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NOTE

On Iraq

Maliki is doing what he can. He was, for the first time, anti-MAS; his new four person inner group - himself, Mehdi, Talabani and Hashemi - want to do the right thing. The question is capability. We must:

- (i) increase the speed of Iraqi army command and control; training and equipment. They are the one reasonably solid force structure the Iraqi government has. All our effort must be directed to building its capability.
- (ii) give substance to the reconciliation and outreach, possibly using other regions especially Sunni neighbours to help. At present the intent is there; the action isn't;
- (iii) create a more effective management system in and around Maliki's office and for disbursement of money.

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These are the three pillars that can prop up the system. We need one person, properly empowered in charge of each. We can't leave it to the Iraqi system.

In the South, I found my forces with surprisingly high morale. They are convinced that ordinary Iraqis don't buy into the extremism. Each time they get reconstruction going, there is an inevitable shift in Iraqi buy-in to us. The militias have to be taken on. They are in no doubt Iran is the major player behind the violence.

It's your call obviously on extra troops for Baghdad. For what its worth, I think this might be sensible short term but only as part of a wider plan to boost Iraqi capability. There is no doubt US forces can lock-down parts of Baghdad. But, very quickly, unless they stay put - and that is very difficult - it is only very short term respite. So there has to be Iraqi force plus reconstruction. Also it is in stopping stuff coming into eg Sadr City that the problem arises. There has to be an effective system of road blocks and check points. At present people are more likely to be frightened of these; than protected by them.

I saw Senator McCain and others in Jerusalem. He places inordinate store by extra troops; and tends to dismiss Iraqi capability as impractical. I would be careful here. Unless you are going to expand forces massively, it is not a panacea. My point is simply: whatever you do, the only ultimate solution is Iraqi.

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