

SECTION 9.7

MAY 2008 TO OCTOBER 2009

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Introduction

1. This Section addresses:

- the conclusion of negotiations on the status of UK forces in Iraq;
- decisions on the drawdown and withdrawal of UK troops;
- the UK's objectives for its ongoing relationship with Iraq; and
- assessments of the UK's legacy, particularly in Basra and the South.

2. This Section does not address:

- the UK contribution to the reconstruction of Iraq and reform of its security sector, which are covered in Sections 10 and 12 respectively.

3. The Inquiry's conclusions in relation to the events described in this Section can be read in Section 9.8.

May 2008

4. On 1 May, at the request of the MOD, the Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC) assessed the strength of those groups and networks which had historically posed an immediate threat to Iraq's stability, and the extent to which the Iraqi Special Forces were ready to tackle those threats.¹

5. The JIC judged that nationalist Sunni insurgents no longer represented an immediate threat to Iraq's overall stability. Sectarian violence had subsided and, since the middle of 2007, many Sunni insurgents had refrained from attacking the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) and the Multi-National Force (MNF) in favour of working with them to resist Al Qaida in Iraq (AQ-I).

6. The JIC assessed that 70,000 Sunnis had joined MNF-sponsored security forces, known as "Sons of Iraq". The JIC judged that their motivation for doing so was "partly financial and partly born of a growing sense that AQ-I represents their most immediate threat – plus recognition that MNF cannot be defeated and will eventually leave Iraq anyway".

7. The JIC judged:

"Iranian-backed Jaysh al-Mahdi (JAM) Special Groups are likely to remain an immediate threat to the MNF. They are increasingly fragmented and are unlikely to have a strategic impact on stability in Iraq without the support of mainstream JAM. Unless faced with a common threat from ISF, the Gol or MNF, as recently in Basra and Baghdad, such support is unlikely."

¹ [JIC Assessment, 1 May 2008, 'Iraq Insurgency: The Hardest Nuts to Crack'](#).

8. In relation to AQ-I, the JIC assessed that it was failing to maintain its strategic impact and no longer represented the most immediate threat to Iraq's security, although it was "unlikely to be eradicated" and could re-generate without sustained military pressure.

9. The JIC assessed that the international threat from Iraqi Shia militias was "negligible".

10. In terms of tackling the threat, the JIC judged:

"ISF as a whole are in a much better position than a year ago. But their ability to defeat AQ-I and JAM Special Groups will depend heavily on their Special Forces, which will rely on MNF support for aviation, airborne surveillance and operational planning for some years."

11. Recent operations in Basra led the JIC to conclude that "significant problems" remained in the ISF's ability to tackle determined opposition alone:

"We assess their ability to successfully manage security outside Baghdad by the end of 2008, without MNF ground support will continue to be patchy and depend heavily on progress being made on national reconciliation and the maintenance of MNF-led security gains."

12. Mr Brown, Mr David Miliband (the Foreign Secretary), Mr Douglas Alexander (the International Development Secretary) and Mr Des Browne (the Defence Secretary), plus Air Chief Marshal Sir Jock Stirrup (the Chief of the Defence Staff), Mr Christopher Prentice (British Ambassador to Iraq), Mr Simon McDonald (Mr Brown's Foreign Policy Adviser) and Mr Matt Cavanagh (Mr Brown's Special Adviser) met General David Petraeus (Commanding General Multi-National Force – Iraq) and Ambassador Ryan Crocker (US Ambassador to Iraq) on 1 May.²

13. Mr Brown's Private Secretary for Foreign Affairs reported that Gen Petraeus had emphasised the political dynamic in Iraq as increasingly more important than the military. Mr Miliband explained that the challenge for the UK was to make the transition from a military strategy in the South to a political strategy for the whole of Iraq. In his view, provincial elections were the next key step.

14. The discussion moved to the Charge of the Knights (see Section 9.6), during which "swift US/UK action" had ensured the right outcomes, leaving JAM and other local militia on the back foot. Gen Petraeus considered that the next priority was support for Prime Minister Maliki's plan for Sadr City. ACM Stirrup described key planned UK actions in Basra and Gen Petraeus agreed that a clear division of labour existed.

15. Mr Alexander reported that the recent investment event in Basra (see Section 10.2) had been a success. Ambassador Crocker commented that there needed to be greater synergy between the Iraqi reconstruction fund and the Basra Development Commission.

²Letter Fletcher to Rimmer, 2 May 2008, 'Iraq: Prime Minister's Meeting with General Petraeus, 1 May'.

16. Summing up the discussion, Mr Brown said that the central UK focus would be accelerated training of the 14th Division, preparations for provincial elections, progress on handing control of Basra Airport to Iraqi control and economic reconstruction. Decisions on troop numbers would be taken in the context of completion of these tasks.

17. Mr McDonald produced a note on troop levels in Iraq for Mr Brown on 2 May.³ He advised that the UK would need to retain around 4,100 troops in southern Iraq for the next six months to complete the key tasks it had agreed. Since these were higher force levels than originally planned, the job of training the 14th Division should be completed a few months sooner than planned, in January 2009.

18. Mr McDonald wrote:

“We’ll need to think about how we assess 14 Div’s readiness; we do not want to leave this solely to the US; they may be tempted to use that responsibility to delay us.”

19. Mr McDonald advised that it should be possible to begin drawing down forces from January 2009 onwards. The MOD had identified 3,500 as the critical mass of troops, below which they could not provide force protection for themselves. The MOD did not favour handing over tasks piecemeal to the US before achieving key objectives, both because “this would look like the UK admitting it couldn’t get the key tasks done” and because the US had indicated that it would not have the capacity to take on additional tasks before the end of the year. Consequently:

“We should therefore aim for a rapid drawdown of combat forces in southern Iraq from 4,100 to a much smaller niche contribution over the first six months of 2009.”

20. Mr McDonald recommended a further statement to Parliament on force levels in Iraq before the summer Recess, without going into specific timescales or numbers. In the meantime, he would discuss the proposals with Mr Stephen Hadley, US National Security Advisor, as part of the process of “sensitising” the US to the UK’s plans.

21. In an email covering Mr McDonald’s advice, Mr Brown’s Private Secretary explained that Mr Cavanagh was “also doing some work to see whether the numbers can be pushed any further”.

22. Lieutenant General John Cooper, Senior British Military Representative – Iraq (SBMR-I), reported on 5 May that Gen Petraeus had returned to Iraq “content in that he has no difficulty with the UK national position and appreciates the reasons behind it”.⁴ He would look to the UK to “deliver on its commitment on MiTTing 14 IA Div [see Section 12.1], the BOC [Basra Operational Command] and on the economic line”. To achieve the last of these, Lt Gen Cooper suggested that the time had come for a “properly staffed Basra Office in Baghdad”.

³ [Email Fletcher to Brown, 2 May 2008, ‘Iraq Troop Numbers – Note from Simon’](#).

⁴ Minute Cooper to CDS, 5 May 2008, ‘SBMR-I’s Weekly Report (299) 5 May 08’.

23. Lt Gen Cooper also reported that Prime Minister Maliki had told Gen Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker that “he had to remove JAM/SG [Special Groups] from Sadr City now”. Lt Gen Cooper considered that the Charge of the Knights had created an inflated view of the effectiveness of the ISF and that consequently Prime Minister Maliki “may yet ignore further advice that mounting a major operation in Sadr City is not a good idea at this time”.

24. On 6 May, the British Embassy Office Basra reported that Charge of the Knights Phase VI had been completed, and Charge of the Knights VII had begun, focused on three districts of Basra, one of which had been a launch area for indirect fire.⁵ The British Embassy Office commented:

“The GoI continues to extend its writ over Basra, and there is a sense of nervous optimism in the city. But the Basrawis will have high expectations of immediate improvements in their daily lives to follow on from the improved security environment. The risk otherwise is that sections of the population will return to support for the militia. Former militia stronghold areas ... are faced with particular problems, like poor sanitation, resulting from years of little or no investment. The next few months will be critical in delivering this change – but it is hard to see how the Provincial Council will be able to respond adequately to the city’s needs.”

25. On 7 May, the British Embassy Office Basra reported taking part in the opening ceremony of the Jameat market in Basra, built on the site of the Serious Crime Unit HQ destroyed on Christmas Day 2006 (see Section 9.5).⁶

26. The British Embassy Office wrote:

- this (so far as collective memory serves) is the first time in over a year that a UK diplomat has gone into the city;
- nobody can remember when we last visited the Jameat, hitherto a JAM stronghold;
- ...
- this is the first visible UK/Iraqi project to be opened in the city since at least last summer.”

27. After Gen Petraeus’ return to Iraq, Major General Barney White-Spunner, General Officer Commanding Multi-National Division South-East (GOC MND(SE)), briefed Lieutenant General Lloyd Austin, Commanding General Multi-National Corps – Iraq (MNC-I), on how MND(SE) intended to deliver the required tasks.⁷ He reported “genuine

⁵ eGram 17550/08 Basra to FCO London, 6 May 2008, ‘Basra – Update 6 May’.

⁶ eGram 17723/08 Basra to FCO London, 7 May 2008, ‘Iraq: A New Market Opens in Basra’.

⁷ Minute White-Spunner to CJO, 8 May 2008, ‘GOC MND(SE) Weekly Letter – 8 May 2009’.

US commitment” to help with police reform and training, but the issue of who manned the border with Iran remained a difficult one:

“Our appreciation of the border is that we need to have a permanent presence on the main crossings, as unless these are controlled they will still offer the easiest passage for lethal aid ... that means we should man Shalamcheh and Sheeb, which we do not have enough people for.”

28. Maj Gen White-Spunner anticipated that Lt Gen Austin would accept that the UK could not be responsible for Maysan and that the US would provide the guard force at Sheeb. In return, they would look to the UK to provide a temporary cover at Shalamcheh, at least until the US construction work to create a more permanent base there was complete. Maj Gen White-Spunner commented:

“This will be painful, but I am inclined to agree to it as otherwise we will face an open border which is not in our interests, as it will allow an ingress of rockets from Iran which could negate much of what has been achieved in Basra and end up being fired at us here in the COB [Contingency Operating Base]. It is also very much in our interest to have responsibility for the Maysan border removed from us, as it is potentially much the most difficult to police.”

29. Maj Gen White-Spunner’s report also described “the end of large scale manoeuvre operations by ISF to clear Basra of militia”. Phase VII of Charge of the Knights met “limited resistance and low cache finds”, suggesting that the militias had fled.

30. Planning was also under way to “clear and search” the town of Al Qurnah, 70km north of Basra, to which many of the Basra JAM leaders were believed to have fled.

31. On 12 May, Lt Gen Cooper reported that in relation to Sadr City, Prime Minister Maliki “was dissuaded by Petraeus and Crocker from launching a premature major ground offensive”.⁸ Following negotiations between the Iraqi authorities and the Office of the Martyr Sadr (OMS), a peace deal was announced on 10 May, to come into effect the following day. The terms of the deal included:

- the right of the ISF to enter Sadr City (without coalition MiTTs in support);
- JAM producing maps and locations of Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs);
- the right of the Iraqi Government to conduct raids and arrests under warrant in pursuit of weapons;
- a cessation of IDF attacks on the International Zone;
- easier access into the area for emergency aid; and
- an acknowledgement that only the Iraqi Government and its security forces had the right to bear arms.

⁸ Minute Cooper to CDS, 12 May 2008, ‘SBMR-I’s Weekly Report (300) 12 May 08’.

32. Lt Gen Cooper reported that it was not clear to what extent the Special Groups had bought into the deal.

33. On 12 May, Mr Browne wrote to Mr Brown to report his visit to Basra the previous week.⁹ He agreed with the assessment in Mr Miliband’s letter of 29 April (see Section 9.6) that the Charge of the Knights had “created the platform for transition we were hoping for from General Mohan’s operations later in the year”.

34. To capitalise on the opportunity presented, Mr Browne considered that the UK must:

- help ensure that the “still fragile” security on the ground in Basra continued to improve;
- finalise agreement with the US over the division of military effort in MND(SE) over the next six months; and
- “agree a narrative of what happened and why, and get it into circulation quickly – not only here but in the US, where our reputation is undoubtedly tarnished”.

35. The medium term was “more complicated”. Military advice was that it would be difficult to fulfil the commitments agreed with the US – in particular mentoring 14 Division – while also making significant force level reductions before November. While Mr Browne agreed with Mr Miliband that the UK should aim to transfer the two-star command sooner rather than later:

“Our discussions so far with General Petraeus will have engendered a US assumption that we have agreed to retain command of MND(SE) at least for the next six months.”

36. Mr Browne continued:

“The key question implied by David [Miliband] is whether we intend to leave Basra this year, by mid 2009 or by the end of next year. We have prepared Washington for a significant further troop reduction after their elections but not, explicitly, for withdrawal ... we have the opportunity to be out by May 2009 ... if we are prepared to inform the President elect of our decision in November. Alternatively, we could negotiate an exit with the new Administration and ... be out at the end of 2009. Both risk compromising our relations with the incoming President but the former runs less chance of our being entangled in longer term commitments ...”

37. Mr Browne’s letter concluded by mentioning the need to resolve the future legal status of UK forces in Iraq after resolution 1790 (2007) expired, something about which he “remained concerned”. This had a direct bearing on the question of troop numbers

⁹ [Letter Browne to Brown, 12 May 2007 \[sic\], ‘Iraq’](#).

and role. In his view, it would be sensible for Ministers to confirm now that transition in 2008 was not an option:

“To do so would simplify military planning, allow us to concentrate on meeting our objectives in Basra, ease our relations with the US and remove the risk of being accused of misleading domestic audiences without prejudging when and how we make the transition in 2009.”

38. Mr Browne recommended that the Committee on National Security, International Relations and Defence (NSID) should commission the Iraq Strategy Group to produce a refined set of options for consideration the following month, together with a draft Parliamentary statement announcing the strategy to November and giving an indication of future possibilities.

39. In an Assessment dated 14 May, at the request of the FCO the JIC examined the impact of ISF operations against the JAM in Basra on Prime Minister Maliki, his government and the Sadrists.¹⁰ The JIC’s Key Judgements included:

“I. Prime Minister Maliki is enjoying broad political support following the success of Iraqi security forces’ (ISF) operations against the Jaysh al-Mahdi in Basra (the Charge of the Knights). Enthusiasm for dialogue on vital legislative issues has increased.

“II. Maliki ... still has many critics ...

“III. The Charge has significantly weakened JAM in Basra. Its disparate factions are unlikely to recover their dominance of Basra’s streets any time soon ...

“IV. ... Expectations in Basra are high. Maliki will need to deliver improvements in public services and job creation in weeks ... The same will apply in other places where the ISF take on JAM.”

40. In relation to the operation itself, the JIC judged that:

“Strong JAM resistance in the initial phases of the Charge exposed enduring weaknesses in the largely untested local ISF, though co-ordination improved as the operation progressed and more experienced Iraqi units from elsewhere performed significantly better. Targeted and sophisticated Multi-National Forces air support and assistance in command and control was also key to the eventual success of the Charge ...”

41. On 16 May, Maj Gen White-Spunner reported that the Deputy Commanding General of MNC-I, who had deployed to Basra during the Charge of the Knights, had left MND(SE), leaving behind a “strong detachment” of US forces.¹¹ Maj Gen White-Spunner

¹⁰ [JIC Assessment, 14 May 2008, ‘Iraq: the Charge of the Knights’.](#)

¹¹ Minute White-Spunner to CJO, 16 May 2008, ‘GOC MND(SE) Weekly Letter – 15 May 2008’.

commented that his presence in the South had been valuable, and that MND(SE) was already seeing the benefit of him being back in Corps headquarters, where he was helpfully ensuring that the MND(SE) perspective was better understood.

42. Having a substantial US presence in MND(SE) had helped UK forces to understand how to work with the US Corps system, but Maj Gen White-Spunner thought that MND(SE) was still not articulating its requirements as fluently as other divisions, and still failed to feature in many of the Corps daily statistics, which had a direct bearing on the allocation of resources. He commented: “We are all learning enthusiastically how to speak American, although the military dialect does take time to master.”

43. Maj Gen White-Spunner reported that the operation to clear Al Qurnah had begun, but that many of the Special Groups they had hoped to detain had moved on.

44. A scene-setting telegram from the British Embassy Office Basra on 18 May, prior to a visit by Mr Browne, assessed the city’s prospects as “on a knife-edge” and judged:

“The Charge of the Knights has to be consolidated. That will require an energised civil society, with effective local government structures. It will need to be Iraqi-led ... If momentum can be maintained, and the militias kept out, Basra might just make it.”¹²

45. On 19 May, Lt Gen Cooper reported that the cease-fire agreed on 10 May appeared to be generally holding; it was not clear what the long-term impact would be on the Sadrist movement.¹³ The militias were in difficulty in Sadr City in Basra and had diminished in Maysan and the other southern Provinces. But the cease-fire was seen as being on the Government’s terms, and there was widespread criticism of Muqtada al-Sadr’s leadership. Lt Gen Cooper speculated that the Iraqi Government was in dialogue with representatives of the Special Groups (“the lack of IDF in recent days is an indicator of this”).

46. Lt Gen Cooper observed that as Prime Minister Maliki’s confidence and control grew, so the influence of the coalition waned. He added:

“How we use our remaining capital will be more and more important as the coalition’s room for manoeuvre is increasingly constrained, and Maliki continues to build a position very like that of the traditional Iraqi strong-man.”

47. On 22 May, Iraqi Security Forces entered Sadr City at first light and met almost no resistance.¹⁴ They secured key infrastructure locations, such as hospitals, and found 45 weapons caches.

¹² eGram 19343/08 Basra to FCO London, 18 May 2008, ‘Iraq: Defence Secretary’s Visit to Basra, 22 May: Scene-Setter’.

¹³ Minute Cooper to CDS, 19 May 2008, ‘SBMR-I’s Weekly Report (301) 19 May 08’.

¹⁴ Minute Cooper to CDS, 27 May 2008, ‘SBMR-I’s Weekly Report (302) 27 May 08’.

48. Lt Gen Cooper commented that the key question was “what, or where, next?”. Both the MNF and Iraqi Government were turning their attention to Maysan, in an attempt to disrupt Iranian operations and address militia infiltration of the police.

49. On 23 May, Mr McDonald wrote a report for Mr Brown of his meeting with Mr Hadley and his team in Washington two days previously to discuss troop levels.¹⁵ Mr McDonald described the meeting as “hard pounding” and reported that the US had been concerned about how UK troop reductions would be described and about reports that the UK was planning to reduce rapidly to 1,000 or fewer.

50. Mr McDonald explained UK military advice that “there was no sustainable combat deployment between 3,350 and zero”, which Mr Hadley suggested should be re-examined in light of the improved security situation in Basra, and that key tasks would be complete by year end.

51. Mr McDonald said that: “The British Parliament and public were expecting British troop numbers to fall to 2,500 this year.” He asked whether US forces would be able to take on any tasks that would allow UK numbers to fall to that level. General Doug Lute (“the US War Czar”) said that the US would look at that. They agreed to continue discussions in advance of President Bush’s visit to the UK from 15 to 16 June.

52. Mr Brown and President Bush discussed Iraq briefly by video conference on 30 May.¹⁶ Mr Brown reported that Mr Browne had returned from his recent visit to Basra feeling more optimistic and said that the UK must focus more clearly on its tasks for the remainder of 2008.

53. Mr Brown also confirmed that his “rough objective” was to draw down to 2,500 UK troops by the end of the year.

54. In his weekly report on 30 May, Maj Gen White-Spunner reported that the people of Basra “remain firmly behind” the ISF and Iraqi Government, as their quality of life had significantly improved following the end of militia dominance.¹⁷ MND(SE)’s weekly security assessment of the city showed that all but one of the districts was stable or improving. Basra’s night-life was returning, illustrated by restaurants opening again at night, the return of music to the streets and even the selling of alcohol.

55. Food and fuel prices, which had increased sharply during the early stages of the Charge of the Knights, had returned to normal. However, the militias continued low-level attacks against the Iraqi Police Service and soft targets (such as music shops or weddings) and the Special Groups continued to target the MNF. Phase XI of the Charge of the Knights, targeted at Abu Al Khasib and the al-Faw Peninsula, was due to begin on 31 May.

¹⁵ Minute McDonald to Prime Minister, 23 May 2008, ‘Iraq: US Views on UK Force Level Plans’.

¹⁶ Letter Fletcher to Gould, 30 May 2008, ‘Prime Minister’s VTC with US President, 30 May’.

¹⁷ Minute White-Spunner to CJO, 30 May 2008, ‘MND(SE) Weekly Letter – 29 May 2008’.

June 2008

56. The Iraq Strategy Group focused on economic developments at its meeting on 2 June (see Section 10.2).¹⁸ Ms Margaret Aldred, Deputy Head of the Overseas and Defence Secretariat, stressed that economic deliverables would form a core part of the narrative that Mr Browne had asked for following his visit to Basra and asked DFID to lead on compiling it.

57. Mr Jon Day, MOD Director General Operational Policy, explained that that request had followed a briefing by the PRT highlighting the lack of capacity within the UK system to give an evidence-based account of what had been achieved in Basra.

58. Mr McDonald noted that Mr Brown would want to announce economic progress – or, at the very least, a Basra economic plan – in his planned Parliamentary statement in July.

59. Mr Frank Baker, FCO Head of Iraq Group, updated the Group on progress towards provincial elections. If the provincial elections law was passed by the end of June, the elections could take place on 1 October, although December was more likely. Some technical work remained to be done.

60. Mr Browne visited Iraq briefly, on his way to Afghanistan, at the end of May, where he “realised a personal ambition by having a cup of tea downtown”, the result of “a remarkable transformation of the security situation”.¹⁹

61. In a report of his visit sent to Mr Brown on 4 June, Mr Browne wrote that he had found UK troops “enthused about their new role, working alongside the resurgent Iraqi Security Forces”, adding:

“Everyone I spoke to sensed a real prospect now to leave behind us in Basra a positive legacy. As one officer put it to me, we are now in a similar position to 2003, but with the benefit this time of a security environment which has a predominantly Iraqi face. If we are to avoid the same pitfalls this time round, rapid investment is needed in Joint Security Stations for the Iraqi Army and Police in Basra, and in eye-catching short-term regeneration initiatives and medium term employment schemes. This needn’t be UK money – the Government of Iraq is revelling in the hike in oil prices ... – but perhaps we should consider across government, as we approach the final stages of Op TELIC, what value we would put upon some flagship projects that we can point to as part of a positive UK legacy in southern Iraq.”

62. Mr Browne explained that discussions with Lt Gen Cooper and Maj Gen White-Spunner had confirmed that it would not be possible to go much below the current troop level of 4,100 and still perform a useful mentoring and training role without the substitution of US troops in some of the UK’s current tasks.

¹⁸ Minute Cabinet Office [junior official] to McDonald, 2 June 2008, ‘Iraq Strategy Group, 2 June’.

¹⁹ [Letter Browne to Brown, 4 June 2008, ‘Visit to Basra’](#).

