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DG OpPol

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OP TELIC – LESSONS FOR THE SECRETARIAT

1. I have been meaning for at least a year to scribble some thoughts on TELIC lessons from a narrowly secretariat perspective, and the pressure of impending departure has finally driven fingers to keyboard. What follows is of course opinionated and indeed biased. It may also be of limited use as the world will have moved on by the time of the next major operation, which in itself will be different. But I'm not sure the 10-year rule holds good any more, so this may not be completely out-of-date by the time that operation comes round...

Planning and deployment phase - general

2. There has been a persistent sense that Ministers dithered over planning and deployment decisions through summer/autumn 2002. This is of course unfair, for several reasons:

- No hard "start-by" date. Indeed, US indicative dates kept shifting to the right, and if Ministers had acted instantly on every piece of advice we should have regretted it later.
- The Department and PJHQ were, in any case, pretty rubbish at providing advice on timelines. Despite persistent requests from the private office, we never managed to provide an analysis in terms of lead-times and inter-dependencies rather than calendar dates.
- The political and diplomatic position. When I interviewed SofS for the lessons process, his view was that if we had started all our preparations as early as some wanted us to, we would have had the best-prepared non-operation in history, because the Government would have lost Parliament.

3. Nonetheless, as debate over the possible deployment of HQ ARRC showed, there is a consciousness now that OP TELIC was in some important respects under-prepared, particularly in terms of logistics and (to a lesser extent) kit, but also in terms of training and acclimatisation, notice given to

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reservists, etc. We were also in many ways under-prepared for Phase IV: although there were other factors at play here, I reckon that the Government to a large extent constrained itself.

4. So the lessons are:

- It always takes longer than you think (whatever "it" is), so start as early as you can
- To get it right, you need to involve all the relevant communities from an early stage. LIMDIS circulations don't work anyway because the organisation is full of leakers, and they are usually too senior to be sacked
- Ministers therefore need to be as upfront as possible, as early as possible, about the fact that we are planning and preparing.

These are lessons for the Department as a whole, but important for the secretariat as the main mechanism for advising Ministers. If I were involved at the outset of another major operation, I would urge Ministers to follow this approach, and point to the year-long TELIC inquiry processes (HCDC, PAC, etc) as an example of what you can expect. Of course, to be able to do this Ministers need to have No 10 and the Treasury onside.

Holes in planning

5. In general, it seems to me that the organisation is not bad at packaging forces and deploying them, or at planning the conduct of operations in the round. However, there do seem to be a few Cinderella areas:

- Reservists: PJHQ just don't do reservists. Thus the TELIC 1 mobilisations were handled by a combination of Sec(Iraq), DMO (co-ordinating with DNO and DAO) and DRFC (bless them). We are now on TELIC 5, and nothing has changed, except that Joint Commitments now cover the DMO/DNO/DAO role. This just seems anomalous. The reason for PJHQ's lack of grip can't be that the FLCs are so good at dealing with reservists: LAND somehow forgot about 3,000 of them for TELIC 1, and more recently started mobilising another lot without any authority at all. Shambolic.
- PWs: Policy on this was only made very late in the day (about the day before the war, I think). Part of the problem seemed to be that nobody was sure whose job it was.
- Casualties: handling/reporting/NOK procedures/repatriation. Ditto, except that some elements were still undecided even after the end of major combat operations.

6. A common thread here is Personnel. My strong impression was and is that the Personnel world is simply not geared for operations, and for that

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matter the operational community isn't geared for personnel. This has also been borne out during Phase IV, as all the aggravation over investigations indicates. There is a whole raft of issues here which need thrashing out well in advance of any future big operation.

Death by planning

7. Perhaps the down-side of our strengths as an organisation is a tendency to be a bit too clever, to see too many options, to over-intellectualise and to over-complicate. The excruciating saga over the so-called Northern Option was a case in point. We convinced ourselves that this was the best role for our land forces, and (therefore?) that it was "strategically essential". (The other thing we said was "strategically essential" was a coherent plan for Phase IV: how did we manage to go to war without the only two things we said we must have? I cringe at some of the submissions I signed.) It became apparent pretty quickly that we had painted ourselves into a corner, but we were incapable of changing our mind without the catalyst of SofS going to Ankara some months later. Those around at the time will remember what a blight this uncertainty cast on our planning (and consequently how it abolished Xmas 2002!). So:

- When we have the chance to choose our role, we should choose early, keep it simple and get on with planning and preparation.
- Adding "branch plans" later on may be OK (indeed difficult to avoid). But anyone who claims to have identified "strategic" arguments for doing something fundamentally different should be taken out and shot.

