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BASRA PROVINCIAL RECONSTRUCTION TEAM (PRT): CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Purpose

This paper provides a field-level perspective on the challenges, both policy and operational, of establishing an effective UK-led Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) in Basra; and offers recommendations to overcome these.

Summary

Following training by the US-led National Coordination Team, the PRT achieved Initial Operating Capability (IOC) on 14 May and will aim to achieve Full Operating Capability (FOC) in the next 2-3 weeks.

However, considerable challenges remain. **The most significant obstacle to the achievement of HMG's objectives in southern Iraq is our lack of operational coherence.** We have one chance to properly launch the PRT and thus maximise the chances of success. But that **success can come only as a result of having an over-arching, integrated strategy** aimed at: 1) Delivering better governance; 2) Delivering better security; 3) Ensuring a strengthened Baghdad-Basra relationship; and 4) Unlocking resources from the centre and investment for economic development, notably in the energy sector.

Moreover, such a strategy must be complemented by a **sophisticated information campaign** that shapes local thinking, and explains ours.

The PRT's work must focus overwhelmingly upon Basra; but its ambit should incorporate a low-key southern Iraq coordination role:

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- Nesting a 'province-only' construct in a system comprised entirely of partners with a regional purview complicates our ability to engage effectively with these.
- The PRT is comprised of people who already work regionally.
- A southern Iraq role for the PRT:
 - Provides a receptacle for knowledge, expertise and local links.
 - Assists the U.S, and may assuage some anxieties about transition.
 - Allows us a potential lever to bid for additional U.S. funding.
 - Bends RTI's 'Regional Programmes' to our purpose.
 - Requires no additional assets, and does not 'fix' the military.

The **key to the PRT's capabilities will be the retention of a core of long-term civilian expertise** in each envisaged work-strand. Basra is the key task; and the notion of withdrawing valuable staff as the PRT gears up is counter-intuitive.

Reporting is fragmented, and lines of authority divided. We propose the formation of a **Basra Steering Group**, binding Division, Brigade, Consulate and PRT in one construct and linking up with the appropriate coordination fora in Baghdad and Whitehall.

The dangers of wholly ceasing support to nascent structures in *Maysan and Muthanna* which we have invested a great deal of time and money, of severing local links, and, inevitably, renouncing a deal of political influence over places within our area of responsibility, are clear. We would wish to maintain presence for as long as possible, and would then foresee incremental withdrawal to the Basra PRT hub.

Properly resourced and as part of a comprehensive approach overseen by the Basra Steering Group, there is every prospect that the **PRT can make a substantial contribution** to the realisation of UK objectives by providing the UK and its partners with:

- A **mechanism for coordinated engagement** with the Iraqis.
- A **repository of capacity-building expertise**.
- A single hub for **integrated multi-national, multi-agency, civil-military effort**.
- An **efficient, focused use of diminishing assets**.
- A **single point of focus for the UN, World Bank, EU and donors**.

Detail

The PRT Context

Among the most significant obstacles to the achievement of HMG's objectives in S Iraq is our lack of operational coherence. Military and civil lines of activity are not integrated, and the separation between military headquarters – both Division and Brigade – at Basra Air Station, and the Consulate in Basra Palace, has made the formulation and execution of sophisticated unitary approaches to the complex challenges we face very difficult. Our outputs are hence

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fragmentary, prone to duplication and intrinsically wasteful of resources; and neither are they subordinated to an over-arching strategy.

This is because no over-arching, integrated strategy has yet been articulated, although the need for one has been identified, most recently in a May 06 DOP (I) Basra paper.¹ UK 'policy' in S Iraq is hence little more than an aggregation of Departmental approaches; and there can now be no realistic expectation that these alone can suffice to secure the legacy – however nascent – of good governance, justice and economic vibrancy that we seek.

The elements of that strategy must now be created, or we risk failure. We must harness political pressure, military power and civilian capacity-building effort, and slave it to a single comprehensive, long-term approach; and create a new steering structure to oversee its execution.

A coordinated and sophisticated information campaign, that shapes local thinking and explains ours, must be an integral part of our plan.

