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THE ESTABLISHMENT AND OPERATION OF THE BASRA PROVINCIAL RECONSTRUCTION TEAM (PRT), APRIL 2006 – JANUARY 2007: LESSONS IDENTIFIED

SUMMARY

- *A cross-government review should be undertaken to examine lessons identified in Iraq (and other relevant theatres); and to recommend the requisite changes to HMG structures, practice and procedures in order to enhance coherence and integration.*
- *Departments, necessarily driven by largely Departmental imperatives and generally lacking post-conflict experience, are not best suited to lead broad state-building endeavours; and should rather be responsible for the provision of niche Departmental expertise to a broader structure, expressly designed for the purpose.*
- *State-building is a national endeavour and should be spearheaded in theatre by supra-Departmental authority - an individual - to whom constituent Departmental effort is suborned.*
- *A similarly unambiguous locus for supra-Departmental analysis and decision-making should be established in London to which that individual would report, and preferably a Minister.*
- *Fragmentary reporting on Departmental lines produces a fragmented view, and militates against coherence. This is particularly marked where key staff undertake short tours. A single integrated report is required to which all major players subscribe.*
- *A whole-of-government approach implies procedural and structural change at all levels if it is to be successfully undertaken. No integrated body can function properly without commensurate contextual integration – in theatre and in capitals. Where this is lacking, the very breadth of an integrated body (like the PRT) will be its most grievous weakness - politically and administratively - because it presumes a collaborative unity that does not exist.*
- *Integration is not divisible, and neither can it be imposed: it is a function of systems and procedures, and the intellectual and practical investment in such preparations should not be under-estimated. The civil-military relationship is particularly important – indeed, integration of this kind fundamentally hinges on it*

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- and cannot easily be fashioned *ad hoc*.¹ The requisite structures and associated planning and policy should be integrated prior to arrival in theatre: elaborate a doctrine; analyse its implications for its constituent components, for procedures and equipment; practice it repeatedly and in depth; and apply it. Once this is done, civil-military co-location, while desirable, is not essential.
- *Integrated execution is as important as integrated planning. The same rigour must be brought to both.* In SE Iraq in 2006 HMG had neither the one nor the other.
 - *The ability to mount complex joint media and influencing operations in theatres like Iraq is a specialist area of expertise in which HMG is deficient.* Sophisticated campaigns of this type are an essential component of successful state-building.
 - *Key staff should be held to a minimum of 1 year tours, with the requisite adjustments for welfare and travel.* The repeated and cyclical loss of experience in SE Iraq 2006 was damaging.
 - *Where integrated bodies such as the PRT are raised in future, they should be recruited or sub-contracted by a single authority and to a single contractual template, with clear procedures established for grievance and misconduct. Ideally such groups would train together - and particularly with major partners - and move to theatre as a formed body.*² That single authority would also be financially and administratively responsible for the operating requirements of the group.

Scope of Paper

This paper, commissioned by the Post Conflict Reconstruction Unit (PCRU), reviews the establishment and operation of the Basra Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) and identifies lessons. The paper first summarises key findings before describing the political and operational context for them; and describes their genesis in detail in separate themed sections. The conclusion – from which these findings are derived – follows.

The acronym ‘PRT’ is no more than a label for coherent effort; and there are hence fundamental and salutary lessons to be drawn from the PRT’s experiences in 2006 that are of much broader application than the mere assembly of similar teams in future. It is HMG’s ability to create a unitary approach – with civil-military integration at its heart – that is reviewed. Only the most dogged optimist would say that it is a skill that Britain has wholly mastered.

¹ Although this was done during the Helmand planning process in Kandahar in late 2005, strong Cabinet Office backing provided the required impulse and Departmental adhesive. Even here, Departmental postures proved difficult to reconcile; and these implicit tensions became the more visible as planning became more detailed.

² This group would ideally include embedded civil servants.

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Caveats, Definitions and PRT Background Detail

This review presents the personal experiences of the team-leader of the Basra PRT April 2006 – January 2007.

It is assumed in this paper that the benefits of an integrated approach are accepted and require no further justification.

‘HMG’ is used throughout for convenience, though it remains a difficult quantity to define - hence the quotation marks - and being so, can mislead. Ironically, the absence of central ‘HMG’ direction was among the most striking features of the period.

