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CIVILIAN-MILITARY RELATIONS IN BASRA

LESSONS IDENTIFIED

**(Stabilisation Unit)
(Development, Doctrine and Concepts Centre)**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This review of Civilian-Military cooperation in Basra was carried out jointly by Stabilisation Unit and MOD's Development, Concepts and Doctrine Centre (DCDC), at the initial request of DFID, and subsequent agreement of FCO and MOD, in order to:

- Draw lessons from the present state of civilian-military relations in Basra, compared to relations over the past two years;
- Make recommendations to inform future civilian-military working arrangements in operational environments.

Since the Stabilisation Unit review of the Basra Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) of September 2008, there have been significant and demonstrable improvements in the civilian-military relationship, with many examples of best practice. General Odierno has stated:

'They [Basra] are completely integrated down there, and that really is the future if we are going to support the Iraqis in the right way next year. Basra is the way forward...'

Strong leadership from the so called 'Gang of Four' (Consul General, Head of PRT, GOC and Head of the US Regional Embassy Office) has had direct beneficial impact on both HMG achievements and external perceptions. The strong leadership currently in place, committed to a coordinated approach, has overcome the challenges faced by the absence of an HMG pre-drawdown Iraq strategy and an integrated operational plan for Basra. Had a cross-Whitehall strategy and integrated plan been agreed from the outset, previous problems may have been avoided. While the present civilian-military picture in Basra is predominantly positive, there remain some challenges at the tactical level in turning the rhetoric and structures supporting collaborative working into consistent improvements in delivery across all sectors.

Establishing a causal relationship between recent improvements in coordination and effect has been complicated in Basra by the simultaneous impact of 2 contextual factors; the improvement of the security situation and the drawdown plan for the UK military deployment. The improved security situation has contributed to the thawing civilian-military relations by refocusing the dialogue from predominantly military issues to that of capacity building, whilst enabling more civilian mobility on the ground, which in turn has increased civilian credibility through more direct engagement in project delivery. The drawdown plan has had a more nuanced impact. For some the drawdown has focused minds and clarified responsibilities in a helpful way. However, the politically imposed deadline has contributed in some areas to a lack of coordination, as the military strive to make an impact before departure and the civilians try to work within Iraqi timescales and processes.

The review has identified that differences in organisational cultures, agendas and mindsets are the predominant factors which influence the civilian-military

relationship. The need to manage expectations of what civilian and military elements can and should realistically deliver is crucial. Furthermore, the military tendency towards a short-term focus and the civilian to a longer-term perspective can be complimentary if the rationale behind the different approaches is understood and respected. In Basra, the key to achieving greater synergy of approach has been the strong leadership of personalities predisposed to work together, seeking compromise not conflict, and setting the tone and conditions for those under their command and influence to follow suit. Through the conscious use of a variety of management tools, a sense of inclusion across disparate organisations has been achieved. These include coordination at highest levels, in the 'Gang of Four', filtering down through joint working groups, and joint delivery mechanisms in a number of areas, including rule of law, essential services, and provincial elections. Internal and external communications have been enhanced, a sense of team ownership founded, with military and PRT plans now aligned and expressed in mutually compatible formats. This has been achieved in the absence of a single chain of command through a shared ethos of cooperation and coordination. The unity of vision in the senior leadership has translated directly to improved external relationships, particularly with US colleagues and Iraqis.

However, despite the impressive turn-around in the civilian-military relationship in many areas, there remain some interfaces where the relationship remains fractious and coordination is lacking. What is difficult to assess is whether these weaker areas would also have improved over time had the drawdown of the UK military deployment not been on the horizon. What is clear is that for any civilian-military relationship to be sound and sustained then it must be built on mutual respect and understanding at all levels.

Given the importance of personality in achieving the turn-around in civil-military relations in Basra, the lessons from this review highlight the primacy of training, selection and career management of individuals to ensure leadership, team-working and emotional intelligence are recognised and developed as vital skills for all in the deployed environment. Enhanced pre-deployment training, specifically introducing civilians and the military to their counterpart's strengths and constraints, is seen as a realistic aspiration to reduce the culture shock, and tensions and frustrations so often a reality of initial civilian-military contacts. Additionally, the importance of collocation and mitigation of duty of care and tour length constraints are identified. The impact of the Whitehall-theatre relationship, resources and formal structures are also considered.

Where the mutual benefits from civilian-military collaborative working are recognised at all levels, individuals tend to see the incentives and work to overcome the often inevitable institutional and contextual barriers. Mutual respect and understanding are the foundations for any civilian-military relationship where the sum is greater than the parts, but this requires investment in time and effort by individuals and the appropriate resourcing and empowerment by the respective hierarchies.

TOP 7 LESSONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Personnel Selection. High quality civilian and military leadership in theatre, which values a holistic approach, is the primary factor in ensuring effective coordination. This is particularly important in the absence of a joint strategy or plan as has been the case in Basra. More emphasis should therefore be placed on strong leadership ability and commitment to joint working in the selection of key personnel. Interpersonal and team-working skills are vital in all those selected to work in such environments, and should be valued above specialist expertise. At the working level, it is often better to have a post gapped, than filled by the wrong individual.

Pre-Deployment Training. An absence of thorough and systematic pre-deployment training for civilians, and sufficient exposure to joint-working for the military, has contributed to personnel deploying without adequate exposure to the realities of a civilian-military environment, and consequently an inevitable delay in delivery as learning and adjustment take place in theatre. More civilian participation in military exercises and pre-deployment preparations, and a bespoke course for PRT staff, would have helped to address this.

Collocation. Collocation of the civilian and military headquarters at the Contingency Operating Base in September 2007 was a significant factor in breaking down physical barriers to good coordination. Collocation of the working environment should be the goal, and if the accommodation and social environments can be collocated as well, that further helps to break down barriers.

Strategic Communications. Good strategic communications are vital in ensuring that internal and external audiences understand the purpose and value of the joint effort. Sufficient civilian and military resources and appropriate coordinating mechanisms at all levels are critical in achieving this. An inclusive briefing process, and a common narrative which all stakeholders buy into, are also valuable.

Planning. Having an agreed cross-Whitehall strategy, set above an integrated operational plan, and linked to individual departmental plans, at the outset of the campaign, would have alleviated some of the tensions that have occurred in Basra in the past. Recent experience in Basra shows that having separate PRT and military plans, using an inclusive process, which are mutually supportive, clearly linked and use compatible language, can work, but largely through the commitment of leaders to make it work.