63. Mr Browne considered that it should be possible to conclude the training of 14 Division by the end of 2008 and thereafter, should the UK so decide, to declare an end to Op TELIC and a move to a longer-term bilateral relationship with Iraq, requiring hundreds rather than thousands of troops. The timing of such a shift would fit with both provincial elections and the expiry of resolution 1790. Even before UK troops departed, Mr Browne pointed out that by October the US would have three times as much combat power as the UK in MND(SE).

64. In conclusion, Mr Browne said that he would work with Mr Miliband and Mr Alexander “as a matter of urgency on the narrative that will put in context our withdrawal of combat troops, and explain what we have achieved since 2003”.

65. At the start of June, Australian and Czech troops left MND(SE).²⁰ Maj Gen White-Spunner observed that, with the imminent departure of the Romanians:

“Our Multi-National Division is now not as multi-national as it once was, being ... essentially UK and US – not forgetting the two Romanians and one Lithuanian in this headquarters.”

66. On 7 June, Mr Prentice reported to the FCO on a briefing from Ambassador David Satterfield, State Department Co-ordinator for Iraq, covering developments in negotiating the US/Iraq Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) and Strategic Framework Agreement (SFA).²¹ The US aimed to have both signed by 31 July, coming into effect at the start of 2009, and had almost reached agreement on the SFA. The SOFA had been set aside in favour of a new “Implementing Arrangement” in the form of a protocol to the SFA.

67. Mr Prentice reported that the US were “now settling for a degree of operational and legal risk and there will be no chance of us being able to negotiate legally watertight authorities or privileges and immunities which go beyond what the US accept”.

68. Uncertainty remained over whether any eventual UK/Iraqi agreement would be subject to separate Iraqi Government and/or Council of Representative approval. Mr Prentice observed that the more the UK sought distinct arrangements, the more risk there would be of particular political attention:

“There may also be some temptation to ‘go after’ the junior coalition partner; post-Basra, there are still anti-British rumours in the corridors ...”

69. In his weekly report on 9 June, Lt Gen Cooper wrote that:

“The key political issue this week has been the bursting into print and speech by many observers and politicians on the SFA/SOFA. Earlier in the week, most parties declared some form of opposition to the SFA or very qualified and conditional support based on significant caveats ... As the week wore on, several senior

²⁰ Minute White-Spunner to CJO, 6 June 2008, ‘MND(SE) Weekly Letter – 06 June 2008’.

²¹ eGram 22049/08 Baghdad to FCO London, 7 June 2008, ‘Iraq: SFA/SoFA Negotiations’.

government spokesmen and officials began to ameliorate comment and produce greater objectivity.”²²

70. Public statements by the US Embassy and the MNF-I stressed “that any agreement would be transparent, that there was no desire to have permanent US bases and that there is no intent to use Iraq as a base from which to conduct offensive operations against third parties”.

71. In the same note, Lt Gen Cooper reflected on the remaining tasks for the UK in the South of Iraq:

“... it is worth considering what is achievable between now and the end of 2008 and the first half of 2009. I have already commented on the need to have metrics that are measurable and understandable to non-military audiences in relation to completing the training of 14 IA Div ... And if we can get 14 Div right, I am confident that we will have set the conditions for the successful delivery of Provincial elections in Basra.”

72. Lt Gen Cooper reported that Gen Petraeus had concluded on the basis of UK statements that there would remain a UK brigade in place in 2009, probably focused on Basra alone. Lt Gen Cooper cautioned that there had not yet been a political decision on future deployments. He told ACM Stirrup that:

“It is difficult in Baghdad to discuss the issue substantively in the absence of a confirmed political decision. Given the impending PM-POTUS meeting, I would expect Petraeus’ expectation to be briefed to President Bush.”

73. On 9 June, a Current Intelligence Group (CIG) considered Basra city’s economy, the impact of criminal activity, obstacles to reconstruction and the likely impact of provincial elections and Iranian influence.²³ The CIG’s Key Judgements included:

“I. The recent Iraqi Government security operation in Basra City had largely driven the Jaysh al-Mahdi (JAM) from the streets and brought a degree of stability. While this lasts, there is a window of opportunity to create the conditions for economic growth. However, insecurity, institutional incapacity, corruption, legislation, competing political agendas, crime and smuggling will remain impediments to reconstruction and development for the next twelve months.

...

“V. Militia violence and intimidation, which specifically targeted middle class Basrawis, prompted many to leave, leaving a shortage of capable local entrepreneurs, which is likely to persist beyond 2008.”

²² Minute Cooper to CDS, 9 June 2008, ‘SBMR-I’s Weekly Report (304) 9 Jun 08’.

²³ [CIG Assessment, 9 June 2008, ‘Iraq: Basra’s Economy’](#).

74. The JIC examined the state of Sunni politics in Iraq in an Assessment of 11 June.²⁴ It confirmed a December 2007 judgement that, despite having worked together to oust AQ-I, there was little sign the Sunni community had rallied to a single political party or cause.

75. The JIC judged that Sunni participation in the forthcoming provincial elections was likely to be:

“... considerably higher than in 2005. Sunni expectations are high and are unlikely to be met by the opportunities that political participation offers. Alienation will grow unless Prime Minister Maliki’s government addresses their concerns.”

76. The JIC judged that Sunni politicians commanded little support from “the Sunni street” and that “established Sunni parties’ low credibility and growing competition for votes will probably render them less dominant in national Sunni politics”.

77. The JIC judged that “Iraq’s Arab neighbours are not driving Iraqi Sunni politics”.

78. The JIC assessed that immediate Sunni concerns were focused on seeing security gains translate into more jobs and better public services. Other common goals included increased representation in the ISF and in the government; the release of Sunni detainees; revision of the de-Ba’athification laws; constitutional review; a timetable for the withdrawal of the MNF; and resisting Shia and Kurdish moves towards federalism.

79. The JIC assessed that Sunni insurgent groups were increasingly interested in the potential gains from political engagement, but saw such engagement “as additional to, not instead of, armed resistance”. There was no sign that any such group had a coherent or realistic set of national political objectives.

80. On 11 June, Sir Mark Lyall-Grant, FCO Director General Political, circulated to members of the FCO Board a paper on ‘Preparing for the End-Game in Basra’.²⁵ The paper set out an analysis of the impact of the Charge of the Knights:

- Maliki’s failure to consult us, and his well-publicised refusal to receive British officers during the first week when things were going badly for the ISF, made it hard for us to sustain our claims that we were co-operating closely with the GoI on Basra, and that our military overwatch role was welcomed and valued by the Iraqis.
- the increased MNC-I (ie the US military) presence on the ground created a mistaken but widespread perception in the US, and in the international media, that we had abdicated to the US our post-PIC [Provisional Iraqi Control] responsibilities for providing *in extremis* support for the ISF.

²⁴ [JIC Assessment, 11 June 2008, ‘Iraq: Sunni Arab Politics’.](#)

²⁵ Email Lyall-Grant to Ricketts, 11 June 2008, ‘Board endgame paper’ attaching Paper Iraq Group, June 2008, ‘Iraq: Preparing for the End-Game in Basra’.

- the fact that Maliki felt moved to intervene so precipitously in Basra, along with the ISF's lack of success in the first week of the operation, led to a renewal of unfavourable comment from the US, Gol and the media about the state of Basra when we handed it over to Iraqi control; our failure to deal effectively with the militias; and the readiness of the Iraqi Security Forces we had trained."

81. The paper also said that the UK's relationship with Prime Minister Maliki had been:

"... severely tested by the events of late March: he believed that we had done deals to allow JAM control of Basra, and that we were consequently unwilling to support the Gol and ISF ... we cannot be confident that he values or appreciates the UK military role in the South, or that he would be particularly concerned by the timing of our departure."

82. On 13 June, Maj Gen White-Spunner sent Lieutenant General Nicholas Houghton, Chief of Joint Operations, an overview of MND(SE) prior to his visit to Iraq.²⁶ He wrote:

"The overall mood across Iraq is positive, with attacks at a low level. The success of the Gol's initiatives in Sadr City and Mosul, together with the perception that AQ and the Sunni insurgency are nearing defeat, have, of course, contributed to this, but from a Basrawi perspective the improvement started with Charge of the Knights in Basra, being Maliki's first sign of willingness to act against the militias and criminal gangs ... a new confidence has emerged in the city, with people openly speaking of life being better than it has been for years and a mood of optimism equal to that experienced in 2003."

83. Maj Gen White-Spunner commented: "There is a sense that the city is just waking from a nightmare and rubbing its eyes as it contemplates what could turn out to be a fine day, although it is too early to be sure."

84. On 13 June, Muqtada al-Sadr declared that JAM would be re-organised from a militia into a primarily civilian, religious, social and cultural organisation, called 'Mumahiidun' (Showing the Way), and its members would be banned from carrying weapons.²⁷ He added that a minority of JAM would be retained to resist the occupation.

85. On 13 June, Mr Brown's Private Secretary for Foreign Affairs emailed Mr Brown advice from Mr McDonald, explaining as he did that: "We asked Simon [McDonald] to have another go at the Iraq numbers."²⁸

86. Mr McDonald advised that it would be possible to reduce UK troop numbers to 2,000 by the end of 2008 if the US assumed a number of the current key UK roles, specifically either the training of 14 Division or the provision of enabling support.

²⁶ Minute White-Spunner to CJO, 13 June 2008, 'MND(SE) Weekly Letter – 13 June 08'.

²⁷ [JIC Assessment, 10 September 2008, 'Iraq: The Future of Jaysh al-Mahdi'](#).

²⁸ [Email Fletcher to Brown, 13 June 2008, 'Iraq Troop Numbers'](#).

87. However, military advice was that leaving Iraq before the key tasks had been completed would damage the morale and reputation of the UK Armed Forces. ACM Stirrup strongly opposed the idea of the US taking over the training of 14 Division, which would leave the UK troops in a “low value-added supporting role of limited benefit”. The US was thought likely to resent taking on “British tasks” when already stretched.

88. Consequently, Mr McDonald recommended that Mr Brown should “decide that UK forces complete training 14 Division, and then prepare to leave Basra”. Completing the training “could make the difference to whether we can end our six-year engagement in Iraq as success or failure”. Departure from Basra could begin before the end of 2008, making the troop rotation that ended in May 2009 the last of Op TELIC. He advised that Mr Brown should agree the policy with President Bush and then with Presidential Candidates Mr Barack Obama and Mr John McCain, before being announced in July. Mr McDonald also recommended that Mr Brown visit Iraq after the announcement to highlight the UK’s economic and security achievements.

89. On 15 June, during a Presidential visit to London, Mr Brown hosted a dinner for President Bush and the two men had an hour-long one-to-one the following day.²⁹ There was no discussion of troop numbers in Iraq. Mr Brown said that it was right for the UK to focus on the four key tasks in MND(SE): training 14 Division, provincial elections before the end of November, economic reconstruction, and preparation of the port and airport for civilian control.

90. On 16 June, Lt Gen Cooper reported that Muqtada al-Sadr’s statement about the re-organisation of JAM left both OMS and JAM “in limbo”.³⁰ He reported that some commentators wondered whether it was a precursor to disbanding JAM. Muqtada al-Sadr had repeated that OMS would not participate in the provincial elections and the movement remained unregistered with the electoral authorities.

91. Lt Gen Cooper also reported that “stoppage in the SFA/SOFA negotiations is now well trailed in the local and international media. We await details of any new discussions to emerge.”

92. On 20 June, Maj Gen White-Spunner’s weekly report from Basra contained “some metrics which show what life is like for Basrawis”, based on a survey conducted for the MNF-I by an Iraqi team, which he judged to have “a good degree of independence and credibility”.³¹

93. The survey showed that:

“Since the start of Operation Charge of the Knights the responses of those polled (in May) show a definite improvement in public perception with 90 percent now considering they have enough to live on and 80 percent having enough food

²⁹ Letter Fletcher to Gould, 17 June 2008, ‘Prime Minister’s Meeting with US President, 16 June’.

³⁰ Minute Cooper to CDS, 16 June 2008, ‘SBMR-I’s Weekly Report (305) 16 Jun 08’.

³¹ Minute White-Spunner to CJO, 20 June 2008, ‘MND(SE) Weekly Letter – 20 June 2008’.

the majority of the time. This is in stark contrast to March when only 60 percent considered that they had enough to live on and only 25 percent thought they had enough food. We are also seeing an upward trend in support for the ISF. The perception that the ISF are defeating the Militias increased by 11 percent in May to 59 percent with similar trends reported for general confidence in the security situation, now at 75 percent, and increase of 18 percent over the previous month, and in confidence in the ISF's ability to protect the population increasing by 10 percent to 70 percent overall. Finally, 74 percent of those polled consider the environment safe enough to report crimes to the ISF, which is an increase of 6 percent over last month."

94. Maj Gen White-Spunner also reported that Operation Charge of the Knights XIV had begun on 18 June, covering "the continuous maintenance of security and control by the ISF throughout Basra Province ... and, secondly, support to ISF operations in Maysan".

95. The British Embassy Office Basra reported on 23 June that Charge of the Knights XIV was targeting insurgents returning to the city, and had generated "further weapons finds and detentions" as well as an increase in attacks against the MNF and ISF, albeit "single rather than multiple rocket attacks which suggests a reduced capability".³² There appeared to be public support for ISF action.

96. In the same report, the British Embassy Office recorded "the first visit in ten months by UK CivPol [civilian police] to the Joint Police Command Centre (JPCC) in Basra". The report said:

"The success of the initial visit to the PJCC cannot be over-emphasised. It will enable, as the security situation allows, future opportunities for the CivPol team to engage close[ly] with the IPS as part of the continuing strategy to support, develop and assess policing standards."

97. On 23 June Lt Gen Cooper advised ACM Stirrup of the importance of engaging the Iraqi Government "sooner rather than later on the nature of our long term strategic relationship with them ... we need to see through Iraqi eyes ... rather than risk taking the future for granted".³³

98. The same report stated that Charge of the Knights XIV had been "well-co-ordinated" and "executed to plan". Lt Gen Cooper reported:

"A vignette that brings to life the burgeoning sense of confidence within the ISF is that a departing JAM member had painted the graffiti comment '*We'll be back*' on the Yugoslav bridge in Amara to which an Iraqi soldier had added '*We'll be waiting*'."

99. Qadisiyah and Anbar provinces were scheduled for transfer to Provincial Iraqi Control (PIC) at the end of June, and Lt Gen Cooper commented that Gen Petraeus

³² eGram 24392/08 Basra to FCO London, 23 June 2008, 'Basra: Weekly Update'.

³³ Minute Cooper to CDS, 23 June 2008, 'SBMR-I's Weekly Report (306) 23 Jun 08'.

“went further than he had hitherto in commenting that he now had a sense of momentum about the future”.

100. On 30 June, Gen Petraeus was reported to have “accepted as likely .. that a bridging arrangement will be adopted and that a final SOFA will not emerge in 2008”.³⁴

101. Lt Gen Cooper judged that Iraqi desire to assert sovereignty was increasing, and was having a significant impact on the SOFA negotiations.

102. General Sir Richard Dannatt, Chief of the General Staff, visited Basra at the end of June, and reported a “very positive mood within MND(SE) and a real sense that we may actually be able to deliver success, although within a realistic timeframe”.³⁵ He believed it was important to be “absolutely focused on delivering success – in terms of the objectives that we have already set – rather than be too directed by any understandable desire for early delivery”. However, he remained “unconvinced that the PRT in Basra is demonstrating enough energy, purpose and drive to be able to deliver meaningful results in the timeframe we require”.

July 2008

103. On 3 July, Mr Day told the Iraq Strategy Group that negotiations between the US and Iraq on legal arrangements for the presence of US forces were going badly.³⁶ The SOFA was now “on the back burner” and the US was pursuing an Interim Protocol to span the gap between the end of the Security Council resolution and the completion of a SOFA.

104. Mr Day thought the most likely outcome was a six month rollover of the Chapter VII mandate contained in the resolution. Mr McDonald said that solution would be acceptable to the UK.

105. The UK would require an additional bilateral amendment, in light of its obligations under the European Convention on Human Rights. Mr McDonald noted that Mr Brown had previously stated that UK forces were in Iraq under a UN mandate and at the invitation of the Iraqi Government; it would be necessary to continue that cover into 2009.

106. Mr Day told the Iraq Strategy Group that the MOD was developing a paper on the long term UK military role in Iraq which would map the route to a normal bilateral military relationship.

107. Mr Prentice called on Ambassador Crocker on 4 July to discuss the SFA and SOFA.³⁷ A minute of the discussion written by British Embassy staff recorded that

³⁴ Minute Cooper to CDS, 30 June 2008, ‘SBMR-I’s Weekly Report (307) 30 Jun 08’.

³⁵ Minute CGS to PSO/CDS, 4 July 2008, ‘CGS Visit to Iraq and Cyprus – 30 Jun-2 Jul 08’.

³⁶ Minute Cabinet Office [junior official] to McDonald, 7 July 2008, ‘Iraq Strategy Group, 3 July’.

³⁷ Email Brett to Prentice, 6 July 2008, ‘Call on Ambassador Crocker, 4 July: SFA/SOFA’.

Mr Prentice described “clear signs that some in Maliki’s circle ... saw no need to give the UK and other non-US forces a role beyond 2008”.

108. Ambassador Crocker told Mr Prentice that, in his opinion, those views were based on “ignorance of the breadth of the present UK role and on overconfidence in the capabilities of the ISF”. He did not think that Prime Minister Maliki had a clear position yet on an agreement with the UK. Mr Prentice considered that the US and UK should avoid closing off any options.

109. Mr Prentice also described plans for Mr Day to visit Iraq with “a non-paper which set out what we would require in terms of legal cover for UK forces post Chapter VII and asked a number of open-ended questions” to discuss with the Iraqi Government.

110. On 8 July, the British Embassy Office Basra reported that the operational phase of Charge of the Knights had ended.³⁸ Phase XV, an influence/information campaign, was in the initial planning stage.

111. On 9 July a CIG provided a “sitrep on the electoral process”.³⁹

112. The CIG judged that for provincial elections to be held before the end of 2008, the relevant legislation needed to be passed by the end of July. The key issues still being debated were:

- whether the elections would run on an open list (allowing voters to back individual candidates) or a closed one (limiting choices to political parties); and
- whether the elections should be held simultaneously across all 18 provinces.

113. Parties that stood to lose out in the elections had been privately lobbying for a closed list, or a hybrid between the two systems, but the Iraqi Government favoured an open list system. Prime Minister Maliki favoured staggered elections, while the Independent High Electoral Commission, whose job it was to oversee and manage the elections, favoured a simultaneous approach.

114. The CIG considered that the elections had the potential to support the national reconciliation process by providing those who had been excluded from power with a means of entering the political process. Greater participation from OMS (which had boycotted the last elections), new Sunni political parties, the Sunni Arab Tribal “awakening” groups and a range of independent candidates was expected to improve the representativeness of local councils.

115. The CIG reported that OMS had not registered as a political party, on the grounds that Muqtada al-Sadr believed that participation would be tantamount to support for the “occupation”. However, the media had reported that OMS would field “independent” Sadrist candidates on other parties’ lists.

³⁸ eGram 26653/08 Basra to FCO London, 8 July 2008, ‘Basra: Weekly Update’.

³⁹ [CIG Current Assessment Note, 9 July 2008, ‘The Iraqi Provincial Elections’](#).

116. The CIG assessed that any Sadrist gains were likely to come at the expense of the “smaller independent parties, Fadilah and, to a lesser extent, ISCI and Dawa”. The Note concluded:

“Newly registered parties to look out for include the Iraqi People’s Assembly (a possibly proxy for JAM Special Groups), First Iraqi Gathering (formerly the Sadrists splinter Iraqi National Gathering), the Independence and Rising Movement (affiliated to Jaysh al-Islami) and the Iraqi Awakening Conference (formerly Sahawa al-Iraq). Not all will win seats ...”

117. On 14 July, following a visit to Iraq, Mr Day told the Iraq Strategy Group that US negotiations on the SFA/SOFA were making little progress.⁴⁰ Iraqi officials and ministers had told him that Prime Minister Maliki wanted UK/Iraq talks on a future legal agreement, separate and parallel to the US negotiations. But Mr Day told the Iraq Strategy Group:

“... the Iraqis wanted the UK combat role to end by mid-2009 at the latest. They would want any residual military relationship to be far smaller and on a different legal basis.”

118. The Iraq Strategy Group agreed that, if NSID agreed, the UK should pursue bilateral talks with the objective of reaching agreement in October.

119. Mr Day also reported that there was “strong Iraqi interest” in an arrangement “regularising the bilateral relationship”, perhaps through a Memorandum of Understanding or Exchange of Letters, with the military relationship as a small component. The Iraq Strategy Group agreed that it would be helpful to begin discussions on future relations, but should not discuss a written agreement until after Mr Brown’s visit to Iraq or before the UK had clarified its own strategic objectives.

120. Lt Gen Cooper reported to ACM Stirrup that “as is clear from Jon Day’s meetings during his recent visit, there are differing views from various members of the GoI”.⁴¹ He concluded “there is a possibility that Maliki may adopt one of several positions when he meets the PM: receptive to our suggestions, hostile and indicating that he sees no need for UK presence or uncommitted either way”.

121. Mr Prentice told the Inquiry that for Prime Minister Maliki “the leitmotif from the start was: when are we going to get out of chapter VII”.⁴²

122. On 15 July, Mr Prentice called again on Ambassador Crocker, who told him that the Iraqi Executive Council had agreed the previous day to proceed with negotiations with the US, firstly on the SFA, then the short-term bridging Protocol and finally on the longer term SOFA.⁴³

⁴⁰ Minute Wigan to Aldred, 14 July 2008, ‘Iraq Strategy Group, 14 July’.

⁴¹ Minute Cooper to CDS, 14 July 2008, ‘SBMR-I’s Weekly Report (309) 14 Jul 08’.

⁴² Private hearing, 15 June 2010, page 36.

⁴³ Email Oppenheim to Prentice, 17 July 2008, ‘Your Call on Ambassador Crocker, 15 July 2008’.

123. Ambassador Crocker and Mr Prentice agreed that the UK negotiations could run in parallel with the US ones, but would be “shaped by them” and were unlikely to conclude until after the US/Iraqi negotiations had ended. Mr Prentice explained that the UK’s deadline for concluding talks was mid-October, both to ensure there was time to finalise the UK arrangements after the US arrangements were in place but also to allow time for the necessary Parliamentary procedures in London.

124. The Overseas and Defence Sub-Committee of NSID met on 15 July to discuss a paper prepared by Cabinet Office officials on UK strategy in Iraq 2008/2009.⁴⁴ The officials recommended that:

- The UK’s key tasks in Iraq for 2008/2009 should be:
 - training and mentoring the Iraqi Army’s 14 Division, until it was capable of independent operations with minimal coalition support (expected in about April 2009);
 - supporting provincial elections, due by the end of 2008; and
 - supporting economic development in Basra, based on Mr Wareing’s outline Economic Development Strategy (see Section 10.2).
- 4,000 UK troops would be required in southern Iraq until 14 Division was trained but after that UK forces should move to a significantly different future role, requiring fewer troops.
- Mr Brown should set out this policy in a statement on 22 July.
- Officials should continue to pursue legal cover for a continued UK mission, through either a resolution rollover (seen as “increasingly likely”) or bilateral relations with Iraq.
- The UK should continue to press for passage of the Hydrocarbons Law.
- Once drawdown plans were clearer, NSID(OD) should agree UK strategic objectives in Iraq and the resources needed to pursue them.