Basra is among the largest cities in Iraq. The city and its province, together with the three provinces around it - Muthanna, Dhi Qar and Maysan³ - comprise the area known as SE Iraq for which the UK is responsible. This paper confines its observations to this area and predominantly to Basra; and deals primarily with the British effort there rather than that of our Coalition partners. It is designed to be a stand-alone document and does not assume substantial prior knowledge.

The PRT was based in a UK Consulate compound in a larger Basra Palace enclosure that included the U.S. and Danish offices and a single British army battle-group. The Consulate was run by an FCO Consul General, with an embedded but largely autonomous DFID office. The PRT was re-located to Kuwait for security reasons in November 2006, where it principally remained for the rest of the period under review. Military headquarters (HQ) – both Divisional and Brigade – were located some 15 miles west of Basra Palace at the airport.

Finally, the PRT did not reach its design strength of 44. It consisted, at ceiling, of 34 multi-national staff provided by the UK, U.S. and Denmark. Constituent partners comprised: (UK) – MOD, DFID;⁴ (U.S.) – D.o.S, USAid, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Research Triangle Institute [‘democratisation’], Iraq Reconstruction and Management Office (IRMO); (DAN) – MFA, DANIDA. Operating costs were met by FCO-DFID-MOD in the first instance and later shared between partners. Programme funds of 40 MUSDS were allocated by the U.S, and disbursed by the PRT and the Basra Province Council (PC) collaboratively.⁵ The PRT also had access to smaller sums of money, particularly DFID’s Governance Development Fund (GDF).⁶

Political and Operational Context

HMG was persuaded by its American allies in late 2005 to establish a PRT in Basra as part of a broader Coalition PRT programme - which initially foresaw such teams in each of Iraq’s provinces - coordinated by a U.S.-led National Coordination Team (NCT) in Baghdad. HMG, impelled chiefly by concern that the U.S. would establish its own team

³ Dhi Qar and Muthanna are now under Provincial Iraqi Control (PIC). This is primarily a military agreement, and essentially proscribes the routine movement of Coalition forces without Iraqi assent.

⁴ The FCO later provided the Consulate’s Legal Advisor on a part-time basis.

⁵ These funds could be disbursed only with joint PRT-PC agreement.

⁶ Approximately 1 M GBP in mid-2006.

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if HMG did not, and its supposed adverse impact on existing HMG institution-building programmes, agreed. One DFID paper of the time spoke of the 'tsunami-effect' of any such initiative; and a measure of distaste for the project - and occasional hostility - was evident among the three main UK Departments (DFID, FCO and MOD) tasked with creating it.⁷

The politically awkward birth of the PRT and its effect on Departmental sensibilities tended to preclude measured examination of the underlying concept, which - if properly executed - appeared to provide an operational capacity-building framework of unassailable logic and improved efficiency, and one consistent with development doctrine. Its core tenets were that the PRT should be multi-national, reflecting the Coalition's composition in the region; that it should be civil-led, but bind both civil and military actors; that it should incorporate all main players in a single practical and - so far as possible - doctrinal construct; and that it should follow a plan agreed by these major stakeholders in full consultation with the Iraqis. In these aims, many of the persistent problems faced by the Allies in Iraq three years post-intervention were implicit: that key Coalition stakeholders were neither integrated nor even adequately coordinated; that the civil-military relationship, particularly, was not just inefficient but often at cross-purposes;⁸ that no over-arching plan had been articulated by HMG; and that these deficiencies, in aggregate, impeded progress to the point at which, taken with a steady and marked deterioration in the security climate,⁹ overall failure in Iraq appeared possible.¹⁰

The reluctance to weigh fully the implications of this new initiative for UK interests appeared the more illogical given the demonstrably fragmentary and ill-coordinated British effort of the time. Work on key areas such as governance, rule of law, economy and infrastructure was ostensibly divided between the three UK Departments: the FCO oversaw political policy and aspects of the rule of law, and DFID governance, infrastructure and aspects of economy. While security in its narrowest sense fell unequivocally to the UK-led Multi-National Division (SE) [MND-SE], the Division also carried out governance, infrastructure, and key aspects of the rule of law. Confusion hence existed on the ground about how these efforts meshed, where each properly stopped and the other began, and - most crucially - who exercised final responsibility, and

⁷ The UK FCO Consul General in Basra told a PRT Deputy in March '06, for example, that he 'wanted nothing to do with it' (the PRT). DFID's Basra representative saw the MOD as the 'senior partner' in the venture; while the latter saw the oft-touted 'civilian-led' PRT as a predominantly civilian affair. MND SE meanwhile pushed for a Memorandum of Understanding that sought to prescribe the Team's remit.

