

DECLASSIFIED
UK SECRET

NOTE

I left Iraq, on balance, more optimistic not less. The good news is that the new Prime Minister is good – brisk and determined and intelligent. The Government obviously has a real sense of mission. Not one – from the Speaker, very Sunni, to the more extreme Shia – said we should go now. If anything, they are more worried about us leaving. All want us to stay to get the job done. If we have a clear plan, properly executed and communicated to the Iraqi people, we will succeed.

Now for the challenge: the nature of the insurgency is changing; we do not, on our own, have the force capability to defeat it; as the Sunni become convinced we are non-sectarian, they welcome it and conversely as the more extreme Shia come to the same conclusion, they don't. Hence Basra becoming a problem. In addition, very simply put: the security is so bad in and around Baghdad for ordinary folk, that it stops improvement in services, we get blamed (in part) and people start looking to militias to protect them. Al Qaida kill Shia. Shia kill Sunni, and sectarian violence increases.

The new Government gives us a new beginning and a genuine possibility of reversing this vicious spiral. But we must have a plan. The elements of such a plan are there already. Casey, Zal and our equivalents are doing a brilliant job. But we need to draw it all together, with the new Government and give it focus. Here are my suggestions:

DECLASSIFIED

(1) A Timetable with Conditions

We are due to publish a programme of transition with the new Government in the next few weeks. We have a conundrum. The Iraqis – all of them – in fact want what we want. They want to know we're going; but not precipitately.

Interestingly I was told that Moqtada-al-Sadr had said he wanted a timetable but 10 years would do!

The conundrum is: how to give the certainty of intention to leave; without giving a signal of intention to desert.

Here the Iraqis have the same problem as us. We both want a timetable with conditions. But the media want to say: no, you can have one or the other. Thus we either cut and run; or stay forever.

This is very difficult. But my view is that we should agree a timetable, with dates but each one conditional on ISF build-up of capability and overall violence levels, i.e. heavily condition-based.

If we don't do this, the risk, as was explained graphically by the Sunni Vice-President from Tawalfuq, is that Iraqis say: you could give a definitive political timetable but not one on security, i.e. our unwillingness to desert the Iraqis gets turned, perversely, into an accusation of bad faith.

I don't underestimate at all the difficulties of this. But with the right conditionality, it could be done. I believe it is essential it is done, because it exposes the Iraqis to their own responsibility to clear the problem up. We can always make it a condition that if, at a later point, they demand that we remain,

UK SECRET
DECLASSIFIED

we will agree. But we have to explode visibly and definitively the myth that it is us who want to stay and the Iraqis who want us to go.

(2) The ISF build-up must be improved

Meeting with our Special Forces people, who work with the US, I got the clearest picture yet, of the security problem. Essentially, we may have well over 100,000 troops but the numbers able to engage in offensive operations are limited.

What this means is as follows. Al Qaida have re-grouped since the turn of the year when the US forces really hit them hard and effectively. They are now on a different strategy: to polarise Shia/Sunni and draw the Sunni insurgents into their net. They are well armed and highly mobile. But they aren't vast in number. They will go to Ramadi, for example, terrorise the local police and just be a continual threat to normality. They don't hold the town in a conventional sense. But neither can the ISF.

There is a plan for Ramadi now. But the basic point is: we need better, stronger ISF build-up.

A strong centre will be a big help. But they also need equipment and intensive support. Therefore we need to do this even better and more strongly and test the robustness of the build-up. Iraqi MOI and MOD need real capability to make it happen. If we don't do this, we can't defeat the terrorists.

DECLASSIFIED

DECLASSIFIED
UK SECRET

(3) Baghdad security and electricity are the two top priorities for the new Government

The Government needs to prioritise. There is a plan that Casey is putting together with the new Government to re-claim Baghdad. We need to make sure it works. The idea is a single security force to drive the militias out and take back the city. We need this fast.

In addition, it is possible to get the electricity up to 6000 MW. It is now an issue of competence as much as sabotage. There is a plan. We should work with the new Minister to implement it.

The new Government has, in my view, about 3-6 months to get some clear "wins".

These two are do-able and would transform perceptions amongst Iraqis.

(4) Cut deals, as we can, with the insurgents, to go political

There are plans underway. The Sunni insurgency increasingly doesn't know what it is fighting the MNF for; and is becoming more of a retaliation machine against the Shia militia and the corruption of the previous regime at the MOI.

Down in Basra, we are planning a mission led by Maliki to sort out differences politically and get things back on track. Basra is crucial to the economy. The trouble is, at present, the UK forces need an Iraqi-led strategy to regain stability.

DECLASSIFIED

UK SECRET
DECLASSIFIED

But with Sunni and Shia militants alike, we need to offer a way back. If they take it, fine. If not, the new Government should be encouraged to be very severe.

(5) The international community should be mobilised

As the US has already said, this is the time to shame the international community into supporting the new Government. The truth is the security of the world rests on Iraqi progress. We should have a big UN donor conference in the autumn and we should really put pressure on the Arab nations to support the new Government. We should try to get Kofi to agree to the donor conference, soon.

TB

22 May 2006

DECLASSIFIED