Tour Lengths. Military tour lengths for HQ staff need to be longer in stabilisation environments. Serious consideration should be given to extending them to 9 or 12 months, to maximise the benefit from trust and knowledge built from personal relationships, particularly with local actors.

Theatre Empowerment. In the past, it was felt that there was too much interference from Whitehall in Basra on matters which should have been delegated to theatre, in part a function of the lack of coherent strategy or planning. The military and civilian leadership now feel they have the right balance of direction and support from Whitehall, and the civilian leadership in particular feels more empowered to take decisions. This in turn gives an incentive for the military to engage. If Whitehall sets the strategy and tone, local empowerment can compel civilian and military leadership to work together to find and agree solutions based on local realities.

FURTHER LESSONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

PRT Ownership. At times in the past, the PRT suffered from an absence of support from Whitehall, impairing its ability to garner support from key actors in theatre, and therefore affecting delivery. It is important for the PRT to have adequate a strategic framework, and reach-back to Whitehall for suitable direction and support - in the form of additional personnel, funding, and championing of its cause.

Chain of Command. A single chain of command is rarely likely to be desirable. However, clarity on where responsibilities lie, and effective coordination, are essential. The emphasis should be on unity of effort, rather than unity of command.

PRT Structure. Local structures should be adapted according to the local context. Nevertheless, best practice in PRTs suggests that a full-time team leader, a military deputy at SO1 rank, a civilian-military mix of around 75:25, and sufficient administrative support for IT systems and knowledge management, are all necessary.

Coordination Tools. The civilian-military structures and processes currently in place in Basra (such as the Gang of Four, Basra Steering Group and Basra Development Group) facilitate good civilian-military coordination throughout the HQ, by ensuring inclusion, buy-in and visibility at all levels.

Joint Projects. It is helpful to identify areas where a joint civilian-military approach can be successful - both to create a sense of shared endeavour, and to improve delivery. There are a number of examples of this in Basra, although with varying degrees of success, such as the Joint Reconstruction Action Teams, the Strategic Communications Working Group, and Provincial Elections Working Group.

Civilian Pool. There has often been an insufficient supply of suitably qualified personnel from FCO and DFID willing to deploy to Basra, impacting on the ability to fill posts with individuals with the right leadership and interpersonal skills. In future, consideration should be given to additional incentives to deploy to such environments in order to increase the pool. Ongoing efforts to build up a larger deployable civilian cadre, with skills which are valued and rewarded by home departments, should be encouraged.

Civilian Rotation. The '6 weeks on, 2 weeks off' civilian rotation should be reviewed on a regular basis, and eased in light of improving security as soon as considered appropriate. In the meantime, a robust system of handover and cover should be established to ensure military colleagues are clear where responsibilities have been transferred during breather breaks.

Wider Expertise. The Basra experience suggests that Whitehall should seek a more inclusive approach to planning in the early stages of a campaign, bringing in expertise from other departments (such as BERR, UKTI, DECC, and local government) and to deployment. This would have impacted on the UK's ability to enhance the civilian effort with additional valuable skills at an earlier stage.

Specialist Skills. In Basra, there appears to have been difficulty in filling J9 posts with staff with suitable CIMIC training, which has made the task of coordinating military-civilian efforts more difficult than it might otherwise have been. Where possible, J9 staff should have some CIMIC training or background before deploying, and more could also be done to identify and harness relevant civilian skills from reservists.

Duty of Care. Recognising that efforts have been made to harmonise approaches in the past, it is worth repeating that different departmental approaches to civilian duty of care regulations remain a divisive issue in theatre. This is particularly so during the early stages of security improvements when there is a time lag before the regime is relaxed, resulting in military frustration at the immobility of their civilian colleagues. Where possible, more timely amendments should be sought, although recognising the need to confirm that the security improvements are durable. The Basra experience has also shown that more delegated authority to local actors has allowed a more flexible and responsive approach.

Resourcing. Campaigns of this scale need to be resourced appropriately if we want to be taken seriously by our coalition partners. Funding mechanisms should not drive programme selection and delivery, but should support it. Basra stakeholders felt the SAF was too small, too inflexible and too slow to respond to the realities of theatre. Consideration should be given to funding both the civilian and military elements of campaigns from the Reserve.

Information Systems. Incompatible information systems (computers, telephones and security protocols) remain a significant barrier to effective coordination in theatre – causing frustration, delays and sometimes stoppages to information flow. While one system across Whitehall remains a utopian goal, the goal should remain to adopt one system for all in theatre – albeit a 2-tier restricted and secret system.

Language. Using a common language and communication media which resonates across cultures has been a significant factor in breaking down barriers. For example, having campaign and PRT plans written in a common language understood by all, and efforts to brief in a style and language which resonates, has made a significant impact in breaking down barriers.

Designation. The name Provincial Reconstruction Team is a misnomer in Basra and has distorted expectations among key audiences, especially the military, regarding the PRT's primary purpose. Designation should be considered carefully in future.

Lessons Capture. The absence of systematic civilian lessons capture and dissemination in Basra has probably hindered the implementation of improvements in the past. A more systematic and integrated approach to lessons should be implemented in future.

INTRODUCTION

Background to the review

1. On 31 March 2009, the UK will hand over 2* command of Multinational Division (South East) to the US, after almost 6 years of British leadership in southern Iraq. On the same date, the UK will hand over leadership of Basra Provincial Reconstruction Team to the US. Over these past 6 years, the level of military-civilian coordination has fluctuated – often dependent on personalities and external factors in the security or political situation. Indeed, when Stabilisation Unit conducted a review of Basra PRT in September 2008, relations and coordination were at a low point. Now however, the perception is that civilian-military relations in Basra are much improved, coordination is going well, and this is being translated into better delivery of the UK mission on the ground.

2. Against this backdrop, DfID asked the Stabilisation Unit to conduct a review of civilian-military relations in Basra, before the handover to the US. The purpose of this review is:

- To draw lessons from the present state of civilian-military relations in Basra, compared with relations over the past two years;
- To make recommendations to inform future civilian-military joint working arrangements in operational environments.

It was also imperative to assess whether any improvement in relations was being translated into improved delivery.

3. Stabilisation Unit were keen to employ a joint civilian-military team to conduct the review, and to disseminate lessons to a wide audience, and consequently decided to partner with MOD's Development, Doctrine and Concepts Centre.

