

~~SECRET~~
~~DECLASSIFIED~~



Note from the Iraq
Inquiry: the correct date
of this minute is 2007.

SECRETARY OF STATE

MSU 4/5/2K

1 February 2006

MA1/DCDS(C)

Copy to:

PS/Minister(AF)

PS/Minister(DP)

PS/USofS

PSO/CDS

PS/PUS

MA/VCDS

NA/CNS-1SL

MA/CGS

PSO/CAS

PS/CDI

PS/Policy Director

MA/CJO

MA/ACDS(Ops)

DG Op Pol

DGMC

DJC D(Mil) / D(Pol)

D News

PJHQ Dep Comd Sec

PJHQ-J9

Special Advisers

DEFENCE SECRETARY'S VISIT TO IRAQ - 28-31 JANUARY 2007

Summary

1. The US apply the brakes to PIC and transition as all eyes turn to a new Baghdad Security Plan (BSP). The new plan has broad Iraqi backing although such consensus does not seem to apply elsewhere. There are concurrent signs that JAM is vulnerable and beginning to lie low. A new US team is in no mood to take risks and re-evaluates across the board, expressing concerns in the South over 10 Div, Iranian influence and UK ability to apply its military muscle in Basra city after re-posturing. In response the new MND(SE) command team begin to look at re-posturing within US tolerances, which might lead to an extended presence in Basra Palace and less of a dividend at roulement.
2. But the broad strategy can and should survive. Both re-posturing and some drawdown should proceed. Above all there is a need to see the wider context - US politics is driving the numbers up just as we feel ours can come down. Basra is still not Baghdad. Nevertheless the resulting tension is manifesting itself in the recently expressed operational concerns of US commanders. MITTs and PTTs are a key element in the US argument. The criteria for transition have always had a measure of interpretation in them, and the US are rapidly re-interpreting to fit the context in which they have to operate.
3. For this visit the net effect was, at first sight, an alarming and unforeseen change in military advice over re-posturing, which has implications beyond Iraq. It suggested that we had either failed to foresee the scale of this US change of approach and its implications, or that perhaps our previous plan was lacking in some areas. There are bound to be a host of nuances that soften this rather stark conclusion but they were drowned out by the 'shock of the new'.

~~SECRET~~
~~DECLASSIFIED~~

DECLASSIFIED

Background

4. The Secretary of State visited Iraq over the period 28-31 January 2007. In Baghdad he met President Talabani, Prime Minister Maliki, Defence Minister Qadir, Deputy PM Barham Saleh, National Security Advisor Rubaie, Water Minister Rasheed, US Ambassador Khalilzad, Lieutenant General Odierno (Commander MNC-I) and Lieutenant General Dempsey (Commander MNSTC-I). In Basra he visited troops in Basra Palace and Basra Air Station, met Basra Governor Wa'ili and spent time discussing re-posturing with new GOC MND(SE), Major General Shaw, the Consul General and representatives of other Government Departments. He also visited MiTT training at Shaibah Log Base. The Secretary of State was very grateful for the support and assistance provided by PJHQ and Theatre visits staff and those who provided briefing material.

BAGHDAD

Embassy Briefing

5. The Secretary of State was briefed by HMA, SBMR-I and the . The new Baghdad Security Plan (BSP) seemed to be offering more potential than previous incarnations. While accepting we had been in this position a number of times before, there were real signs that there was adequate Iraqi political engagement across the spectrum of allegiances and interests to give it a greater chance of success. It seemed that this time even the Iraqis thought that this might be the "last throw of the dice". As a result there was greater Iraqi leadership both at the military and political level, greater Ministerial involvement through new functional committees and a sign that the necessary resources were being invested by the Iraqis themselves.

6. JAM were noticeably pulling their horns in, in anticipation of what was to come. They were now less visible in Sadr city and the numbers of militia on the streets were reducing. SBMR-I had been able to engage directly with Shia community leaders who were receptive to plans to tackle the worst elements of the militias. The perception of Iran as a negative influence was also growing; Iranian intentions and therefore those of JAM were becoming more suspect. This set the conditions for operations against them that had netted up to 600 individuals.