⁸ The cyclical disbursement of substantial sums of U.S. Commanders' Emergency Response Program (CERP) funds, for example, tended to encourage short-term and rapid military expenditure in a manner that precluded the proper exercise of nascent Iraqi governance structures at provincial level.

⁹ The increasingly constrained security climate forced daylight helicopter flights between Basra airport and Palace generally to cease in May 2006; and the use of civilian armoured 4 WD vehicles in Basra city followed suit in November 06.

¹⁰ However the word 'failure' might ultimately be defined. For background see '11-19 February 2006 Iraq Visit Report: Establishment of Basra Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT)', 19 February 2006.

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who was in charge. Responsibilities overlapped or failed to meet, objectives were unclear, timelines inconsistent with one another and leaders transient.¹¹

The central plank of the PRT concept was it was designed to incorporate or replace pre-existing Departmental structures rather than merely duplicate them, and to entwine, integrate (and supplement) existing effort; and to make sense of the PRT whole, each constituent player had therefore to cede ground and influence for the utilitarian good of 'HMG' - the major regional player in the SE - and its partners. But this, in the curious absence of central and *supra*-Departmental direction, proved a painful and protracted business as consultants negotiated the PRT concept forward piece-meal with the very Departments who had just employed them to carry it out; while the latter, palpably reluctant to be in Iraq and apparently concerned that the PRT might further ensnare them, largely shunned responsibility and hoped that another Department would assume it. Yet a UK-led PRT clearly could not succeed as a concept unless the UK assumed a substantial part of the burden; and tensions hence arose between Departments who had either significantly under-estimated or ignored the implications of formally establishing an inter-agency approach, and a PRT unavoidably cast in the role of *demandeur* if it were to implement the programmes assigned to it.

What became rapidly clear as PRT staff and assets began to assemble in Spring 2006 was that, in the absence of this unequivocal support, the Team's very scope and breadth of composition made it an orphan; conceived as a multi-national, inter-agency mechanism, it lacked an obvious counterpart in theatre and in capitals, and hence a forum for the broad-based and forward-thinking policy decisions it required to prosper. Its partners in theatre, as members of government Departments, were motivated almost entirely by Departmental imperatives and policies; and few were in Iraq long enough to take a broader view. The PRT thus spent much of its time arguing for its own existence with an ever-changing cast of people, and in administrative dispute with Departments that were neither minded nor configured to assist.

From this single important misjudgement – dropping a complex cross-Departmental body with a two-year development plan into the existing and somewhat haphazard mosaic of British effort without recognising that the one must, logically, integrate with the other – flowed the bulk of the other difficulties that loomed in the reporting period, as a plethora of largely autonomous Departmentally-sponsored systems, locked in unwanted embrace with a nascent PRT, vied with one another – unwittingly or otherwise - for political visibility, facilities, staff, money, and scarce transport resources.

Creating the PRT required, in short, a deal of prior homework about the manner in which the UK and its partners conducted its Iraqi business – how they planned, operated, and reported; and, above all, how best to conjoin civil-military effort. This was not done and one can only speculate as to why. Among the causes is probably operational *naiveté* – a broad lack of operational experience of mounting an integrated effort in Whitehall despite the experience of other theatres where similar principles had applied. A second is,

¹¹ The ten-month period examined in this paper saw three Consul-Generals, three Divisional commanders, three heads/acting Heads of DFID (South), and three Brigade commanders in Basra. (UK staff only).

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perhaps, best described as ‘departmentalism’. Each Department resembled Greek city-states: surprisingly autonomous, with their own discrete theologies, rituals and routines; and one or two appeared to have their own foreign policy. None appeared to see a causal link between the situation in Basra and decisions taken, perhaps because none had been charged with the role of long-term and comprehensive analysis; and, despite a clear deterioration by any measure in the situation in SE Iraq, external advice tended to be drawn upon only reluctantly. A third was undoubtedly the fact that the PRT was seen as an American creation – actually an imposition; and one that the British, who perhaps felt implicitly criticised, were initially minded to consider as a short-lived political gesture of limited practical utility.