Improving perceptions

4. It had been clear in recent months that perceptions about the military-civilian relationship in Basra had been improving. This was manifested in reporting coming back to Whitehall, and positive reflections from senior visitors returning from Basra. Just as important, the US chain was now being much more positive about Basra, compared to the criticisms which had been levelled earlier in 2008. During a visit to Basra in December 2008, Gen Odierno went as far as stating:

'They [Basra] are completely integrated down there, and that really is the future if we are going to support the Iraqis in the right way next year. Basra is the way forward...'

5. Other US interlocutors praised Basra PRT for its Iraqi-led approach to development, citing it as a model for other US-led PRTs to follow. This was a far cry from perceptions of the PRT last summer, when the US Office of Provincial Affairs were regarding Basra PRT's approach and delivery with concern.

Security and political context

6. It is important to recognise that the context has changed significantly since then. Operation Charge of the Knights in March-April 2008 was a low point for the UK in Basra – the military sidelined by Prime Minister Maliki's unilateral plans, then apparently overrun by the influx of US military, the Consulate struggling to engage with local political leaders, and the PRT unable to get off the COB even as security started to improve in the immediate aftermath of the operation.

7. Contrast that with the security situation now, with IDF on the COB a rare occurrence (only 5 in the last 6 months compared to around 5 per month a year ago), levels of violence in the city much lower, and security ranking well below jobs and water as a concern for Basrawis. The PRT are now able to move off the COB relatively frequently (compared to being completely immobile one year ago) and more visitors and journalists are able to get into Basra to see conditions at first hand.

8. This has coincided with a change in the political dynamic. On 22 July 2008, the Prime Minister set out in his statement to the House of Commons the five remaining tasks for the UK to achieve, before a "fundamental change of mission" in 2009. These were: training Iraqi Army 14 Div; preparing Basra airport for transfer to Iraqi control; pushing forward economic development; supporting provincial elections; and "honouring our obligations to the Iraqi people". Following elections in the US, and in parallel with negotiations to extend the legal basis for troops to remain in Iraq in 2009, the Prime Minister announced on 18 December the timeline for the withdrawal of combat troops from southern Iraq, with a deadline of 31 July 2009. A more conducive environment in Iraqi politics towards the UK has further improved the atmosphere.

9. By the time of this review, Basra airport had been handed over to the Iraqis, successful and peaceful provincial elections had taken place, and progress had been made towards delivery of the other tasks. British civilian and military staff in Basra had clarity on the timelines of the drawdown, were no longer facing constant pressure from the US, Whitehall or Iraqi leadership to do more, were able to move around more freely, and live and work with less fear than before. It is not surprising therefore that tensions between the civilian and military staff have been eased, and that there are now positive drivers for good coordination as opposed to forces pulling them apart.



Maj Gen Salmon at the Basra Airport handover ceremony on 1 January 2009.

Cultural divide

10. It is worth mentioning in this section the cultural barriers to good civilian and military integration. These are largely based around different perspectives and understandings, leading to problems in expectation management, and a struggle to recognise the mutual benefits to joint working. Different perspectives centre around the civilian longer-term approach to local capacity building, often resulting in slow progress and intangible benefits, and the military pressure to deliver results quickly, but sometimes at the expense of local processes, and therefore producing unsustainable benefits. The two groups tend to work at a different tempo, further exacerbated by the usual mismatch in resources. Civilians and military alike need to recognise that their approaches are not necessarily mutually exclusive, and if coordinated correctly can bring benefits rather than tensions. Appreciation of the added value of working together is the goal which leaders in theatre have been striving to achieve, and through this a genuine mutual respect for the skills and expertise of both parties.

Other coordination challenges

11. Lastly, although this report concentrates on relations between the British military and civilians in Basra, it should be noted that these groups are not homogeneous. There exist barriers, tensions and challenges within the groups also. For example, the duty of care approach is not consistent for the numerous civilian actors – FCO, PRT, UNDP, USAID, NGOs, local Iraqi staff etc. And we must not forget that we are part of a much larger coalition, in which there are arguably even greater challenges of coordination and integration, and lessons to be learned. That, however, goes far beyond the scope of this report.

THEMES AND LESSONS/RECOMMENDATIONS

Personnel

Selection criteria

12. Without exception, all of the stakeholders we interviewed for this report, when asked to give reasons for the recent improvement in relations, cited leadership as the principal driving factor. It was imperative not only to have strong leadership among the so-called Gang of Four (General Officer Commanding MND(SE), Consul General, Head of the Provincial Reconstruction Team and Head of US Regional Embassy Office) but also a genuine commitment to work together. A real recognition of the value of a holistic approach among the four key leaders has been the driving force behind improved coordination in Basra.

13. Looking beyond the leadership, we saw that where there were strong interpersonal skills, and a commitment to team-working at the lower levels, that contributed to greater coordination and then usually to greater delivery. In the PRT in the past, subject matter expertise had been accorded a higher value, at the expense of building relationships. Tough action by the new PRT leader had underlined that subject matter expertise alone was no longer sufficient, in the absence of a willingness and ability to engage with military counterparts.

Personnel Selection. High quality civilian and military leadership in theatre, which values a holistic approach, is the primary factor in ensuring effective coordination. This is particularly important in the absence of a joint strategy or plan as has been the case in Basra. More emphasis should therefore be placed on strong leadership ability and commitment to joint working in the selection of key personnel. Interpersonal and team-working skills are vital in all those selected to work in such environments, and should be valued above specialist expertise. At the working level, it is often better to have a post gapped, than filled by the wrong individual.

Civilian pool

14. Perhaps outside of the remit of this report, but worth mentioning nevertheless, is the dynamic created by the employment of large numbers of consultants instead of HMG civilians. Consultants have different motivations from civil servants and are less likely to be inspired by the desire to work towards a common HMG vision. Furthermore, consultants are often, by their very nature, not necessarily natural team players. As a result, and as mentioned in the PRT review last summer, that dynamic can have a detrimental impact on both working atmosphere and effective coordination. That impact has been largely mitigated now in Basra by the imposition of strong leadership and direction, but is nevertheless a consideration for the issue of civilian-military coordination in future.

15. The employment of consultants is partly driven by the unavailability of civil servants who are both qualified and willing to deploy to environments such as Iraq. Civilian postings to Iraq have consequently often been driven by availability over suitability, and we do not always have the luxury of picking those with the aptitudes

mentioned above. This is not only due to perceptions about the danger of the post or the living conditions, but also a sense that a posting to Iraq is not necessarily valued by their home department – in short, an absence of incentives. The MOD system while not perfect, at least tried to address this in a more systematic way, with a database of volunteers, organised according to role, actively managed, and proactively trained. Among MOD civilians there is also a greater sense that their department values experience in such environments, and greater relevant use of that experience post-deployment, although other departments are starting to learn from this. These findings further support the need for ongoing efforts by the Stabilisation Implementation Team to enhance civilian deployable capacity across the board.