125. At the meeting, Mr Browne described his recent discussions in Washington with Mr Hadley and General Lute.⁴⁵

126. Mr Browne reported that the US was likely to agree to Iraqi demands for an indicative timetable for troop withdrawals and would welcome a UK policy statement which “could set out the conditions for a move from combat operations (ending Operation TELIC) to a long-term relationship” and “could say we expected to meet conditions in early 2009, and could then reduce troop numbers significantly”.

127. ACM Stirrup reported that the UK could expect to complete its current military tasks in 2009, allowing transition to a normal bilateral relationship. In discussion, it was suggested that the “remaining military tasks” beyond April 2009 were continued

⁴⁴ [Paper Cabinet Office, 11 July 2008, ‘Iraq’.](#)

⁴⁵ Minutes, 15 July 2008, NSID(OD) meeting.

“small scale” mentoring of 14 Division’s HQ, training the Iraqi Navy and supporting officer training. These would “resemble normal defence co-operation”.

128. Mr Miliband warned that provincial elections might be postponed until April 2009, or to coincide with Iraqi Parliamentary elections the following autumn.

129. Mr Alexander reported on Mr Wareing’s draft economic strategy (this is addressed in Section 10.2).

130. Concluding the discussion, Mr Brown welcomed the opportunity that his 22 July statement would provide to set out UK policy publicly, given the risk that the next US President might ask the UK to “hold further changes”. He summed up that the UK’s key goals for the year ahead should be to push for early provincial elections; hand over Basra Airport by the end of 2008; produce an economic plan shortly; and complete training of 14 Division by the end of May 2009.

131. On 15 July, the Assessments Staff reviewed recent intelligence on foreign fighters in Iraq against an earlier JIC judgement⁴⁶ that the situations in Iraq and Afghanistan were “creating a new supply of battle-hardened jihadists that will add resilience to the wider AQ campaign”.⁴⁷

132. The update stated:

“Since 2003, we estimate that several thousand foreign fighters ... have travelled to Iraq to undertake jihad. We judge that the majority of these joined Al Qaida in Iraq (AQ-I) and became either suicide bombers or were killed in other action. But a proportion have left Iraq as experienced and competent jihadist fighters ...

“The total number of foreign fighters who have left Iraq since 2003 remains unclear ... We are aware of only a handful of individuals who have come to the UK after fighting in Iraq, and have seen no intelligence to suggest that these individuals are currently involved in attack planning.

“The impact of the return from Iraq of foreign fighters has, so far, been less than the JIC predicted.”

133. On 17 July, Maj Gen White-Spunner reported that MND(SE) was an entirely UK/US organisation, apart from one Australian “handling their loose ends”.

134. Maj Gen White-Spunner also reported that he had discussed with Lt Gen Austin the transfer of the UK’s remaining responsibilities in Maysan, Muthanna and Dhi Qar to Multi-National Division (Centre) (MND(C)).⁴⁸ They agreed the transfer made military

⁴⁶ JIC Assessment, 17 May 2007, ‘International Islamist Terrorism: Who’s Winning?’

⁴⁷ Intelligence Update Assessments Staff, 15 July 2008, ‘International Terrorism: The Departure of Foreign Fighters from Iraq’.

⁴⁸ Minute White-Spunner to CJO, 17 July 2008, ‘GOC MND(SE) Weekly Letter – 17 July 2008’.

sense but Lt Gen Austin thought that Gen Petraeus might take the view that it would be presentationally difficult for the US.

135. Maj Gen White-Spunner commented that if the transfer did not go ahead, “it will not make much practical difference to us as MND(C) are already dealing with governance and economic reconstruction”.

136. On 18 July, Mr Brown’s Private Secretary for Foreign Affairs informed Mr Brown that Prime Minister Maliki had told Mr Prentice that he wanted to end the coalition presence in Iraq as soon as possible.⁴⁹ Prime Minister Maliki did not want to agree to the continuation of any coalition forces other than the US beyond the end of 2008. US officials were concerned by this proposal and by the wording of Mr Brown’s statement which declared an end to Op TELIC and withdrawal of all UK combat troops in early 2009.

137. On the same day, *BBC News* reported a White House announcement that:

“Improving conditions should allow for the agreements now under negotiation to include a general time horizon for meeting aspirational goals – such as the resumption of Iraqi security control in their cities and provinces and the further reduction of US combat forces from Iraq.”⁵⁰

138. According to the report, the announcement was prompted by Prime Minister Maliki, raising the prospect of setting a timetable for the withdrawal of US troops as part of negotiations of a new security agreement.

139. Mr Brown visited Iraq on 19 July, during which he held a bilateral meeting with Prime Minister Maliki.⁵¹

140. Mr Brown underlined to Prime Minister Maliki the UK’s wish to help on key issues, including Basra port, oil and the steel industry as well as the training of 14 Division. He commented that the Iraqi police and army were “increasingly ready” and capable of taking over their responsibilities.

141. Prime Minister Maliki agreed that it was in the interests of both countries to have long-term co-operation in all fields, including training the military. The Iraqi people’s desire for the departure of all foreign forces did not necessarily mean that they were ungrateful for the help that had been provided, but they wanted to be a sovereign nation and he did not feel that there was a need for such a large number of foreign forces to be present.

142. Mr Brown explained that UK forces would not stay longer than was necessary to “finish the tasks we had started”, specifically training 14 Division, making Basra

⁴⁹ Email Fletcher to Brown, 18 July 2008, ‘Iraq’.

⁵⁰ *BBC News*, 18 July 2008, *US seeks ‘time horizon’ on Iraq*.

⁵¹ Letter Fletcher to Hickey, 19 July 2008, ‘Prime Minister’s Meeting with Prime Minister Maliki, 19 July’.

Airport operational and supporting provincial elections. That would take until mid 2009. Negotiations could begin immediately, in advance of a further meeting in October.

143. Summing up the discussion, Mr Brown concluded that:

“... in principle they had agreed to negotiate until October this year; that the tasks the UK was undertaking would be complete by mid-2009; and that Maliki supported a further training role for the British Army while we finished our current tasks. It was essential that the GOI [Government of Iraq] understood that by the end of December 2009, we should have an MOU giving our forces a legal basis. He and Maliki should speak monthly to avoid misunderstandings.”

144. Later the same day, Mr Brown met Ambassador Crocker and Gen Petraeus.⁵² He told them that after meeting Prime Minister Maliki he felt that there was agreement to a transition process. Although Prime Minister Maliki had said he wanted an agreement with the UK, Mr Brown felt that he was “unclear about what he wanted in it”.

145. Ambassador Crocker explained that the White House statement the previous day did not mean a change in US policy: the “time horizons” were “aspirational” and did not have fixed dates. The Status of Forces Agreement with the Iraqi Government had so far “made good progress”. In response to a question from Mr McDonald, Ambassador Crocker said that he thought rolling over the UN Security Council resolution once again would be politically impossible for Prime Minister Maliki.

146. Following Mr Brown’s visit, on 21 July Lt Gen Cooper reported that the UK appeared to have a way forward to secure an agreement with Iraq in terms of future UK military contribution.⁵³ But he cautioned against an assumption that the Iraqi position would remain unchanged and urged “it will be essential for London to be very closely engaged with this office, in order to be fully informed on the current Baghdad atmospherics”.

147. Lt Gen Cooper also reported “a week of notable milestones” in Iraq. They included the return of Tawafuq to the Government, following approval by the Council of Representatives of a ministerial slate that appointed six Tawafuq ministers, and oil production exceeding pre-war levels for the first time. The provincial elections law was scheduled to pass through the Council of Representatives, giving a possible election date of 22 December, but there was “no overwhelming sense that it will actually happen”.

148. On 22 July, Mr Brown told Cabinet that he would be making a statement to the House of Commons later that day.⁵⁴

149. Mr Brown explained that UK force levels in Iraq had reduced to 4,100. A planned further reduction to 2,500 had been suspended in March when the Iraqi Government

⁵² Minute [unattributed], [undated], ‘Prime Minister’s Meeting with Petraeus and Crocker, 19 July 2008’.

⁵³ Minute Cooper to CDS, 21 July 2008, ‘SBMR-I’s Weekly Report (310) 21 Jul 08’.

⁵⁴ Cabinet Conclusions, 22 July 2008.

had decided to take action in Basra. UK troops had taken on a more active training and mentoring role, with around 1,000 UK personnel currently embedded in Iraqi units. Levels of violence had reduced significantly and life in Basra was returning to normal. The UK was pursuing four key functions:

- UK forces had moved from a combat to an overwatch role. UK troops' primary role was training and mentoring Iraqi forces, with a last resort intervention capability, although that was also gradually being taken over by Iraq.
- Pursuing economic development, which was showing some evidence of success, providing Iraqi citizens with work and a stake in their future.
- Local government elections, which would give former members of the militia the opportunity to engage in democratic politics.
- Working to transfer Basra Airport from military to civilian control.

150. Mr Brown said that the Basra Development Commission would produce an economic plan in the autumn and he hoped that local elections and the handover of Basra Airport would take place by the end of the year. Training of 14 Division should also be completed by the end of the year, with additional training of headquarters and specialist functions required in early 2009. Mr Brown “expected that we would be able to make substantial reduction in the number of British forces next year, but that would depend on circumstances. He was not going to make an estimate of the numbers now.”

151. Finally, Mr Brown told Cabinet that the UK would be working to sign “a new agreement” with the Iraqi Government, and he would tell the House of Commons that the UK would be “ready to move to a new relationship in the first half of next year”.

152. Summing up, Mr Brown concluded that whilst some militia activity in Iraq was “inevitable”, in general “security had significantly improved”. A new agreement with the Iraqi Government would require “significant negotiation” and the Armed Forces would need a legal basis for operations post-December. If the UK had left Iraq a few months ago, the job would not have been finished; with the improvements in security, momentum for economic development and a move towards local democracy once the elections were held, the Iraqi people now felt that they had a stake in the future.

153. The House of Commons Defence Committee published a report into UK operations in Iraq on 22 June, before Mr Brown made his statement.⁵⁵

154. The report concluded that following the Charge of the Knights, a high degree of security had been restored to Basra and “the preconditions are in place for political progress and economic recovery”. However, “the UK Government must ensure that it continues to provide support to the ISF to ensure that the progress which has been made is not lost and that Basra does not slip back into instability”.

⁵⁵ Fifteenth Report from the House of Commons Defence Committee, Session 2007-2008, *UK Operations in Iraq and the Gulf*, HC982.

155. The Defence Committee considered that military training offered “an opportunity to maintain a substantial position of influence for the common good in southern Iraq, if we can commit the military capacity to do so”.

156. On the afternoon of 22 July, Mr Brown made a statement “to update the House on the latest developments in Iraq”.⁵⁶ He reiterated the objective he had described in October 2007 for “an independent, prosperous, democratic Iraq that is free of terrorist violence, secure within its borders and a stable presence in the region”.

157. Mr Brown told the House of Commons:

“In recent months, conditions in Basra have shown a marked improvement. Incidents of indirect fire against British troops in the Basra air station have fallen from 200 a month at their peak last summer to an average of fewer than five a month since April this year. As the all-party House of Commons Defence Committee ... says in its report today, the security situation in Basra has been ‘transformed’.

...

“The most important development is that the improvements that we have seen have been increasingly Iraqi-led. Security responsibility for 10 of 18 provinces has now transferred to Iraqi control, including all four provinces in Britain’s areas of operations ...”

158. Mr Brown continued:

“The improved security situation has provided a platform for further, essential progress on reconciliation. We have seen not only increased co-operation between Sunni communities and the Iraqi Government ... and the return of the Tawafuq Sunni party to the Government, but the passage of key legislation that is helping to embed democracy ... The next stage will be Provincial elections ... Our message to the leaders of all Iraq’s communities ... is that they must continue to make these right long-term decisions to achieve a sustainable peace ...

“We will also continue to focus on helping the Iraqi Government to rebuild their economy and ensuring that the Iraqi people all have a stake in the future.”

159. Mr Brown went on to describe the UK’s changing role:

“Nine months ago, I set out the key elements of our strategy for handing over security in Basra to the Iraqis and set out the stages for completing the tasks that we have set ourselves. We completed the initial phase on target, handing over Basra to Provincial Iraqi Control in December. This allowed us to reduce troop numbers in southern Iraq from 5,500 in September to 4,500. After the Iraqi Government launched Operation Charge of the Knights to enforce the rule of law in

⁵⁶ House of Commons, *Official Report*, 22 July 2008, columns 660-679.

Basra against the militias ... the military advice was that we should pause the further planned reduction ...

“Since then, we have responded to changing needs and embedded more than 800 UK personnel within the Iraqi command structure ... The focus of the 4,100 forces still in southern Iraq is now on completing the task of training and mentoring the 14th division of the Iraqi army in Basra ... Other remaining military tasks ... include finalising the preparation of Basra Airport for civilian control, and continuing to develop the capacity of the Iraqi navy and marines ...

“It is now right to complete the tasks we have set ourselves ...

“As we complete these tasks and as progress continues in these different areas, we will continue to reduce the number of British troops in Iraq. Of course, future decisions will, as always, be based on the advice of our military commanders on the ground, but I can tell the House today that, just as last year we moved from combat to overwatch, we expect a further fundamental change of mission in the first months of 2009, as we make the transition to a long-term bilateral relationship with Iraq, similar to the normal relationships that our military forces have with other important countries in the region.”⁵⁷

160. Concluding his statement, Mr Brown explained that Mr Browne and military commanders would work with the Iraqi Government to agree the details of the long term UK/Iraq relationship, including “its necessary legal basis”, and report to the House in the autumn.

161. On 26 July, Mr Brown met Senator Obama.⁵⁸ Mr Brown’s Private Secretary for Foreign Affairs reported that:

“... the Prime Minister explained why he had taken his decisions on timelines and overwatch.”

162. On 28 July, Lt Gen Cooper reported to ACM Stirrup that the US military were discussing agreeing a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Iraqi Government instead of a Status of Forces Agreement.⁵⁹ An MOU would “look very similar” to a SOFA but would “avoid the political emotion that the term creates”. At the heart of the arrangement would be the formation of a joint committee that agreed operations.

163. Lt Gen Cooper also reported that the Council of Representatives had passed the Provincial Election Law, but the Presidential Council had rejected it. If issues were not resolved and the law re-passed before the Council of Representatives rose on 30 July, then elections were likely to be delayed into 2009, with possible implications for UK transition plans.

⁵⁷ House of Commons, *Official Report*, 22 July 2008, columns 660-679.

⁵⁸ Letter Fletcher to Gould, 26 July 2008, ‘Prime Minister’s Meeting with Obama, 26 July’.

⁵⁹ Minute Cooper to CDS, 28 July 2008, ‘SBMR-I’s Weekly Report (311) 28 Jul 08’.

164. Mr Baker briefed the Iraq Strategy Group on 28 July that the “sticking point” on the Electoral Law “was how Kirkuk would be governed until 2010” and “prospects for agreement were poor”.⁶⁰ Mr McDonald emphasised the importance to Mr Brown of elections taking place on time. The Group agreed to keep up pressure for the Electoral Law to be adopted before 30 July, including through conversations with US interlocutors.

165. Mr Baker also reported that FCO and MOD lawyers were working towards agreeing the UK’s internal position on the legal arrangements for British forces in Iraq, to enable negotiations to start in early September, subject to Iraqi agreement. He observed that the FCO and the MOD “would require a judgement by the Attorney General about use of force, given that the Iraqis would not want us to declare that an internal armed conflict existed in Iraq”.

166. The Iraq Strategy Group judged that the US negotiations, which were close to agreement, were unlikely to complicate the UK’s, although “we may face a tough negotiation if the US agreement did not include elements which we will want included in our own agreement”.

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167. On 7 August, the JIC reviewed security prospects for the Kurdish north of Iraq, at the request of the MOD and the FCO.⁶¹

168. The JIC judged that the Kurdistan Region was still the most stable part of Iraq, continuing to outpace the rest of the country in terms of trade, reconstruction, investment and economic growth. By contrast, the other northern provinces – Ninawa and Ta’min (formerly Kirkuk), which were administered by the Government of Iraq – accounted for more than 80 percent of insurgent attacks recorded across Iraq. Unlike central and southern Iraq, much of the violence there was ethnically motivated. Criminality, especially extortion and intimidation by insurgents, was a serious problem.

169. The JIC’s Key Judgments included:

“III. The Arab/Kurd dispute over control of Kirkuk and other territories is likely to intensify in the next few months as the UN makes its recommendations on their future administration. Street fighting and displacement of local communities could occur with little warning, and solidify ethnic divisions in local ISF.

“IV. Intensified coalition and ISF operations have failed to eradicate Al Qaida in Iraq (AQ-I) in Mosul. But they have greatly limited its operational effectiveness and access to funding. AQ-I is nevertheless likely to be capable of occasional surges in activity including high profile attacks in Iraq’s major cities for the foreseeable future.

⁶⁰ Minute Cabinet Office [junior official] to McDonald, 31 July 2008, ‘Iraq Strategy Group, 28 July’.

⁶¹ [JIC Assessment, 7 August 2008, ‘Iraq: Security in the North’.](#)

“V. Against any determined and competent opponents in the north, ISF will still need help for at least the next few years with airborne surveillance, heavy fire power (including from the air) and embedded coalition training teams. The Kurds’ Peshmerga forces in the Kurdistan Region face fewer challenges.”

170. Considering longer-term trends, the JIC judged that:

“In the longer term, we assess that the balance of power is gradually changing: as the Baghdad government becomes more confident and assertive, it is likely to be less willing to accommodate Kurdish intransigence, and the risk of confrontations will rise, especially over disputed oil revenue sharing. KRG political unity is not assured. Power sharing between the two main political parties, the PUK and KDP, is working well. But tensions following their civil war in 1995-1998 remain. We assess that the process of who succeeds PUK leader Talabani (now 75) ... will test stability.”

171. Mr Brown wrote to Prime Minister Maliki on 11 August, attaching a copy of his 22 July statement to the House of Commons.⁶² In the covering letter he explained that the UK did not want to retain combat troops inside Iraq once their current tasks (particularly the training and mentoring of the 14th Division of the Iraqi Army in Basra) had been completed. He expected that, subject to conditions on the ground, it would be possible to complete training of 14 Division in 2009 and start to reduce the number of UK troops in southern Iraq. He explained that in order to complete the training, the UK would require a firm legal basis for the presence of personnel in Iraq beyond the end of 2008.

172. Mr Brown continued by addressing a concern expressed by Prime Minister Maliki about the detention of Iraqi citizens by UK forces in Basra. He explained that the UK held only two criminal detainees, on remand awaiting transfer to the Iraqi criminal justice system to be tried for involvement in the murders of two British servicemen. Mr Brown explained that only nine individuals had been interned in Basra in 2008, but “the UK is not at present holding any security internees”.

173. During a meeting with Mr Prentice on 17 August, Prime Minister Maliki agreed to open discussions on a UK SOFA in late August or early September.⁶³ Mr Prentice reported that the equivalent US/Iraqi negotiations were at a delicate stage, with no guarantee of a result.

174. Mr Prentice attended the Iraqi National Security Council on 24 August, and reported that Iraqi Ministers had requested advice on how long it would take for Iraq to be able to handle its own security needs without outside help, to inform political decisions on how long an MNF-I presence was required.⁶⁴ Defence Minister Abdul

⁶² [Letter Brown to Maliki, 11 August 2008, \[untitled\]](#).

⁶³ eGram 32303/08 Baghdad to FCO London, 19 August 2008, ‘Iraq: UK-Iraq: Meeting with PM Maliki: Agreement to Open Negotiations on a SOFA’.

⁶⁴ eGram 33064/08 Baghdad to FCO London, 25 August 2008, ‘Iraq: National Security Council, 24 August 2008’.

Qadir told the Council that he believed “the ISF would be able to run all its own internal security operations by 2010, but would still need outside logistical support until the end of 2011”.

175. On 27 August, Mr Day wrote to Mr Brown’s Assistant Private Secretary with an update on the legal framework for UK troops.⁶⁵ He reported that since Mr Prentice’s meeting with Prime Minister Maliki, “US/Iraq negotiations have become increasingly difficult and seem to have reached an impasse”. Prime Minister Maliki was reported to have “fundamental concerns over Iraqi sovereignty”.

176. The key outstanding issues were jurisdiction over MNF service personnel and timelines for the withdrawal of combat forces. Mr Day said that UK officials and lawyers had been undertaking the technical work to prepare for negotiations with the Iraqi Government, but it was not possible to make substantive progress on the drafting of a UK/Iraq framework before the final outcome of the US/Iraq process. That was unlikely before the middle of September.

177. Mr Day considered that once US/Iraq agreement had been reached, it should be “reasonably straightforward” to complete a draft UK/Iraq agreement as a basis for discussion. The aim remained to reach agreement on text by the middle of October, in advance of Prime Minister Maliki’s proposed visit to London.

178. Mr Day also reported that “If the US does not succeed it will focus on trying to renew the current Chapter VII Security Council mandate”.

179. On 29 August, Mr Browne’s Private Secretary wrote to Mr Brown’s Private Secretary for Foreign Affairs with an update on the US proposals for military transition in southern Iraq.⁶⁶ Reports from Iraq suggested that “the US military has become reconciled to the departure of UK ground troops from Basra by the end of May 2009” and was working to generate the forces they believed were needed as replacements.

180. Mr Browne had agreed that “planning on the basis of the US proposals represented a good opportunity both to meet the Prime Minister’s intent of moving to a fundamental change of mission in the first half of 2009 and to maintain our strategic relationship with the US”. Transition at the end of May would enable completion of the training of 14 Division and the handover of Basra Airport. The MOD would look to make reductions in force levels before the end of May, but military advice was that it was unlikely to be possible to make significant reductions before “we are able to relinquish core functions to the US Brigade”.

181. Mr Browne’s Private Secretary also reported that contingency planning was under way in case agreement could not be reached on a legal basis for UK operations in Iraq, and forces had to be withdrawn sooner.

⁶⁵ Letter Day to Catsaras, 27 August 2008, ‘Legal Framework for UK Military Presence in Iraq After 2008: Update’.

⁶⁶ [Letter Ferguson to Fletcher, 29 August 2008, ‘Iraq: Transition Planning for 2009’.](#)

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182. At the start of September, Mr Prentice sent the FCO a “snapshot of what has gone well and badly over the summer break” and an assessment of prospects for the autumn and into 2009 as “background to work starting in Whitehall on a ‘whole Iraq’ strategy and UK transition in 2009”.⁶⁷ Mr Prentice summarised the content of his advice as “arguments for sustaining our investment in the ‘New Iraq’”, but wrote that the prospects were “more clouded” than when he arrived in Iraq the year before.

