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From: Simon McDonald

Date: 20 July 2007

**PRIME MINISTER**

**IRAQ - TRANSITION**

1. Tony Blair announced in February that we would leave Basra Palace in the late summer. The military would like to hand over the site as soon as possible and current military planning is for this to take place in late August, with the only variable being the capacity of the Iraqi guard force to secure the site once we have gone. The US would be unhappy at any movement on our part in advance of the Petraeus and Crocker testimony to Congress and would prefer it to be in late September.

2. Once we withdraw from central Basra, we will have difficulty in conducting operations, other than in support of the Iraqi Security Forces. In effect, it would mean a de facto transition to Provincial Iraqi Control (PIC); our remaining military mission would then have two stages, Overwatch and Training.

Overwatch

3. The current plan presumes that, after PIC, the UK will reduce from 5700 to around 5000 and provide overwatch, during which time we have a responsibility to support the Iraqis in maintaining security in Southern Iraq.

4. In reality, we would not be able to conduct effective operations from the Air Station: on one site our forces would be at risk (what the military call "a tethered goat"); no longer in the city centre, they would have limited

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awareness of what was happening on the ground. So, we should recognise at the outset that we could not sustain this stage for long and set a time limit to wind-down our presence at the Air Station and to transition to the training mission. It would take around six months to withdraw the majority of our forces.

5. In the overwatch phase we would have a (gradually falling) force of around 5000, which would carry out the following tasks:

- 650 for strike and detention operations and providing the initial reintervention capability;
- 1000 dedicated to force protection tasks;
- 450 to support UK air operations;
- 600 in the HQ at BAS and Talil (in Dhi Qar);
- 1000 for Security Sector Reform activities - training and mentoring the Iraqi Army, Navy, Police and Department of Border Enforcement;
- 1300 for combat and logistic support.

#### Training

6. Once we were no longer providing overwatch from the Air Station, our mission would have two major elements: a component of a few hundred providing training to the Iraqi Army, navy, police force, and department of border enforcement; and a contribution to the wider Iraqi theatre.

7. Having left the Air Station, we would have to persuade the Americans to house and protect our training forces. One option might be in Talil in Dhi Qar province, where

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**1100 Australians and Romanians are currently providing training on a US base.**

8. We would also want to continue the other contributions to the wider Iraq theatre. Because they are not part of MND SE, these are not counted in our existing force of 5700:

- a niche contribution to the US-led fight against AQ-I in Balad (around       );
  - a naval deployment in the Northern Gulf (300 personnel on 2 ships);
  - a contribution to coalition air strike operations.
- Currently 6 GR4s based in Qatar (around 350-400 personnel supporting the GR4s, and the tactical air support C-130s and refuelling VC-10s).

**This, together with the training mission, would give an overall UK contribution to Iraq of around 1500 troops.**

### Military/US/Commonsense Angles

9. These proposals have not been discussed with departments but I judge the military would support because they are keen to get out of Basra and MND SE but see the importance for alliance reasons of maintaining a presence in 2008.

10. President Bush would not be pleased but the rest of the Administration see that things are changing: they too are under pressure. after Petraeus/Crocker, US forces will have to move from population control to training and support of Iraqi forces. They will be glad that we have a presence throughout 2008.

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**11. Only the Iraqis can fulfil the key task of political reconciliation. It seems that they won't feel the necessary pressure to get on with the job until the Coalition begins to leave; and, as they try to do that job, they will need continued training and mentoring. This plan would be compatible with that.**

**Simon McDonald**

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