The PRT Role in a Comprehensive Approach

Among the prospective components of this strategy is the new Basra Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT). Born of a U.S. initiative in Afghanistan, the name is unimaginative and the notion of its U.S. – led centralist hierarchical structures may grate. But its core principle – that all major stakeholders of our effort in S Iraq are formally incorporated in a single structure and under a single roof – is entirely sensible and largely unprecedented; and U.S. expectations of direct command can be managed. PRT 'success' can be achieved only as part of a broader engagement plan.

The PRT provides the UK and its partners with:

- *A mechanism for coordinated engagement with Iraqis and for ensuring a coherent approach among stakeholders, informed by experience and political requirement.*
- *A repository of capacity-building expertise for Iraqi structures that includes all key partners, and binds them to a common planning framework to which they themselves have contributed.*
- *A single hub for integrated multi-national, multi-agency, civil-military effort capable of adapting quickly to political and operational circumstance.*
- *An efficient, focused use of diminishing assets sufficiently flexible to endure to exit.*
- *A single point of focus for the UN, World Bank, EU and donors.*

The PRT's work must focus overwhelmingly upon Basra – but its ambit should incorporate a low-key southern Iraq coordination role, in which the principal aim

¹ 'We need to pursue a three-pronged strategy: political, military and economic aimed at delivering better governance; better security; a strengthened Baghdad-Basra relationship; and unlocking resources from the centre and investment for economic development, notably in the energy sector'.

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is to exchange and promulgate best practice, while promoting coherence and efficient use of scarce resources. Why?

- Nesting a 'province-only' construct in a system comprised entirely of partners with a regional purview will complicate the existing network of authority and reporting lines rather than simplify it.
- The PRT, which has drawn on these structures for its staff, is hence comprised of people who already work regionally, and thus provide the foundation for precisely the central repository of expertise we wish to create.
- A southern Iraq role for the PRT:
 - Provides a receptacle for knowledge, expertise and local links gathered in the outlying provinces for which we retain responsibility, thereby retaining the vestiges of UK influence. No alternative address for this exists.
 - Assists the U.S., and may assuage some anxieties about transition.
 - Allows us a potential lever to bid for additional U.S. funding.
 - Bends RTI's 'Regional Programmes' to our purpose, and logically precludes attempts by them to ring-fence staff and other resources.
 - Requires no additional assets, and does not 'fix' the military.

Basra PRT Structure

The team is composed of a civilian team leader (UK), who answers to the UK Consul General and to the U.S.-led PRT National Coordination Team (NCT) in Baghdad; and three deputies (Danish Foreign Ministry, U.S. Department of State, UK Army). Each deputy is responsible for steering the delivery and outputs of one of the three PRT Units: Governance (DNK); Rule of Law (U.S.); and Economic and Infrastructure (UK).

The current established strength of the PRT is 35, drawn from the UK (FCO, DFID, MOD, PCRU), Denmark (Danish Foreign Ministry) and the U.S. (U.S. DoS, USAID, RTI, Iraqi Reconstruction Management Office, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers). Of these, 17 are now in Building Five; 11 are in Basra but await the provision of office space; and 7 have either yet to arrive, or are on leave. Police and Prisons teams (5 staff approximately) will move into the Rule of Law Unit once offices are prepared, but are not formally allocated to the PRT. The anticipated total number of staff in PRT Building Five is therefore 40.² This may increase.

Basra PRT Outline Plan

This, the first of the Coalition PRTs, attained Initial Operating Capability (IOC) 14 May after the completion of two days of NCT training. Each of the three substantive Units will now assemble Working Groups in which all relevant stakeholders, military and civil, are assembled. These will agree on prevalent

² This figure does not include interpreters, site security or PSD staff.

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conditions in Basra; and how best to address and prioritise implied deficiencies in capacity. This work will produce two documents:

- *NCT Baseline Assessment.* This document is actually the first of the Basra PRT's Monthly Reports, and assesses the province in security, governance, economic and infrastructure terms.
- *NCT Work Plan.* This addresses the deficiencies identified in the Baseline Assessment, and melds partners' efforts to best effect. It establishes work-plans for the three PRT Units. The NCT accepts that these will need adjustment.

The reports will be submitted to the NCT in late May. Once cleared – a process that generally requires a week – the PRT is deemed to be Fully Operationally Capable (FOC).

