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IN THE CAULDRON
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SUBJECT: IRAQ VALEDICTORY: SIX MONTHS IN THE CAULDRON

SUMMARY

1. This often chaotic and hazardous process of building the new Iraq has produced some surprisingly solid results, and stimulated some alarmingly nasty enemies. The outcome will not be finally determined for a long time to come, and we do not yet know in whose hands it may lie. The political lines of battle are beginning to be drawn, and the competition could become ugly. The only way to ensure success in UK/US terms is to keep slogging on, and bear the costs. Indications of what is coming up over the next stage. A tribute to the British Team in Iraq.

DETAIL

The People of Iraq

2. A year on from the start of military action against Iraq, eleven months from Bremer's arrival and nearly seven months from the beginning of my own direct involvement, the cardinal fact to report is that the majority of the Iraqi people are still with us, just. They do not want their country to be occupied by foreigners; they feel humiliated both by Saddam and by the manner of Saddam's removal; they are suspicious of American motives; they fear each other and some scenarios for the future. But they can see an opportunity and they do not wish to lose it.

3. The poll conducted earlier this month by the Oxford Research Institute for the BBC confirms our impression in the Iraq Rep office: a majority of Iraqis believe that, on balance, life is improving and foreign assistance must be tolerated for a while longer. They have put up with an awful lot over the past few months: as many have died as might have been the case under

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Saddam. But there is no solid political opposition to what the CPA has been offering; there have, as yet, been no violent demonstrations against the occupation, as I earlier warned we should be prepared for; Paul Bremer is held in less low regard than Iraqi political leaders; and the towns and cities are full of the traffic of normal life. Iraqis are, in the same mix, bright, violent, determined and gullible. We have to bring out the best in them.

The Coalition

4. This fragile state of semi-progress might not seem hugely merited by the Coalition. The preparations for the post-conflict stage were abject; wrong analysis, wrong people. No one understood early enough the full potential for brutality and mindless destruction in this repressed and traumatised population. And the volume of resources required on the ground, especially in military terms, was and continues to be misjudged. The full disbandment of Saddam's security forces; the intensity of the de-Ba'athification programme; the neglect of the borders and the ammunition stores - perhaps the greatest security lacunae of all; the failure of the CPA to create a public impact; the complacency and the constant overselling of the true picture; all these mistakes have cost lives and made the final outcome more doubtful.

5. Bremer's vigorous marshalling of the instruments at his disposal and his increasingly sensible adjustment to the evolving realities have to a large degree compensated for these deficiencies, even if he has to take responsibility, as do I, for some of them. His relentless driving pressure through endless 18 hour days and his direct motivation of all the productive parts of the machine have been an indispensable factor in holding the CPA on course. He does not like to hear alternative views and the Americans here have tended to suppress them in front of him. Hence the occasional scratchiness when I and my team have filled that gap. But his skill in changing course in response to the realities as though nothing untoward had happened has eased us through a number of narrow gates.

6. The compartmentalisation of US activity grates with the British habit and has caused real setbacks. US military and US civilian arms have struggled to work with each other.

The Brits in the machine have often had to supply the links. But the power delivered when plug meets socket is impressive. And the American tolerance for losses has far exceeded our early, pessimistic assumptions. I really believe that the US will see this through to the end.

The Iraqi Governing Council

7. No committee of 25 has ever run anything smoothly. The IGC without an Administrator would quickly fall apart. They have often been lazy, indecisive, long-winded and disunited. A few of them are downright untrustworthy. In none of them do I see a natural prospect for leader of a United Iraq. Yet when marshalled and prodded, and asked to do something which does not defy gravity, they can see sense; and their results sheet presents a

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not too shameful picture. They have earned a respectable amount of international support through travelling and cajoling. They have adopted a lot of essential legislation, usually by unanimity. They have, with the CPA, presided over a political space with no recognisable political opposition except mindless brutality.

8. But what about Sistani? The Grand Ayatollah has in some respects been an asset. He has filled the huge area of religious authority with, on the whole, moderation. He has advocated tolerance of the Coalition. He has nullified a certain amount of Iranian mischief-making. He has promoted true democracy. Where he has thrown grit into the machine is over his obsession with early elections. This has been played upon by the Shi'a politicians who have the main access to him to turn him - or use his name - against the Transitional Administrative Law (TAL). Yet the CPA's objectives are not so very different from his. His isolation from active politics and from the Americans and us have led him to misinterpret what the TAL is all about. We have won a few skirmishes with him recently and we should stick to our guns on this one. The Americans are again trying to strike up a discreet channel to him; and I have been encouraging centre-ground members of the IGC (eg Allawi) to get through to him. But he or his immediate circle could so easily drop a match into the flammable pool of Shi'a heartland perceptions. It might well be an uncomfortable ride.

The Future

9. The hard bit - casting the Iraqi State loose on its own responsibility - is still to come. The democrats are disorganised; and the best organised are not the most democratic. There are widespread fears that Iran is stepping up its interference and its anti-Coalition activity. The religious Shi'a parties are beginning to show their muscle. There is an increasing amount of wary focus being placed on the Group of Five: Hakim (Sciri), Bahr al Uloom, Jaafar (Da'wa), Rubaie and, of course, Chalabi, whom we never expected to see in this company. If effective political parties do not come into being soon to represent other mainstream views, particularly secular and liberal ones, the Islamists' momentum might attract a majority, even if this is not a true reflection of where Iraqis want to go. This is Chalabi's calculation: join the biggest organised group and undermine or buy off the rest. There is a real power struggle looming, and it will come to a climax with the elections at the turn of the year.

10. The security threat will, alas, not go away when the occupation ends. The evil-doers, as Bremer persists in calling them in public addresses, are small in number but lethal in effect. Recent events have made them bolder, and recruitment may have become easier for them. They have weaponry and planning capability in considerable depth and will continue to operate until and unless the whole of Iraqi society turns against them. We have to work hard to prevent this capacity from changing the overall political balance. And we have to plan to protect our people on the ground for some time to come.

11. Nonetheless the Iraqi people want this experiment to work. If we lose that strength of determination, we have no way out. It will hang on perceptions, the dilution of sectarianism; and the

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right leadership. On all three counts we have some way to go. But it is doable.

The Team

12. The British Government has been well served in Iraq since the end of the conflict. My colleagues here, civilian and military, have proved themselves effective and courageous and have been inspired by the environment within which they are working. None of us civilians ever expected to be involved in such an enterprise; and few of us would recommend a repeat. But there is an intensity of spirit and a strength of mutual support which, for children of a long peace in Western Europe, is as close as we may ever get to an experience of war. We have had excellent support from our home departments. And, whatever the occasional sideswipes in one direction or the other, the development of our twinned relationship with the Americans has turned into something unprecedentedly close and immensely valuable. Finally, we have had to sustain, and be sustained by, the support and understanding of our families at home, who in many ways have had the harder task. In all of this, the Prime Minister and you, Sir, should know that your CPA team out here have been delivering, and will continue to deliver, something remarkable. I pay tribute to them all and leave my excellent predecessor and successor, David Richmond, my warmest good wishes for the three months remaining.

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PS PUS	1		
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DG POLITICAL		0	
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