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18 February 2004

Foreign &
Commonwealth
Office

London SW1A 2AH

Dear Mr. [unclear],

Iraq: Security Sector Reform

Recent attacks in Baghdad, Iskandariyah and Fallujah have highlighted the vulnerability of the Iraqi security forces. Both former regime elements (FREs) and Islamist extremists have conducted attacks against Iraqi police and military as an explicit policy aimed at undermining stability and striking at perceived Coalition "collaborators" and more Iraqi security force personnel have been killed since 1 May than have coalition troops.

It has not been possible in most cases to determine which groups have been responsible for specific attacks; intelligence has been limited and often contradictory. FREs are still assessed as responsible for the majority of attacks in Iraq (currently running at about 20 a day, mostly small scale). Intelligence indicates that Islamist groups have focussed on suicide bombings, mainly using vehicle borne improvised explosive devices. Although only 1% of the total number of attacks, these have achieved disproportionate effect, causing well over 1000 casualties and they probably have the greatest strategic impact against Coalition objectives.

Morale among the police has understandably been dented but is not thought to be at breaking point, and it remains high among the Iraqi Civil Defence Corps. The coalition is implementing changes to the security procedures at recruiting stations and has revised its information campaign to help bolster recruitment, which has not suffered yet. It is worth taking stock of progress on security sector reform in this context.

Police

Although much progress has been made since last summer, police figures given by US commanders are inflated and training is behind schedule. There are also significant weapons, vehicles and communications shortfalls. Much of this can be put down to unrealistic expectations created by the US military commanders' decision to accelerate the original 18 month to two-year plan to fit the new political timetable, but without additional resources. In Jordan, infrastructure and contract problems mean that the school is only running at half

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*this is not
good enough.*

of its projected target of 3,000 graduates every 8 weeks. At the current rate, the police training programme will need to extend at least to end 2004.

The key issue is anyway not overall numbers but credible police capability. One of the key factors in delivering this will be a system to monitor or mentor newly trained officers in order to consolidate the training effort. Security constraints have prevented the deployment of civilian police to take on this task. In the South as elsewhere in Iraq, the military (including military police) have had to take on this role in addition to their other duties. There are signs that picture may now improving, and we are looking to see what additional resources the UK could put into monitoring activity. In general however, the mixed civil/military police training programme in the South has been commended by the Pentagon's recent assessment team as exemplary, and the overall level of UK commitment looks about right.

Iraqi Civil Defence Corps

Although the Iraqi Civil Defence Corps is by no means fully resourced yet, it is proving its worth, not least in regaining control after the recent assault on a Fallujah police station. To fully capitalise on its potential, an increase in its size to 45,000 in total and additional training support is being recommended to enhance its ability to operate more autonomously. Decisions still have to be made about its future, but the likelihood is that it will become an Iraqi Army Reserve or National Guard. ✓

New Iraqi Armed Forces

A recent Pentagon assessment team recommended that the good, but long-term programme for the establishment of the new Iraqi Armed Forces should be slowed down to free up resources for the police and ICDC.

From the UK perspective, a slowdown in the development of the new Iraqi armed forces only makes sense if the ICDC develop genuinely autonomous capability. Our intention is that UK military personnel should continue to have senior roles in the project team establishing the new Iraqi Armed Forces as long as this programme remains adequately resourced.

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Overall

The US strategic concept is of a progressive handing over of security responsibilities to Iraqi forces, allowing a reduction in the coalition troops needed for internal security. The Pentagon has advocated some major changes to the management of the security sector reform programme to help deliver these objectives.

There may be implications for the UK's input into SSR. The overall view is that our approach in the South is working well and we may need to consider ways to assist other coalition partners to adopt similar approaches.

The key question is whether coalition efforts, even if refined and improved, will deliver Iraqi Security forces capable of taking over first local and then regional responsibility from the coalition later this year. The answer is not straightforward. In some locales, it may be possible to envisage a significant change on the streets in the lead up to 1 July and thereafter, with coalition forces acting only as emergency back-up. But in other areas where counter-insurgency and counter-terrorist operations continue this may take much longer.

The picture over the remainder of 04 is likely to be mixed both geographically and in terms of the speed of progress: the coalition/MNF will need to move flexibly in and out of sensitive areas in response to events on the ground. To make this work, we will need to reach workable understandings with the Iraqis on command and control of security forces and co-ordination of tasks, allowing the Iraqi government genuine involvement in security where appropriate. Even if there is to be no formal security agreement, these arrangements need to be agreed with the Iraqis in some form before handover, for political as much as legal reasons. We will continue to argue for this in contacts with the US. In parallel, continued multinational resources and engagement will be required for security sector reform well beyond transition – in essence, for as long as it takes to create genuine sufficient capability to allow multinational forces to draw down.

I am copying this letter to Desmond Bowen and (Cabinet Office), Chris Baker (MOD) and Jonathan Sedgwick (Home Office).

Yours sincerely,

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