Speculative these root causes may be; but the key deficiency in HMG effort in SE Iraq, whatever the rationale, was quite clear. It was the business of ownership – no single *locus* of responsibility in Whitehall had been identified to embody integrated effort of this kind; and no over-arching theatre authority existed to steward Departmental effort, despite an abundance of empirical evidence that transient and *ad hoc* approaches were not working.¹² A mere aggregation of determinedly minimalist Departmental policies proved no substitute for an integrated effort, and could not alone amount to a comprehensive approach.

Planning and Implementation

Among the key problems of 2006 was that HMG lacked an over-arching campaign plan for SE Iraq that included all major actors - whether civil or military - ascribed objectives to them, and measured progress against time. Rather, each Department and agency had its own ‘plan’; and this was particularly the case with the UK-led Division. A wide variety of initiatives was underway: police mentoring, police training, capacity-building in prisons; governance initiatives in Basra and the other three provinces of SE Iraq; infrastructure projects; economic programmes; media campaigns; political work; intelligence gathering; and so on – the list is merely illustrative. While coordination between each would occur, it varied in quality and frequency; and each reported discretely up separate chains to Departments, where staff members or teams would effectively ‘run’ this strand of effort *in absentia*. Given that no theatre forum existed in which such information might be shared, collated and policy set, British effort tended to occur as a scattered archipelago of endeavour, islands in which staff worked hard - and sometimes bravely- but without reference to the whole.

Indeed, there *was* no definable ‘whole’. Lacking a template for action based on comprehensive, regular and over-arching analysis, British effort lacked clear goals and particularly a matrix of interlocking objectives that amounted to broad strategy; and without these, progress became impossible to define or quantify except by brandishing statistics that, without context, were logically meaningless – of money spent, police trained, schools painted, conferences held. British effort resembled a scattered flotilla of vessels, whose principal common characteristic was that they had put to sea. Each vessel’s crew and its sponsors had set views about course and speed, and manoeuvred

¹² As though the UN’s 1999 intervention in Kosovo had been undertaken with the four ‘pillars’ of OSCE, UN, EU and UNHCR but without a UNSRSG.

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accordingly; but no more detailed instructions for the flotilla existed, and no convoy commander had been appointed.

This operational deficiency and the confusion it engendered made the simplest thing very difficult: requests for staff and other resources, for example, could not be easily justified because that justification must necessarily be subjective - no over-arching plan existed against which to measure them. As the security situation deteriorated, Basra Palace was subject to increasing levels of rocket and mortar attacks. Understandably anxious for the welfare of its staff, the Foreign Office would ask at intervals each team of experts – Police, Prisons, PRT and the like – to justify its presence in an over-crowded compound. Each, predictably, fought their corner using necessarily subjective argument. A comprehensive plan would have subordinated existing effort to a single template of objectives; weighted and prioritized activity; created savings by eliminating duplication; and allowed scarce strategic resources – space and transport assets – to be slaved efficiently to national intent. Risky vehicle journeys into the city were additionally assessed on whether they were ‘mission essential’ – but no clear mission had been articulated. The effect of existing work could not be quantified because mechanisms to do so had either been created and ignored, or not created at all.

This policy gap affected all strands of effort, though not equally; and proved particularly awkward for an multi-national inter-agency PRT tasked with developing a two year plan for governance, rule of law, infrastructure and economy because the team’s ambit was sufficiently broad to demand substantive analysis and direction, and to make duplication with existing work inevitable if structures and methods were not altered to accommodate its presence.¹³ The idea that the team would merely create its own strategy in these key areas and pursue it regardless was absurd.

The problem proved more deep-rooted even than this. No integrated UK plan for SE Iraq existed in 2006 because, as previously noted, no properly integrated structure at the requisite level existed to create one. It was not clear who was in charge; rather, the three principal HMG Departments existed in awkward condominium with one another. This absence of a theatre decision-making body constituted to review events - and set policy - was a surprising gap in British capability three years post-manoeuvre war, given the priority accorded to ‘succeeding’ in Iraq; and its effect was to encourage an essentially *ad hoc* and cellular approach. ‘All hands’ meetings took place daily in the British Consulate in Basra, but they tended to be used for security and welfare purposes and their very breadth precluded policy discussion; and the Divisional commander would meet at irregular intervals with the Consul-General, but without representative staffs present. Statistically it was unlikely that either would have been in theatre longer than six months, or have worked in Iraq before; and the inherent dangers of this were clear. There was simply no SE theatre forum in which branch heads - civil and military - reported on

¹³ These were the timelines and areas of effort assigned by the U.S. National Coordination Team, and with which FCO-MOD-DFID had agreed.