7. This position seemed to be reinforced by a Sadrist weakness at Ministerial level. Even Moktadr Al Sadr (MAS) appeared to recognise that he did not have the right people to fill the Ministries he was responsible for. He might be prepared to accept technocrats from other groupings in their place. MAS had absented himself in fear of his enemies. No-one was selling this as a defeat for JAM – this was a tactically astute adoption of a low profile, but it had opened the door for action against them. The key would be to capitalise on this opportunity and ensure that what started as a tactical withdrawal became a strategic denial of the ability to re-enter the fray.

8. On developments in Basra the key issue seemed to be the need to make changes in the higher level security structures. General Latif of 10 Div had to go, as did the Chief of Police. The Emergency Security Committee had also largely failed to add any value and its weak head, General Hamadi, had to be replaced. The routinely unhelpful resisted, mostly likely a result of a desire not to lose influence. UK interlocutors had been campaigning for change for some weeks and Prime Minister Maliki appeared to accept the arguments.

9. SBMR-I confirmed a clear and widespread apprehension at the highest levels of the US military about our plans for Basra. They were not comfortable with what appeared to be our willingness to cede the city to the militias, nor were they convinced that our plans to ensure the Iraqi Army was prepared for the future were robust enough. They were also particularly unsure about our plans for Military Transition Teams (MiTTs). A debate raged over differing approaches to 'MiTTing'. Contemplation of deploying additional military forces into Basra seemed to be

SECRET UK EYES ONLY
DECLASSIFIED

~~SECRET~~
DECLASSIFIED

serious rather than sabre-rattling. An element of such willingness seemed to stem from a surplus of additional troops bestowed by the President. The concern was that there should at least be a balance between the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) and the militias.

10. The US military was in an invidious position. It had been reinforced according to a political need that came with an attached expectation of success and yet visiting Democrats were making very clear their determination to scrutinise and challenge the new approach. This meant a refocusing on clear success rather than 'just enough' and an associated discomfort with risk. To some UK re-posturing represented just such a risk and so early in the timing of the BSP.

Prime Minister Maliki

11. Maliki began with a long and very confident exposition of the BSP and the likelihood of it leading to 'defeat for terrorism in Iraq'. He described it as the key to ending Multi-National Forces' (MNF) role. There was a noticeable change in tone from previous meetings with his talk being only of terrorists and not of the insidiousness of 'Baathists'. Maliki said all political groups wanted the BSP to work.

12. The Secretary of State questioned how well prepared the ISF were for the task. Maliki responded by saying that they needed strong public support in the form of an active media campaign. They had to be prepared to face psychological warfare. A strong political consensus was also needed, an effort being led by Vice President Mehdi. He also recognised the need to get the non-military lines of operation right, having services and reconstruction ready to follow the military effort. He then described a series of committees formed, ready to take forward parts of this plan, including an Economic Committee led by Barham Saleh and a Public Mobilisation Committee led by Chalabi.

13. Maliki then asked Abdul Qadir to briefly summarise the military effort. Qadir briefed in familiar terms noting that he viewed this operation as very much putting policing first. **Comment: This slightly jarred with his description of a four phase operation: firstly preparation, then establishing security with military forces, then maintaining it and lastly enforcing the law.**

14. The Secretary of State noted that a key element of the plan had to be that once it was complete JAM would not be able to reassert itself. Maliki's answer that "everything was accounted for, we have a plan for everything", seemed a little glib but he followed with some firm political messages which were encouraging. He said that whoever broke the law, regardless of their background or affiliation, would be dealt with. He also stressed that the ISF had to be, and would be, impartial.