183. Under the heading “What went well”, Mr Prentice recorded that the security situation across Iraq had continued to improve throughout the summer. Casualty statistics were at a four-year low and, despite occasional major incidents, the trends remained downward. The declaration of transition to PIC in Anbar on 1 September had been a “highly symbolic success”, as was Tawafuq’s return to government.

184. “What went badly” included the stalling of Iraqi Army operations in Mosul because of a lack of manpower. There had been a deterioration in relations between Governor Wa’ili and the local Iraqi Army command in Basra. Clashes had narrowly been averted between the ISF and the Peshmerga in Diyala, exacerbating Arab-Kurd tensions. The US/Iraq SOFA negotiations had become deadlocked and were suspended until mid-September. Reconstruction activity “showed little result” and service provision across the country remained problematic.

185. In Mr Prentice’s view, Iraq had not yet settled a national vision: although the Council of Representatives had begun to enact some of the laws needed to frame the national political and constitutional settlement, they had postponed the most difficult issues.

186. The Council of Representatives would now need to tackle a series of tough legislative challenges including the passage of a SOFA, the Elections Law, the Hydrocarbons Law and the 2009 Budget, in addition to the ongoing review of the Constitution, all of which provided “ample scope for ... political deadlock”.

187. Mr Prentice concluded:

“It is against this background that work in Whitehall and here (Baghdad, Basra and Erbil) will shortly be coming together on:

- Our opening position for bilateral negotiations with the GoI [Government of Iraq] on a legal base for our forces to stay in Iraq beyond 2008 to complete their present tasks. I have advised already that this should be the least challenging and demanding bid we can make.

⁶⁷ [eGram 34129/08 Baghdad to FCO London, 1 September 2008, ‘Iraq: Prospects for the Autumn’](#).

- The redesign of our economic and institutional development effort in Basra to take advantage of the improved conditions to deliver accelerated effect with full military-civilian co-ordination.
- A longer term 'Iraq Strategy', setting out the rationale for the broad-based relationship with the whole of Iraq, for which we are aiming post-transition. There is strong appetite for this form of UK connection among many Iraqis, in contrast to the (inevitable) irritations which have become associated with our/the coalition's long military presence. Iraq will be an enormously wealthy country with huge needs and long-suppressed demand. The opportunities for UK engagement in so many sectors – education, health, energy, services – will be mouth-watering. And beyond the bilateral interest, there is the strategic interest that the 'New Iraq' should develop as a pro-Western, broadly democratic and secular regional power, exercising its influence helpfully in world energy markets and acting as a link from Europe through Turkey to the Gulf and not from revolutionary Iran through Syria to Hizballah.
- We will also need to plan and fund the right long-term platform for HMG in Iraq to take best advantage of these opportunities ...”

188. On 10 September, at the request of the FCO and the MOD, the JIC examined the threat from the evolution of JAM.⁶⁸

189. The JIC's Key Judgements included:

“I. The surrender by Jaysh al-Mahdi of its strongholds in Basra, Sadr City and al-Amara and damage to its reputation have left it in greater disarray and weaker than at any time since 2003.

“II. The extent to which Muqtada al-Sadr will succeed in his attempt to transform JAM into a primarily 'cultural' organisation is unclear. It will not mean a transition to exclusively peaceful activity – Sadr's model is Lebanese Hizballah and there is a risk of at least some continuing intimidation to enforce strict Islamic codes.”

190. The JIC considered that, although popular support for Muqtada al-Sadr and his championship of the Shia poor remained strong, JAM's standing had been undermined in the past year by its involvement in criminality, Shia on Shia violence, collateral damage to Karbala's holy sites and mounting evidence of Iranian support. Its claim to be a “defender of the Shia” was increasingly vulnerable, particularly following the severe degradation of AQ-I.

191. The JIC judged:

“III. The majority of JAM members will continue to lie low and will not overtly challenge Iraqi Security Force (ISF) control in the short term. Whether Sadr's new minority armed wing resumes attacks on Multi-National Forces (MNF) is likely to

⁶⁸ [JIC Assessment, 10 September 2008, 'Iraq: the Future of Jaysh al-Mahdi'](#).

depend on whether the coalition issues a timetable for withdrawal. A small minority of other hard-liners will continue such attacks in any case ...

“IV. In the longer term, JAM members are likely to remain a source of instability through their recovery of criminal power and malign influence over Shia communities, unless military pressure is maintained. There is also potential for violence between the Sadrists and their Shia political rivals, especially as provincial elections approach.

“V. Prime Minister Maliki ... is likely to remain uncompromising towards any attempt by JAM or the Special Groups to continue as a militia, and will repeat the recent crackdown should they try to challenge his security gains.”

192. The JIC assessed that Iran was adopting a “more discriminating approach” to the provision of lethal aid to Shia militias, which it was likely to sustain at least until the MNF had left Iraq.

193. Lieutenant General Peter Wall, Deputy Chief of the Defence Staff (Commitments), updated the Iraq Strategy Group on 11 September on the emerging plan for UK military drawdown and transition to US command in southern Iraq.⁶⁹ In summary, he said that:

- At the end of November 2008, command of Maysan, Muthanna and Dhi Qar provinces would transfer to an expanded MND(C), under US command.
- At the end of March 2009, command of Basra would transfer to a new Basra based US division, MND(South), bringing UK forces there under US command.
- At the start of May 2009, US forces would begin to deploy to Basra.
- By the end of June 2009, the UK’s departure would be complete.

194. Mr McDonald emphasised the need to protect this planning, particularly in the lead up to the US elections, and highlighted the presentational problem if the US assumed tasks that the UK was currently undertaking.

195. Lt Gen Wall and Mr Day advised that “the US presence in the South would probably not be engaged in the same tasks that we had been doing”. The US was likely to focus more on border security and on protecting their main supply lines.

196. Mr McDonald told the Group that no further statement by Mr Brown was planned for 2008, although he would like to make one in early 2009.

197. Mr Brown and President Bush spoke by video link on 11 September and Mr Brown told the President that the UK would need to be part of a SOFA deal.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Minute Cabinet Office [junior official] to McDonald, 15 September 2008, ‘Iraq Strategy Group, 11 September’.

⁷⁰ Letter Catsaras to Gould, 11 September 2008, ‘Prime Minister’s VTC with US President, 11 September’.

198. On 12 September, an official from the FCO Iraq Group reported to Mr Miliband's Private Secretary that Ambassador Satterfield had visited London two days earlier and provided UK officials in the FCO, the MOD and the Cabinet Office with an update on the negotiation of the US/Iraq SOFA.⁷¹ Ambassador Satterfield had advised Washington that agreement would not be possible without US compromise on three points: jurisdiction, detention and timelines. To resolve those issues, he proposed that:

- US military and non-diplomatic civilian personnel would be subject to Iraqi jurisdiction if they committed a serious crime while off base and not on duty; and
- US forces would, in principle, hand over any detainees to the Iraqi authorities within 24 hours.

199. Ambassador Satterfield reported that both the US and the Iraq governments had agreed to a reference in the SOFA that US forces should withdraw from Iraq by 2011, but the Iraqi Government was keen to have a more concrete commitment.

200. The Iraq Group official advised Mr Miliband that Mr Browne shared US concerns about jurisdiction. If the US compromised on this, the UK was unlikely to “get a better deal”. One possible “fix” was to declare all UK forces “on duty” for the duration of their deployment to Iraq.

201. From 15 to 16 September, ACM Stirrup visited Iraq and Kuwait.⁷² He asked General Raymond Odierno, Commanding General Multi-National Force – Iraq, whether he was content with the plans for MND(SE) transition, reporting that Gen Odierno had been “encouraged” and “comfortable” with the outline proposal though he had yet to see the detailed timeline. ACM Stirrup “underlined his need to bolster enablers in Afghanistan as soon as possible” though made clear that any Iraqi transition plan would need to meet “mutual timeline requirements”.

202. Mr Brown and Mr Browne met the Chiefs of Staff and Sir Bill Jeffrey, MOD Permanent Under Secretary, on 18 September.⁷³ ACM Stirrup reported that “remarkable progress” had been made in Iraq over the past 18 months, although it was “fragile and reversible”. In the South, the biggest risk was stalled economic progress. ACM Stirrup reported that the US commanders had high regard for the UK contribution in Basra and elsewhere in Iraq and were “bought in” to a timetable that would see “two-star UK/US handover in March and one-star in May”. SOFA negotiations were “stalled”.

203. Mr Brown said that it would be important to have projects that helped with employment in place before the UK left Basra, and to establish a UK Trade and Investment (UKTI) presence there. The main obstacle was not security but the business

⁷¹ Minute McKelvey to Baker and Private Secretary [FCO], 12 September 2008, ‘Iraq – Update on US Status of Forces Negotiations’.

⁷² Minute Kyd to PS/SofS [MOD], 18 September 2008, ‘CDS Visit to Iraq 15-16 Sep 08’.

⁷³ Letter Catsaras to Rimmer, 18 September 2008, ‘Prime Minister’s Meeting with Defence Chiefs, 18 September’.

climate. He would raise again with President Bush UK concerns about the SOFA, including “the real risk we would run out of time”.

204. On 18 September, at the request of the MOD and PJHQ, the JIC circulated its Assessment of the prospects for security across southern Iraq into 2009.⁷⁴

205. The JIC judged that overall security had improved significantly since the Charge of the Knights operation against JAM in March. The authority of the Iraqi Government now extended into previously “no-go” areas. There were reports of improved perceptions of general security among Basrawis, and instances of violent criminality and score-settling were reported to have fallen. There had only been three attacks on the MNF at Basra Air Base in the previous six weeks.

206. The JIC assessed that security gains in Maysan had been more limited in scope and restricted to al-Amara. Security in Muthanna and Dhi Qar provinces remained “less of a challenge for local security forces”.

207. The JIC had recently assessed that JAM was “in greater disarray and weaker than at any time since 2003”, but a threat remained:

“II. ... Whether Sadr’s planned small armed wing resumes attacks on Multi-National Forces (MNF) is likely to depend on whether the coalition agrees a timetable for withdrawal ... A few other hard-liners will continue such attacks in any case. In the longer term, violent criminality, murders, kidnappings, score-settling and intimidation may gradually increase again.

“III. The Iranian-backed Special Groups ... are likely to be better trained and equipped and focused on attacking US forces as they return from Iran. They and a number of smaller Shia militias will probably also see attacks on withdrawing UK forces as an opportunity to claim victory over the coalition (albeit that US forces will take their place). But anti-MNF attacks are unlikely to reach anywhere near the peak seen in 2007.”

208. Looking to the future, JIC continued:

“IV. Locally raised army units in the South will continue to need coalition mentors and to operate alongside more experienced Iraqi forces to manage security for the rest of this year. By early 2009, provided JAM remains quiescent, they will be able to cope with only limited MNF mentoring. Intra-Shia clashes are likely to intensify as provincial elections approach ...

“V. Further growth in the local economy is probable in 2009. But significant economic improvement depends on security, sustained political support and a major improvement in government ability to implement reconstruction and development projects. All are likely to remain uncertain for some years ...”

⁷⁴ [JIC Assessment, 18 September 2008, ‘Iraq: Security in the South’.](#)

209. On 21 September, Major General Andrew Salmon, who had succeeded Maj Gen White-Spunner as GOC MND(SE) in August, reported that Gen Odierno had assumed command of MNF-I “with a clear focus on putting ISF into the lead”.⁷⁵ Gen Odierno had informed Prime Minister Maliki that the US would be “positioning elements in Basra next year”.

210. Maj Gen Salmon also reported that MND(SE) had been:

“... considering what being without a SOFA on 1 Jan means, either because we won’t get one, or because one hasn’t quite been finalised and we’re in limbo. There are probably various legal interpretations as to where we will stand in the latter case, so it might be useful to have some policy views in due course on the limbo scenario.”

211. Mr Brown met President Bush at the White House on 26 September.⁷⁶ In a report of the meeting, Mr Brown’s Assistant Private Secretary recorded that a formula had been developed for the SOFA to cover when US service personnel would be subject to Iraqi jurisdiction. It meant that “in practice it was extremely unlikely that these conditions would ever be met”. Mr Brown emphasised that a SOFA needed to be agreed by the end of December. He told President Bush that in July Prime Minister Maliki had said he wanted the UK out of Iraq. Mr Brown had responded that the UK would stay.

212. An MOD note in the No.10 files entitled “Southern Iraq Force Levels”, dating from late September 2008, set out “as requested” the options “to reduce the overall size of the force to c.1,900 as part of the November 2008 rotation”.⁷⁷

213. The note explained that under current plans there would be 4,148 UK ground troops in southern Iraq until November. In October, it was expected that the number of support roles (engineers) could be reduced by 200, bringing the total to around 3,950.

214. The note continued:

“Our analysis shows that we could not achieve the required level of reduction through pro rata cuts across the force.”

As a consequence:

“The only alternative is to give up some of the tasks we currently undertake. In practice, that means transferring responsibilities to the US. We have identified two options for achieving a reduction to around 1900 posts. Both would make us very much the junior partner in MND(SE) and in these circumstances we assume that the US would take over command of the division ... The options are (a) transfer to the US responsibility for providing enabling capabilities and running the COB

⁷⁵ Minute Salmon to CJO, 21 September 2008, ‘GOC MND(SE) weekly letter – 21 September 2008’.

⁷⁶ Letter Catsaras to Gould, 26 September 2008, ‘Prime Minister’s meeting with President Bush, 26 September’.

⁷⁷ Paper MOD, [undated], ‘Southern Iraq Force Levels’.

[Contingency Operating Base] ... (b) transfer to the US responsibility for training and mentoring 14 Division and providing the QRF [Quick Reaction Force] ...

“Both options carry major disadvantages. Neither would be at all attractive to the US. We would be asking them to make a substantial additional investment in southern Iraq ... We could not present a coherent military rationale for either alternative ...”

215. The author advised that the longer term damage to the UK’s military, defence and security reputation and interests in the US would be “considerable” because:

“Both Washington and General Petraeus believe they have a commitment from us that we will stay the course until 14 Division has been fully trained. These options require the US to share the burden and will be seen as the UK reneging on a deal ...

“There would be similar reputational consequences in Iraq and regionally. Domestically we could not present a credible military case for the reduction nor argue that it is conditions-based. Our contribution would be portrayed as a token sop and would be especially difficult to explain if we began to take casualties. We should expect an adverse and long-lasting impact on morale across Defence. Option (b), which would involve UK forces withdrawing into the COB while US troops took over our tasks in Basra, would be especially toxic to the Army’s morale and reputation.”

216. Mr Brown, Mr Browne and ACM Stirrup met Gen Petraeus (who had recently been appointed Commander in Chief US Central Command) on 29 September.⁷⁸ Briefing for Mr Brown stressed the importance of ensuring that Gen Petraeus understood that the UK’s plans for drawdown in Iraq had Mr Brown’s backing, and were not just contingent military planning. It was equally important that Gen Petraeus realised that “UK drawdown in Iraq will not translate to a scaling-up in Afghanistan”.

217. In their discussion, Gen Petraeus paid tribute to UK forces in Iraq: work to capitalise on operations in Basra, Baghdad and mentoring the Iraqi headquarters had all been “superb”.⁷⁹ No discussion of drawdown was recorded in the note of the meeting. Mr Browne was reported to have “questioned whether Iraq had the right Constitution”.

October 2008

218. On 13 October, an interview with Prime Minister Maliki appeared in *The Times*.⁸⁰ He was reported to have said that at their current strength (4,100), British troops were “definitely ... no longer necessary”. The tasks he envisaged for British military trainers did not warrant a deployment of anything like that scale. Prime Minister Maliki also

⁷⁸ Briefing No.10 [junior officials] to Brown, 29 September 2008, ‘Visit of General David Petraeus, Monday 29 September’.

⁷⁹ Letter Catsaras to Thorneloe, 30 September 2008, ‘Prime Minister’s Meeting with General Petraeus, 29 September’.

⁸⁰ *The Times*, 13 October 2008, *Thank You, and Goodbye*.

warned that if the legal basis for their presence was not resolved by the end of the year, British troops would have to leave.

219. The “accommodation” reached with JAM was, in Prime Minister Maliki’s view, a “disaster”. *The Times* observed that “Iraq’s Prime Minister appears to have decided that, at a critical juncture, British Forces put their own security ahead of Basra’s”.

220. Mr Ian Forber, Head of the MOD Iraq Policy Team, briefed the Iraq Strategy Group on 15 October that the US had given its SOFA text to Prime Minister Maliki, “who had apparently agreed it”.⁸¹ The next steps were for the Council of Ministers and the Iraqi Parliament to consider it. The MOD and FCO view was that the US text would be sufficient for the UK’s needs. MOD officials would advise the Defence Secretary that the UK should pursue its own legal arrangements based closely on the US text, and that he should tell Prime Minister Maliki that when visiting Baghdad on 19 October.

221. The Iraq Strategy Group also discussed alternative scenarios in case the UK did not conclude its own legal agreement. Contingency planning for withdrawal was in place and it could be done within three months. Mr Forber told the Group that there was legal provision under Coalition Provisional Authority Order No.17 which was still in force. If withdrawal did happen, early discussions would be needed with the US to give them “time to back-fill”.

222. Mr McDonald commented that the option of a further resolution had not been ruled out, though would be difficult. The Group tasked the MOD and the FCO to produce a negotiating timetable and a public and diplomatic handling plan.

223. Mr Forber and his deputy also updated the Group on planning for transition, which was taking place against a range of scenarios. Plans had been co-ordinated with the US:

“In particular, including their plans to backfill us as we drawdown and, if we were forced to withdraw earlier, a plan for them to backfill more rapidly, also covering what assistance we would need from the US to withdraw.”

224. A day later, Mr Prentice reported from Baghdad that negotiations on a US/Iraq SOFA had entered their “endgame”, meaning that the UK could “finally launch our own bid for a bilateral agreement”.⁸² Although the UK’s objective of a broader bilateral relationship was consistent with Prime Minister Maliki’s own aims, Mr Prentice observed that “he remains deeply suspicious of us and feels politically besieged”. Those factors, plus a tight deadline, made the UK/Iraq agreement “a difficult trick to take”.

⁸¹ Minute Cabinet Office [junior official] to McDonald, 21 October 2009, ‘Iraq Strategy Group, 15 October’.

⁸² eGram 41161/08 Baghdad to FCO London, 16 October 2008, ‘Iraq: Visit by the Defence Secretary to Baghdad: Scen setter’.

225. Mr Prentice told the Inquiry that US negotiations on jurisdiction and legal immunities would “set the bar” for the UK.⁸³

226. In mid-October, a Cabinet Office official wrote to Mr Brown’s Private Secretary for Foreign Affairs with advice on a visit to Iraq, potentially including downtown Basra, being contemplated by Mr Brown.⁸⁴ He advised that such a visit “would present a number of difficult security issues, with presentational implications”. The official continued:

“The security situation in Basra has improved considerably over the past 12 months. But it is far from being inherently safe. Members of the JAM Special Groups are returning to Iraq from Iran and Syria and there are continuing reports of a return to violence, including assassination. And although the operating environment for militants and terrorists in Basra is difficult, it is by no means impossible ... Moreover, there remain corrupt elements in the Iraqi police, many affiliated to JAM, for whom the Prime Minister would be an attractive target ...

“Against this background, we advise against any visit by the Prime Minister to downtown Basra at this stage. If such a visit was to be contemplated there would need to be a significant security operation to ensure the Prime Minister’s safety. This in turn would raise presentational difficulties as the security precautions that would be necessary would not be consistent with a return to normality.”

227. Mr Brown’s Assistant Private Secretary advised Mr Brown that:

“Whilst there is progress, there is no new policy announcement to add to your July statement ... A timetable and numbers for drawdown would be new and MOD have planning figures – but (a) any plans depend on an agreed SOFA or UNSCR rollover first (b) there may be a spike in violence after the elections (c) MOD have operational security concerns about releasing our timetable – they argue it encourages increasing attacks on UK troops so that militias can claim success for driving UK out.”⁸⁵

228. The Assistant Private Secretary further advised that visiting Basra before the US elections in early November risked annoying Prime Minister Maliki at a time when the UK SOFA was still being negotiated.

229. Although Mr Brown deferred his proposed visit, Mr John Hutton, who had succeeded Mr Browne as Defence Secretary on 3 October, visited Iraq in mid October.⁸⁶ In a letter reporting his visit, Mr Hutton told Mr Brown that in Basra he had:

“... found our troops in excellent spirits. They clearly feel that they are doing important work and are making a real difference.”

⁸³ Public hearing, 6 January 2010, page 40.

⁸⁴ Minute Gibbons to Fletcher, 16 October 2008, ‘Prime Minister’s Possible Visit to Iraq’.

⁸⁵ Email Catsaras to Brown, 20 October 2008, ‘Iraq Visit?’

⁸⁶ Letter Hutton to Prime Minister, 23 October 2008, [untitled].

230. Behind this optimism sat a “confident and capable” Iraqi Army with “complete freedom of movement throughout the city”, meaning that “we will soon have reached the point where we can say with confidence that we have fulfilled our training mission for 14 Division”.

231. During his visit, Mr Hutton confirmed with Gen Odierno that he was fully content with plans to draw down the vast majority of UK troops by mid 2009, adding that:

“The phased movement south of additional US forces will help to ensure that the withdrawal of our own combat troops is as seamless as possible. He [Gen Odierno] is alive to the presentational risks and will, I am sure, speak positively about our contribution.”

232. Mr Hutton reported that Prime Minister Maliki had told him that he wanted to build a strong, broad-based relationship with the UK and was keen to start bilateral discussions on the UK SOFA as soon as possible to ensure that an agreement was in place by the end of the year.

233. Ambassador Crocker and Ambassador Satterfield were more downbeat, and saw significant difficulties ahead. Mr Hutton explained that the UK had decided that before pursuing the UK SOFA he would await formal agreement from the Council of Representatives of the US/Iraq SOFA, on which it was largely based.

234. Mr Hutton concluded:

“Should the UK fail to secure a SOFA or a UNSCR extension, the operational and presentational risks associated with a hasty exit would be severe indeed ... We will need to watch this very closely, and to use any and all diplomatic means at our disposal to reach an agreement as early as possible.”

235. The MND(SE) weekly letter on 26 October said that Gen Mohammed and Governor Wa’ili had agreed to meet for the first time (having previously refused to do so), paving the way for co-operation on security issues ahead of the forthcoming provincial elections.⁸⁷

236. The letter also described a visit by the MNF-I Joint Campaign Plan Assessment Team, “not one but two multi-disciplinary teams” headed by a retired General and a former Ambassador and featuring “a broad cross-section of diplomats, academics and advisors”. Gen Odierno had tasked the team “to make an independent campaign assessment to inform the rewrite of the Joint Campaign Plan”.

237. Mr Hutton reported to Cabinet on 28 October that the security situation in Iraq had been “completely transformed and continued to improve”.⁸⁸ The MNF had had significant successes in disrupting and destroying AQ-I leadership. The UK would hand over Basra

⁸⁷ Minute Storrie to CJO, 26 October 2008, ‘MND(SE) Weekly Letter – 26 October 2008’.

⁸⁸ Cabinet Conclusions, 28 October 2008.