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developments, analysed their import, and took decisions;¹⁴ ironically, it is a common feature of daily life in British Embassies. Departments continued to operate departmentally, and would rarely consult externally, preferring to formulate policy in-house even where it demonstrably affected a wider majority. This logically meant that decisions were often taken without access to the salient facts; or that decisions required were not taken because there was no process by which that requirement could be recognised.

The Southern Iraq Steering Group (SISG) - comprising CG, Divisional Commander, DFID Office, Chief Police Advisor, PRT and U.S. and Danish Offices - was created in mid-2006 (after lobbying by the PRT)¹⁵ - in order to become that forum; but it became rapidly clear after initial meetings that the underlying *malaise* concerning direction persisted - it had no plan to steer and hence no binding purpose, becoming by default a briefing meeting in which each present briefed on 'their' portfolios rather than subscribing to a unitary view.

Particularly problematic was distinguishing between 'civil' and 'military' matters, largely because the roles of each had not been properly delineated. Consul-General, General, Brigadier alike would, for example, meet the Iraqi Governor of Basra at intervals, and generally without conferring; and this was also the case with the Basra Province Council. Division, PRT and DFID all 'did' Governance; and all three had some responsibility - whether mandated or assumed - for infrastructure. The PRT had a measure of responsibility for Rule of Law, but no authority over what remained an FCO portfolio. It appeared that no-one at all was yet 'doing' Economy when the PRT was established; though all agreed with the notion that employment generation was of central importance, particularly given the effectiveness with which the Sadrist military wing had co-opted the angry poor.¹⁶ Division had a media plan but it was military only. Each component advertised its 'successes' - a subjective quantity - for largely UK domestic political purposes, although it was clear that true success could accrue only to a UK whole. Meanwhile, all reported on generally incompatible communications systems to 'their' civil servants in London; who then issued instructions to 'their' teams and organisations. Reporting of all kinds proliferated but was rarely shared.

It appeared unlikely that this approach would prove the most effective in addressing a situation in Iraq of burgeoning danger and complexity; indeed, it had already failed over the years since sovereignty particularly to secure the tangible evidence of 'eye-catching' and 'iconic' advances in Basra which London craved, and demanded more regularly as the prospect of a 2007 hand over to Provincial Iraqi Control (PIC) in Basra approached.

¹⁴ The Southern Iraq Donor Group (SIDG) was a UN-led gathering of donors that met irregularly and was limited to governance issues, but was a forum for information exchange rather than policy formulation. These largely ceased after the UN's departure in Summer 2006.

¹⁵ Specifically in the PRT Cabinet Office and Departmental paper '*Basra Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT): Challenges and Opportunities*', 17 May 2006 and in the 22 May 2006 Cabinet Office meeting that followed.

¹⁶ It appeared that no economic study of Basra had been carried out since the dissolution of the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) in mid-2004.

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The opportunity to address some of these difficulties arose in late summer '06 with the 'Better Basra Action Plan'. Initially an FCO-driven Whitehall call for high-visibility projects, it was re-worked in theatre by Consulate and PRT staff to become a more valuable document – a matrix of activities and goals that sought to encompass much of the breadth of civilian effort. Led by the Basra Consulate, it foresaw seven 'Pillars' of effort and ascribed leads: Political (FCO), Security (MND SE), Governance (PRT), Rule of Law (PRT), Economy (PRT), Infrastructure (PRT) and Media (FCO). The plan profited both by the presence of a PRT sufficiently broad-based that 4 of the 7 coordination lead functions might be allocated to it; and by the fact that the PRT had already submitted a detailed plan comprising these four key pillars to the NCT and London in May 06, and was hence well-placed to assist.¹⁷

MND SE had separately concluded that a new security plan - 'Salamanca' - was required for Basra to arrest a steady increase in violence, and particularly to take action against the Sadrist military arm. Typically, this planning process and 'Better Basra' had been initiated in parallel. It was agreed *post-facto* that the two plans - civilian and military - would merge. 'Salamanca' would become the security pillar of 'Better Basra', aimed at delivering an environment conducive to the implementation of the remaining six. The newly-formed Southern Iraq Steering Group (SISG) would steward the overall effort.

