearing on the wider questions of HMG coherence such as matching the post conflict and conflict prevention agendas, and the relationship with broader issues of organised crime, instability and radicalism. If the PCRU becomes simply a free delivery mechanism, a supply depot for ready use equipment, an exotic employment agency, or a secretariat expected only to make proposals that fit inside a consensus determined by others, talented people will not want to join or stay in it.

18. That would matter a great deal. The Unit's future will depend largely upon the skills and commitment of its staff. Departments can help in this. To maintain the standard of personnel in the PCRU, they need to continue to assist in identifying, encouraging and releasing high-quality people. (A cautious dose of positive media coverage, perhaps involving renewed Ministerial attention, might help in promoting interest among potential volunteers over the coming year.) Similarly, as we begin running Stabilisation Planning and Methods courses, it will obviously be desirable that Departments ensure suitable numbers of their key staff attend. We should together be aiming to build up a wider long-term cadre within Whitehall who will be able to work easily together using common planning frameworks in future crises.

DECLASSIFIED

19. Finally, despite the progress described above, senior support will remain crucial for some time to ensure successful PCRU involvement in cross Whitehall work. The Unit relies critically upon the development of coherent and effective cross-departmental working relationships. But they all impose costs and demands on the staff time of others. We have learned that it is sometimes difficult to persuade colleagues to take this on without direction from within their own organisation. I hope that my successors can continue to rely on that being available.

Paul Schulte
Head of the PCRU
16 December 2005