International Airport by the end of the year and was “on track” for a fundamental change of mission next year. The US had submitted the final text of its proposed SOFA though it was unclear whether or not the Iraqi Government would agree it.

238. Mr Hutton added that UKTI was about to establish a presence in Baghdad, but there was a need to consider what more could be done. Some commentators were suggesting that Basra had more potential for development as a regional centre, yet there were no British companies active in southern Iraq.

239. Concluding the discussion, Mr Brown said that further consideration would need to be given to building economic links with Iraq.

November 2008

US Presidential Election

On 4 November, Mr Barack Obama was elected as the 44th President of the United States.

He telephoned Mr Brown on 6 November.⁸⁹ Mr Brown spoke of the strength of US/UK common purpose in Iraq – success would not be achieved by military means alone.

240. In an Assessment issued on 6 November, the JIC examined the impact of the centralisation of power under Prime Minister Maliki.⁹⁰ The JIC judged:

“Though [Prime Minister Maliki] continues to operate broadly within a constitutional democratic framework, he has brought about greater centralisation of power.

“Maliki’s ... approach is driven by ... suspicion of political rivals and his perception that centralising power is essential to getting things done in stabilising Iraq ...

“Constraints on Maliki ... include the judiciary; the Shia religious authorities; parliament; his desire to share responsibility as broadly as possible for more controversial decisions ...

“... Maliki’s political rivals remain unwilling and probably unable at this stage to unseat him ...

“Maliki remains highly suspicious of HMG’s intentions in Iraq. He wants to restrict the future UK military presence to no more than a small number of training staff beyond the end of this year. Maliki will continue trying to maintain relationships with Iran and the US, but the influence of both over him will decline further throughout 2009.”

⁸⁹ Letter Fletcher to Gould, 7 November 2008, ‘Prime Minister’s Call with US President-elect, 6 November’.

⁹⁰ JIC Assessment, 6 November 2008, ‘Iraqi Politics: Maliki’s in Charge’.

241. The Iraq Senior Officials Group met on 7 November.⁹¹ Mr Forber and Mr Baker gave updates on the Status of Forces Agreement negotiations and the parallel US negotiation. Ms Aldred emphasised the importance of recommendations to Ministers being placed in the current political context, in particular what the Iraqi Government wanted and the information in the recent JIC Assessment. The Cabinet Office would draft an overarching context paper for NSID(OD).

242. Mr Forber reported that the Iraqi Government said that it was willing to agree a SOFA with the UK “providing it did not include combat elements”; it was not clear whether that was a firm position or a negotiating tactic. The MOD and the FCO argued for an increase in pressure on the Iraqi Government to persuade them to accept that the UK needed combat troops for a short while into 2009. US support would be crucial.

243. Ms Aldred reported a discussion with Gen Lute about the agreement between President Bush and Mr Brown on the timetable for UK drawdown, and the possible need for US help to agree a SOFA.

244. The Iraq Senior Officials Group also discussed a draft post-drawdown strategy, particularly the UK’s energy and commercial objectives and the proposed FCO, DFID, MOD and military presence.

245. On energy, the Group agreed that the Department for Energy and Climate Change and the FCO should develop a “coherent and detailed” strategy for Iraq, including what sort of presence would be needed to deliver it. DFID were to consider further:

“... whether a presence only in Baghdad supported by a communications strategy and programme funding in the South, would be sufficient to sustain our legacy there, protect our reputation and ensure the US did not win credit for progress that we had engineered.”

246. On 12 November, Mr Prentice reported a “highly successful” visit to Iraq by Mr Alexander the previous week.⁹² Mr Alexander met Prime Minister Maliki and Ambassador Crocker and attended the launch of the Basra Investment Commission (see Section 10.2).

247. Prime Minister Maliki “continued to insist that the UK had done little for Basra” but he welcomed Mr Alexander’s assurances that the UK wanted to move towards a more normalised bilateral relationship, including closer economic, cultural and educational links. They discussed the SOFA, “the success of which would be a fundamental first step in the transition both governments were looking for”.

⁹¹ Minute Cabinet Office [junior official] to Aldred, 10 November 2008, ‘Iraq Senior Officials Group, 7 November’.

⁹² eGram 45112/08 Baghdad to FCO London, 12 November 2008, ‘Iraq: Visit by Secretary of State for International Development to Baghdad and Basra, 6 November’.

- 248.** In an update on Iraq for Mr Brown on 14 November, Cabinet Office officials reported that Prime Minister Maliki remained reluctant to agree to the continuing UK combat role that the MOD judged essential for training 14 Division.⁹³
- 249.** Although the US SOFA text had reportedly been agreed between Prime Minister Maliki and President Bush, it had yet to be approved by the Iraqi Parliament, suggesting that: “By December, the US may still be trying to get its SOFA while warming-up the UN Security Council Resolution track.” US lobbying on the UK’s behalf was unlikely while its own negotiations remained difficult.
- 250.** More positively, the security situation remained “promising”, 14 Division was “operating increasingly independently”, Basra Airport would be ready to hand over “within weeks”, the Iraqi Electoral Commission had announced that provincial elections would be held on 31 January 2009 and Mr Alexander had announced the Basra Investment Commission ahead of schedule.
- 251.** The update also said that, although AQ-I continued to pose a threat in Iraq, Basra remained calm, with no attacks on the UK Base for more than 40 days. That was “the longest unbroken period of calm since January 2006”.
- 252.** On 16 November, the BBC reported that the Iraqi Cabinet had approved a “security pact” with the US, under which its troops would withdraw from the streets of Iraqi towns in 2009 and leave Iraq by the end of 2011.⁹⁴ An Iraqi Government spokesman also said that the agreement placed US forces under the authority of the Iraqi Government and that they would need its permission, and that of a Judge, to raid homes. US forces would also hand over their bases to Iraq during 2009.
- 253.** In a televised statement on the agreement, Prime Minister Maliki explained that the Iraqi Government had “reservations” about the agreement, but saw it as “a solid prelude to the restoration of Iraq’s full sovereignty in three years’ time”.⁹⁵
- 254.** Maj Gen Salmon reported on 23 November that a call by Muqtada al Sadr at Friday prayers for “increased opposition” to the SOFA had been “ignored”.⁹⁶ There had instead been a “pro-SOFA demonstration”.
- 255.** In Baghdad, however, the BBC reported that “thousands of people” had responded to al-Sadr’s call and protested in Firdous Square.⁹⁷
- 256.** On 24 November, Lt Gen Cooper reported to ACM Stirrup that the “only political game in Baghdad at the moment is that surrounding the US SOFA”.⁹⁸ The progress of the SOFA through the Council of Representatives had been “colourful” but it would

⁹³ Minute Cabinet Office [junior official] to Prime Minister, 14 November 2008, ‘Iraq: Update’.

⁹⁴ *BBC News*, 16 November 2008, *Iraq cabinet backs US troops deal*.

⁹⁵ *BBC News*, 18 November 2008, *Iraq leader defends US troop deal*.

⁹⁶ Minute Salmon to CJO, 23 November 2008, ‘GOC MND(SE) Weekly Letter – 23 November 2008’.

⁹⁷ *BBC News*, 21 November 2008, *Iraqis protest against troop deal*.

⁹⁸ Minute Cooper to CDS, 24 November 2008, ‘SBMR-I’s Weekly Report (328) 24 Nov 08’.

be put to the vote on 26 November. If unsuccessful, the US was expected to press Prime Minister Maliki to take forward renewal of the Security Council resolution.

257. Lt Gen Cooper had recently discussed the UK SOFA with Gen Odierno, who had agreed to raise the UK agreement with Prime Minister Maliki if the US equivalent was agreed by Parliament. This was “a one shot weapon” and Lt Gen Cooper advised that “we need to hold our nerve and let him judge the moment”.

258. On 28 November, Mr Brown’s Assistant Private Secretary wrote to Mr McDonald to record a discussion with Mr Brown on the UK/Iraq SOFA two days previously.⁹⁹ In the discussion, those present had “noted that the US SOFA was being considered by the Council of Representatives”. Before the note was circulated, the US SOFA had passed. Attention was now expected to turn to the UK SOFA.

259. The Assistant Private Secretary reported that Mr Brown said he had been clear with Prime Minister Maliki that the UK would not leave until the job was done, but he thought that Prime Minister Maliki wanted a fixed end point in the SOFA. Mr Brown directed that Mr McDonald should visit Prime Minister Maliki on his behalf and “negotiate a SOFA with combat authorities – initially offering May, but with a fall-back to March if necessary”.

260. In an update on Afghanistan and Iraq on 28 November, Cabinet Office officials told Mr Brown that the Iraqi Parliament had approved the US SOFA the previous day, but had also ordered a referendum on it by the end of July 2009.¹⁰⁰ If the Agreement was voted down, the US would have 12 months to leave Iraq.

261. It was looking increasingly unlikely that the UK SOFA would be agreed before the Iraqi Parliament rose on 22 December. That left a risk that the UK would need to suspend combat operations from the end of 2008 until a SOFA was approved. Mr McDonald was scheduled to meet Prime Minister Maliki on 1 or 2 December.

262. The update also recorded that “Basra remains calm and stable, with no attacks on UK forces for seven weeks”.

December 2008

263. On 1 December, Lt Gen Cooper reported to ACM Stirrup that he had spoken once again to Gen Odierno about the UK SOFA.¹⁰¹ Gen Odierno planned to raise the issue with Prime Minister Maliki that evening if the moment was right. Mr McDonald would meet Gen Odierno beforehand, and then see Prime Minister Maliki the following day.

⁹⁹ Minute Catsaras to McDonald, 28 November 2008, ‘Iraq/SOFA’.

¹⁰⁰ Minute Cabinet Office [junior official] to Prime Minister, 28 November 2008, ‘Afghanistan and Iraq; Update’.

¹⁰¹ Minute Cooper to CDS, 1 December 2008, ‘SBMR-I’s Weekly Report (329) 1 Dec 08’.

264. Mr Brown met ACM Stirrup on 4 December for a “personal and confidential” discussion.¹⁰² On Iraq, Mr Brown said that it looked as though Prime Minister Maliki would accept a legal agreement that included fixed dates for the withdrawal of UK troops. It would be important for the UK to show that the withdrawal was happening because the UK had completed all the tasks it had set out. A “last push” on economic development was needed, along with a communications plan for the next few weeks.

265. ACM Stirrup said that he hoped there would be cross-party support for a message of UK success. Although it was “never the intention to have transformed Basra”, nonetheless “we would have got it to the starting point”. UK troop numbers would reduce significantly in June, with the US brigade combat team arriving in May to “do their own tasks”.

266. Reporting his visit to Iraq to the Iraq; Strategy Group on 5 December, Mr McDonald said that Prime Minister Maliki had agreed combat authorisations to enable UK forces to complete the training of 14 Division and to continue naval operations in the northern Gulf.¹⁰³ Rather than putting a legal agreement to the Council of Representatives, there would be an exchange of letters between the two Governments. He added that:

“The imminent declaration by the Attorney General that a state of Internal Armed Conflict in Iraq continued to exist would be necessary to underpin the legal basis.”

267. Mr McDonald described three possible scenarios, all of which NSID(OD) would need to consider:

- An exchange of letters with the Iraqi Government, providing a legal basis for combat operations, but not as robust as a full SOFA. Ministers would need to decide if they were content with this.
- Political agreement with the Iraqi Government, with an uncertain legal basis. The UK would have to consider what it could still do, relying on the right to self defence.
- No agreement reached, meaning transition to a “normal bilateral relationship” from January 2009.

268. NSID(OD) discussed Iraq on 9 December 2008.¹⁰⁴

269. Papers provided for the meeting included ‘Iraq: Arrangements for Transition’.¹⁰⁵ The paper recounted Mr McDonald’s scenarios and Ministers were invited to consider “the implications of the three scenarios for the UK’s reputation, and what the Armed Forces would be able to do in each”. If no legal agreement was achieved, Ministers were

¹⁰² Letter Catsaras to Rimmer, 4 December 2008, ‘Prime Minister’s meeting with Chief of Defence Staff, 4 December’.

¹⁰³ Minute Cabinet Office [junior official] to McDonald, 8 December 2008, ‘Iraq Strategy Group, 5 December’.

¹⁰⁴ Minutes, 9 December 2008, NSID(OD) meeting.

¹⁰⁵ [Paper by Officials, 8 December 2008, ‘Iraq: Arrangements for Transition’.](#)

asked to consider whether a political agreement would be sufficient or whether the UK should move on 1 January 2009 to a “normal” bilateral relationship with Iraq.

270. The implications of the second scenario (a political agreement) were that the UK would have to “adjust” its force posture and halt activities supporting combat operations. Since UK forces would only be able to carry out advisory tasks, “the US would have to complete much of our mission in Basra”.

271. If no agreement was secured (the third scenario), UK forces would have to “leave as quickly as possible”, causing reputational damage for the Army in particular.

272. Since Mr McDonald’s discussion with Prime Minister Maliki, the paper explained that continued negotiations had produced a proposal for:

- “• a short draft law to the CoR [Council of Representatives] with: authorisation for UK (and Australian) forces to remain in Iraq until 31 July 2009 and exemption from Iraqi jurisdiction for those forces; and a statement that Maliki shall set the necessary arrangements for the tasks and missions of these forces.
- complement this law with a (non-legally binding) EoL [Exchange of Letters] between governments enshrining the tasks.”

273. This proposal looked “acceptable from a legal perspective” but carried “some political risk”, specifically that Prime Minister Maliki might leave the legislation “to its own fate” in the Iraqi Council of Representatives.

274. An annex to the paper suggested that the key elements of future relations with Iraq should be:

- diplomatic and political activity – lobbying and influencing in support of the full range of UK activities, encouraging Iraq’s political development and the usual migration and consular activities conducted by an Embassy;
- economic development – influencing Iraqi economic policy and supporting further capacity building on public finance management, investment, trade and higher education;
- defence – continued support for the coalition Naval Training Team, capacity building within the Iraqi Ministry of Defence, and Royal Naval and Royal Air Force participation in coalition maritime and air operations in Iraq and in the Northern Arabian Gulf;
- energy – ensuring the security of Iraq’s oil supply and long-term increase in oil output;
- commercial – support for trade missions, UK investor visits and political lobbying to ensure a level playing field for UK exporters and investors; and
- education – increased collaboration with Iraqi educational institutions, civil society, student exchanges and English language training.

275. The paper invited Ministers to agree that Mr Miliband should circulate detailed proposals on the UK's future relations with Iraq, for agreement in writing.

276. At the NSID(OD) meeting, Mr Brown outlined "strong progress" on the UK's four key tasks (training the Iraqi Army, promoting economic development, readying Basra Airport for transfer to Iraqi control and preparing for provincial elections).¹⁰⁶ He told those present that he would visit Iraq on 17 December.

277. In discussion of the future legal basis for military activity in Iraq, it was observed that it was vital to avoid any risk of UK troops facing Iraqi jurisdiction; without a legally binding agreement the UK would not be able to complete its tasks.

278. Summing up the discussion, Mr Brown concluded that the UK should keep up the pressure on Prime Minister Maliki and his advisers to "see the proposed agreement through" before his visit. Planning should proceed on the current proposed timescale, for now. If a legal agreement looked unlikely before the Prime Minister's planned visit "we should re-consider our options then".

279. Mr Brown also concluded that more should be done to improve economic development and prospects for investment, including with Ministries in Baghdad, and that it was also important to make progress on the Hydrocarbons Law (see Section 10.3).

280. Ministers agreed that sign off for the UK's long term strategy for Iraq would be sought out of committee.

281. The following day, Mr Prentice wrote to Prime Minister Maliki's Adviser on Foreign Affairs, attaching "a draft of the Exchange of Letters recording the tasks to be completed by the UK forces and the timeframe agreed with Prime Minister Maliki last week for their withdrawal from Iraq".¹⁰⁷ The letters assumed that the Iraqi Government would submit a "short law" to the Council of Representatives on 16 December, to give UK forces "the necessary jurisdictional protections".

282. Gen Dannatt visited Iraq from 13 to 15 December and reported to ACM Stirrup that Basra was:

"... marked by a sense of great optimism: attacks are now the exception rather than the rule; the Iraqi security forces are demonstrating impressive, albeit nascent, ability. And there are early signs of a bustling city attempting to return to normality."¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶ Minutes, 9 December 2008, NSID(OD) meeting.

¹⁰⁷ Letter Prentice to al-Rikabi, 10 December 2008, [untitled].

¹⁰⁸ Minute CGS to Various, 15 December 2008, 'CGS visit to Iraq: 13-15 Dec 08'.

283. However, that positive assessment was tempered by concern about the state of the economy:

“... scratch the surface and the scale of the challenges that lie ahead becomes apparent ... the issues raised by the locals I spoke to cause me some concern: jobs, electricity, rubbish and jobs again – I see only limited progress in any of these areas. We must do all that we can to generate employment and encourage Iraq’s neighbours to invest in the potentially rich South. We must not over-sell the outstanding work that has been done.”

284. Looking to the longer term, Gen Dannatt reported that he did not support any residual Army commitment in the South of Iraq once UK troops had been extracted. Rather, the Army should plan to provide the lead for the NATO training mission in Baghdad, “though I am not convinced we fully understand the potential totality of this task, particularly in terms of FP [force protection] and life support”.

285. Gen Odierno had been “generous enough to suggest” that, once the US merged the MNF-I, MNC-I and MNSTC-I commands in early 2010, the UK should provide one of the three-star Deputy Commander posts. Gen Dannatt’s view, given the UK’s overall commitment and the focus of the training mission, was that a two-star post would be more appropriate.

286. Mr Brown told Cabinet on 16 December that, following delicate discussions, the UK had agreed with Prime Minister Maliki arrangements that would give legal protection for UK troops in Iraq after the expiry of resolution 1790 at the end of the year.¹⁰⁹ The law would be put to the Council of Representatives shortly.

287. Mr Brown noted progress on the four key tasks – training Iraqi forces, restoring local government, handing over Basra international airport and economic development. He urged further efforts over the next few months to complete these tasks and allow the drawdown of troops to begin in May, a timetable agreed with the Iraqi Government that suited UK forces. The UK would leave Iraq “with pride, having successfully completed our tasks”.

288. In discussion, members of Cabinet observed that although negotiations were not complete, the “risk of premature departure” was reduced. ACM Stirrup had advised that the outcome was “acceptable, if not perfect”.

289. Mr Hutton wrote to Mr Brown on 16 December to report that the MOD and FCO team in Baghdad had finalised negotiations with its Iraqi counterparts on a draft law providing UK forces with the necessary jurisdictional immunities, and was nearing agreement on a Government to Government Exchange of Letters.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹ Cabinet Conclusions, 16 December 2008.

¹¹⁰ Letter Hutton to Brown, 16 December 2008, ‘Iraq: Legal Arrangements in 2009’.

290. The Chiefs of Staff were content that these provisions “but no less” were sufficient to allow the UK military to complete its tasks. Mr Hutton and ACM Stirrup therefore recommended that Mr Brown agree with Prime Minister Maliki that UK forces should complete their mission in Iraq on that basis. The MOD would need to review the position if the text of the draft law changed as it proceeded through the Iraqi Parliament.

291. The draft law on immunities meant that UK forces were exempt from Iraqi justice unless they committed a crime “off-base and with intent or as a result of gross negligence”. Anyone captured by this would remain in UK custody. This was:

“... less than the US have secured through their Status of Forces Agreement, but UK forces are not doing the same range of tasks, are far fewer in number and, on current plans, will complete our key tasks and withdraw the vast majority of troops by 31 July 2009.”

292. The accompanying Exchange of Letters constituted an “invitation” from the Government of Iraq to complete the UK tasks.

293. The two main remaining risks were that the Iraqi Parliament amended or failed to pass the law, or that it was not ratified by 1 January 2009. However, Mr Hutton wrote that:

“... the Iraqi Council of Ministers voted today to agree the legal text and have passed it to the Council of Representatives ... The draft law is expected to have its first reading on 17 December. There is still a chance therefore, if there are no further delays, that it will pass its third Reading on 22 December and be ratified by the Presidency Council no later than 10 days afterwards.”

294. Mr Brown spoke by telephone to President Bush on 16 December.¹¹¹ He explained that the UK had almost agreed the legal arrangements for a continued UK military presence in Iraq in 2009 and that he was grateful for US support.

295. At its 17 December meeting, the JIC assessed the performance of the Iraqi Security Forces.¹¹²

296. The JIC assessed that:

“1. Major security decisions are driven by Prime Minister Maliki ... But his circumvention of over-bureaucratic processes has furthered rather than hampered the overall improvement in security.”

297. The JIC judged that the ISF would be “much better placed to manage internal security in 2009, including during elections, but will be unable wholly to prevent

¹¹¹ Letter Fletcher to Gould, 16 December 2008, ‘Prime Minister’s call with US President, 16 December’.

¹¹² [JIC Assessment, 18 December 2008, ‘Iraqi Security Forces: Mixed Abilities’](#).

intimidation of the electorate or political assassinations”. The ISF’s ability to maintain security after the MNF’s departure would depend on:

- continued improvements in capabilities;
- loyalty to the state;
- effective reconciliation of Shia insurgents;
- any resurgence of AQ-I; and
- popular trust.

298. The development of the ISF is addressed in more detail in Section 12.1.

299. Mr Brown visited Baghdad and Basra on 17 December accompanied by ACM Stirrup.¹¹³ During the trip Mr Peter Watkins, MOD Director General Operational Policy, briefed Mr Brown on the latest security agreement developments. ACM Stirrup’s Military Adviser reported that he had been “clear that the final text had to ensure that ‘our people must not be subject to legal proceedings in Iraq’” and was “*adamant* that ‘we must have written legal confirmation for the spectrum of ... operations’”. Mr Watkins was fairly confident that the law would complete its third reading by 30 December.

300. Mr Brown met Prime Minister Maliki in Baghdad on 17 December.¹¹⁴ He confirmed that the UK wanted to “finish the tasks we had set” and to “see Iraq in full control”. It would be important to ensure that the public in the UK and Iraq knew about the successes that had been achieved. Mr Brown said that he intended to tell Parliament that UK forces would conclude their mission by 31 May and withdraw by 31 July.

301. Prime Minister Maliki said he was grateful for what the UK had achieved. Thanks to military co-operation, terrorism had been confronted in Iraq. The UK and Iraq would need to work together on the basis for the future involvement of UK forces in Iraq. His preference was for an MOU or exchange of letters, although he understood that this would not be legally binding. Once the arrangements had been agreed, it would be important to move to a broader bilateral relationship between the two countries.

302. On 18 December, Mr Brown made a statement in the House of Commons on “the future of British troops in Iraq, the timetables, our legal agreements and our force numbers”.¹¹⁵

303. Mr Brown set out progress against the key tasks he had described in his statement on 22 July and told MPs:

“Yesterday in Baghdad, I told Prime Minister Maliki, and he agreed, that British forces in Iraq should have time to finish the missions I have just outlined.”

¹¹³ Minute Kyd to PS/SofS [MOD], 18 December 2008, ‘CDS Visit to Iraq 17 Dec 08’.