"Submission Command"?

8. There used to be a lot of harrumphing from some military quarters that everything got held up by the need (which they would deny) to submit to SofS (indeed, this is the only thing CGS has ever said to me). As submitter-in-chief, I'm obviously very biased. But I firmly believe this was an urban myth. Nine times out of ten, we managed to submit within a few hours of the relevant Op COS meeting, and SofS usually responded very quickly (though No 10 sometimes took longer). What we should be asking ourselves is why everything had to go through Op COS first. I know I'm a cracked record on this subject, but I don't see the justification for this stately process, which gives the single-Service COS the prerogative of the harlot. I am a firm believer in O Groups. What the CDS of the day does to square his Chiefly colleagues is a matter for consenting adults behind closed doors. It should not waste everybody else's time.

9. It is also worth noting that there is a need for an audit trail. This may not be obvious at the time, but one becomes very thankful for it when dealing with later post-mortems. The Butler Review is a case in point: there is no doubt that the documentary trail we have provided has served us well and

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created the impression that MOD (unlike some parts of Whitehall) handles these issues with the seriousness they deserve.

HNS

10. We were incredibly lucky with TELIC. We only settled on the land package on 17 January 2003, and needed to start moving it on 20 January. We only approached the Kuwaitis on 18 January.

11. We were also pretty lucky with the air package (except in Turkey), despite the combination of (self-inflicted) short notice and host nation

A lesson from this is the importance of a coherent approach, led by the relevant bilateral relations secretariat. Confusion arose when individual RAF officers in various parts of the system took it upon themselves to have a go at tasking the embassies.

Legal Base

12. We all understand why the legal base was only clarified shortly before the war, although it was frustrating that the same base could have been identified several months earlier. Hopefully similar circumstances will not recur, but this was another major piece of uncertainty which afflicted ROE, IO, etc, almost down to the wire.

The war

13. From a Secretariat perspective, the most obvious thing (apart from the policy and planning holes that kept emerging in some of the less glamorous areas) was the insatiable demand for information. The respectable element of this was the need to make regular Parliamentary statements, often at very short notice; and to provide material for press conferences. This is an integral part of fighting a war in a Parliamentary democracy. But it is hard to overstate the number of vexatious and pointless requests ("exactly how many Iraqi tanks were in that column that just left Basrah?" was a No 10 classic). This in turn reflected the fact that the media almost always broadcast information before it reached the top of our own chain, even if they did so without understanding it or setting it in context.

14. I'm not sure what we can do about this. But I do think we need to look at whether deployed forces (and PJHQ) need to be provided with more people dedicated solely to the collection and reporting of information, including people who understand the way Ministerial/Parliamentary/media minds work. This may also be one area where the Head Office/PJHQ split falls down, by slowing the passage of information. The other issue, though, is accuracy, particularly for information that we want to release ourselves. It is amazing how often the first report from theatre turns out to be wrong (and the second, and the third...). I lost count of how many times we achieved control of Umm Qasr.

Post-war

15. As this is fresher in our minds, I won't harp on about it. The failings were : other parts of Whitehall than in MOD or PJHQ. But I do think we collectively devoted insufficient effort to it, and with insufficient urgency. It is inevitable that people dealing both with planning for a war and planning for the post-war will give priority to the former, which is always more pressing: personally I must confess that in Autumn 2002 anything to do with Phase IV was always the last task of the day, and the one most likely to slip into the next day, and so on.... The only way round this in my view is by creating a separate structure to focus specifically on Phase IV from an early stage.

16. From a secretariat perspective, the other issue I would flag up is the long-running and incredibly time-consuming backward-looking work – the lessons process, with external publications in July and December 2003; the HCDC inquiry running for a year from May 2003 (and another one just starting!); the PAC/NAO inquiry running from summer 2003 to January 2004 (and still to report); the Butler Review running from March to July this year. Until the Butlerites split off to join the Iraq Inquiries Team a few weeks ago, all this was absorbed by the secretariat including the Telic Review Team. In this sense we can expect to keep fighting the war for a good 12 months after the end of combat operations, and we need to staff ourselves accordingly.