15. A brief discussion on the need to limit external influences followed but again Maliki was confident and short with his answers. Everything had been covered. On Basra, the Secretary of State made clear the UK's desire to see key figures such as Commander 10 Div and the Chief of Police replaced. Maliki agreed and said he had been given names of potential replacements by the MOD and the MOI. In response to a plea for consultation about potential replacements, he simply responded that the Ministries would know how to pick competent people. He also said that once the BSP was started he felt he and others would be able to turn their focus on Basra. He had a plan for Basra and he did not want to delay it. The Secretary of State concluded with a plea for some serious attention to the ABQT as a key strategic weakness and also for some Prime Ministerial intervention on the enforcing of the RMP6 arrest warrants. On the latter Maliki seemed unsighted but agreed to follow it up.

16. **Comment.** Throughout the meeting Maliki spoke in confident terms and it was hard to tell whether he was over-confident in the planning that was being done or simply determined to show it was his planning, Iraqi planning, and therefore was not really open

DECLASSIFIED

~~SECRET~~ **DECLASSIFIED**

to further debate. Nevertheless, his approach seemed even-handed and it was clear that he recognised how crucial universal political support for the new security plan would be.

President Talabani

17. Talabani began with cheery news; "JAM have decided to stop! This should help the Baghdad Security Plan". He said key JAM figures had come to speak to him within the last week to tell him that they were prepared to relinquish some of their control. Community leaders in Sadr City were meeting with the US military and the Ambassador and many were talking about dismantling or reducing the size of JAM militia. They were also determined to push out those leaders they were not able to control. Some were leaving for Iran and Syria. In discussion he agreed that there was a renewed political determination to act together although he concluded that this had not quite reached any formal agreements and some were still misusing the constitution to prevaricate. In the enthusiasm for the BSP Barham Saleh was quick to note that Iraqi Government would have to fulfil its various promises on economic development and reconstruction if it was to work.

18. Talabani covered his recent visits to Iran and Syria.

19. In a subsequent brief discussion after lunch the subject of detention arose. The Secretary of State asked National Security Adviser Rubaie what his estimate of numbers was. Rubaie said that between the MOI and the MOD around 10,000 were held. The Ministry of Justice held around another 9,000 but he said all of them had been either convicted or were in the process of being seen by the Courts. It was estimated that the BSP could generate up to another 6,000 detainees, though he felt that might drop to around 3,000. The Government was in the process of creating space for another 5,000 prisoners around Baghdad. When asked by the Secretary of State about the 14,000 the US held, Rubaie simply replied that he was glad that it was not his problem. They would either have to take them away or release them.

Defence Minister Abdul Qadir

20. Qadir began by saying that in his view all parties had now to reject the concept of armed or 'honourable' resistance; only the State could bear arms. The Secretary of State raised General Latif.

Qadir went on to outline his aspirations for 10 Div. Rather than having one brigade with two battalions in Basra he wanted to see two brigades each with three battalions. He felt that currently they were weak in Basra but had done better elsewhere in the South; he quoted As Samawah as an example. Qadir recognised that 10 Div had until recently been a low priority in comparison with the Brigades working in Baghdad. When asked about equipment he seemed relatively confident that things were improving. He said he would soon have significant numbers of BTR80s, noting wryly that it would not be long before he had more APCs than the British Army. Asked directly whether he felt the Iraqi Army would soon be ready to takeover from MNF, he replied simply 'yes'.

21. When asked his views on our repositioning plans he initially suggested he knew little of them but then in slightly uncertain terms backtracked.