¹¹⁴ Letter Catsaras to Gould, 18 December 2008, ‘Prime Minister’s Meeting with Iraqi Prime Minister, 17 December’.

¹¹⁵ House of Commons, *Official Report*, 18 December 2008, columns 1233-1250.

304. Working with the Government of Iraq, the UK had defined:

“... first, the tasks that need to [be] completed; secondly, the authorisations needed to complete them; and thirdly, a way to provide a firm legal basis for our forces.”

305. Mr Brown explained that he expected the process of securing a legal basis for UK forces to be completed before resolution 1790 expired, but:

“In the event of the process not being complete, the Iraqis have told us that Coalition Provisional Authority Order 17, which confers protection on coalition troops, will remain in place. Our troops will therefore have the legal basis that they need for the future.”

306. Once the agreed tasks were complete, “the fundamental change of mission that I described in the House last summer will take place by 31 May 2009 at the latest”. Thereafter a “rapid withdrawal” of troops would begin, taking the total from around 4,100 to under 400 by the end of July. Most of the remaining troops would be dedicated to naval training.

307. After withdrawal had taken place, the future Iraq/UK relationship would be “one of partnership”, focused on “economic, commercial, cultural and educational relationships”.

308. The Council of Representatives rejected the law covering UK operations in Iraq on 20 December, by six votes.¹¹⁶ Mr Brown’s Assistant Private Secretary told Mr Brown that there had been a dispute over whether the correct procedures had been followed in debating the proposal within the Council of Representatives.

309. Iraqi politicians told Mr Prentice that they were objecting to the process rather than the content of the law; Prime Minister Maliki was clear that he still wanted to ensure that the arrangements were put in place.

310. The Assistant Private Secretary advised Mr Brown that the UK was pursuing three options:

- discussing with Mr Maliki’s legal adviser whether it would be possible to reach agreement on a Government to Government basis, without formal ratification by the Parliaments;
- a letter from the Iraqi Chief Justice confirming that a Government to Government agreement could rest on CPA Order No.17; or
- making cosmetic changes to the law, which would then be resubmitted to the Council of Representatives.

311. Mr Hutton was quoted in the media describing the incident as “a minor hiccup”.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁶ Email Catsaras to Brown, 20 December 2008, ‘Iraq Withdrawal Law Lost by 6 Votes’.

¹¹⁷ *BBC News*, 21 December 2008, *Blocked Iraq troop law ‘a hiccup’*.

312. Mr Prentice told the Inquiry that after further discussion with the Iraqi authorities, it was agreed that rather than proceed with the law as previously planned, the best way to achieve the outcome needed in the time available would be to ask the Council of Representatives to pass a legally binding resolution (rather than legislation) that would authorise the Council of Ministers to enter into the necessary MOUs with all the non-US coalition members.¹¹⁸

313. On 21 December, Mr Brown's Assistant Private Secretary emailed him to say that "the way forward is crystallising around a resolution of the Iraqi Parliament (one vote rather than three readings)".¹¹⁹ A vote was expected the following day.

314. Mr Prentice reported progress to the FCO on 24 December.¹²⁰ He explained that for Iraqi MPs, resolving the legal basis for coalition forces had been a "side show ... as they focused on how to remove their Speaker" after he made a series of insulting statements in the chamber.

315. Following Speaker Mashhadani's resignation – accepted "in an almost unanimous vote" – on 23 December, the Deputy Speaker read out a resolution which authorised the Council of Ministers to "take all necessary measures to regulate the presence and activities of the forces of the UK, Australia, Estonia, Romania, El Salvador and NATO from 1 January until 31 July 2009" which was then approved by "a clear majority".

316. Mr Prentice recorded: "The approval of the Resolution took three minutes from start to finish."

317. Mr Prentice commented that Prime Minister Maliki and his allies in the Council of Representatives had been instrumental in ensuring that the resolution passed, reflecting that he was in a "completely different (and much better) place" regarding the UK:

"We now have the opportunity to build on this better relationship in the transition we see to a wider 'normalised' relationship with Iraq, as it recovers its full sovereignty from 01/01/09. First we need to achieve 'closure' through the completion of our remaining military tasks and the drawdown of our forces with proper pride in their achievements. Thereafter, we should take care to retain due focus on Iraq's continuing strategic importance to our interests and the opportunities which will progressively open to us here."

318. Mr Watkins advised Mr Hutton on 28 December that the resolution had been ratified by the Presidency Council the previous day.¹²¹ But an exchange of letters between the UK and Iraqi Governments "recording the GoI's consent to UK forces' tasks

¹¹⁸ Public hearing, 6 January 2008, page 45.

¹¹⁹ Email Catsaras to Brown, 21 December 2008, 'Iraq Withdrawal Law Lost by 6 Votes'.

¹²⁰ eGram 50868/08 Baghdad to London, 24 November 2008, 'Iraq: Parliament Passes Resolution Providing Legal Basis for UK Forces Beyond 2008'.

¹²¹ Minute Watkins to PS/Secretary of State [MOD], 28 December 2008, 'Iraq: Legal Basis of UK Forces'.

and regulating other matters such as the use of bases, freedom of movement etc” was still required, and had run into difficulties.

319. Drafts had been prepared in early December, but discussions were put on hold while passage of the law was in progress. After the resolution was passed on 23 December, Iraqi officials did not appear willing to re-engage on the letters.

320. Mr Prentice and Mr Watkins met their key contact on 28 December and were told that it remained the Iraqi Government’s intention to complete the authorisation process in time for the letters to be signed on 31 December, but the indications were that there would be further delays within the Iraqi system. Mr Watkins commented:

“This is an unwelcome turn of events, although we had not expected the finalisation of the EoL [Exchange of Letters] to be straightforward ... Subject to developments tomorrow, there is a risk that the CoM [Council of Ministers] on Tuesday will (at Maliki’s behest) circumscribe the authorisation of our tasks in a way that effectively gives us a ‘training only’ mission in 2009 (which, the cynic might suspect, was his aim all along). We will have two options:

- Conclude the EoL on this basis (and inform the US that we will have to cease ‘operational’ MITTING – and so induce an accelerated deployment of US forces into Basra ...)
- Push for combat authorisations and accept delay in the signature of the EoL beyond 31 December, leading to another operational ‘pause’ ...”

321. Just over 24 hours before the expiry of resolution 1790, at 2230 on 30 December Mr Prentice signed an MOU with the Iraqi Minister of Defence on behalf of the UK and Iraqi Governments.¹²² The Australians signed their own MOU the same day; other coalition partners were continuing their negotiations, supported by the US. Mr Prentice reported to the FCO that:

“A further UK-Iraq agreement is planned, to cover non-operational training tasks which will continue beyond 31 May. This may also need to be put to the CoR [Council of Representatives] in due course.”

322. In his evidence to the Inquiry, Lt Gen Cooper commented that the terms of the UK’s MOU had not been as strong as the Status of Forces Agreement that the Iraqis had negotiated with the US, but it was sufficient for the tasks that UK forces were conducting at the time.¹²³

323. Asked by the Inquiry why the UK had settled for an MOU rather than pushing for a Status of Forces Agreement like the US, Mr Prentice explained that, by this stage, there was “exhaustion in the Iraqi body politic with the idea of international agreements” and,

¹²² eGram 51110/08 Baghdad to FCO London, 31 December 2008, ‘Iraq: MOU Signed Sealing Legal Basis for UK Forces Post 2008’.

¹²³ Public hearing, 15 December 2009, page 88.

with several other coalition partners in addition to the UK, there “just wasn’t the capacity or the political will” to go through the process of negotiating another Status of Forces Agreement, having just agreed the US one.¹²⁴ So, on Iraqi advice, the UK went for an authorising law in Parliament.

324. On the Iraqi political dynamics surrounding the MOU, Mr Prentice told the Inquiry:

“The whole issue was ... a symptom and also a sort of football, kicked around amongst the political actors who were trying to manoeuvre each other into a position of appearing to be the advocate of continued international occupation of Iraq.”¹²⁵

January 2009

325. On 13 January, Mr Miliband’s Private Secretary circulated a draft strategy for “UK policy towards and relations with Iraq following military drawdown” to members of NSID.¹²⁶ It had been agreed by officials from all interested departments and by Mr Miliband and concluded that:

“... the UK will retain an important strategic interest in the emergence of a stable, unitary and broadly democratic Iraq, with a functioning economy, which can contribute to regional stability and prosperity and to global and European energy security.”

326. To retain influence on bilateral interests in the areas of trade, immigration and counter-terrorism, it was necessary that “the Iraqis believe we take the relationship seriously”. Both the UK’s bilateral objectives and the “wish to draw Iraq into a pro-Western ‘arc of stability’ reaching from Turkey to the Gulf States” would require “a high degree of engagement”. Mr Miliband had decided to maintain the Embassy in Baghdad as the “focal point” for that engagement, with an office in Erbil to support “commercial and other relationship building activity” but in Basra representation would be reduced to a “mini-mission” of three or four staff.

327. The strategy paper explained in more detail that the UK had:

“... a strategic national interest in a strong, stable and non-hostile Iraq that:

- acts in accordance with international law and does not threaten its neighbours;
- provides a counterweight against Iran, ideally as a pro-Western state ...;
- is able to deny AQ-I and other terrorist groups a safe haven in its national territory;

¹²⁴ Public hearing, 6 January 2010, pages 43-45.

¹²⁵ Public hearing, 6 January 2010, page 38.

¹²⁶ [Letter Hickey to Catsaras, 13 January 2009, ‘Iraq: Strategy’, enclosing Paper ‘Iraq: A Review of Strategy’.](#)

- contributes positively to stable world energy markets by maximising its potential as a producer and exporter of oil and gas, and increases EU energy security through developing new supply routes.”

328. In order to achieve these objectives, the paper suggested that it was essential that Iraq should remain a single entity; be capable of representing and serving the interests of all its communities effectively; be able to defend its own borders and maintain internal and external security; and have a functioning economy, which would require agreement on the Hydrocarbons Law.

329. It was also highly desirable that Iraq should be “a broadly democratic state”, should address critical humanitarian issues (in particular the large number of refugees and displaced people) and should develop a strong and open market economy.

330. The main strategic risk identified was “the inability of the Iraqi leadership and parties to rise above sectarian or partisan motivations and work in the interest of the whole of Iraq”. The main operational risk was the security situation, which remained “inimical to normal civilian operations”, so keeping the cost of operating in Iraq high.

331. An annex to the main paper described further “problem areas”, including:

“Fundamental questions about Iraq’s future have not yet been settled. There is still no broad agreement between a critical mass of Iraqi actors on the extent of centralism versus devolution (both economic and political); the nature of the relationships between Sunni and Shia, and between Arabs and Kurd ... In addition, serious doubts remain about the willingness and ability of Iraqi leaders to effect reconciliation between Iraq’s main communities and encourage an inclusive and fair political process.”

332. The strategy paper set out the elements of the future relationship, in broadly similar terms to those identified in the Cabinet Office paper for NSID. The main difference was the specific addition of counter-terrorism and the processing of voluntary and compulsory returns of migrants to Iraq, including the Kurdish Region. The paper stated that:

“The UK ... are no longer in a position to dictate political, economic and security outcomes in Iraq ... however, we have a clear interest in these outcomes insofar as they affect Iraq’s security, stability, prosperity and governance. We therefore need to remain politically engaged and seek to maximise our influence over Iraqi choices on issues such as reconciliation, energy sector development and Kirkuk which are fundamental to the future nature of the Iraqi state. This will only be possible if the Iraqis believe we take the relationship seriously ...

“UK assistance to Iraq should increasingly aim to support the Iraqis in ways they find useful and persuade them to leverage their own resources ... Elements of training and capacity-building assistance can continue to be offered outside Iraq. But overall,

the strategy will require the active involvement of a wide range of Departments in country ...”

333. On 16 January, the Principal Private Secretary to Lord Peter Mandelson, Business, Innovation and Skills Secretary, wrote to Mr Brown’s Assistant Private Secretary setting out plans for UKTI resources in Iraq.¹²⁷ He reported that three new UKTI staff would be operating in Baghdad in the coming weeks and that a vacant Commercial Assistant slot had been filled. All four would cover the whole of Iraq and would work with UKTI staff in Jordan “maximising the potential for British exporters and investors”.

334. On 19 January, the day before the inauguration of Mr Obama as the 44th President of the United States, Mr Brown telephoned President Bush and said that he had been proud to work together on Iraq.¹²⁸

335. Mr Alistair Darling, Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr John Hutton, the Defence Secretary, and Mr Alexander all confirmed their agreement to the proposed strategy.¹²⁹

336. Mr Hutton’s Private Secretary reported that:

“... the decision to retain an Embassy office in Basra is welcome, as this should help us to preserve our legacy and to support UK business in southern Iraq. Indeed, the Defence Secretary hopes that HMG will do all it can to encourage and support UK business to take advantage of the commercial opportunities now available in Iraq.”¹³⁰

337. On 26 January, days before the provincial elections, Lt Gen Cooper’s Policy Adviser reported that election planning had “generated major administrative and security challenges to which, as matters stand, the Iraqi Higher Electoral Commission (IHEC) and the ISF are responding positively”.¹³¹

338. On 28 January, at the request of the MOD, the JIC assessed the strategic threats facing Iraq and the UK change of mission in 2009.¹³² Its Key Judgements included:

“I. Iraq will face significant political and security challenges in 2009, but these are unlikely to threaten overall stability while US forces remain and the progressive shift from violence to politics continues. National elections will maintain the focus on political activity and delay progress on the long-standing disputes that divide Iraq.

“II. The greatest strategic threat to Iraq’s stability stems from internal political failures that could lead to renewed violence within and between Iraq’s Sunni, Shia

¹²⁷ [Letter Abel to Catsaras, 16 January 2009, \[untitled\]](#).

¹²⁸ Letter Fletcher to Gould, 19 January 2009, ‘Prime Minister’s Call with US President, 19 January’.

¹²⁹ Letter Jordan to Hickey, 26 January 2009, ‘Iraq Strategy’; Letter Ferguson to Catsaras, 29 January 2009, ‘Iraq: Strategy’; Letter Wright to Catsaras, 5 February 2009, ‘Iraq Strategy’.

¹³⁰ Letter Ferguson to Catsaras, 29 January 2009, ‘Iraq: Strategy’.

¹³¹ Minute POLAD to PSO/CDS, 26 January 2009, ‘SBMR-I’s Weekly Report (337) 26 Jan 09’.

¹³² [JIC Assessment, 28 January 2009, ‘Iraq: Threats to Stability and UK Mission Change in 2009’](#).

and Kurdish communities. Pressure on the Iraqi budget by the low price of oil will increase factional competition over allocation of resources ...

“III. Government mishandling of Sons of Iraq Sunni auxiliaries would present a serious risk of a return to a large-scale Sunni insurgency. This is unlikely during 2009.

“IV. The threat from Al Qaida in Iraq has reduced significantly. It will continue to exploit ethnic and sectarian tensions and will remain capable of sporadic high profile attacks for the foreseeable future, but lacks sufficient support from the Sunni community or a sufficiently volatile sectarian environment to pose a strategic threat in 2009.

“V. The Sadrist threat has declined. But Sadrists are likely to cause some instability through their criminal activities and intimidation of Shia communities, particularly if they fail to achieve political representation. Some Iranian-backed Shia militants see attacks on withdrawing US forces as an opportunity to claim a victory but coalition and Iraqi forces will be able to prevent them from derailing the withdrawal plans.”

339. On 31 January, provincial elections were held across Iraq.¹³³ The BBC reported that there was “virtually no violence at all” on polling day.

February 2009

340. On 9 February, Mr Brown’s Assistant Private Secretary told the Private Secretaries of Mr Miliband and Lord Mandelson that Mr Brown had endorsed the strategy, which was consistent with the approach described to Parliament on 18 December.¹³⁴ Mr Brown had “welcomed the recent provisional [sic] elections and discussed with Gen Petraeus the good progress with military drawdown planning”. Mr Brown was reported to be “keen to ensure maximum savings as we move to a normal bilateral relationship” but agreed that:

“... the UK will retain an important strategic interest in the emergence of a stable and prosperous Iraq, able to contribute to regional stability and global energy security; and that we will have important bilateral interests in Iraq which need to be secured and promoted ...

“In particular, the Prime Minister continues to believe that improving trade and investment in Iraq is key both to consolidating the security gains that have been made, and ensuring UK investors are able to benefit from the opportunities in Iraq ... We also need to ensure that investors in Basra continue to be supported as our military hands over to US.”

341. The Assistant Private Secretary wrote that a planned visit by Prime Minister Maliki to an Investor Conference in London at the end of April would be “an important

¹³³ *BBC News*, 6 February 2009, *UN hails Iraq election result*.

¹³⁴ Letter Catsaras to Hickey, 9 February 2009, ‘Iraq Strategy’.

milestone for showcasing progress in the transition to a new relationship with Iraq” and requested advice on the communications strategy for Iraq over the coming six months. He recorded that Cabinet Office officials had been asked to provide advice on “ambitious deliverables” for Prime Minister Maliki’s visit.

342. Lt Gen Cooper reported the provisional results of the provincial elections to ACM Stirrup on 9 February.¹³⁵ He wrote:

“There were several key themes. In Baghdad (with 38 percent) and the south, PM Maliki’s State of Law Coalition made very significant gains; in Basra and Najaf they were the leading party with 37 percent and 16 percent respectively. In the troubled provinces of Ninawa and Diyala there was significant change, principally reflecting the Sunnis’ return to local representation. In Anbar, fears of a violent reaction ... were averted when the two principal parties shared the spoils (with 18 percent and 17 percent respectively). In Diyala the Sunni/Kurd/Shia divide was resolved in favour of the Sunni and Kurds. Maysan was lost by the Sadrists who were pushed into second place with Maliki leading with 18 percent.”

343. Confirmed results were expected on 23 February at the earliest.

344. Mr Baker visited Basra in mid-February.¹³⁶ Reporting his “personal impressions” to senior FCO officials he commented:

“The provincial elections have left a definite winner – the Maliki coalition – but all leading politicians were clear that they wanted to work together for the good of Basra. This laudable desire could be torpedoed by Maliki if he decides to impose his own man as governor. But the initiative encouraged by us last year to bring the parties together under a unity and justice heading, has paid dividends in encouraging political co-operation.

“This unity argues well for the next Provincial Council. Which is as well, as it will face many challenges ... I have talked through potential for investment and assistance with the political leadership who responded enthusiastically to the thought of UK help. But they have little ideas of their own and their views on service delivery and investment came across as naive.

“I therefore discussed with the team in Basra ways in which we should be looking to help over the next few months and especially as we begin to draw down militarily. We have begun the investment work ... and we are well advanced on capacity building which will be taken over by the UN, funded by DFID. We now need to identify areas for UK companies to get involved ... Our continuing role in capacity-building will help identify further niche areas.

¹³⁵ Minute Cooper to CDS, 9 February 2009, ‘SBMR-I’s Weekly Report (339) 9 Feb 09’.

¹³⁶ Minute Baker to Jenkins, 19 February 2009, ‘Iraq: Visit to Basra’.

“We should also focus on the long-term relationships between Basra and the UK. I have asked my team to draw up a mini strategy focusing especially on areas such as co-operation in the educational field, including universities, local government co-ordination, city twinning (perhaps focused on oil, eg Aberdeen; or as a centre for a religion eg Canterbury), co-operation in the field of the arts and museums.”

345. Mr Baker reported that security in Basra continued to improve, and observed that the city was “increasingly reminiscent of Erbil: a good thing”. He added:

“While it is true that the key enabler for recent progress was Charge of the Knights, it was our reaction to those events which was critical. It would have been easy to have taken that opportunity to disengage with Basra. Instead, we recognised that we could take advantage of the improving security situation and formulated and then delivered a Basra policy which focused on empowering the Iraqis through (military) training, (PRT) service delivery and (CG) political reconciliation.”

346. Reflecting on what had gone well, Mr Baker wrote:

“... the last year in Basra has been a model of co-operation between the GOC, Consul General and the Head of the PRT. This excellent example of joined up government has allowed us to reach our objectives across the board, which in turn means we will be able to leave a lasting positive legacy, something that would not have been the case even six months ago. When preparing our next lessons learned paper, we need to factor in the success this team effort has had in shifting the policy focus and improving our reputation – and thus our legacy – on the ground.”

347. The Permanent Secretaries of the FCO, the MOD and DFID – Sir Peter Ricketts, Sir Bill Jeffrey and Dr Nemat Shafik – visited Baghdad on 23 February.¹³⁷ They met several Iraqi ministers and UK officials based in Iraq to discuss how the “whole Iraq” policy could be taken forward over the next 15 months.

348. Mr Prentice reported that all their interlocutors had welcomed the UK’s commitment to move to a broad-based bilateral relationship. Foreign Minister Zebari was reported to have said that there “had been some hard feeling towards the UK as a result of our operations in Basra but these should not negatively influence our future relationship ... The Gol was open to strategic partnerships.” Sir Peter Ricketts assured him that the UK “planned a continuing presence in Erbil and Basra”.

349. Although “normality” was returning to Baghdad, Mr Prentice commented that the visitors “will have been reminded, by what they saw ... and by what they heard on all sides, that Iraq remains a country in transition with continuing political, economic and security challenges”.

¹³⁷ eGram 7003/09 Baghdad to FCO London, 25 February 2009, ‘Iraq: Visit to Baghdad by FCO, MOD and DFID Permanent Secretaries, 23 November [sic]’.

350. On 26 February, Mr Hutton placed in the House of Commons Library a list of all individuals held in UK detention facilities in Iraq, first at the Shaibah Divisional Temporary Detention Facility and subsequently at the Contingency Operating Base in Basra.¹³⁸ The list had been compiled following a review of the record of detainee numbers commissioned by Mr Browne “to satisfy himself that appropriate procedures were in place to ensure that persons captures by UK forces and transferred to US detention in Iraq were treated in accordance with UK policy and legal requirements”.

351. Mr Hutton told the House of Commons that some previous government statements on the number of detainees had been inaccurate; on three occasions they had overstated the number of detainees held in the period following January 2004 by 1,000. The information below was placed in the Library of the House of Commons by Mr Hutton on the same day.

Table 1: Number of detainees held in Iraq by the UK¹³⁹

	Interned	Released	Escaped	Deceased	Transferred to US	Transferred to Iraqi system	Detainees held at year end
Dec 2003	105 ¹⁴⁰						
2003	44	9					140
2004	230	219	1	1	2	124	23
2005	47	21				12	37
2006	136	66					107
2007	77	165 ¹⁴¹	11			3	5
2008	12	11			4	2	0
Total	105 + 546	491	12	1	6	141	

352. Mr Miliband visited Baghdad and Basra on 26 and 27 February.¹⁴² In a minute to Mr Brown reporting the visit he described it as:

“... an opportunity to highlight with the Gol in Baghdad our new and positive agenda and to explain that we want to use 2009 to build up a comprehensive UK-Iraq

¹³⁸ House of Commons, *Official Report*, 31 January 2003, columns 394-397.

¹³⁹ House of Commons Library, 26 February 2009, ‘Record of Detainees – Review Conclusions; Oral Statement by Defence Secretary – 26 February 2009’.

