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CABINET

MINISTERIAL COMMITTEE ON DEFENCE AND OVERSEAS POLICY

SUB COMMITTEE ON IRAQ

BASRA: OBJECTIVES AND PRESENCE IN 2007

Note by the Secretaries

The attached memorandum by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office is circulated to the Committee for consideration at its meeting on Thursday 07 December 2006. The meeting will be chaired by the Defence Secretary at 09.00 in Conference Room A.

Signed:

M ALDRED

Cabinet Office
06 December 2006

[Covering 1 December
papers]

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BASRA: OBJECTIVES & PRESENCE IN 2007

Summary

1. The political and security context for our civilian operations in southern Iraq is changing significantly. The heightened security threat, which forced us to draw down staff from Basra Palace in October, shows no sign of abating. We expect security responsibility in Basra to be transferred to the Iraqis in Spring 2007. And MOD are considering a major reposturing of UK forces in the coming months, with direct implications for civilian operations.
2. This new context demands careful reconsideration of our objectives and civilian presence in the period ahead. In the political and security environment we are likely to face, what can we realistically hope to deliver? What civilian resources do we need to achieve these objectives, and where should they best be deployed?
3. Officials strongly recommend that we maintain a civilian effort in Basra province during 2007. Our main objectives should be:
 - To help deliver Provincial Iraqi Control (PIC) in Basra;
 - To continue political engagement, security reform work and capacity building in Provincial Government to sustain progress post-PIC;
 - To ensure that Baghdad decision-makers deliver the resources Basra needs.
4. We recommend that, in this period, we plan to co-locate as much as possible of the civilian effort with MND(SE) at the Basra Air Station (BAS). We are pressing ahead with plans to construct suitable hardened facilities at BAS.
5. We need to do more work rapidly with MoD and the US to determine whether we can find a way to preserve the option of returning the Consulate to Basra Palace at a later date, should the security situation improve, at a cost we can afford. We do not wish to close off this option immediately.

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Context

6. Current Multinational Force (MNF-I) planning is for the transfer of security responsibility to Iraq authorities in Maysan in January, and Basra in April. The Iraqi Government has made clear that, post-transfer they expect the MNF to be repostured 'in their bases', in a supporting role.
7. The UK military is accordingly considering plans to reposture significantly. The current PJMO proposal is to close all bases in Basra city by April and to consolidate at Basra Air Station (BAS). Of particular relevance to us:
 - Two military bases in central Basra (Old State Building and Shaat Al-Arab Hotel) will close during January/February, leaving just BP in the city;
 - The BP military base (essential for sustaining our civilian presence) will close by 1 March.
8. If these proposals are agreed by Ministers, then we will have just 12 weeks from 4 December to move personnel and equipment from the BP to the BAS. This is an extremely tight timetable, given the operational constraints in theatre.
9. The threats to civilian staff and the military in Basra remain very high:
 - Indirect Fire Attack (IDF). There has been a dramatic increase in IDF against Basra Palace since mid-September. November saw more attacks than the previous high in October;
 - IEDs. The latest example was the 11 November attack on the MNDSE boat on the Shaat Al-Arab waterway killing four soldiers. 2 CRG close protection personnel were injured earlier in the year following an IED attack on a convoy en route from Nasariya to Basra; and a PRT convoy in central Basra was attacked with RPGs in October.
 - Helicopter threat. There has been no repeat of the shooting down of the Lynx helicopter in May. [(Gist of redacted text) There is likely to be a desire and some

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capability of militants to bring down a helicopter.] Basra Palace is reliant on the military helicopter airbridge for its sustainability. Travel to & from the compound currently takes place at night in order to minimise the risks.

10. MND(SF) are doing what they can to address these threats, in particular IDF. But those attacking us, a mix of JAM supported by Iranian elements, are determined to drive us out and to claim the political credit. Any military solution to IDF is unlikely to have more than a short-term impact - and even then, only with the input of critical assets from MNF. We can therefore make no assumption in our planning that the security threat will reduce over the next 6-12 months.

Our objectives in 2007

11. These fall broadly into 3 phases:

A: From now until the end of Operation Sinbad in mid January;

B: From mid-January to PIC. Depending mainly on progress with the Basra Police, PIC could come at any time between March-June. Experience in Muthanna & Maysan suggests slippage is likely. But Maliki will be pressing for progress,

C: From PIC to end-2007.

Beyond 2007, we would like to be able to conduct more normal diplomatic and commercial activity in Basra. Ideally we would like to retain a small Consulate in the city for this purpose (at BP if possible). But much will depend on how the security situation evolves after PIC. Security and cost considerations may make this aspiration undeliverable in practice.

Phase 1: Delivering Better Basra & support to Operation Sinbad

12. Key policy outcomes during this period will involve:

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Political: Continued engagement with Iraqi leaders to ensure political support for Better Basra/Operation Sinbad. This will include managing the political fall out of detention operations against Shia militias.

- Police: As well as providing police advisors for the Op Sinbad Police Training Teams (PTTs), a key task is to clear out the militia infiltrated Serious Crimes Unit from 10 December to 15 January. This will involve dealing with 300-400 staff – investigating, sacking and prosecuting – and our Prisons Adviser helping transfer Iraqi prisoners out of SCU custody.

Phase 2: Getting to Provincial Iraqi Control.

