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4 October 2005

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Foreign Policy Adviser to the Prime Minister,
and Head of the Defence and Overseas Secretariat

Dear Peter,

S/112/05

IRAQ STRATEGY

The Prime Minister was grateful for the draft paper from the Foreign, Defence and International Development Secretaries on the implications of the incident in Basra on 19 September. He has also seen a number of other papers on Iraq over the weekend.

The Prime Minister agrees that we do not need to change our overall strategy. He is convinced, however, that we need a major and sustained push over the next few months on the political and security lines of operation if we are to get what we need - the political process moving ahead on time and producing an effective and moderate Iraqi Government after the elections, with visible progress on the Iraqisation of security.

This will require changes above all in the intensity of our work, in our (and the Americans') implementation of policy, and the structures for delivering them, and will need to be underpinned by a more effective communications strategy.

Policy

(i) Political:

The Prime Minister does not believe that we or the US are as active as we need to be in this crucial period. Higher Sunni turnout in December's elections is the key to a successful political process, leading to an increased willingness by Sunni politicians to take part in a representative coalition government. In particular we need:

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- a more vigorous and coordinated US/UK plan of activity, with greater involvement from capitals, including both Ministers and senior officials. The main focus of this should be contact with Sunni politicians, using both political leads. But we need to be active with all parts of the political spectrum and support moderate, centrist groups;
 - to this end we need continued engagement, in coordination with the key neighbours, with those Iraqi leaders who could play a leading role in an effective government after December's elections. It will be critical to avoid another prolonged period of government formation after the elections. We cannot try to pick the government, but we should look at what we can do now to encourage some of the key players to stay in touch and start thinking before the election about what sort of government might emerge. We need to pay particular attention to Allawi and others in the centre ground;
 - we need to press the neighbours much harder to support the Iraqi political process. Saudi Arabia and Jordan are the key targets. We should also promote the idea, of a Contact Group of neighbouring countries
- Action
- with the neighbours will require an intensive programme of Ministerial visits to the region. The FCO might wish to consider using Baroness Symons. Number Ten will also be closely involved;
- we need effective lines of communication to Sistani and Muqtada al Sadr – for Baghdad to pursue;
 - a revitalised UN effort on political dialogue. Of course there would be risks in reintroducing Brahimi, but he is uniquely placed to encourage the Sunnis into the political process

We would not want at this stage to lose Qazi, but he does not appear to be up to the task on his own – although

his link to Sistani is valuable. I should be grateful for advice from Emyr Jones Parry by the end of this week please;

a programme of high-level UK engagement in the Southeast. The Consulate-General bear a heavy burden. During this crucial period – and subject to the security situation – they may need additional support through eg visits by Ministers, senior officials from London, HMA Baghdad and perhaps other Ambassadors from the region. The FCO should consider this urgently. The aim should be to provide London with a clearer analysis of how to strengthen the position of more moderate political forces in the South East, and how to restore the UK position following the incident on 19 September. The Prime Minister accepts that we may need to work up a form of words (but not of course an apology) with the Iraqi Government and/or local authorities in Basra in order to draw a line under this issue and enable future cooperation. The FCO and MOD should work urgently on this;

The Prime Minister would be grateful if the Foreign Secretary could lead on drawing together this political strategy and monitoring its implementation.

ii) Security:

The Iraqisation process is moving forward. The Prime Minister looks forward to regular reports from the Defence Secretary, including analysis of the effectiveness of the new Iraqi forces. The Prime Minister is particularly concerned that the poor state of much of the Iraqi Police, including in the South East, will be a drag on further progress. It is clear that we need to review whether our police training strategy in the South East is working, and whether the national policing strategy knits together. He agrees that it would be a good idea for Ronnie Flanagan to visit. But he also wants a UK Minister to take ownership of our overall policing strategy, including our liaison with the US over national strategy. This needs to be supported by a dedicated and sufficiently strong team in London. The FCO should work on this with the Cabinet Office and MOD.