StructuresWhitehall

17. One could write quite a long essay about this. But the points that struck me were:

- The lack of collective discussion for Phases I-III. The Cabinet Office did in fact do quite a lot to bring Home Depts into the loop on Phase IV, and was helpful on individual issues (eg, they arranged several meetings for me and others to brief OGDs and agencies affected by reservist mobilisation, such as Health, Home Office, NHS, ACPO, Fire Service, etc). They also ran daily meetings during the war, which helped a bit when we had issues to resolve with Home Depts (again usually Health and Home Office). But the more fundamental decision-making seemed to be handled in an incredibly informal style. It seems absurd that in the run-up to DESERT FOX the Cabinet Office was holding meetings almost daily and reporting to No 10 in writing after each one, yet nothing remotely similar happened for TELIC, despite the significant expansion of the staff there in the intervening years. I don't think the change in relationship between No 10 and the secretariat has helped in this respect.
- The lack of preparedness in the FCO. Many diplomats couldn't believe that it would ever come to war, and behaved accordingly. !

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think this is related to the point above: without proper collective discussion there is no way of ensuring that everybody is on the same page. The inclusion of FCO and other officials in various MOD meetings is a good thing, but not an adequate substitute.

- DFID. Oh dear, oh dear. No 10 allowed this to become a festering sore: for a long time we were not permitted to engage with DFID, at least in relation to Phase III. This also goes back to the need for the Government to be upfront about what it is doing. It was a pity, because DFID do have quite a lot to offer once one gets past the Guardian-reading pieties.
- The Treasury. By their standards, relatively helpful on preparations for Phase III, and the time and effort invested in regular briefings at official level seemed to pay off. But it is absurd to spend billions on a short, sharp war and then try to run an area the size of France with hardly two pennies to rub together. We don't necessarily help our own cause here. Once we are well down the planning route and the tea and medals are in sight, we are too keen to get on with the war to disturb Ministers with the unwelcome thought that we should not proceed further without setting aside large sums for reconstruction – just as we never quite pointed out that our "strategically essential" requirements had not been met. I reckon money has also been the biggest crippling factor in our efforts to exert any kind of influence on US decision-making.

18. Will the Post-Conflict Reconstruction Unit solve any of these problems? I am agnostic verging on sceptical, but in any case it all depends on top-level direction: we can shuffle the Whitehall deck-chairs any way we like, but that doesn't make policy decisions for us.

MOD/PJHQ

19. Coming to TELIC having been out of the policy/commitments swim for a while, I was astounded at the bottom-upness of the process. The Commitments staff produced many worthy and utterly uninformative pieces of paper, whilst most of the key decisions were based upon what CJO told Op COS about CENTCOM planning. As a process this raises some obvious questions. Once you have a bottom-up process, you are inevitably driven by bottom-up concerns. Planners of course want to begin nailing down the corners of the carpet, but this is difficult in the absence of clarity over timeframes at the political level. I think the circle can partly be squared, at a national level, by a degree of self-denial – ie, choosing our option early and keeping it simple – since this allows us to bound the uncertainties for planners without necessarily taking steps which are politically impossible. But self-denial will have to be learnt, since it clearly doesn't come naturally.

20. There was at times a similar bottom/top tension on the secretariat side. Although the personal relationships with J9 have been very good (I can only recall one serious case of handbags at dawn), it has not always been easy to

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work out where J9 end and we begin and vice versa. There have been occasions when PJHQ have submitted to Ministers on what are arguably strategic issues simply because CJO has insisted on their doing so; and there have been times when submissions have gone from them simply because we have refused to put our names to what we considered to be bad advice. Equally there were many times when we submitted something which PJHQ could just as well have submitted, simply because SofS' office would believe it if we said it.

21. So there is a degree of duplication here. On the whole, I don't think there is much alternative. We would need a much bigger Head Office secretariat if we were to absorb all J9's functions, and even if this were physically possible it would not work well because of the dislocation from the other PJHQ staffs. Equally, PJHQ would need a much bigger secretariat to absorb the Head Office functions, and this would not work well because of the dislocation not only from other Pol/Cts staffs but also from Ministers, OGDs and Parliament.

Head Office Secretariat

22. Now to be really parochial! The history, for context:

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