Civilian Pool. There has often been an insufficient supply of suitably qualified personnel from FCO and DfID willing to deploy to Basra, impacting on the ability to fill posts with individuals with the right leadership and interpersonal skills. In future, consideration should be given to additional incentives to deploy to such environments in order to increase the pool. Ongoing efforts to build up a larger deployable civilian cadre, with skills which are valued and rewarded by home departments, should be encouraged.

Harnessing expertise

16. Lastly, many raised the issue of untapped expertise - firstly in Whitehall, where we were only relatively recently trying to harness expertise from OGDs like BERR, DECC, and the British Council etc. Some mentioned the expertise from local government in service delivery, which was currently a largely untapped resource, although there remain questions about the relevance of their expertise overseas. While personnel from these departments would be even less prepared for deployment than those from FCO and DfID, their input into planning at the early stages of the campaign might nevertheless have been valuable. On the military side, it was surprising that the personnel we interviewed in J9 posts lacked CIMIC training. This is not a reflection on the quality of those staff, who were committed to working as effectively as possible with the PRT, but more a reflection of the system which appoints staff without suitable backgrounds, leading to an unnecessary period of steep learning at the start of their deployment. Likewise, there did not seem to have been a conscious effort in Basra to harness reservist skills, which we understand is now being addressed more in Afghanistan in the Military Stabilisation Support Teams. This was also a recommendation of the Cabinet Office Task Force review.

Wider Expertise. The Basra experience suggests that Whitehall should seek a more inclusive approach to planning in the early stages of a campaign, bringing in expertise from other departments (such as BERR, UKTI, DECC, and local government.) and to deployment. This would have impacted on the UK's ability to enhance the civilian effort with additional valuable skills at an earlier stage.

Specialist Skills. In Basra, there appears to have been difficulty in filling J9 posts with staff with suitable CIMIC training, which has made the task of coordinating military-civilian efforts more difficult than it might otherwise have been. Where possible, J9 staff should have some CIMIC training or background before deploying,

and more could also be done to identify and harness relevant civilian skills from reservists.

Preparation and Development

Pre-deployment Training

20. Individuals, with little or no previous experience of working in the civilian-military environment, spoke of a real culture shock when exposed to the different approaches, agendas, mindsets and working practices of their opposite numbers for the first time in theatre. This could quickly develop into tension, as misunderstandings arose and expectations were not met.

21. Currently the preparation of civilians before deployment concentrates almost exclusively on security issues. Military pre-deployment training, though more thorough, also lacks specific preparation for working in the civilian-military environment. To prepare individuals for working in this environment, the following topics are amongst those which were considered important for an enhanced pre-deployment package:

- What civilian and military elements can and should deliver.
- Why there are differences in duty of care, and terms and conditions, and what this means in practice.
- Civilian structures and terminology e.g. what is a PRT? What is meant by sustainable development?
- Military structures and terminology e.g. what is the difference between a Div and Bde HQ? What are J1-9?
- Different planning tools and methodologies.
- The short versus long-term approaches, and how they can be seen as compatible and complementary to each other.
- The realities of the political imperative.
- Areas for synergy e.g. polling and survey work, capacity building and strategic communications.

22. If better prepared, individuals are more likely to see the incentives to collaborative working and find ways to overcome the barriers, recognising the mutual benefits. Better education should reduce the oft-observed short versus long-term outlook tensions between civilian and military elements, and go some way to mitigate military short tour lengths through reaching a higher level of mutual understanding earlier.

23. The US have a more systematic and developed pre-deployment regime than the UK (see vignette box). This has considerable advantages but is resource intensive. Other options should also be considered including the standardisation of pre-deployment training for all civilians, including contractors, deploying in support of UK operations, with the addition of modules on the civil-military environment into existing civilian HEAT and military OPTAG pre-deployment training. Stabilisation Unit is currently piloting a more structured PDT for Helmand.

24. Preparation for those filling senior leadership roles is also currently ad hoc and appropriate cross-Whitehall office calls should be formalised to ensure consistent and thorough preparation.

Pre-Deployment Training. An absence of thorough and systematic pre-deployment training for civilians, and sufficient exposure to joint-working for the military, has contributed to personnel deploying without adequate exposure to the realities of a civilian-military environment, and consequently an inevitable delay in delivery as learning and adjustment take place in theatre. More civilian participation in military exercises and pre-deployment preparations, and a bespoke course for PRT staff, would have helped to address this.

Vignette: US PRT Pre-Deployment Training

US State Department runs a 3 week PRT Course, with 3 modules:

1. Security
2. Iraq area studies
3. Working in a PRT and with the military

Wherever possible the incoming PRT is formed and trains together prior to deployment, exercising with the military units with which they will work in country. Although the deployment of a PRT as a team would bring benefits, there would nevertheless be a trade-off in terms of continuity when a new team takes over.

Lessons

25. Few of the civilian interviewees expected to be formally debriefed on return to their parent departments. Hard earned experience and corporate knowledge is being lost. The importance of documenting failure as well as success was noted, as was the need to share lessons across departments. The issue of lessons should be seen as a process; from lessons capture, through the identification of trends and prioritisation, to the timely dissemination of lessons in an appropriate format to a target audience for which they have relevance. An analysis of lessons should be part of the iterative approach to pre-deployment training.

Lessons Capture. The absence of systematic civilian lessons capture and dissemination in Basra has probably hindered the implementation of improvements in the past. A more systematic and integrated approach to lessons should be implemented in future.

Whitehall-theatre interface

Empowerment

26. Both the civilian and military leadership in Basra mentioned the level of direction and support received from Whitehall as a factor. Most interviewees felt that the balance was now right – Whitehall had set and agreed the strategic direction, and were letting theatre implement it in a way that worked best for them. Clarity on timelines and end state had allowed the civilians and military to draw up compatible plans. In the past however, the relationship has suffered from lack of an agreed direction from Whitehall – characterised by the absence of an agreed Iraq Strategy until very recently – and a tendency for a long screwdriver approach – imposing mechanisms like the Southern Iraq Steering Group. There was an argument to suggest that imposing empowerment on theatre compelled the leadership there to work together – whereas when Whitehall had a tighter grip on the reigns there was less reason, and less value, in doing so.