Yet substantial tensions between the two sponsoring systems remained, because no merger of this kind can function without the creation of a system to underpin it. Cultures differed substantially; planning and decision-making processes were dissimilar; communications systems were incompatible; and the capacity and resources of the military dwarfed those of the civilian component. Indeed, the military's staff resources were always such that civilian aspects – including the key function of civil authority - risked being submerged altogether. No foundation existed on which to build a complex joint structure - particularly between two groups at 15 miles distance, bridged only by a frail air-link. Questions of fundamental importance remained. What were Britain's core objectives in the SE, how were they to be achieved and when?¹⁸ What were the proper limits of action for civil and military components of the British effort? What improvements to British method were deemed necessary given UK's experiences since Iraq's re-assumption of sovereignty in 2004? What processes were required to satisfactorily mesh the range of disparate effort that characterised the Coalition's endeavours in 2006? These questions were not so much unanswered as unasked; perhaps because no single part of the British effort had been mandated with that responsibility.

Iraqi reluctance to endorse a security plan that appeared to target Shi'ia militia forced 'Salamanca' to mutate in order to gain Iraqi Prime Ministerial sanction; and to become, not the muscular security template that allowed the implementation of 'Better Basra', but 'Sinbad', a civil action plan predicated on short-term assistance to Basra's districts, and the expenditure of large quantities of CERP money on high-visibility projects such as date-palm planting, and other means of temporary employment generation. Its political and economic impact in Basra was arguably over-sold at the time and remains hard to

¹⁷ The NCT, and - separately- FCO, DFID and MOD, reviewed the plan and agreed it.

¹⁸ This would naturally include long-range consideration about how best to prepare for PIC in Basra.

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gauge; but its effect on a Whitehall starved of positive developments in Iraq, and increasingly anxious about the hand-over of Basra, was striking. 'Sinbad', born of an initiative to provide the environment in which 'Better Basra's' initiatives might take place, and championed by an impatient military force on a six-month cycle, now supplanted the longer-term civilian plan it was first designed to enable; and short-term imperatives increasingly eclipsed the long-term institution-building for which the PRT had been constituted.¹⁹ The PRT was hence ill-suited for the task of creating the 'iconic' and 'eye-catching' initiatives which HMG sought as it overhauled the 'Better Basra' plan; and only limited economic or infrastructure work, particularly, had been commissioned by HMG in preceding years that might by now have created these visible advances.

Administrative Support - General

The absence of clarity regarding ownership of the PRT caused substantial administrative difficulty, for the PRT disposed of no assets of its own and no single Department believed itself responsible for it. From this, as elsewhere, the vast majority of the PRT's problems flowed.

Unlike other PRTs in Iraq, the UK-led team was assembled in large measure from existing effort – and at least half of the Danes, Americans and British who gathered had been working elsewhere in Basra compound beforehand. While this conferred valuable operational momentum and expertise on a new team it significantly complicated administration, because the team had to merge a wide array of existing contracts, leave schemes, equipment, security procedures and cultures while lacking any defined mandate to do so.

The administrative world which the PRT was thus forced to inhabit was always difficult, and verged in the early months on Kafka-esque. An FCO car in the Iraq support team at Kuwait airport would not pick up the inbound PCRU-contracted PRT office manager - or book her hotel - because she was 'not an FCO responsibility'. An harassed FCO Management Officer, asked for information on a PRT equipment order, responded that she 'did not have time to deal with another Department'. Military members of the team were not allowed in UK civilian armoured vehicles. Civilian members of the team were not allowed in UK military Land Rovers. The U.S. State Department Deputy was not allowed in either vehicle. Any member of the team, including the team leader, had a lower priority than any member of a UK government department for aircraft seats. Neither PRT military staff nor Danes were allowed in UK transit accommodation. Joint activity – the *raison d'être* of the PRT – was hence practically impossible. While the FCO agreed in mid-year that all PRT staff would be treated as FCO staff henceforth, regardless of origin, a subtle caste system nonetheless remained.²⁰

These essentially Departmental views of what one might assume to be a national effort created inefficiency. This was particularly the case in terms of the allocation of accommodation and other facilities. Such resources were scarce – and this encouraged an

¹⁹ Set out in Basra UK Cabinet Office and Departmental PRT TOR April 2006.

²⁰ Regarding, for example, the provision of accommodation and transport.

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essentially adversarial view among those components of the British effort required to bid against one another for them. Lacking a plan, these bids lacked rationale, and encouraged fragmentation; and lacking the requisite operational objectives encouraged an insular impulse rather than a more desirable unitary identity.