13. Key outcomes during this period will be:

- Political: Maintaining engagement with key players, putting pressure on the local authorities to act against death squads, corrupt police, improve services and spend the provincial budget. Action will be required locally and in Baghdad and Iraqi Ministers will need to keep visiting Basra in this period. If clearing out the SCU (see below) proves politically bumpy, we will need to pull out a lot of stops both in Basra and Baghdad.
- Police: To achieve PIC, we will need to have delivered at the least:
 - 72% or more of Basra Police Stations have achieved have received Transitional Readiness Assessment Level II. Currently 50% of Basra Police Stations have achieved this. We are likely to achieve 72% by February 2007.
 - The SCU cleared out and new Major Crimes Unit established at the Warren site. This is likely to become tougher as the DIA is expected to take a robust role in dealing with the SCU
- In addition, we should continue to provide additional police support that reinforces Basra IPS capabilities and improves the chances of sustainability post PIC. This should include:

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- Specialist police support to Basra's police HQ at the Warren. This may involve the National Iraqi Intelligence Agency (NIIA), continue the TIPS hotline, forensics training etc.
- Mentoring the Chief of Police, whose role is critical;
- Develop police leadership training to be delivered in police modules at the new Leadership Training Academy to be set up at BAS.
- Governance and Reconstruction: By January 2007 to replace a water purifier at Khor Az Zubayr near Basra to provide bottled drinking water for around half a million people. In February 2007, delivery of a new gas pumping station, to increase the gas supply to three power stations in southern Iraq. This will add nearly 60MW, enough to give 24 hours power to 120,000 people.
- Help the Iraqis finalise the provincial development strategies and the resource statements and present them to Baghdad for funding
- Establish a Provincial Treasury and Accounting Office in the Basra Governor's Office.

Phase 3: Delivery of ongoing Post-PIC work

14. Key outcomes for the remainder of 2007 will be:

- Political work. To shape the post PIC environment and make it predisposed to HMG both in the short and long term.
- Police. Our police training team effort will have concluded and our effort will be more focussed on specialist assistance. Plans are being further developed, but the broad outline should include:
 - Support to the MCU, DIA and PMU. This will involve building on earlier successes during the pre-PIC phase and consideration of their future relocation to central Basra.

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- Continued support to the Police Leadership Academy.
- Governance and Reconstruction. In summer 2007: build three new water towers in one of the poorest areas of Basra. To date this has been beset by a difficulties including security in the Shia Flats and the capacity of our contractor. We anticipate the project will be concluded by August 2007. Together with repairs we are making to the nearby Hartha pump station, this will improve the piped water supply to 500,000 of Basra's poorest residents.
- The PRT and Prisons team will Complete the construction of a new courthouse and prison in Basra.
- Strengthen the UK's rule of law work through continued mentoring of judicial and prisons officials

Operating locations

15. Until September 2006, we had seen the Basra Palace as the optimal site from which to deliver the bulk of our civilian effort. The changes in the context described above mean we now face two decisions:

- What is the optimal site, given the current security situation, from which to deliver our objectives in the three phases ahead (ie from now to late 2007)?
- What is the optimal site for a presence longer term? Can we find a way to preserve the option of returning the Consulate to Basra Palace at a later date, should the security situation improve, at a cost we can afford?

From now to late 2007

16. It is clear from November's IDF statistics that there is no prospect of our being able to recommend to Ministers a return to full staffing at Basra Palace in the near future. It is equally clear that there is a powerful and urgent imperative for us to get our in-country civilian operations back up to strength as quickly as possible, to deliver in the critical period ahead.

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BAS is the only viable alternative site for civilian operations. We currently have a small amount of poor, unhardened accommodation there. We have already set urgent work in train to create sufficient office space and hardened accommodation to enable us to operate a civilian operation effectively from BAS. We hope to have 10 units of hardened accommodation operational by mid-December, and 54 by mid-January.

18. Conditions for staff at BAS will be much tougher than at BP. Operating from there will impact significantly on the range of activity we could carry out. Travel to/from Basra will become much harder. We are likely to face staff recruitment and retention challenges. Space will be limited. With only 54 hardened units of accommodation we will need to make difficult choices about priorities.

19. But against that, there will be significant advantages in co-location with the military – making possible a more cohesive approach than is currently possible from the different sites in Basra. This should help us deliver PIC.

20. Our recommendations are therefore that:

- From now to mid-January we continue to operate from split locations. The CG and her core team will continue to work from BP, assuming no significant worsening of the security threat. The PRT will move back from Kuwait to BAS as soon as accommodation becomes available – some in December, the rest in January. Some Consulate staff will also be at BAS;
- From mid-January to PIC or reposturing, whichever comes sooner, we increasingly concentrate our resources at BAS, only keeping at BP those staff who have to be there to do their jobs;
- After PIC, our operation would operate exclusively from BAS and, as security permits, the Warren site in central Basra.

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Longer Term presence in Basra

21. Early next year we will need to reach a decision on the longer-term future of our interest in the Basra Palace. Will we agree to give it up completely, or can we somehow seek to preserve our ability to return at a later date, should security conditions permit? (NB We do not currently own the site. It is currently "occupied" although under general international law and the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations 1961, it retains protection and immunities separate from any CPA order.)
22. We cannot take this decision unilaterally. The US (who are on an adjacent plot of land in BP and are very keen to retain their interest in the site), Denmark, MNF and the UN will all need to be consulted. The US are currently thinking of maintaining a residual private security contingent at the BPC, possibly backed by US military, to preserve their Consulate and the option of returning to it should the security situation permit.
23. Our decisions will inevitably be heavily influenced not only by security but also by financial considerations. Maintaining our current contract guard force will be very expensive.
24. Whatever we do, we must avoid a repeat of the UK military's experience in Maysan, when Camp Abu Naji was handed over to the Iraqi Army, only for local militia elements immediately to loot it. If we do decide that it is not possible and/or affordable to mothball the BP site, we will need to work up a robust plan to hand it over to the Iraqis in a way which provides as much assurance as is possible that this will not happen again.

Iraq Policy Unit
FCO

1 December 2006

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