27. Nevertheless, it should be noted that there are times when intervention is required from Whitehall to unblock problems in theatre. An example would be the agreement of FCO, DfID and MOD on the need for a review of Basra PRT in summer 2008. This external intervention was necessary to impose changes on the PRT which could not have been initiated in theatre.

Theatre Empowerment. In the past, it was felt that there was too much interference from Whitehall in Basra on matters which should have been delegated to theatre, in part a function of the lack of coherent strategy or planning. The military and civilian leadership now feel they have the right balance of direction and support from Whitehall, and the civilian leadership in particular feels more empowered to take decisions. This in turn gives an incentive for the military to engage. If Whitehall sets the strategy and tone, local empowerment can compel civilian and military leadership to work together to find and agree solutions based on local realities.

28. Worth mentioning is the impact of the drawdown timelines on both relations and delivery. In areas where coordination was not working so well, this was often attributed to the military need to deliver as much as possible before 31 March 2009, and they had in some cases left their civilian colleagues behind and by-passed processes, and sometimes key Iraqi players, which the PRT had been developing over a long period. This artificial timeline is not based on Iraqi realities. An example is in the Joint Reconstruction Action Teams (JRATs), which did not deliver its potential in all areas, notably on water projects, due to conflicting time perspectives. (JRATs are explored in more detail in a later vignette). However, while this artificial timeline has had an impact, all staff need to recognise that such impositions are a reality in stabilisation environments, which do not exist in a political vacuum.

PRT Ownership

29. Lastly, ownership of the PRT has been problematic since its inception in early 2006, with fluctuations in the nature and amount of support and direction for the PRT, from a number of sources. Staff in the PRT agreed that the situation was now much better, with the right level of direction, empowerment and support coming from from DfID. They felt they had an 'owner' to champion their cause in Whitehall, to supply it with additional personnel and funding when requested, and reachback for advice and

expertise. Importantly, there was now a sense that other Whitehall departments also bought in to the aims and approach of the PRT.

PRT Ownership. At times in the past, the PRT suffered from an absence of support from Whitehall, impairing its ability to garner support from key actors in theatre, and therefore affecting delivery. It is important for the PRT to have adequate a strategic framework, and reach-back to Whitehall for suitable direction and support - in the form of additional personnel, funding, and championing of its cause.

Structures

Collocation

30. The withdrawal of civilian staff from Basra Palace in late 2006, leading to the physical dislocation of the military and PRT, had a damaging effect on civilian-military relations, reinforcing a 'them and us' perception. However, the eventual collocation on the Contingency Operating Base (COB), with the PRT and Div HQ within the same building, had been a positive factor in the restoration of the working relationship. Some elements of the PRT remain dislocated from the core, notably the Infrastructure team who operate from a separate compound on the COB, and it may not be coincidental that this is where the civilian-military relationship remains particularly tense.

31. Although the domestic accommodation for civilian PRT staff is in a separate compound to the military, efforts are made to invite the military to social events, which has paid dividends in mending and building relations.

Collocation. Collocation of the civilian and military headquarters at the Contingency Operating Base in September 2007 was a significant factor in breaking down physical barriers to good coordination. Collocation of the working environment should be the goal, and if the accommodation and social environments can be collocated as well, that further helps to break down barriers.

Chain of Command

32. There was considerable debate and difference of opinion on whether a single chain of command is achievable, or indeed desirable, for future civilian-military endeavours. The predominant opinion was that while single ownership and responsibility of the problem looked seductive in theory, be it through a single leader or supra-departmental authority, in reality this was not desirable. It was felt that the strength of the different departmental approaches and expertise might be diluted under a single command, and that disagreement and constructive conflict was an important part in ensuring that the sum was greater than the parts. Joint ownership in Basra had forced a consensual approach formed through mutual understanding, trust and respect. Unity of effort was seen as essential and could be achieved without unity of command.

33. There was a perception that in the past civilians had been reluctant to accept a leadership role, even when deemed appropriate, and that there were occasions when the military had been too quick to fill any perceived void. To overcome these tensions the concept of 'supporting' and 'supported' was seen as a useful tool for adaptive and transformational leadership in the absence of a single leader owning all actors. This relationship would change throughout a campaign primarily in respect of the security situation and the appropriate balance between military and civilian primacy.

Chain of Command. A single chain of command is rarely likely to be desirable. However, clarity on where responsibilities lie, and effective coordination, are essential. The emphasis should be on unity of effort, rather than unity of command.

PRT Structure

34. There was universal agreement that the creation of the Head of PRT as a full time position had been a major contributing factor to the recent improvements in the civilian-military relationship in Basra. Although there were valid reasons for merging the Deputy Consul General and PRT leader post in 2007, there were strong drivers for needing a full time PRT leader by the time of the PRT review in summer 2008.. Under this leadership, the PRT had established clearer management lines and a more structured approach. The disparate nature of the different elements of the PRT, including UN and US contributions, brought the advantages of broad expertise and resources, but expectations had to be managed as to how formal and homogenous the PRT structure could really be.

35. There is no one-size fits all model for a PRT, however interviewees suggested several areas that would have been worth consideration had the PRT been remaining under UK command. Many believed that a military deputy, of SO1 rank to ease access to Div HQ, would be advantageous. It was also noted that more military within the PRT would help ensure that the PRT and military outputs were harmonised. A 75% civilian to 25% military mix was suggested as the theoretical optimum balance. Greater military representation would help meet the military HQ's demands for reports and returns, provide the PRT with an enhanced planning capacity and have a positive effect on perceptions of a integrated civilian-military approach.

36. There was no consensus over whether CMOC/J9 should remain outside, or be embedded within the PRT, but greater coordination between the 2 entities was required in order to assure all projects were complementary.

37. To optimise the output from the PRT investment was required in IT, administrative and knowledge management support. There was a good deal of criticism in particular at the absence of comprehensive historical and current data on PRT projects, supporting a requirement for improved knowledge management.