~~SECRET~~ **DECLASSIFIED**

SECRET UK EYES ONLY
DECLASSIFIED

US Ambassador Khalilzad

22. Khalilzad felt the Iranians were a little nervous. They were reaching out to try and seek some form of compromise. The US wouldn't reject the possibility of a meeting but they were going to insist on some evidence of change in behaviour before they actually agreed. He then pointed out that in
23. Following the recent capture of Iranians operating inside Iraq the US had insisted Iran provide a detailed list of all their official diplomats in the country. The Iranians had acquiesced and the US were studying the list. Khalilzad had admitted that the US were now talking in terms of 'force protection trumping Geneva', an allusion to the fact that, were they to suspect people listed nominally as diplomats of being engaged in taking action against US forces they would take action in response. He felt the Iranians were now worried that they may have overreached themselves. The Iranian President had taken them too far and they were concerned that now Shia and Sunni in the Gulf region were uniting against them. They were also seriously worried about the US escalating. He asked our views on any preconditions that could be laid down before any kind of engagement. The Secretary of State noted that we could perhaps ask for a commitment to non-interference in work to clean up the Shatt Al Arab waterway.
24. Khalilzad's deputy gently probed on UK re-posturing. The Secretary of State noted the commitments placed upon the UK's Armed Forces both in relation to Iraq and Afghanistan. US demands on us were somewhat conflicting, with an emerging expectation that we would increase our presence in Afghanistan against a much more clearly expressed desire for us not to reduce our presence in Iraq. The UK's Armed Forces could simply not do both. He also highlighted the need to be true to the narrative we had laid out before the UK public, a narrative that demanded a move towards a lower level of forces. He then went on to address some of the US concerns such as the growing IDF threat, the desire to maintain a presence at Basra Palace, the need for effective mentoring, and the requirement to be able to exert influence and military effect within the environs of Basra city. He felt that these concerns could be answered by work taking place within MND(SE) under the new GOC and that those plans would be developed in concert with US commanders. Re-posturing should aid rather than hinder this process particularly as it freed up forces to act in a more flexible way.
25. Above all, however, he stressed the need to recognise the political context and not to try and artificially dress it up. America's commitment was going up and ours was likely to reduce. The political drivers on both sides were clear and our strategy was still the same; we agreed on the ends and many of the means but we simply had to militarily resolve some of the differences expressed. He was confident that this could be done. To add context he also highlighted the fact that there was no evidence that Basra was in serious danger of collapse and questions over 10 Div's capability had to be seen in this light. He stressed that any suggestion that UK forces would be augmented or replaced by US forces coming to work in the South was distinctly unhelpful. We could resolve the issues that faced us without indulging in that kind of language which was likely only to deepen any public perception of disagreement.
26. **Comment:** Khalilzad seemed content to accept that, as long as we could address some of the military concerns over Basra and 10 Div at the operational level the higher level issue posed by our force reductions at a time of US increases could be managed. In a subsequent dinner, Lt Gen Ordierno seemed similarly mollified by the course of action being developed by MND(SE). He was clearly comforted by the Secretary of State's categorical assurance that the UK would neither claim 'victory' as the rationale for the forthcoming drawdown, nor were we under a misapprehension over the imminence of PIC. Progress would be the watchword. We sensed that the US might be helped into offering

SECRET UK EYES ONLY
DECLASSIFIED

~~SECRET~~
DECLASSIFIED

additional support for the South including assets (on the back of their Iranian proxy strategy) and increased economic funds (CERPS and civilian).

Abdul Aziz Al-Hakim

27. The Secretary of State had a good natured meeting with Abdul Aziz al Hakim, which built on the success of previous encounters. Much of it was spent discussing the nature of the Ashura festival and Hakim's success in reuniting communities during the course of the festivities. During discussion he made it clear that he did not support attacks on coalition forces. He explained this in terms of the hospitality principle; how could we ask MNF to stay in Iraq to help and then attack them. The Secretary of State asked whether he said this to Iran. He assured him he had, many times, but he would happily do so again.

BASRA

GOC MND(SE)

28. Major General Shaw outlined his first impressions. The US were delaying transition to PIC in the run up to the BSP. The BSP came first, second and third. Even Governor Wa'ili was beginning to question whether we were moving too quickly towards PIC. His overall impression was that we should not be too optimistic about an early PIC in either Basra or Maysan.