The “ink-spot strategy” set out in the recent Red Team report may not be exactly right. But it highlights the vulnerability of our efforts so far to reclaim

key cities from the terrorists. It also, rightly in the Prime Minister's view, stresses the importance of coordinated implementation, involving both the Coalition and the Iraqis. Unless we are able to show that we can hold the ground and improve the lives of local Iraqis, these efforts will continue to produce meagre, or negative political results.

There is still some uncertainty over the fate of the Red Team report. We should press Khalilzad and Casey to agree an authoritative plan for the next few months, working with UK counterparts.

The Prime Minister and the President have agreed to hold a video conference, probably in the week of 10 October, with Generals Casey and Brims and Ambassadors Khalilzad and Patey present. This should help to focus on some of these issues.

The Prime Minister would be grateful if the Defence Secretary could continue to oversee the overall security strategy.

iii) Reconstruction:

It is unlikely that we will be able to enhance significantly the impact of reconstruction activities in the period before elections. But he would be grateful if Hilary Benn could work hard with the World Bank and UN in particular – their future engagement is critical. We also need a more effective link-up between DFID and the US agencies involved.

Communications

The Prime Minister believes that the key communications challenge now is to shift the terms of the debate about the security transition. The prospects for transition must be more widely understood well before December's elections. We need to get over the fact that our strategy, provided that Iraqi capabilities are built up as planned and the insurgency can be reduced, is for substantial troop withdrawals starting next year. We must make the insurgency clearly and plainly the obstacle to, not the pretext for, withdrawal. This is a message which needs to be got across both by the US and ourselves, but above all by the Iraqis, and if possible with moderate leaders like Allawi gaining some of the credit for the policy.

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The Prime Minister believes that we need to get this message out well before the December elections. There are two opportunities, which might be brought together. First, we need during October to roll over UNSCR 1546. This could be the occasion for major statements in New York by the UK, US and Iraqis setting out the strategy for security transition. Second, the Iraqi/US/UK Committee which has been meeting in Baghdad to look at the conditions for transition will be concluding its work shortly, and an announcement is due in any case this month. The FCO and MOD should urgently work up a game plan to manage this.

The Prime Minister will look at doing a major speech on Iraq in the coming weeks. He wants other Ministers also to be active with the media. No 10 Press Office will coordinate this.

Structures

The Prime Minister plans to chair a meeting of DOP (Iraq) every fortnight if possible. He has asked me to continue to chair weekly meetings of senior officials. He would also be grateful if the Foreign and Defence Secretaries could chair regular Ministerial meetings in their areas, with support from the Cabinet Office. The OD Secretariat will be in touch with Private Offices about this.

The Prime Minister also wants us to find more effective ways to join up with the US system. I will discuss with Steve Hadley in Washington next week. The Prime Minister also hopes that the Foreign and Defence Secretaries can touch on this with their US opposite numbers. We would also welcome other ideas on how to energise State and DoD. One possibility that I have discussed with John Sawers and Philip Zelikow (State Department Counsellor) would be for them to lead a US/UK working group on political strategy in the run-up to the elections. We should try to set this up as soon as possible.

The Prime Minister will chair a meeting of DOP (Iraq) on Wednesday 12 October. The OD Secretariat will be in touch separately about the papers needed for that meeting. We will need sitreps from the FCO and MOD on the political and security strategies, covering the issues raised in this letter.

I am copying this to Sir Gus O'Donnell, Margaret Aldred, George Fergusson and Tim Dowse (Cabinet Office), Chris Baker and CDS (MOD), Moazzam Malik and Suma Chakrabarti (DFID), Sir Michael Jay (FCO), Emma

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Churchill (Home Office), (HM Treasury), "C", Sir David Pepper (GCHQ), William Patey (Baghdad), James Tansley (Basra), Sir David Manning (Washington), Sir Emyr Jones Parry (UKMIS New York), Sir John Grant (UKREP Brussels), Sir Peter Ricketts (UKDEL NATO), Sir Sherard Cowper-Coles (Riyadh), Christopher Prentice (Amman) and Sir Derek Plumbly (Cairo).

*Yours,
Nigel*

NIGEL SHEINWALD

Peter Hayes
FCO

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