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PRIME MINISTER

cc: Jonathan Powell  
Antony Phillipson

## IRAQ: CONVERSATION WITH PRESIDENT BUSH

President Bush has asked to speak to you at 6pm this evening about Iraq.

I attach a telegram from Washington giving the latest on the US Strategy Review. The key points are:

- A surge of US combat forces, with various options on numbers (up to 20,000), but insufficient clarity on the nature of the mission – is this just a repeat of the Baghdad security plan; or does it go wider, eg. Anbar, border with Iran etc?
- Support for the idea of further embedding of mentors in order to improve Iraqi capability.
- Use of existing State Department/USAID programmes to provide support for economic reconstruction, along with the military commanders' funding. The total of this would be almost \$2 billion, but would not be new money.
- The political elements are unclear. But we know that the Americans are continuing to support the idea of the "moderate centre" in Baghdad.
- Personnel changes: Abizaid (CENTCOM) to be replaced by Admiral Fallon (in charge of US Forces in the Pacific); Casey to be replaced by Petraeus (Casey was due to go anyway, but this is being advanced); Khalilzad to replace Bolton at the UN (his successor in Baghdad is likely to be Crocker, US Ambassador in Islamabad); John Negroponte to take the vacant Deputy Secretary of State slot, and handle Iraq for Condi there. The idea is new faces for a new approach.

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I think the key points to discuss with Bush are:

- The need for him to present this as a change of policy, though not of course of objectives. This seems to be the intention, but Bush's critics will see this as "more of the same", and a refusal to accept the lessons of the Baker/Hamilton report.
- The need to put emphasis both in public and in terms of the follow-up, on Iraqi capability. As you have said to Bush before, the surging of US forces may or may not be the right thing (the UK Chiefs of Staff do not support it), but it can only work if it is combined with early improvements in Iraqi capabilities. We all know where the problem areas are - command and control, personnel (both at the top and the NCO levels), logistics, transport, heavy weaponry. This requires a qualitatively different US programme.
- The need to make clear that the numbers and mission of coalition forces depends on the situation on the ground. So what happens in Baghdad (surge of US forces) should not pre-determine what happens in Basra (where we anticipate a drawdown over the next six months following Operation Sinbad). It is important that Bush does not say anything next week which prejudices our plans, which have the support of General Casey, General Pace (Chairman of the Joint Chiefs) and others.
- The need for an overall regional strategy. Very little has come out in the press about this dimension, which was prominent in the Baker report. We know that Bush will not want to enter direct contact with Iran and Syria; but you should say that there would be advantage in regional groupings involving them, as now, the US should participate too. You should also repeat the need for Bush's speech to give an adequate profile to the MEPP. Condi will visit the region immediately after Bush's policy is unveiled. The Administration should claim the credit for this, not brush it under the carpet. If they do not do so, it will be seen as a rebuff not just to the UK and others in Europe, but to their regional allies.

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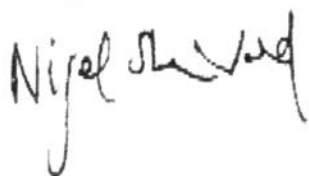
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- The need to support Maliki in the short-term, but be open to change. Bush had a two-hour conversation by video with Maliki yesterday.

This will have encouraged Bush. It is still not clear whether Maliki and Dawa will join the new Group of Four and if not, whether Maliki's position is secure in the medium-term.

I am doing a separate weekly note for you, covering Basra and other points.



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