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**SUBJECT
MASTER
Filed:**

From the Private Secretary

16 January 2007

Dear Irfan,

IRAQ: MEETING WITH OFFICIALS

The Prime Minister met CDS and senior officials from FCO, SIS, MOD, DFID and Cabinet Office for an update on Iraq today.

The Prime Minister asked about Basra, stressing the importance of ensuring that the conditions on the ground genuinely justified any draw down of troops. CDS reported that while the security situation in Basra had improved substantially since the start of Operation Sinbad, the situation remained imperfect. Areas of concern included the police, the militias and Iranian activity. On these, we needed to see the Iraqis implement arrest warrants against former members of the serious crimes unit, to continue our own operations against key JAM leaders (while recognising that we could not take on JAM as a whole militarily), and to implement our plans to target Iranian proxies.

Asked about Iraqi security capability in Basra, CDS noted that the last two (combined) pulses of Op Sinbad had been carried out entirely, and satisfactorily, by 10 Div. 10 Div was relatively well equipped, but lacked capable officers and NCOs – hence the importance of a continued training and mentoring effort. This had been factored in as a key element of the proposed re-posturing.

The Prime Minister asked how the proposal to drawdown to 4,500 troops would affect our capability. CDS said there would be no impact, and no difference in our ability to create military effect, though this would in future be focused on training and mentoring. The troops who would be pulled out were involved only in static guarding, of bases which we intended to close in any case. On the US position, CDS said that Casey understood and was comfortable with the idea of our drawing down to 4,500 troops by May. His concerns centred on the idea of “leaving Basra unattended” (which we did not plan to do), the performance of the police, and Iranian activity. Moreover, Gates had agreed that

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the Coalition should aim to get out of the centre of Iraqi cities,

The Prime Minister noted the potential psychological impact on Iraqis of feeling that their government was genuinely in charge of a well equipped army, able to take on its internal enemies. It was important to pursue this goal.

The Prime Minister asked about work on joint structures to deliver assistance in Basra. CDS said that he did not agree with all of Major-General Shirreff's ideas on this issue. It was too late in the day to try to establish a Joint Inter-Agency Task Force, and our focus should be on building Iraqi capability to deliver assistance. On our own effort, co-location at Basra Air Station would help, and the effort should not be led by the military. Martin Dinham (DFID) agreed, noting that DFID's long-term work to establish better water and power supplies in Basra would come to an end soon, having produced results. DFID's efforts were therefore focused on building the local authorities' own ability to express their needs to the centre, and the centre's ability to respond. This was beginning to pay off, with \$300m committed by the authorities in Baghdad, to around 400 projects.

On the Baghdad Security Plan, CDS assessed that it was difficult to see how the revised plan would be more effective than previous efforts, unless the Iraqi government improved its ability to lay the political groundwork for success.

The Prime Minister said that this was why it was essential to keep close track of the situation on capabilities, reconstruction and reconciliation, and be prepared to go back to Maliki repeatedly

And we should think creatively about how to bind people into Iraqi politics. He had discussed with Tareq Al-Hashemi how best to get some section of the Sunni insurgency to come to a deal with the US, perhaps starting with a single town or region. The US should aim to secure a ceasefire in return for a promise, on which they would have to deliver, of effective reconstruction. Hashemi had responded positively, noting that many Sunni insurgents attacked Coalition forces 'by default', despite the fact that the Coalition was the best guarantor of their security. They did so out of frustration, and a sense that they lacked alternatives. He thought Anbar might be a good area

to try out such an initiative. The Prime Minister asked officials to follow-up on this proposal, including with the US. (Action: FCO)

Hashemi had also said that it was vital to make a reality of the proposal for a four man 'Council' (Maliki, Hashemi, Talabani and Mehdi). This would demonstrate that the government really was acting in a consensual way, across communities. The Prime Minister felt that,

we should continue to push this point. (Action: FCO / BE Baghdad).

Martin Dinham noted that

There was no shortage of (Iraqi) funds, but political direction and technical ability were lacking. We were helping on this, and there should be a role for the World Bank. CDS agreed that this was an essential element of our overall strategy. The Prime Minister asked for advice and action on this, promoting a clear plan with Maliki and others. We should ensure that the new US official tasked with reconstruction gave Maliki a strong message on this (Action: DFID / FCO / BE Baghdad).

I am copying this letter to Sir Gus O'Donnell, Sir Richard Mottram, Margaret Aldred and Tim Dowse (Cabinet Office), PS / C, (MOD), Howard Taylor (DFID), (HMT), Sir David Manning (Washington), Dominic Asquith and Lt-General Graeme Lamb (Baghdad), Ros Marsden and Major-General Jonathan Shaw (Basra).

Yours,



NICK BANNER

Irfan Siddiq, FCO