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From the Private Secretary

8 November 2006

Dear Irfan

### IRAQ

The Prime Minister discussed Iraq policy yesterday at a meeting with CDS, Nigel Sheinwald, John Sawers, [S1S 2], Jonathan Powell, David Hill and I.

CDS briefed on the continued good progress in Operation Sinbad, noting that once it had concluded, we would have done as much as we judged militarily possible in Basra. He noted, however, that it did not deal with the fundamental problem of militias. The Prime Minister queried whether it could therefore be effective. CDS suggested that the militia problem would have to be dealt with politically. We would see when we went back for Maliki's support on the last and most difficult pulses of Op Sinbad whether he was yet in favour of action against hard targets. The assumption was that he would not be. The Baghdad Security Plan had run out of steam.

On the political situation, John Sawers said that we had taken one step forward on the UNSCR, as Maliki had at least now defined his position, and we could negotiate on that. But there was still a danger he would try to take it through the Council of Representatives. More widely, the Shia were indulging factional in-fighting, and the Sunni risked being entirely marginalised from the political process. John's discussions in Washington last week had suggested some recognition of the need to accept that we were working in support of Maliki, rather than trying to do things for him.

The Prime Minister said that we needed to pursue a strategy with four key elements:

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- agreement on a 'national compact' which produced a settlement of the key issues acceptable to all groups in Iraq, and the basis for non-sectarian government;
- improvement in the functioning of Iraqi institutions, particularly disbursement capability;
- capability gaps in the security forces, the army in particular, had to be identified and filled;
- regional actors had to be brought in to offer effective support to the Iraqi government.

I noted that Maliki's room for manoeuvre was constrained. He had little or no political base of his own, and was therefore leaning towards, and dependent on, the Sadrists. This brought an anti-coalition tinge to his position, whatever his own views might be. Nigel noted that, although Maliki was not looking for a precipitate exit, he did need greater clarity about when and how we would draw down. CDS observed that the Coalition still underpinned the ISF, and was therefore essential to Maliki's aspirations on security.

The Prime Minister said that our best source of leverage over Maliki was his desire that we not leave precipitately. We should therefore offer him a timetable, conditional on his securing an acceptable political compact, to which Moqtada Al Sadr had signed up. The Prime Minister asked John Sawers to use his forthcoming visit to broach these points with Maliki.

I am copying this letter to Sir Richard Mottram, Margaret Aldred and Tim Dowse (Cabinet Office), Sir Peter Ricketts and John Sawers (FCO), and CDS (MOD), Sir David Manning (Washington), and Dominic Asquith (Baghdad).

Yours ever



NICK BANNER

Mr Irfan Siddiq, FCO

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