¹⁴⁰ These individuals were transferred from US custody when the Shaibah base opened in December 2003.

¹⁴¹ This number includes 14 individuals released on bail.

¹⁴² [Letter Miliband to Prime Minister, 9 March 2009, ‘My Visit to Iraq: 26-27 February’](#).

partnership following the end of our military presence; and in Basra to underscore the progress made and the surge of effort towards our transition.”

353. He continued:

“Overall we have an increasingly strong story to present about Basra ... The clear view of the US ... in Baghdad is that the key stage of the military transition will be ... on 31 March. They want to help us to make the most of that and to co-operate in presenting our key messages on what has been achieved in Basra ...

“In my view, a proper ceremony to mark the TOA [Transfer of Authority] on 31 March will be essential to our campaign to ‘end well’ in Basra. In June-July, after the US have been in command in the South for some months, it will be harder to distinguish between UK and US achievements.”

354. Mr Miliband described a number of obstacles to the development of a broader Iraq/UK relationship, most of which stemmed from “Iraq’s own continuing internal challenges”:

“Security had improved hugely but conditions for business visitors are still far from normal. Political and parliamentary dispute had replaced the clash of militias but the government does not yet have a monopoly of arms in society. Tensions, particularly between the Arabs and Kurds, could still flare into clashes along the Green Line. And Iraq’s economy is also facing its version of the global recession with the collapse of government revenues after the fall in the oil price. Corruption needs to be checked.”

355. Mr Prentice’s report of the visit recounted that Mr Miliband had agreed the basis for negotiation of a follow-on military training agreement, handed over a draft MOU on Trade and Investment and received an advance briefing from Gen Odierno on President Obama’s Iraq strategy.¹⁴³

356. Gen Odierno recommended that the US and UK should mark the transfer of command in Basra at the end of March – “the easiest and best moment to shape the public story over the British achievement and legacy”.

357. Mr Prentice commented:

“Only two months into the New Year and your visit has completed the first phase of our strategy to construct the new broad-scope bilateral relationship for 2009: telling everyone how different the relationship is and will become, and agreeing on the processes.”

¹⁴³ eGram 7488/09 Baghdad to FCO London, 1 March 2009, ‘Iraq: Your Visit to Baghdad, 26-27 February 2009’.

358. Cabinet Office officials told Mr Brown on 27 February that the confirmed provincial election results had been published:

“PM Maliki’s party did well and will have a working majority in both Baghdad and Basra councils. But it will have to rule in coalition in the seven other provinces where it gained the most votes. Female candidates won 103 of 440 seats. The new Provincial Councils will be working by end March.”¹⁴⁴

359. On 27 February, President Obama gave a speech at Camp Lejeune, a Marine Corps base, in which he announced that most US troops would withdraw from Iraq and the US combat mission would end by 31 August 2010.¹⁴⁵ After that point:

“... our mission will change from combat to supporting the Iraqi government and its security forces as they take the absolute lead in securing their country.”¹⁴⁶

360. Up to 50,000 troops would remain, leaving by the end of 2011, as:

“... a transitional force to carry out three distinct functions: training, equipping, and advising Iraqi security forces as long as they remain non-sectarian; conducting targeted counter-terrorism missions; and protecting our ongoing civilian and military efforts within Iraq.”

361. Sir Nigel Sheinwald, British Ambassador to the US, reported from Washington that President Obama set the announcement in the context of “a wider strategy towards the Greater Middle East”, stating that the US would work with partners to establish a new regional framework and would “pursue principled and sustained engagement with all of the nations in the region”, including Iran and Syria.¹⁴⁷

362. The need for a “comprehensive approach” was the reason the US was “refocusing on Al Qaida in Afghanistan and Pakistan; developing a strategy to use all elements of American power to prevent Iran from developing a nuclear weapon; and actively seeking lasting peace between Israel and the Arab world”.

363. President Obama had said that the US would work to promote a “just, representative and accountable” Iraqi Government but cautioned that the US could not “let the pursuit of the perfect stand in the way of achievable goals”. He recognised that it would not be possible to rid Iraq of all who opposed the US or sympathised with its enemies, but a new US Ambassador, Christopher Hill, would lead a new strategy of “sustained diplomacy”.

¹⁴⁴ Minute Cabinet Office [junior official] to Prime Minister, 27 February 2009, ‘Iraq: Update’.

¹⁴⁵ *BBC News*, 27 February 2009, *Obama outlined Iraq pullout plan*.

¹⁴⁶ *BBC News*, 27 February 2009, *Obama’s Iraq speech: Excerpts*.

¹⁴⁷ eGram 7456/09 Washington to FCO London, 28 February 2009, ‘Obama Announces Iraq Drawdown Plan’.

364. Sir Nigel reported that the President had drawn a number of “lessons learned” from Iraq:

- that to go to war the US needed clearly defined goals;
- that funding for wars should be included in the budget as part of wider transparency about the costs of war;
- that the US would expand its civilian national security capacity; and
- that the US had learned “the importance of working closely with friends and allies”.

365. In a section of the speech addressed “directly to the people of Iraq”, President Obama praised Iraq’s history, civilisation and fortitude in recent decades, and continued:

“... let me be clear about America’s intentions. The United States pursues no claim on your territory or your resources. We respect your sovereignty and the tremendous sacrifices you have made for your country. We seek a full transition to Iraqi responsibility for the security of your country. And going forward, we can build a lasting relationship founded upon mutual interests and mutual respect as Iraq takes its rightful place in the community of nations.”

366. On the same day as President Obama’s announcement, the Cabinet Office provided Mr Brown with an update on Iraq.¹⁴⁸ It recorded that there had been “a slight deterioration” in security, including the deadliest single attack for three months which had killed 55 civilians.

367. Basra remained calm, and the training of 14 Division was “virtually complete”, meaning that embedded UK mentoring teams would start to pull out from early March. The UK government had assisted six investor visits in the previous week.

March 2009

368. After a year in post as SBMR-I, Lt Gen Cooper handed over to Lt Gen Chris Brown on 3 March 2009.¹⁴⁹ In his end of tour report Lt Gen Cooper wrote that:

“... 2008-09 was a very significant year in the Iraq campaign. It built on previous events in security terms but perhaps the key event was the assertiveness of Maliki in dealing with Shia militias that then gave him the credibility and authority to establish the writ of government across Iraq ... Notwithstanding the risks and fault lines that remain in Iraq and the weakness of the economic position, the glass is half full, with regular drips of progress entering it.”

¹⁴⁸ Minute Cabinet Office [junior official] to Prime Minister, 27 February 2009, ‘Iraq: Update’.

¹⁴⁹ Report Cooper, [undated], ‘End of Tour Report 4 Mar 09 to 3 Mar 09’.

369. In political terms, Lt Gen Cooper judged that:

“Despite frequent and frustrating in-fighting, a good deal of positive progress was made politically in the last year. The political parties cobbled together a mini ‘grand bargain’ to pass the 2008 budget and the amnesty and provincial powers law; the ... [Council of Representatives] passed the provincial elections law and brought down their powerful Speaker; and the GoI pushed the US back over successive red lines before concluding the Security Agreement. In many ways, the political class came of age ...”

370. Lt Gen Cooper attributed campaign progress in Iraq to a range of factors, including:

- The clear focus maintained by the US on its declared aim of defeating extremism and allowing democracy to develop. That led to a continued commitment to win, despite very evident pressures.
- The effectiveness of the US and Iraqi surges.
- The Sunni Awakening movement, and the Sunni reconciliation initiative started by Lt Gen Lamb (see Section 9.5): “one of the key factors why Reconciliation with the Sunni worked, was that it was initiated, negotiated and delivered from a position of strength ... Against that background, the MND(SE) Reconciliation/ Accommodation with JAM in Basra in 2007 may be perceived to have been completed from a position of relative weakness.”
- The JAM national cease-fire which had allowed political and security strength and legitimacy to accrue, over time, to the Iraqi Government and ISF.
- The scale of the resources committed (in particular the US contribution).
- Time, because: “*All COIN [counter-insurgency] campaigns take time.*”
- Strong leadership on both the civilian and military sides of the coalition and within the Iraqi government and security forces.
- US development of counter-insurgency doctrine, and its understanding of the nature of the conflict, which had been “hugely impressive”: “Meanwhile, in 2009, the UK has yet to update and publish its own doctrine on COIN operations – a serious omission.”
- Co-ordination across the various lines of operation within the US system: “There are powerful lessons here for the UK cross-Government approach to future campaigns and post-conflict reconstruction.”

371. Lt Gen Cooper observed that relations between the UK and Iraq had “warmed a little in the past four months” though he was frustrated that the UK had yet to confirm the nature, scale and resource of its long-term military relationship with Iraq, particularly with the Iraqi armed forces. The Iraqi MOD was very keen to establish links. Lt Gen Cooper wrote: “Thus far we have promised something but not yet delivered it.”

372. In relation to relationships with the US, Lt Gen Cooper commented:

“2008 was a difficult year in Iraq for the UK-US relationship, but it has recovered to a degree since then. A degree of certainty in our position in MND(SE) has helped. Whilst it is true that many US officers would have wished us to stay with them until the end of their mission here, the fact that we now have a defined end date to which both parties are working has allowed harmony in planning to be maintained.”

373. Mr Prentice reported on 5 March that President Obama’s announcement had received “blanket media coverage” in Iraq.¹⁵⁰ Given his campaign pledge to withdraw troops within 16 months of taking office, the announcement had come as little surprise. But the Iraqi Government had welcomed the statement and, although some were nervous about the implications, public opinion in Iraq appeared to be mostly positive.

374. Mr Prentice commented that the “phantom elephant in the room” was the promised referendum on the US Security Agreement, described in the law that ratified the US SOFA. The US and the MNF were working on the basis that there would not be a referendum.

375. On 9 March, a CIG considered the implications of Iraq’s provincial elections, at the request of the FCO.¹⁵¹ The CIG noted that the average turnout was 51 percent and that the formerly dominant parties all performed poorly. Overall, Prime Minister Maliki’s “Rule of Law” coalition and secular Sunni parties were the winners at the expense of the Kurds and Islamist parties. Sadrists won “a handful of seats” on all southern councils and in Baghdad.

Table 2: Seats won in January 2009 provincial elections

Party	Seats
Rule of Law	126
ISCI	55
Sadrists	41
Allawi’s coalition	26
Ja’afari’s coalition	23
Hadba	19
Total seats	440

376. The CIG assessed that improved security at the elections (11 reported attacks, compared with some 300 in 2005) indicated both improvement in ISF capability and

¹⁵⁰ eGram 8095/09 Baghdad to FCO London, 5 March 2009, ‘Iraq: Reactions to Obama’s Announcement on Military Drawdown’.

¹⁵¹ [CIG Assessment, 9 March 2009, ‘Iraq After the Provincial Elections’](#).

“the increasing readiness of Iraqis to pursue their objectives through politics instead of violence”.

377. The CIG judged that Prime Minister Maliki viewed his coalition’s success as a personal victory. It had increased his standing but his power to achieve specific objectives would still vary with the issue. A successful challenge to his position was now unlikely before national elections, expected in early 2010.

378. The CIG assessed that the election results represented an endorsement of strong central government and a setback for federalism. It judged that Prime Minister Maliki would use his success to push for greater centralisation.

379. On 9 March, the Assessments Staff issued a Current Assessment Note that looked at the prospects for the ongoing reconciliation efforts between the Iraqi Government and the Sadrist movement.¹⁵² It said:

“Prime Minister Maliki has sought reconciliation with the Sadrist movement since he launched successful security operations against its Jaysh al-Mahdi militia in 2008. Progress has been slow ... but we judge that the prospects are now improving ...

“We assess that Maliki’s relationship with the Sadrists is changing and that the pace of this change is increasing. But achieving reconciliation and political alliance will take months. The reconciliation process allows Maliki to control the Sadrists without needing to give much in return. The Sadrists remain fragmented with no clear direction or strategy, and have few levers.”

380. Cabinet Office officials provided Mr Brown with an update on Afghanistan and Iraq on 13 March.¹⁵³ They reported that levels of violence across Iraq were at a six-year low, a 90 percent decrease since the US surge began in 2007. Violence in Basra remained low, with no UK or US casualties although a Pakistani civilian contractor had been killed.

381. UK military mentors and trainers embedded with the Iraqi Army had begun to disengage, and would have withdrawn completely by 31 March.

382. Discussions on an MOU for the UK’s “future (normal) military relationship with Iraq” had started and should have concluded by the time of Prime Minister Maliki’s visit for the Investment Conference.

383. The Council of Representatives had agreed the US\$59bn Iraqi Budget, but it remained US\$16bn underfunded; 86 percent of the revenue would be from oil.

384. Gen Dannatt paid what he expected to be his final visit to Iraq between 23 and 25 March, and described the mood in the South as “rightly positive about what has been achieved and optimistic about the future”.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵² CIG Current Assessment Note, 9 March 2009, ‘Iraq: Prospects for Reconciliation with the Sadrists’.

¹⁵³ Minute Cabinet Office [junior officials] to Prime Minister, 13 March 2009, ‘Afghanistan and Iraq: Update’.

¹⁵⁴ Minute CGS to PS/SofS [MOD], 25 March 2008, ‘CGS Visit to Iraq – 23-25 Mar 09’.

385. Security in Basra was “improved” since his last visit in December 2008 and there were “strong signs of economic growth”. He considered it “vital that we continue to assist the Basrawis with their economic revival”. He concluded his report to Ministers and senior staff within the MOD with some reflections on the lessons that had been learned in Iraq:

“As our operations come to an end in Iraq we must be conscious that it has at times been a difficult and bumpy ride. We will not be universally praised for what we have achieved and some will be overtly critical but we have achieved what we set out to do and we leave Basra in good shape, secure and confident about the future. But it is also essential that we learn the lessons from this campaign and transfer them effectively to Afghanistan to ensure success there. Tactical military lessons have been learned and it is the higher level political-military issues that we must now focus on; whilst the Theatres may be different, political ambition and constraint will continue to influence military operation and we must not make the same mistakes in Afghanistan that we have made in Iraq. We must do what is right militarily in a dynamic and complex environment and must not allow long term political aspiration to drive what we do – to do so invites failure. We would do well to conduct a formal and open appraisal of the operational and strategic lessons we have identified across government – this should not be seen as a means to apportion blame for what did not go well but rather as an opportunity to ensure success in Afghanistan and thereafter.”

386. On 31 March, ACM Stirrup visited Basra to attend the Transfer of Authority Ceremony for the handover of Division command to the US.¹⁵⁵ His Principal Staff Officer reported that “clear positive public and private messages ... [were] received from all Iraqi and US participants”. In calls on senior US and Iraqi officers and in a speech at the handover ceremony, ACM Stirrup reinforced that:

“This was not the end, just an important milestone:

“This did not represent the end of UK and UK Mil engagement – indeed, it really marked a new beginning:

“On a military level we remained focused ... on our Maritime and Training responsibilities ...

“UK looked to establish a positive and long term military relationship with Iraq based on partnership, mutual understanding and mutual self interest.”

387. ACM Stirrup’s Principal Staff Officer observed that “In an otherwise very upbeat day, the only thread of concern that ran through meetings was the degree of change (and drawdown) taking place around Iraq”.

¹⁵⁵ Minute Johnstone to PS/SofS [MOD], 1 April 2009, ‘CDS Visit to Iraq (Basra) to attend the MND(SE) Transfer of Authority Ceremony – 31 Mar 09’.

April 2009

388. A CIG Current Assessment Note issued on 1 April stated:

“Iraq’s increased sovereignty and security are giving it the confidence to become more assertive towards Iran. The Iraqi-US Security Agreement was the clearest example of Iraq putting its interests first.”¹⁵⁶

389. The note reported an apparent increase in Iraqi popular criticism of Iran. Nevertheless, the CIG judged that Prime Minister Maliki was not yet likely to risk antagonising Iran.

390. Lord Mandelson visited Basra on 6 April, accompanied by a UK business delegation and Mr Wareing, to attend an investment conference at Basra Airport.¹⁵⁷

391. Mr Nigel Haywood, British Consul General in Basra, reported the event to the FCO and commented that it had been “timed perfectly” so that the UK could “demonstrate that whilst the military were drawing down, the UK’s commitment to Basra continued”. The event is addressed in more detail in Section 10.2.

392. On 19 April, the Council of Representatives elected Tawafuq MP Mr Iyad al-Samarri’e as its new Speaker, filling the vacancy left by Dr Mashhadani’s resignation in December 2008.¹⁵⁸ Mr Prentice commented that this marked another important step along the path to embedding Iraq’s democratic system.

393. Mr Hutton wrote to Mr Brown on 20 April setting out the plans to mark the completion of the UK’s current military mission in Iraq, including a report to Parliament on the deliverables set out in Mr Brown’s statement of 18 December.¹⁵⁹ Mr Hutton wrote that:

“Prime Minister Maliki’s visit and the London Conference are the next key milestones for our overall bilateral relationship with Iraq. Excellent progress by UK and Iraq forces means that 30 April will now ... see the completion of our current military mission – a month ahead of previous plans ... We also hope by then to have signed the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) we need to cover the enduring military activity ... agreed in February. You and Maliki could highlight this at your joint press conference as an example of how the transition in our relations you set out to the House in December has been implemented.”

394. Mr Hutton explained that after 30 April the main UK activity under Op TELIC would be “the Royal Navy’s protection of Iraqi oil platforms and territorial waters, while also training the Iraqi Navy and Marines to take on this task in due course”. Officer training,

¹⁵⁶ CIG Current Assessment Note, 1 April 2009, ‘Iraqi Relations with Iran’.

¹⁵⁷ [eGram 12607/09 Basra to FCO London, 7 April 2009, ‘Iraq: Lord Mandelson’s Visit to Basra, 6 April’](#).

¹⁵⁸ eGram 13869/09 Baghdad to FCO London, 20 April 2009, ‘Iraq: Iyad al-Sammari’e Elected COR Speaker’.

¹⁵⁹ Letter Hutton to Brown, 20 April 2009, ‘Iraq: End of Current Military Mission’.

under NATO auspices, would also continue and a small number of embedded personnel remained in coalition HQ. Troop numbers would reduce to around 250 by April 2010.

395. On 24 April 2009, the Military Adviser to Lt Gen Wall provided him with briefing about the negotiations with JAM1 (see Section 9.6), to enable him to brief Mr Hutton “following his query to DG Sec Pol”.¹⁶⁰ The briefing set out the background to the operation and described its objectives as:

“**GOC MND(SE)**. The objective as seen by GOC MND(SE) was to split JAM into pro and anti-Iranian elements to place into a majority those viewing Iran (rather than the coalition) as the root cause of violence and instability in Basra).

“**SofS**. At the strategic level, the perspective was slightly different. 2006 saw a steady increase in the number of UK fatalities; by 2007, on average, three UK Service Personnel were being killed each month. The focus was on reducing these attacks. Further, at the end of 2006, there was a realistic prospect of 2007 being the last year in which our presence in Iraq would be authorised by a UN Security Council resolution from which coalition forces drew their authority to hold detainees. In Jan 06, there were 117 detainees held in the UK run facility in MND(SE). Given that the vast majority of these detainees would have to be released anyway, the then Secretary of State agreed that we should make a virtue out of necessity by negotiating with Basra JAM to use the releases to persuade them to stop attacks on coalition forces.”

396. The advice also reported how the negotiations were likely to be treated by an Iraq Inquiry, if one were to be commissioned:

“The extent to which [NAME OF OPERATION] would form part of an Iraq enquiry [sic] would depend on the ToRs of the enquiry (public, private, dates covered). It is, however, reasonable to assume at this stage that the operation would be admissible. In any event, most elements of the operation are in the public domain; this would be unlikely to stop the issue becoming one of a few high profile headlines in an enquiry.”

397. In an email on 29 April, Mr Brown’s Assistant Private Secretary described the following day as “a big day for Iraq”.¹⁶¹ Mr Hutton was in Basra for the transfer of authority ceremony, Prime Minister Maliki was making his first formal visit to the UK as Prime Minister, and a major Iraq investment conference would be held in London. The Assistant Private Secretary told Mr Brown that Prime Minister Maliki was “increasingly well-disposed to the UK”.

398. Mr Prentice described the “Invest Iraq” conference as the UK’s “headline initiative ... demonstrating in a practical way our desire for a new and normalised bilateral

¹⁶⁰ Minute MA1/DCDS(Ops) to DCDS(Ops) & DG Sec Pol, 24 April 2009, ‘[NAME OF OPERATION]’.

¹⁶¹ Email Catsaras to Brown, 29 April 2009, ‘PM Maliki’s Visit – Briefing’.

relationship”.¹⁶² Around 100 Ministers and senior officials from the Iraqi Government would attend, plus Iraqi businessmen and around 200 UK businesses. Prime Minister Maliki would address an evening reception at No.10.

399. The conference is described in more detail in Section 10.2.

400. Mr Brown and Prime Minister Maliki had a meeting on 30 April, during which they discussed “the bilateral relationship, and closer political, economic and investment relations based on the military co-operation between the two countries”.¹⁶³

401. The discussion also covered the need for an agreement on the legal basis for the ongoing UK military presence. Prime Minister Maliki told Mr Brown that since it was unclear legally whether there was a need to seek the approval of the Iraqi Parliament, he would do so. He assured Mr Brown that he would do so by the end of May.

402. In a letter to Mr Hutton’s Private Secretary, Mr Brown’s Assistant Private Secretary highlighted that both Mr Brown and Prime Minister Maliki had paid tribute to the work of UK Armed Forces in Iraq, and especially those who had lost their lives serving their country and bringing stability to Iraq, in their joint press conference.¹⁶⁴

403. Mr Brown’s Assistant Private Secretary confirmed that Mr Brown “welcomed the completion of the current military mission today – a month ahead of previous plans.”

May 2009

404. On 14 May, a Current Intelligence Group examined the prospects for Arab-Kurd conflict over the coming year at the request of the FCO.¹⁶⁵

405. The CIG’s Assessment recalled that the Iraqi Kurds had played a leading role in the 2003-2005 state-building process and had established territorial, political and financial power unique to their community. They enshrined the powers and territorial claims of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in the Constitution, extended their political and military influence beyond the KRG into disputed territories, gained control of Iraq’s northern oil fields and secured 17 percent of the federal budget, and central funding for their Peshmerga militia. The CIG judged that the Kurds wanted to protect these gains and to extend them by bringing Kirkuk into the KRG.

406. Although the Kurds were allied with Arab parties within the Iraqi Government, disagreements over budget allocation, Peshmerga funding, the oil industry, disputed internal boundaries and constitutional review all continued to cause tensions between the KRG and the central government. This had manifested itself in a challenge to

¹⁶² eGram 15041/09 Baghdad to FCO London, 28 April 2009, ‘Iraq: Invest Iraq Conference, London – 30 April – 1 May’.

¹⁶³ Letter Catsaras to Hickey, 30 April 2009, ‘Prime Minister’s Meeting with Iraqi Prime Minister, 30 April’.

¹⁶⁴ Letter Catsaras to Ferguson, 30 April 2009, ‘Iraq: End of Current Military Mission’.

