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NICK BANNER

From: Nigel Sheinwald

Date: 8 June 2006

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IRAQ AND AFGHANISTAN

The Prime Minister had a private meeting with the Defence Secretary on 6 June.

There were three main points:

- The Prime Minister asked the Defence Secretary to focus on the situation in Basra, and make sure that the political and military strategies were aligned and proceeding together. This required micro-management. We had been slow to grip the situation there, but now needed: to get on top of the gaps in equipment and training for the Iraqi forces; a plan for getting Iraqi forces on to the streets; and a new political dispensation given the interest now being shown by Iraqi national figures. The Defence Secretary agreed to take this on, and to visit Basra and Baghdad regularly.
- The Prime Minister said that there was a need to reinvigorate our media handling on Iraq, re-forming the No 10-based Media Unit, and stepping up our capacity to rebut and get Iraqi figures on to the UK media. (David Hill was present for this part of the discussion.) The Prime Minister wanted Des Browne to continue with the responsibility for coordinating the media side at Ministerial level. Again, Des Browne accepted this.
- They also discussed media handling of Afghanistan. The Prime Minister accepted Des Browne's point that it had to be the military

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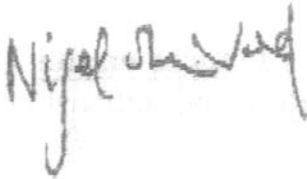
supporting the political and development effort, not the other way round - as it often came across at the moment. The Prime Minister agreed that FCO and DFID Ministers needed to be much more active in getting their sides of the story across.

I agreed with Des Browne afterwards that I would make the Afghanistan point at his Ministerial meeting on 7 June, which I did; and I am writing out to confirm the point.

The Prime Minister said that he would use DOP(I) on 15 June to divvy up Ministerial responsibility for different parts of the Iraq strategy, including his wish for Des Browne to take charge of the Basra situation and UK media handling.

I have briefed Des' office.

Comment: Grateful if OD Sec could ensure that this is reflected in the brief.



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