The challenges facing us in Basra, three years post-manoeuvre war, are substantial; and we judge that we have but one chance properly to configure and launch the PRT in order to maximise the chances of its success. For this reason we would wish to retain in theatre for as long as possible those resources that are already here; while fully accepting that this approach will need to be qualified by review later in the year.

Current Issues and Recommendations for Action

PRT Core Staff. *The key to the PRT's capabilities will be the retention of a core of long-term civilian expertise in each envisaged work-strand. Basra is our main problem and the notion of withdrawing valuable staff as the PRT gears up to tackle it is counter-intuitive. The military component of the PRT – roughly a third – is invaluable, but cannot act as a repository of expertise because tour-lengths are short. This civilian core must be large enough to withstand the turbulence of the six-and-two week leave system and the frictional losses of movement around the country, or we risk a loss of momentum. The challenges of Iraq demand that our efforts are front-end loaded, and that we work on a broad front. Saddling existing staff with an additional PRT role is inefficient, and we would ask that lines of responsibility are made clear, particularly given the security implications. Our partners' capacity may substantially assist us, but it too early to tell.*

- *Governance. We ask that all DFID's governance staff are retained. While we see clear advantage in keeping advisors in the outlying provinces for as long as possible, we would ask that they be incorporated into the PRT once withdrawn.*
- *Rule of Law. We would similarly ask that existing civilian police and prisons advisors are retained, and that their activities are integrated.*
- *Economic and Infrastructure. We see a need to reinforce this strand by two civilian posts, in the fields of banking and commerce, and trade development.*
- *Management and Support. A study is needed to establish how best to create a sophisticated and targeted information campaign to complement a*

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comprehensive approach in Basra, perhaps by the MOD Directorate of Targeting and Information Operations (DTIO).

Provincial Transition. *While the military imperative to withdraw from Maysan and Muthanna is understandable, the dangers of wholly ceasing support to nascent structures in which we have invested a great deal of time and money, of severing local links, and, inevitably, renouncing a deal of political influence over places within our area of responsibility, are clear.³ We would wish to maintain presence for as long as possible, and would then foresee incremental withdrawal to the Basra PRT hub.*

Steering Structure.

- *Our reporting is fragmented, and our lines of authority largely divided according to civil-military precepts. No unitary structure can function properly without unitary direction. Our decision-making in southern Iraq lacks depth and consistency, and is particularly affected by the high turnover of key staff and separation between military and civilian decision-making centres.*
- *We propose the formation of a Basra Steering Group, which binds Division, Brigade, Consulate and PRT in a single construct linking up with appropriate mechanism in Baghdad and Whitehall. Its aim would be to create a comprehensive strategy across all lines of activity, to prosecute it in detail and to review it monthly. Its views would inform unitary reporting – particularly the NCT monthly report – and allow the requisite adjustment to policy, together with any related allocation of assets.*

Military Profile in the PRT. The PRT's military staff are indispensable, but their (uniformed) profile arouses local sensitivities. We would like the latitude to place them in civilian clothes where appropriate, but understand that the implications of this will need to be studied. In addition, recent direction has resulted in military personnel being prohibited from traveling with CRG. The reasons for this are linked to counter-measure capabilities; but the result has been to force the parallel movement of military and civilian vehicle convoys to the same destination, thus increasing our profile and decreasing our security. We seek the application of common minimum standards for the PRT, while retaining the military's right to move under military arrangements.

Communications. It has become rapidly apparent that we require UK civil and military secure communications in the PRT building. This need will be further highlighted in the PCRU IT consultant's report.

Finances.

- Start-Up Costs. The PRT has been allocated an initial GBP350K as start-up costs. The need for additional funding has been identified and prioritised to the PCRU in a 6 May budget reassessment. *The PRT will not be a resource-neutral enterprise, and high-priority funding needs to be fully met, lest it affect working capacity.* Additional PSD, comprehensive

³ The abrupt withdrawal of CPA staff in 2004 provides a useful cautionary tale.

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IT and improvements to Building 5 all fall within this category. The PRT will also need an operating budget.