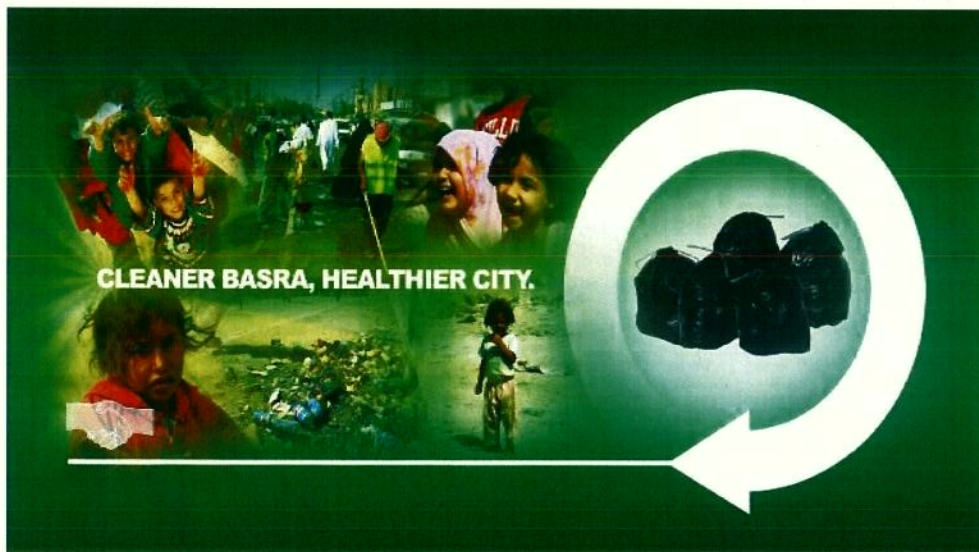
PRT Structure. Local structures should be adapted according to the local context. Nevertheless, best practice in PRTs suggests that a full-time team leader, a military deputy at SO1 rank, a civilian-military mix of around 75:25, and sufficient administrative support for IT systems and knowledge management, are all necessary.

Communication

Strategic Communications

38. One of the reasons for this review has been the perception, among key stakeholders in Whitehall and the US, that the level of joint working and delivery, has improved significantly in recent months. This is in part due to the quality and quantity of communication, and notably joint communication, coming out of Basra. The PRT review last year highlighted better communications as a key recommendation – needing to be recognised as crucial, and resourced appropriately. The PRT has now done that, hiring a full time communications specialist focused on getting the right messages out to all audiences, supported by an additional member of DfID staff, and recognised by the head of the PRT as central to the PRT's success. Internally, the PRT are now clear what their collective aims are, and no longer work so much in silos.

39. Within the joint HQ, there is sharing of information at all levels – in the daily meetings attended by military and civilians, and in working groups on a variety of issues, including the Strategic Communications Working Group. One notable area of cooperation was on polling, where the PRT had used military capacity to target surveys according to their priorities. Another example was in the launch of the Basra Investment Commission in November 2008, where again the PRT had relied on military resources to produce 'Basra Open for Business' and JRAT promotional material. There is now much more of a sense of shared endeavour in the HQ.



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A JRAT 'Trash' promotional poster.

40. Externally, communication is better coordinated – with joint briefings to the press (no longer just defence correspondents), inputs from civilian staff into military reports to Whitehall, and vice versa, and PRT input to the Battle Update Assessment to US commanders. There is a recognition of the key audiences – Whitehall, US, UK media, Iraqis – and coordinated targetting of each.

41. Stakeholders in Baghdad also noted an improvement in communications from Basra, in part due to the success of the Basra Support Office (BSO) in ensuring that sufficient information was flowing to the right audiences. SBMR(I)'s office in particular, had improved perceptions and awareness of the work of Basra PRT since the creation of the BSO.

Communications. Good strategic communications are vital in ensuring that internal and external audiences understand the purpose and value of the joint effort. Sufficient civilian and military resources and appropriate coordinating mechanisms at all levels are critical in achieving this. An inclusive briefing process, and a common narrative which all stakeholders buy into, are also valuable.

Terminology

42. There has also been a recognition of the importance of language, and concerted effort by the military and civilian leadership to use compatible terminology. For example, when the PRT briefs the military on the progress of their projects, they always link their work into the Decisive Conditions set out in the military campaign plan. Similarly, the campaign plan is an accessible document notable for its absence of military jargon.

Language. Using a common language and communication media which resonates across cultures has been a significant factor in breaking down barriers. For example, having campaign and PRT plans written in a common language understood by all, and efforts to brief in a style and language which resonates, has made a significant impact in breaking down barriers.

Designation. The name Provincial Reconstruction Team is a misnomer in Basra and has distorted expectations among key audiences, especially the military, regarding the PRT's primary purpose. Designation should be considered carefully in future.

IT

43. However, many interviewees noted the continuing barriers imposed by incompatible IT systems – raising problems in the simple transfer of information between civilians and military working on the same issue. Different levels of security clearance was an additional barrier.

Information Systems. Incompatible information systems (computers, telephones and security protocols) remain a significant barrier to effective coordination in theatre – causing frustration, delays and sometimes stoppages to information flow. While one

system across Whitehall remains a utopian goal, the goal should remain to adopt one system for all in theatre – albeit a 2-tier restricted and secret system.