29. There was an obvious enthusiasm for strike operations against militant JAM among the local population. Even the Provincial Council showed signs of accepting this. Iranian influence was described as the greatest threat by a wide cross-section of sources and interlocutors. He wondered whether this meant perhaps that there was an increasing appetite for action against Iranian proxies. There was also a heightened sensitivity among the US over Iranian interference. This meant additional scrutiny of UK plans but it might offer leverage for more US resources.

30. On plans for re-posturing he noted the importance of the change in likely timings for PIC. The original plan that had been developed by MND(SE) was based on the assumption of PIC around April or May, all but coincidental with re-posturing. In simple terms this had meant that UK forces would only limit their ability to act in the city in the very immediate run up to or after PIC. That position had clearly changed and there was a much greater risk now that the UK would still have a defined security responsibility for Basra city because PIC had not taken place, while re-posturing completely outside the city would leave them unable to properly affect that responsibility. In his view it would be necessary to maintain a foot on the ground in Basra city, such that the ability to strike could be maintained, and perhaps more importantly, such that the intelligence required for operations could still be collected.

31. He commented in the round that he was surprised at how limited our intelligence and local knowledge was within Basra. Some of this was due to a shortage of specialist resources such as Arabists, both within his team and within the FCO. This debilitated the information campaign. He questioned whether our information campaign was too focussed on UK domestic issues that did not have relevance in theatre. **Action: DG Op Pol – please follow up.**

32. The GOC discussed the IDF threat. In 2004 and 2005 combined there had been just under 40 attacks; that had already been superseded in December 2006 alone, with the whole year accounting for 178 attacks. The rate of attacks was consistently rising. He hoped in February to have a partial solution as the 105mm guns deployed would become fully effective. He was also keen to get US Apache back in MND(SE). **Comment: The Secretary of State was seized by the threat posed by IDF, particularly to BAS, which lacked some of the hardening of OSB and Basra Palace. He was keen to ensure all available avenues to enhance protection were being explored. Action: PJHQ please submit (by Wednesday 07 FEB) on ongoing work covering offensive/defensive and scope for further enhancements.**

DECLASSIFIED

~~SECRET UK EYES ONLY~~
DECLASSIFIED

33. On the ISF in Basra, he noted 10 Div's good performance on Operation SINBAD but questioned the extent to which they had been challenged. Their robustness was still an unknown quantity although they seemed enthusiastic to take on the JAM. The IPS remained a significant problem. Although 90% of the force was assessed to be relatively 'clean' they were being rendered ineffective by the remaining 10% who were either corrupt or linked to the militias.

Basra Palace - 1 RGJ

34. The Secretary of State visited 1 RGJ who had assumed responsibility for Southern Basra. There was a strong feeling that consent was rising for both the UK presence and their actions against militant JAM. The public at large seemed more prepared to stop and talk although most still feared the Police. At the same time the enemy was getting more sophisticated and more active. Attacks across the board had risen, not just IDF but also planting of IEDs and the conduct of complex attacks including small arms fire and RPGs. CO 1 RGJ neatly summed up the environment as 'high consent yet high threat'. He also revealed the casualty figures for his unit (and attachments) over the period of their tour so far as 10% of his strength. If this rate continued it would equate to 20% of the Battlegroup strength by the end of the tour¹.

SISG/Consul General Brief

35. The Secretary of State met a number of the Southern Iraq Steering Group for a round table discussion at Basra Palace. Key conclusions were:

a. supported by some others, that the situation was generally worse for the ordinary Basrawi than six months ago. This assessment was based on reported intimidation rising significantly. **Comment: These seemed in contradiction to the messages we had previously received on the success of Op SINBAD and also to the message coming through from units operating on the ground that the civil population was far more willing to engage with UK forces. There was a lack of firm indicators to substantiate or refute this conclusion. It was not possible to identify trends in economic activity or displaced persons and crime statistics, or at least the reported murder rate, did not support this assessment. The net impression was of a mixed picture and divided views, with varying anecdotal evidence but few hard facts. Action: DCDS(C) - can we, in concert with the FCO, sharpen the metrics upon which we base assessments of the situation on the ground?**

b. The Police Adviser felt that the Police were less effective than six months before, principally because of intimidation rather than any lack of training or capability.