- Capacity-Building and Project Funds. *The launch of the PRT will be adversely affected if we are unable to establish financial credibility with a jaded Iraqi audience.* While the PRT's ability to enhance coherence of effort is its primary role, rather than to act as a reconstruction body, it is likely that the prospect of the latter will be significant in securing the local leverage we need. The PRT currently has no funds allocated to it. Each Team is theoretically to be given USD15M, but the earliest disbursement of this money, if all proceeds smoothly, is estimated to be mid-summer. A flat allocation to all PRTs of USD15M is illogical, given Basra's size and 'Red' status. The NCT tacitly agreed, and encouraged a further bid, but meanwhile proposed that the PRT rely on CERP funds. The presence of DFID Governance and Capacity-Building (GCBP) staff in the PRT allows us, we understand, to access DFID's Governorates Development Fund (GDF), of which some GBP190K presently remains locally uncommitted, together with an estimated additional GBP1M held in London.

Main Risks to PRT.

- Approach. The Basra PRT can succeed only as part of a comprehensive approach that integrates the efforts of all partners in a single plan.
- Security. The PRT, because of its integrated civil-military structure, has continued to function despite the difficult security environment. The military component is able to travel when the civilian component cannot; and Iraqi interlocutors appear content to meet their civilian counterparts in Basra Palace under UN auspices. The team is therefore well-placed to handle intermittent down-turns in the security situation through imaginative use of its staff resources. In the event of a protracted deterioration in security terms, the PRT would also be forced to cease military capacity-building efforts in Basra; and it is probable that our Iraqi partners would be reluctant to continue meeting us. In these circumstances the PRT would have to suspend its work altogether until security was restored.
- Resources. Failure to properly staff and resource the PRT.

A Look Forward.

The Basra PRT is operating from Basra Palace's Building Five, with the bulk of its staff in place, at Initial Operating Capability and expected to be at Full Operating Capability in three weeks. Correctly resourced, and as part of a comprehensive approach overseen by the Basra Steering Group, there is every prospect that the PRT can make a substantial contribution to the realisation of UK objectives.

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ASRA PRT COSTS

	Per Annum
PRT STAFF COSTS	
Consultant Salary Cost for Team Leader (See Note 1)	182,500
Consultant Salary Costs for Communications Manager	61,340
Consultant Salary Costs for Office Manager	61,340
Local Staff Salary Costs	9,000
Local Staff Salary Costs	9,000
LIFE SUPPORT COSTS	
Life Support Costs for 3 HMG Consultant PRT Staff @ £9K p/m (See Note 2)	324,000
Life Support Costs for 18 PRT International Staff @ £4.5K p/m (See Note 3)	972,000
CAPITAL COSTS	
Security Enhancements to Building 5	18,000
Purchase of Red Sea Containers for Consulate	200,000
ERN Secure/Insecure Communications & IT operating system (See Note 4)	765,000
Total	2,602,180
Total minus recoverable costs	1,737,000

NOTES

1. Salaries for Consultants are based on PCRU rates for 2006. Salaries for local staff are based on average salary for local staff employed by HMG Consulate Basra.

2. Life Support Costs for HMG Consultants are based on the provision of the following services for which costs may be chargeable to a PRT Budget Line.

Blast proof single living accommodation within the Basra Consulate Compound.
14 International Flights and Transfers from UK to Basra and return
Travel on PRT business by vehicle, helicopter or aircraft within Iraq as required
Protection by HMG Post Security Detail and Ghurka Guard Force in accordance with Duty of care policy
Workspace in Building 5 that is fit for purpose
Access to secure and unclassified communications and IT operating system
Sustenance based on 3 meals per day, laundry and welfare facilities
On site routine and emergency medical care

3. Life Support Costs for PRT International Staff are based on estimates for the provision of the following services for which costs may be recoverable from Capitals.

Travel on PRT business by vehicle, helicopter or aircraft within Iraq as required
Protection by HMG Post Security Detail and Ghurka Guard Force when on PRT business
Workspace in Building 5 that is fit for purpose
Access to unclassified communications and IT operating system
Sustenance based on 2 meals per day.
On site emergency medical care.

4. The Emergency Response Network is a commercial communications and IT operating system which can provide an Secure voice, fax, VTC and unclassified voice, data, VHF radio and web based worksharing tools for upto 200 users. The system includes on site technical support and reach back technical and logistical support. Estimates are based on 28 workstations and include 2MB upload and download. PCRU is currently trialing this system and expects to make recommendations on whether the Basra PRT require such a capability in early June 2006.

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