Staffing. Nowhere were the PRT's difficulties better illustrated than in the vexed issue of staffing. The MOD seconded seven staff at the outset,²¹ though none were from the British Division. DFID seconded two consultants.²² The FCO seconded no-one. Those strands of British effort that the PRT was designed to help unify hence remained largely outside the team's confines. This was particularly true of MND SE.

The manner in which the PRT was gathered constrained the formation of a unitary team. In the British case, for example, the commercial company 'Enterplan' fielded the bulk of consultants for DFID; which in turn seconded them into the PRT. Perhaps understandably, the consultants that made up the team tended to look to either or both of their original employers for guidance and recourse; and this divided loyalty persisted because UK Departments, upon whom the PRT concept had largely been forced, were lukewarm about the idea and seconded none of their civil servants into the Team, preferring to retain separate Departmental structures. This made the creation of a distinct PRT 'brand' difficult.²³ It also made dealing with cases of misconduct complex because it was unclear where responsibility for a consultant properly lay, and there existed no defined procedures. While this undoubtedly exposed companies such as 'Enterplan' to risk - after all, it was they who were contractually bound to individuals - it also allowed them undue influence in theatre and allowed the possibility that conflicts of interest might arise. In the only instance of the period in which misconduct proceedings were initiated these difficulties became obvious.

The PRT consisted, at peak, of staff on seven different kinds of contract. DFID consultants were, for example, variously recruited to terms of six weeks on, two weeks off; four weeks on, two weeks off; and three weeks on and two weeks off. UK military staff, variously, arrived for three months *en bloc* and departed in the same manner; or for six months with an intervening two-week break. A number of PCRU staff were on single 8 week contracts; and others worked 'back to back'. PRT teams such as economy and infrastructure were necessarily composed of a range of such contracts; and the cumulative effect of managing these leave schemes, together with a range of other frictions, was to make the maintenance of momentum almost comically difficult.

The sheer throughput of staff exacerbated this difficulty. This tended to be because parent agencies and departments tended to move 'their' people in and out of theatre without reference to PRT management, with none feeling a sense of responsibility to the PRT 'whole'.

²¹ Three of whom were regular soldiers and the rest reservists.

²² Increased to 5 in Autumn 2006.

²³ 'Enterplan' consultants were encouraged to brand their work with a company rather than PRT logo.

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PRT staff varied widely in calibre and disposition. Some clearly found service in Iraq stressful. One or two were demonstrably unsuitable for team endeavour or lacked cultural sensitivity. While the four-day UK Hostile Environment (HEFAT) course satisfies the minimum security requirements for theatres such as Iraq, the rigours of the kind of implementation with which the PRT, for example, was tasked, demand an enhanced training and selection procedure, together with individual profiling to assess suitability. A regular reporting and performance review procedure should also be instituted.

The Post Conflict Reconstruction Unit (PCRU) contribution of core staff such as a communications and IT expert and office manager proved invaluable.

Reporting and communications. It is worth re-iterating the obvious truth that integrated operations are difficult without integrated communications; and doubtless the provision of such hardware, when it comes, will make unitary endeavour a deal easier. In its absence, it is nonetheless clear that no inter-agency body can exist in isolation either intellectually or administratively from the bodies it purports to represent, and that communications systems, reporting and procedures are hence key to undertakings of this kind. Such systems, however, depend overwhelmingly on human culture and procedure rather than on electronics.

In this matter of sharing information, the PRT ascended a number of false crests. It was clear that British effort would be made more efficient by a plan and a body to steer it. On establishing the one and convening the other, it was clear that their formation would inexorably demand joint working and joint reporting; but that culture, habits, discrete experience and Departmental theology now tended to form the primary obstacles to achieving unitary effect. Departmental tensions are neither new nor distinctly British, but their effect in SE Iraq was notable. Access to communications systems in this environment would alone change little – the key was to be involved in Departmental policy debate, and to help shape and unify it through demonstration of the efficacy of the PRT concept. The best way of achieving this would have been to leaven the PRT with civil service staff, who would thereby import their systems and social networks, ensure their interests were represented, that reporting of the kind they sought was implemented, and perhaps most importantly, lend credibility to the enterprise in Departmental minds. This may have made the business of bidding for communications systems easier, but, more importantly, might have proved effective in breaking down the Departmental approach that lay at the heart of most of the PRT's problems.

