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cc: David Manning

IRAQ: MILITARY BRIEFING

As requested, this is a full note of the Prime Minister's 80 minute meeting with Geoff Hoon, CDS and Rob Fry this afternoon. David Manning and I sat in.

Baghdad

Fry: RG moving around, in small packets of eg 3-4 tanks, many in built-up areas. So will be more difficult for us to win conventional land battle. Better to take them on piecemeal than punching through them to Baghdad.

PM: Iraq turning its army into a guerilla outfit. US will succeed in cleaning them up in a methodical way.

Fry: There will be an extended period with not much visibly going on.

Hoon: Street-fighting loses us our technological edge over the RG. And breaking up RG allows Saddam to put his people alongside RG leaders.

CDS: Breaking up the RG leads to weaker C2.

Fry: This is buying Saddam time.

PM: This is "time-resolvable" (ie it might take longer, but Coalition will win in the end). We must adjust media expectations this week. How long will it take to get to Baghdad?

Fry (privately): 10-14 days.

PM: How many troops in Baghdad?

Fry: 5000-6000 SRG.

CDS: plus some RG will retreat to Baghdad.

PM: The guerilla-style response is time-resolvable, provided the guerillas don't win Iraqi popular support. What do we know about public opinion in Baghdad?

Fry: Baghdad more complicated than Basra (ethnic mix, vestiges of regime) but Baghdad Shias may rise up, and at some point tide from other cities turning will become overwhelming. But weight of repression of the Iraqi people far greater than we had expected.

Iraqi regular army

PM: Where is it?

Fry: 60% next to the Kurdish Autonomous Zone, which we can disregard because the Kurds are "fixing" it. More in E Iraq, providing an indirect threat to the Coalition rear - Coalition attacking it by air and ground.

Basra

PM: What are the 2000-4000 thugs in Basra doing?

Fry: Patrolling the streets, intimidating and firing at people, executing some in an arbitrary system of martial law.

CDS: But in lower numbers now.

PM: How long to tipping point?

CDS: At least four weeks.

PM: Huge strategic importance of Basra. What would it take to do it quicker? Would double the number of troops help?

CDS and Fry: No.

Fry: US don't see strategic importance of Basra the way you do. US think main role in south is to hold the oil fields and Um Qasr, and isolate Basra. They don't see the causal linkage between Basra and Baghdad.

DM: Basra is vital for hearts and minds.

PM: Yes, symbolic acts are important as our strategy is steady advance not shock and awe.

Fry: Route 6 into Basra is now a one way valve, ie Iraqi thugs etc can leave but not enter.

CDS: We have taken down the radio transmitter and are now broadcasting on medium wave. Our message now, different from when we were worrying about catastrophic success, is: rise up.

PM: Humanitarian situation in Basra?

Fry: People probably have a month's food from stockpiling. Water was always limited and of poor quality. So situation is not hugely worse than before.

PM: In each town taken by coalition, we need a sense that it can be run differently and better than before.

Fry: Yes, we have experience of doing that from the Balkans.

Overall campaign

PM: Steady advance.