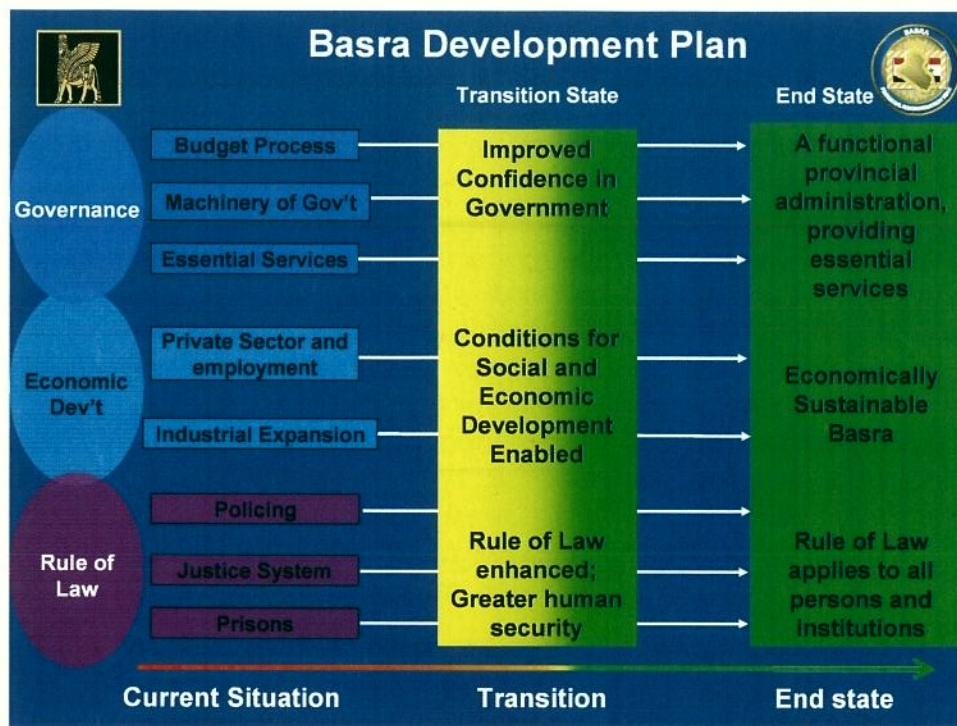
Coordination and Planning

Planning

44. The early days of the Iraq campaign were characterised by the absence of a strategic framework. Although there were some high level objectives, there was insufficient clarity on priorities, sequencing and responsibilities. Better Basra plans in 2006/07 were an attempt by theatre to overcome those shortfalls, but the consensus was that they had been over-ambitious and lacked buy-in from all stakeholders, especially the military. However, it was acknowledged that the process had started to bring civilians and military together and in particular had forced civilian elements to articulate, timeframe and sequence activities in order to make best use of resources. The attempt at having an in-theatre integrated plan in the absence of a Whitehall strategy was valid, but struggled to succeed in the absence of a higher level consensus.

45. Prior to their deployment, the current Div staff had conducted an estimate, attended by DfID though not FCO, and subsequently visited theatre 3 times to produce and agree their campaign plan with all stakeholders. This military campaign plan, driven by PM's deliverables, openly recognised that the military were supporting civilian capacity building, with one of the 8 decisive conditions being 'support to the PRT'.

46. There was a conscious decision by the PRT to align their plans to this military plan, which was in turn linked to the coalition Joint Common Plan. The PRT's new Basra Development Plan is directly linked to the campaign plan by consciously using military terminology, with supporting effects articulated in the former clearly linked to the decisive conditions in the later. Both the process and the product was recognised as important, in bringing together civilian and military efforts and enhancing delivery. The Basra Development Plan has attempted to bind all stakeholders, even those with no command relationship, in an attempt to track activity and hold all stakeholders to account through the discipline of reporting against the plan to the overseeing Basra Development Group. The plan has in many respects become the narrative for the civilian-military effort, in the absence of an HMG integrated plan]



The Basra Development Plan top level structure.

47. Despite the relative success in developing and aligning existing plans in theatre, this has been achieved through reverse engineering. The aspiration must remain for a truly integrated operational plan to be derived from a clearly articulated cross-Whitehall strategy and as the result of a thorough shared analysis, from the outset. A shared analysis, including all stakeholders would assist in the balancing and merging of short and long term aspirations. An integrated planning process should ensure that expectations are managed through realistic objectives, and priorities measured and adjusted, with assigned leads held accountable through a process of monitoring and evaluation. In the context of Basra it was noted that what was needed was one plan coordinated with Iraqis and acknowledging realistic timescales.

Planning. Having an agreed cross-Whitehall strategy, set above an integrated operational plan, and linked to individual departmental plans, at the outset of the campaign, should be the preference, and would have alleviated some of the tensions that have occurred in Basra in the past. Recent experience in Basra shows that having separate PRT and military plans, using an inclusive process, which are mutually supportive, clearly linked and use compatible language, can work, but largely through the commitment of leaders to make it work.

48. The creation of the Gang of Four, notably drawing in the US, set the tone for collaborative working in theatre. The leadership team are seen to work, brief and socialise together, and have created a unified front to the Iraqis. To act as the catalyst for more informal joint working, some formal coordination structures have been imposed to ensure coordination at all levels.

Vignette: The Gang of Four

The Gang of Four is a unique construct thrown together in the absence of formal coordination or command structures, and driven largely by good relationships between the four key players. It has worked both in spite of, and because of this. Although varying in rank/grade, the four work together as equals, and do so openly and in good grace, setting the tone for collaborative working among their staff, and establishing communication and coordination tools to create the structures and processes to support a collective endeavour. This it has achieved with a large degree of success, resulting not only in better working relationships, but also improved delivery. Had personal relationships between the four not been so good, the Gang of Four was unlikely to have been so effective, and may not even have survived as a group. It is worth adding here that the establishment of the Head PRT as a dedicated post, equal in seniority to the Consul General, has been positive – raising the profile of the PRT to a higher level. Again, had relations between PRT head and Consul not been so good, this might have become a point of tension.

49. On inheriting a difficult civilian-military relationship, an internal PRT 'away day' and a joint PRT/military open session were used to clear the air, better understand approaches and identified gaps and overlaps.

50. Two key overseeing groups have been established: the Basra Steering Group, co-chaired by Consul Gen and GOC, focusing on the Campaign Plan; and the Basra Development Group, chaired by Head PRT, focusing on the Basra Development Plan. In addition, the GOC's morning briefs include the PRT who provide an update on key activities. The civilian element has thus been integrated into the more formalised military 'battle rhythm'. Several civilian interviewees noted that this requirement to regularly articulate priorities and progress had introduced a useful discipline to their work, while they had gained credibility with the military through their willingness to adapt to the more formal briefing and presentational styles.

51. These coordination tools have proved broadly successful in ensuring a demarcation of responsibilities. However, there remains inconsistency in the success of coordination at the tactical or delivery end. Relationships are best in areas where the military are used to working with civilian agencies, for example amongst intelligence operators (J2) and engineers (J9). Examples of both successful and less successful integrated civilian-military projects are given in the next section.

Coordination Tools. The civilian-military structures and processes currently in place in Basra (such as the Gang of Four, Basra Steering Group and Basra Development Group) facilitate good civilian-military coordination throughout the HQ, by ensuring inclusion, buy-in and visibility at all levels.

Joint Projects

52. Work on the Rule of Law and the Provincial Elections Working Group (led by the FCO but including the PRT, military and the US) are examples of projects which have seen successful civilian-military integration. Similarly the agreement of the 4 priorities for basic service delivery as sewage, water, electricity and trash (SWET) allowed for a common approach to be adopted. The conscious effort to identify joint projects, where civilians and the military could and should work together, aimed to motivate people through focusing on delivery and thus demonstrating the benefits of collaborative working. However while there has been success in many areas, and the overall picture remains one of improvement from the situation last year, there remain areas for further improvement. The Joint Reconstruction Action Teams (JRATs) are an example of a sound concept which has however failed to deliver on the initial promise (see vignette box).

53. While the success of implementation of joint projects on the ground has been inconsistent, there are signs that the leadership's ethos is paying dividends in terms of constant efforts to improve where problems are identified. For example, to date separate military and PRT led marshlands projects have at best been deconflicted and in reality co-exist rather than coordinate. However, a joint PRT/MiTT initiative is now aimed at improving coordination at the sub provincial level through the inception of District Development Forums. These should improve focus on local Iraqi priorities, whilst also serving as a means to improve civilian-military working at the tactical level, including coordination of projects such as those in the marshlands.