c. The role of Iraqi leadership was identified as being a major weak point. Within the Army, the Police and the political sphere few were willing or able to provide the necessary drive or direction. Some steps were being taken to address this with the formation of a new joint leadership college (for IPS/IA/DBE) which would be established in the Combined Operations Base in April.

d. Clear understanding of progress on reconstruction was inhibited by a lack of verifiable detail. While the Provincial Council were able to show a paper trail for work commissioned there was very little independent corroboration. **Comment: Metrics again. Given both the importance of this reconstruction and endemic corruption this seemed to be a key weakness in our understanding of progress.**

e. Sectarian violence remained low.

¹ This included casualties sustained by those operating within the AOR but not formally part of the Battlegroup but nonetheless the conclusions were stark.

~~SECRET UK EYES ONLY~~
DECLASSIFIED

~~SECRET~~
~~LA~~
~~ONLY~~
DECLASSIFIED

f. The Consul General expressed the view that leaving Basra Palace would constitute a victory for JAM. HMA identified a problem over funding if the FCO tried to maintain the presence in Basra Palace whilst continuing with current aspirations for enhancements in Afghanistan. **Comment: Funding is a recurring theme in the Iraq Strategy Group meetings in London. A clear statement of intent is required.**

g. The GOC expressed the view that the military requirement for Basra Palace might well end once PIC was achieved.

Governor Wa'ili

36. The meeting began with a rather extravagant claim by Wa'ili that he had just returned from Abu Dhabi with a deal to build a new stadium and a supporting city outside Basra. The Secretary of State noted that Op SINBAD had been a good example of how politicians and MNF working together could achieve a great deal for the people of Basra and he hoped that the Governor would continue to offer cooperation in the months ahead. In particular he identified the need for him to bring his influence to bear to limit the IDF threat. Wa'ili responded by blaming the IDF on the weakness of the Emergency Security Council and in particular on the Chief of Police.

37. The Secretary of State asked how his trip to Baghdad to secure funding for development had gone. Wa'ili said it had been a success and he had procured a similar budget for 2007 to that provided in 2006. He had landed a number of major projects including agreement for a new heart disease hospital and for a bridge in the centre of Basra to connect to the far side of the Shatt Al Arab. The Secretary of State urged Wa'ili to return to Baghdad to continue to push for additional funding for further projects.

38. Wa'ili raised the issue of the inclusion of his brother's name on a printed wanted list. GOC said he felt this issue had been dealt with. Wa'ili clearly indicated that this was still causing him problems and needed MNF attention. In particular he pointed up his own increased co-operation being part of the developing UK / Fadillah working relationship brokered by Hazim Sha'alan (ex IMOD) and Fadillah leader Yacoubi. **Comment: This needs some careful handling to maintain Wa'ili consent – short of MNF apology but sufficient to move this forward.**

39. The meeting concluded with request that Wa'ili use his influence with the Governor of Maysan to take forward the RMP6 arrest warrants. Wa'ili felt the Governor would find himself dead if he did so but would raise it with him. He went on to suggest that MND(SE) should do the operation itself.

Equipment

40. BULLDOG received rave reviews universally. It had already been tested by RPGs and passed with flying colours. Theatre medical staff were clear about the life saving effect of OSPREY and KESTREL, especially the benefits of the raised collar against shrapnel. The tourniquet received similar praise, having become more relevant now that the body armour was saving people who previously would have been killed by IED/IDF incidents. Despite constant attention boots remained a bugbear for many. The perception seems worse than the problem (a view supported by medical staff, who are not dealing with large numbers of footsore soldiers, despite popular belief), but the perception is a problem all by itself.

R J McNEIL
Lt Col
APS 2 to SofS

~~SECRET~~
~~LA~~
~~ONLY~~
DECLASSIFIED