Finance. The PRT's operating costs were jointly financed by the MOD, FCO and DFID. PCRU's ability to finance the PRT in its early months while this was resolved was a valuable tool, and the subsequent arrangement worked well. However, accounting procedure was unwieldy. The Team was required to order its equipment through the Management Office of the FCO-led Consulate, who held the Team's account and ran it. It would be preferable to have established the team as a self-standing business unit charged with running its own account, and this would also have reduced the work-load on Consulate staff.

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Conclusion

The UK has espoused the 'whole of government' or 'Comprehensive' approach for years and regularly exercises its function. This review of the 2006 operations of the UK-led Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) in SE Iraq illustrates the disparity between theory and its practise; and underlines anew the principle that there cannot be coherence without over-arching control. HMG lacked an integrated plan, and a single line of authority to prosecute it. The PRT could not but illustrate these fundamental deficiencies because it required both to operate; and mere aggregation of disparate Departmental postures provided no substitute. This vacuum had substantial consequences for the structure and function of the PRT, and made integrated planning and execution of longer-range institution-building – the role for which the Team was constituted - virtually impossible. 'PRT' is no more than shorthand for integrated effort; and it is HMG's ability to undertake this that is accordingly reviewed.

Ironically, it was 'HMG' itself that appeared to be missing in SE Iraq in 2006. The PRT's partners were, overwhelmingly, individual Departments; and the Team was forced to negotiate separately with each. This, in the absence of theatre consensus or the plan that might have substituted for it, proved particularly burdensome; Iraq, too, was an unpopular cause, and Departments feared the PRT might further embroil them. It was, in the end, American pressure that forced Departments to create the PRT, an apparently unitary impulse to which none genuinely subscribed; and, as the Team assembled with such difficulty and that American pressure diminished, so the support implicit in these Departmental commitments diminished with it. No UK *supra*-Departmental authority intervened.

In its stead the PRT created its own policy and plans - under difficult administrative conditions and in the face of some hostility - in support of a two-year development mandate. This was revised in early 2007 by an HMG in pursuit of 'iconic' and 'eye-catching' projects of political value which, lacking the investment and longer-term operational posture that might rationally have produced them, may yet prove elusive.

HMG's effort in SE Iraq has so far failed to achieve its potential; and this shortcoming springs particularly from the fragmentary nature of its application and damagingly limited planning horizons. It is tempting to ascribe this simply to the lack of an over-arching plan, and the objectives and procedures that might underpin it; but these deficiencies, though grave, are the effects of a lack of what one might term 'central' control - in theatre and in Whitehall - and not the cause. This created, by default, over-reliance upon Departments, who, animated predominantly by Departmental imperatives, are not best configured for the 'national' endeavour of broad-spectrum institution building. This is particularly true of theatres such as Iraq and Afghanistan, where the civil-military partnership is of such central importance and the political stakes so high.

An integrated approach cannot be pursued in isolation – this is arguably what the PRT was forced to attempt. A unitary posture is necessarily indivisible: logic demands that its successful prosecution requires an integrated structure - a braided rope - that runs vertically and unbroken through the decision-making and analysis cycle. The strands of

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this rope include *unitary* analysis, planning, execution, reporting and administration; and hence, clearly defined *supra*-Departmental focal points in theatre and in Whitehall - nested among complementary and bespoke structures and the procedures to fit - are required for these purposes in order to meld national effort. Where these are missing, the efforts and activities of a great many staff in theatre – consultants and civil servants alike – will be fatally hampered, absorbed by the substantial frictional losses and internecine politicking inherent in an inefficient system. State-building undertakings tend to be formidably difficult, time sensitive and unforgiving of error – and an unvarnished Departmental system is ill-suited to its demands.

It is thus difficult to agree with the argument that integrated approaches are best led by Departments, if only because the evidence from SE Iraq appears to suggest the opposite: that where Departments lead no genuine integration is possible, reducing efficiency, prematurely eroding UK power - political and military – and tarnishing its prestige. The solution lies in formal study of British procedures and practices in light of present performance. The question is simple enough: what changes are required to HMG's conflict architecture, systems and procedures in light of our experiences in Iraq and elsewhere? The answer will require detailed analysis and reflection. Without risking pre-judgement, the need for a more *dirigiste* Cabinet Office appears self-evident, strengthened for its task by specialist staff; and if these are to come from the Post Conflict Reconstruction Unit (PCRU) or other body, the argument that such units cannot do their job while embedded in Departments must have considerable force.

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