Joint Projects. It is helpful to identify areas where a joint civilian-military approach can be successful - both to create a sense of shared endeavour, and to improve delivery. There are a number of examples of this in Basra, although with varying degrees of success, such as the Joint Reconstruction Action Teams, the Strategic Communications Working Group, and Provincial Elections Working Group



Vignette: Joint Reconstruction Action Teams (JRATs)

JRATs were formed in Sep/Oct 08 in an attempt to channel all development stakeholders into a more unified approach and to present an integrated face to Iraqis. Separate JRATs were established for each of the basic services priorities; sewage, water, electricity and trash (SWET). The aim was to identify project gaps and overlaps, pool expertise, and align and tailor activities under a mixture of civilian and military leadership. It was hoped that JRATs would create a bottom up momentum, marrying civilian expertise with military resources, and providing a forum to air differences constructively.

The concept was widely accepted as being a sound, pragmatic approach and was heralded by the US as the way forward. Initially, it was seen as a success, harnessing all stakeholder skills and forging a sense of inclusion and joint ownership. However, after initial progress, the regular meetings ceased and some interviewees stated that tensions and mistrust became worse than before.

The reason for the JRATs not delivering on expectations was most frequently identified as the pressure on the military to ensure a positive UK legacy through the delivery of quick, tangible results. This apparent haste was seen by some as incompatible with their approaches and perceived as unrealistic or inappropriate, ignoring the realities of Iraqi pace and timescales. Some felt the civilian expertise was being sidelined, although there were fractures across civilian to civilian interfaces, as well as civilian to military. From the other perspective the military grew impatient and frustrated with the slow pace and the focus on refining the plan rather than moving to delivery.

Although the JRATs for the most part failed to deliver on the initial promise, the concept remains sound. Had the artificial, in development terms, timeline of the UK military withdrawal not been imposed, then the concept may have been more successful. As it is, there have still been successes in some areas, notably the electricity JRAT which is Iraqi driven, with coalition money and is creating sustainable improvements. Most put the relative success of this workstrand down to personalities.

54. Duty Of Care (DOC) still remains a divisive issue in theatre, although perhaps less so now, largely because it is better understood by military – they know that civilians don't join up to take the same risks that they do. Less well understood is why MOD civilians have a different approach to DOC than FCO and DfID. Another problem is that when security improves, there is an inevitable delay until improved civilian mobility catches up, and this is a source of frustration for the military. In September 2008, the civilian DOC regime was relaxed in Basra, although they still need either a military escort, or airlift, in order to move through suburbs. Local actors – the Consul General and Overseas Security Manager – now feel more empowered to take decisions based on parameters set in London, and this greater flexibility has

been positive. Although beyond the scope of this report, it is worth adding here that the UK's cautious approach to duty of care has had an adverse impact on the perceptions of journalists and locals, as messages about returning normality in Basra are not well supported by images of heavily protected troops and civilians. Clearly, perceptions need to be balanced against the level of risk we are willing to take.

Duty of Care. Recognising that efforts have been made to harmonise approaches in the past, it is worth repeating that different departmental approaches to civilian duty of care regulations remain a divisive issue in theatre. This is particularly so during the early stages of security improvements when there is a time lag before the regime is relaxed, resulting in military frustration at the immobility of their civilian colleagues. Where possible, more timely amendments should be sought, although recognising the need to confirm that the security improvements are durable. The Basra experience has also shown that more delegated authority to local actors has allowed a more flexible and responsive approach.

Military and civilian tours

55. Tour lengths are another cause of some tension. All of our military interviewees stated that they should be doing longer tours in such environments, particularly where it was imperative to establish and maintain good relationships with the locals. Many civilian interviewees noted a certain degree of fatigue in having to explain, and defend, their approach to new military colleagues every three months – due to the staggering of Division and Brigade roulements.

Tour Lengths. Military tour lengths for HQ staff need to be longer in stabilisation environments. Serious consideration should be given to extending them to 9 or 12 months, to maximise the benefit from trust and knowledge built from personal relationships, particularly with local actors.

56. Similarly, the civilian approach to tours in such environments – generally longer tours of around 12 months, but working 6 weeks on and 2 weeks off - was problematic. This caused frustration among military colleagues at finding their key interlocutor in the PRT had disappeared on 2 weeks leave, without handing over work to another colleague, or arranging proper cover in their absence. Some civilian interviewees questioned whether the '6+2' routine was still necessary in light of the improved security and living conditions, although recognised that any revision might have an impact on incentivisation.

Civilian Rotation. The '6 weeks on, 2 weeks off' civilian rotation should be reviewed on a regular basis, and eased in light of improving security as soon as considered appropriate. In the meantime, a robust system of handover and cover should be established to ensure military colleagues are clear where responsibilities have been transferred during breather breaks.

Resources

Resourcing

57. Levels of funding were rarely cited as a constraining factor due to the availability of US CERPs and the unlocking of Iraqi resources in the form of I-CERPs. However, several interviewees viewed that a lack of UK money, and the administrative constraints of the funds that were available, had had a negative effect on UK reputation due to missed opportunities. A number of interviewees mentioned that this had at times led to a loss of credibility with US colleagues. It is not clear that additional funding would have made a material improvement to delivery however.

58. The SAF was acknowledged as a good concept but there were queries over how prioritisation is made between Iraq and Afghanistan, and why the SAF board for Iraq is in London but is delegated to theatre in Afghanistan. It was also felt that SAF constraints were driving project selection and implementation rather than supporting project design.

59. Comment was frequently made of the MOD being funded for expeditionary operations from the reserve, but DFID and FCO activities being sustained from core funding. It was widely felt that all expeditionary operations, regardless of parent department, should be funded from the reserve.

60. The civilian-military resource mismatch was also manifested in terms of manpower. Few felt that the manpower imbalance would or necessarily should even out, however it was felt that civilian expertise should be better valued and used more to shape the military effort when delivering civilian effect. The military also needed to realise that civilian colleagues do not have the same ability to surge and do not always have the capacity to keep up with the military tempo.

Resourcing. Campaigns of this scale need to be resourced appropriately if we want to be taken seriously by our coalition partners. Funding mechanisms should not drive programme selection and delivery, but should support it. Basra stakeholders felt the SAF was too small, too inflexible and too slow to respond to the realities of theatre. Consideration should be given to funding both the civilian and military elements of campaigns from the Reserve.