¹⁶⁵ [CIG Assessment, 14 May 2009, ‘Iraq: Arab-Kurd Relations – Opportunities & Risks’](#).

the Kurds' share of the national budget and in the creation of the Hadba party, which successfully campaigned in provincial elections against Kurdish domination in Ninawa.

407. The CIG's Key Judgements included:

"I. The prospects for a 'grand bargain' encompassing constitutional review, disputed internal boundaries and hydrocarbons legislation are poor before national elections ... Maliki and Barzani have an opportunity to establish a constructive dialogue ... which might reduce friction between Arabs and Kurds and increase the chances of eventually reaching a deal. But it is not clear whether they will take it.

"II. The relationship between the governments in Baghdad and Erbil is largely shaped by Maliki and Barzani ...

"III. Agreement on national hydrocarbons legislation is the most likely area for progress among the issues dividing Arabs and Kurds. But this will not be achieved in 2009. There will also be no real progress on the review of Iraq's Constitution this year.

"IV. The Iraqi and Kurdish government have incompatible maximalist demands over disputed territories. International pressure will be needed on both sides if they are to take the opportunity to establish a constructive dialogue over Kirkuk following the UN report."

408. On 15 May, Maj Gen Salmon sent his end of tour report to Air Marshal Stuart Peach, Chief of Joint Operations.¹⁶⁶

409. Maj Gen Salmon reflected that October 2008 had been a significant turning point in Basra, with the local people ceasing to be "preoccupied with security" and "looking to the future with greater optimism".

410. Maj Gen Salmon was optimistic both about the progress that had been made during his time in post and the prospects for the future:

"Basra has arguably progressed from anarchy to democracy in 12 months. The militias have been defeated and residual insurgent activity is limited ... There is widespread acknowledgement of the Rule of Law, with judicial processes being developed to meet the needs of a democratic society ... In terms of wider Basrawi security, policy and border security have improved considerably ... The first free and fair elections in Iraqi history have been conducted without violence or intimidation and the results have been ratified and acknowledged internationally. The new Provincial Administration is now established. International trade through UQP [Umm Qasr Port] is flourishing and the Port ... is secure. BIA [Basra International Airport] has been handed over to trained Iraqi management. Progress has been made

¹⁶⁶ Report Salmon to MA/CJO, 15 May 2009, 'COMUKAMPHIBFOR OP TELIC 12/13 (HQ MND(SE) Post Operational Report (POR)'.

on improving essential services and Basrawi quality of life. External investment is growing rapidly and the future economic prognosis of the region is very positive. Basrawis are optimistic about their future. Our in-Theatre relationships with the US are very strong and there is widespread US and Iraqi acknowledgement of the UK's contribution to this six-year campaign. Six of the eight remaining suspects implicated in the murders of the RMP 6 in 2003 are now in custody. The conditions have been met and plans made for transition to a more normal defence relationship with Iraq. UK combat operations have now ceased ahead of schedule and the plan of UK drawdown is well under way. UK Defence can withdraw from Iraq having delivered on this promises and with its professional reputation intact. We must now focus on learning the lessons.”

411. Mr Prentice updated the Iraq Strategy Group on 21 May on negotiations with the Iraqi Government regarding the future of the UK military presence in Iraq.¹⁶⁷

412. So far, UK lobbying “had not yet got traction”. A meeting of the Council of Ministers on 26 May was expected to be critical. In the absence of an agreement, Lt Gen Wall told the Group that remaining UK personnel (naval trainers, a ship, personnel embedded in the MNF and at the military academy) would need to be withdrawn.

413. Mr McDonald told the Group that it should consider whether failure to secure an agreement was damaging in substance, or in presentational terms. Mr Watkins felt that “on balance staying with an agreement would benefit the UK”. The Group considered whether offering a reduced UK package might be helpful. Mr Prentice was given “delegated authority on whether and how to offer Maliki different options on the UK package”. Lt Gen Wall and Mr Watkins agreed to consider this further and offer guidance.

414. Mr McDonald told the Iraq Strategy Group that he saw “two conflicting objectives”: firstly that the UK should not devote increasing effort to a diminishing presence and secondly that it should not end its military presence in Iraq on “a sour note, having successfully withdrawn from Basra”. Mr McDonald concluded that the UK should make a final major effort before the 26 May meeting of the Council of Ministers, including reminding them of the commitment Prime Minister Maliki made to Mr Brown in April. If that failed, the UK should be ready to leave and should develop a handling strategy. Mr Brown should be informed.

415. Mr Prentice confirmed that Ambassador Hill and Gen Odierno were clear that if the UK withdrew it was because of the Iraqi Government's stance, not a weakening of the UK's commitment.

416. Mr Hutton wrote to Mr Brown on 22 May to say that a Defence Memorandum of Understanding looked “increasingly difficult to achieve”.¹⁶⁸ Prime Minister Maliki was

¹⁶⁷ Minute Wigan to McDonald, 21 May 2009, ‘Iraq Strategy Group, 21 May’.

¹⁶⁸ Letter Hutton to Brown, 22 May 2009, ‘Iraq: Negotiations on the Defence MOU’.

reported to believe it would be near impossible to secure Cabinet and Parliamentary agreement.

417. FCO and MOD officials in Baghdad were engaged in a final round of lobbying but Mr Hutton cautioned that Ministers might “need to make a decision shortly on whether to withdraw all remaining UK forces from Iraq”. To do so by 31 July, as the December agreement required, would mean military commanders needed instructions to depart by 15 June.

418. The key disagreement was about jurisdictional immunities for UK troops, which the Council of Ministers had diluted “to such an extent that I [Mr Hutton] and the Chief of Defence Staff consider them unacceptable”.

419. Mr Brown’s Assistant Private Secretary reminded Mr Brown that:

“Our December agreement was already less than some other NATO allies were prepared to accept – so any further dilution also risks the future NATO training mission.”¹⁶⁹

420. Mr Brown told his Assistant Private Secretary that he was prepared to speak to Prime Minister Maliki provided the groundwork had been done, and was prepared also to speak to other Iraqi politicians.¹⁷⁰ He suggested that the government could “send out David M[iliband] or John H[utton] to talk to people”.

421. Mr Brown telephoned Prime Minister Maliki early on 26 May.¹⁷¹

422. In a brief for the conversation, Mr Brown’s Assistant Private Secretary reported that Prime Minister Maliki was thought to be concerned that the agreement would be used to attack him in Parliament about extending the presence of foreign forces.¹⁷² As a result “the level of political exposure is too great for the limited reward which 400 troops and five ships can provide”.

423. Mr McDonald told the Inquiry that “one of the features of Iraqi democracy then was, something supported by the Prime Minister was looked at even more sceptically by the Iraqi Parliament”.¹⁷³

424. Prime Minister Maliki told Mr Brown over the telephone that he had been keen to reach agreement but his Cabinet had been surprised by “demands for additional elements” in the proposal “including increasing troops to 1,000”.¹⁷⁴ The version adopted by Cabinet would pass through Parliament but the UK’s current proposal would not.

¹⁶⁹ Email Catsaras to Brown, 23 May 2009, ‘Iraq: Negotiations on the Defence MOU’.

¹⁷⁰ Email Brown to Catsaras, 24 May 2009, ‘Iraq: Negotiations on the Defence MOU’.

¹⁷¹ Letter Catsaras to Ferguson, 26 May 2009, ‘Defence MOU: Prime Minister’s Call with Iraqi Prime Minister, 26 May’.

¹⁷² Email Catsaras to Brown, 26 May 2009, ‘Maliki Briefing’.

¹⁷³ Public hearing, 5 January 2010, page 41.

¹⁷⁴ Letter Catsaras to Ferguson, 26 May 2009, ‘Defence MOU: Prime Minister’s Call with Iraqi Prime Minister, 26 May’.

425. Mr Brown said that the UK was not asking for any more troops than he and Prime Minister Maliki had already discussed: 400 troops plus ships. It would be possible to discuss a reduction in troop numbers but the UK could not weaken jurisdictional immunities.

426. Prime Minister Maliki said that Iraq had three concerns:

- The number of locations for troops in Iraq was unspecified.
- Immunities were being requested even inside Iraqi installations.
- Troop tasks were not limited to training and naval support but also involved participation in command chains.

427. Prime Minister Maliki suggested that the British Embassy should recommence negotiations with the Iraqi MOD. Mr Brown said that he hoped that rapid progress could be made during the course of the day and would call again later; Mr Maliki said that Iraq could move quickly but would require the UK to be flexible.

428. Later that day Mr Brown's Assistant Private Secretary reported that there remained no agreement in Baghdad.¹⁷⁵

429. The Assistant Private Secretary advised that the MOD and the Embassy wanted to "throw in the towel" but Mr McDonald, Mr Cavanagh and he disagreed and thought that agreement could be reached on a new package, for example offering places at Sandhurst plus the naval operation. Mr McDonald would go to Baghdad as Mr Brown's personal envoy after visiting Washington the following day.

430. Mr Brown's Private Secretary wrote to Mr Hutton's Private Secretary on 28 May to say that Mr Brown had asked Mr McDonald to visit Baghdad early the following week to seek agreement on a package comprising:

- an offer to withdraw the remaining 400 troops, and re-badge UK training assistance under the NATO training mission;
- enhanced training opportunities in the UK, including a substantial number of officer training places at Sandhurst; and
- continuing with the UK's naval operations, especially to protect oil platforms.¹⁷⁶

431. Mr McDonald told the Inquiry that it had been "quite easy" agreeing with Prime Minister Maliki that Iraq had a training need to give the navy extra capabilities and the

¹⁷⁵ Email Catsaras to Brown, 26 May 2009, 'Maliki'.

¹⁷⁶ Letter Catsaras to Ferguson, 28 May 2009, 'Iraq: Defence MOU'.

UK was well placed to assist.¹⁷⁷ But it was less easy agreeing the legal basis for that to happen:

“... as I had been involved in it in December 2008, I went back to Iraq in the spring of 2009, saw Prime Minister Maliki’s key advisers, saw Prime Minister Maliki himself, and agreed a package, which eventually became Iraqi law.”

432. Mr Prentice told the Inquiry that he saw this agreement as “meeting Iraqi needs, expressed needs, and also being a natural part of a full bilateral relationship with a country with whom we have historical ties with their military”.¹⁷⁸

June 2009

433. Mr Brown reshuffled his Cabinet on 6 June and appointed Mr Bob Ainsworth, formerly Minister for the Armed Forces, as Defence Secretary. Mr Miliband and Mr Alexander remained in their posts as Foreign Secretary and International Development Secretary.

434. On 12 June, Mr Brown told Cabinet that since the withdrawal of British troops was nearly complete, “the time was right to announce an Inquiry into the war in Iraq”.¹⁷⁹ It would be an inquiry by Privy Counsellors, following the model of the Franks Inquiry into the Falklands War.

435. On 15 June, Mr Brown made a statement to the House of Commons on the UK’s future involvement in Iraq.¹⁸⁰ He said:

“Our troops first went into Iraq in March 2003 and now they are coming home. In total, 120,000 men and women have served in Iraq during the last six years, so it is fitting that I should now come to the House to talk of their achievements through difficult times; to chart the new relationship we are building with Iraq; and to set out our plans for an inquiry into the conflict.

“In my statement to the House last December, I set out the remaining tasks in southern Iraq for our mission ... I can report that those three objectives are being achieved ...

...

“Significant challenges remain, including that of finding a fair and sustainable solution to the sharing of Iraq’s oil reserves, but Iraq’s future is now in its own hands, in the hands of its people and its politicians. We must pay tribute to the endurance of the Iraqi people; we pledge to them our continuing support ... As the House knows, our military mission ended with the last combat patrol in Basra on 30 April. As of

¹⁷⁷ Public hearing, 5 January 2010, page 40.

¹⁷⁸ Public hearing, 6 January 2010, page 42.

¹⁷⁹ Cabinet Conclusions, 12 June 2009.

¹⁸⁰ House of Commons, *Official Report*, 15 June 2009, columns 21-22.

today, there are fewer than 500 British troops in Iraq, with more returning home each week.”

436. On the UK’s continued military presence in Iraq, Mr Brown told the House of Commons that:

“At the request of the Iraqi Government, a small number of British Navy personnel – no more than 100 – will remain in Iraq for long-term training of the Iraqi Army. Royal Navy ships will continue to protect the oil platforms on which Iraq’s exports depend, and we will continue to offer training to the Iraqi army as part of a wider NATO mission. We will also offer training opportunities at Sandhurst and elsewhere in the United Kingdom for Iraqi officers of high potential. At the core of our new relationship however will be the diplomatic, trading and cultural links that we are building with the Iraqi people, supporting British and other foreign investors who want to play a role in the reconstruction of southern Iraq.”

437. Mr Brown also announced the establishment of the Iraq Inquiry, with a “primary objective ... to identify lessons learned”.

438. On 28 June, Mr Prentice attended his final meeting of the Iraqi National Security Council.¹⁸¹ As previously agreed with the US Embassy, at the end of the meeting he made a statement announcing that the UK would not attend in future (and he believed that it was also the US intention to withdraw). He told the Iraqi ministers present that:

“We had greatly appreciated the privilege of being part of the NSC over the previous five years. Now on the eve of a further major demonstration of Iraqi lead responsibility through the withdrawal of US troops from cities and towns, it was the right time for us to bow out. The Iraqi Government was showing its ability to deal with the tough security issues and should be allowed to continue their discussions in the NSC without any external presence.”

439. Although the announcement came as a surprise to the Iraqis, it was welcomed. Prime Minister Maliki thanked the UK and US for their support over many years, emphasising that there should still be a means to discuss security issues bilaterally or as a group. Other NSC members welcomed the announcement and afterwards thanked Mr Prentice for the UK’s role.

440. Following the meeting, Mr Prentice, Ambassador Hill and Gen Odierno sent a joint letter to Prime Minister Maliki, thanking him for the opportunity to take part in the NSC, confirming US and UK withdrawal, underlining the progress the NSC had made and emphasising their readiness to provide support or advice in the future.

¹⁸¹ eGram 23890/09 Baghdad to FCO London, 30 June 2009, ‘Iraq: National Security Council Meeting, 28 June: Our Last Bow’.

441. A few days later, Mr Prentice reported that, on 30 June, US troops completed the transfer of responsibility for all urban areas to the Iraqi Government.¹⁸²

442. The Iraqi Government had declared the day a national holiday, with the title National Sovereignty Day or the Day of Dignity. Despite increased violence in the run-up to the transfer, the arrangements on the day were “broadly successful” with the exception of a car bomb in Kirkuk which killed 33 people.

443. Mr Prentice reported that Prime Minister Maliki compared the day to the Arab Revolt against the British in 1920 (see Annex 1). President Talabani thanked the coalition for its commitment and sacrifice, although “noticeable by its absence was any statement of thanks to coalition forces from the Prime Minister”. Mr Prentice reported that the public mood was “a mixture of pride and apprehension” and judged that “the Gol is now unequivocally in the lead and the Iraqi people are watching to see whether it can deliver”.

July 2009

444. At its meeting on 8 July, the JIC examined the likely political and security trends in Iraq over the next six months.¹⁸³ Its Key Judgements included:

“I. Maliki is determined to secure a second term as Prime Minister in the 2010 national elections. This influences all of his political decisions and relationships.

“II. The current fluidity of Iraqi politics makes predictions difficult. But Maliki will probably be able to assemble a cross-sectarian nationalist coalition if he can attract a Sunni partner. Given the Iraqi government’s continuing commitment to the success of the Sons of Iraq initiative, his best chance probably lies with the Awakening movement, though will retreat towards a Shia alliance if he doubts the stability or popularity of a cross-sectarian nationalist alliance.

“III. The Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI) will probably seek to join Maliki in any type of coalition; it is less clear whether Maliki will accept an alliance with ISCI, given its reputation as a sectarian party influenced by Iran. The Sadrist are preparing to participate fully in the elections and want to be part of a nationalist alliance, but Maliki and Sadr will not commit to an alliance until polling is complete.

...

“V. Violence across Iraq will probably remain around the current level during 2009 – an average of about 130 attacks per week compared with nearly 1,600 attacks per week in mid 2007. The progressive shift from violence to politics will continue,

¹⁸² eGram 24067/09 Baghdad to FCO London, 1 July 2009, ‘Iraq: Withdrawal of US Troops from Urban Areas, 30 June’.

¹⁸³ [JIC Assessment, 8 July 2009, ‘Iraq: Political & Security Trends’.](#)

denying terrorist or insurgent groups the opportunity to escalate violence significantly by provoking organised sectarian violence. Recent security gains will not be lost.

“VI. A spike in attacks and especially casualties over the coming months, following withdrawal of Multi-National Forces from the cities, might lead to perceptions that security gains are eroding. But this would not indicate that violent groups are growing, becoming more lethal or position a greater challenge to Multi-National Forces or Iraqi Security Forces.

“VII. Western military and civilian groups will remain a priority for violent groups.”

445. On 21 July, at the request of DFID, a CIG considered the impact of corruption in Iraq.¹⁸⁴

446. The CIG judged that corruption “has a significant impact on the economy and governance” in Iraq, with cost estimates ranging from 3.5 to 10 percent of GDP.

447. The Assessment stated:

“In 2008 the global anti-corruption society Transparency International (TI) designated Iraq the third most corrupt country in the world, behind Somalia and Burma. TI’s Global Corruption Barometer 2009 reported that 44 percent of Iraqis had paid some form of bribe in the last 12 months, compared to 3 percent in the UK and a worldwide average of 11 percent. 42 percent of Iraqis polled in TI’s survey felt that corruption was most prevalent in the public sector and civil service, while 27 percent considered political parties most tainted. The survey suggested that public trust in the judiciary and news media was much higher.”

448. The CIG judged that government ministries were “riddled with” corruption and recorded that:

“Iraq’s Commission on Integrity (CI) has identified the Ministries for Oil and Foreign Affairs as prominent embezzlers ...”

449. The CIG reported that, in 2006, Mr Stuart Bowen, the US Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction had referred to a “virtual pandemic” of corruption costing Iraq US\$4 billion a year (equivalent to approximately 3.5 percent of GDP). The CIG assessment stated:

“Later estimates suggest the cost of corruption in the South alone could be as high as \$12bn pa. This range of cost estimates suggests corruption at a level which is significantly hindering macroeconomic recovery, as well as damaging local economics. In March 2007, Rhadi Hamza al-Rhadi, CI Chairman, claimed that corruption was worse than under Saddam’s regime. CI had brought corruption charges against eight Ministers and forty Directors-General, but all had fled

¹⁸⁴ [CIG Assessment, 21 July 2009, ‘How Corrupt is Iraq?’](#)

abroad. Bowen described al-Rhadi as Iraq's most prominent corruption enforcer, but by September 2007 al-Rhadi had resigned following repeated death threats, and subsequently sought asylum in the US. Bowen called the corruption problem 'the second insurgency' for its destabilising effects on Iraq. We judge that the US draw-down will have an impact on oversight, making international scrutiny of institutional corruption more difficult."

450. The CIG assessed that corruption was "driven both by a desire for personal enrichment and by political considerations" and that "the practice of soliciting bribes at checkpoints was commonplace". Shia militias had "exploited their control of economic assets for political gain".

451. The CIG judged that "the Iraqi public is more tolerant of certain kinds of corruption such as nepotism than in the West, but is growing tired of political graft". That had "led to an increase in anti-corruption rhetoric, but little change in behaviour". The Assessment stated:

"In May [2009] CI announced that 97 officials were under investigation for graft, including 53 ranked as Directors-General or higher, and that 120 Iraqis had been arrested for corruption in April and May. On 30 May former Trade Minister Sudani was arrested on charges of embezzlement and corruption regarding food imports and rations under the Public Distribution System, which was established in 1995 as part of the UN Oil-for-Food Programme following the 1991 Gulf War."

452. The CIG reported that, in mid-June, the son of Grand Ayatollah al-Sistani had urged Prime Minister Maliki to lead the fight against political corruption, believing that corruption and the provision of public services would be the public's fundamental preoccupations in the forthcoming elections.

453. The CIG judged that nepotism and cronyism were "widespread" in Kurdistan, where:

"Lucrative construction contracts are regularly awarded to families of party or regional government officials. Corruption has become a prominent issue in the run up to the KRG parliamentary elections ..."

454. The CIG assessed that corruption also affected governance at regional and local levels. Endemic public sector corruption in Basra had prevented the delivery of social security payments, and health and education services.

455. The CIG also assessed that:

"The lack of effective anti money-laundering and counter-terrorism finance regimes deters foreign financial institutions from doing business with their Iraqi counterparts, and severely cramps the development of the Iraqi financial sector."

456. In the oil sector:

“Corruption within the Oil Ministry acts as a deterrent to some foreign investment. Despite attempts to make bidding processes more transparent, foreign oil companies willing to pay bribes are likely to receive preferential treatment.”

457. The assessment concluded, under the heading “Outlook”, that:

“Corruption is strongly associated with the slow pace of development and reconstruction. These issues resonate with voters. As the January 2010 national elections approach, we judge that Maliki is likely to intensify his policy focus on corruption as a vehicle for popular appeal and as a tool with which to attack political opponents.”

458. On 23 July, a letter from Mr Ainsworth’s Private Secretary to Mr Brown’s Private Secretary for Foreign Affairs explained that further delays in the Iraqi Parliament meant that it was very unlikely that the UK/Iraq defence agreement would be ratified before late September.¹⁸⁵ The Chiefs of Staff had agreed that the UK should begin the temporary withdrawal of the remaining UK military personnel to Kuwait.

459. In parallel the UK would make clear that it was prepared to resume activity ahead of the formal ratification provided that the Iraqi Government issued a clear invitation to the UK for this purpose and explicitly recognise that the UK’s legally binding jurisdictional immunities continued beyond 31 July.

460. Mr Ainsworth’s Private Secretary explained:

“The government-to-government agreement we signed on 6 June has ... been proceeding through the Iraqi parliament and passed its second reading (of three needed) on 7 July. Unfortunately, despite broad support from the main Iraqi political blocs, walk-outs from the Sadrists (who oppose the presence of any foreign troops on Iraqi soil) prevented the agreement from being put to a third reading and vote as planned on 11 and 13 July ... It failed again on 21 July ... because the Iraqi parliament did not reach it before finishing for the day.”

461. The FCO Iraq Policy Team advised Mr Miliband’s Private Secretary that in Baghdad the “Embassy has lobbied key figures to support the agreement throughout, and aside from the Sadrists there is no major organised opposition inside the CoR”.¹⁸⁶ The British Embassy Washington was preparing to lobby Prime Minister Maliki during his visit to the US.

462. Mr Jon Wilks, Chargé d’Affaires at the British Embassy Baghdad, called on Prime Minister Maliki’s Chief of Staff on 27 July to review the position.¹⁸⁷ He explained that UK

¹⁸⁵ Letter Ferguson to Fletcher, 23 July 2009, ‘Iraq: UK Military Presence After 31 July 2009’.

¹⁸⁶ Minute Croker to PS, 22 July 2009, ‘Iraq Update: Defence Agreement’.

¹⁸⁷ Email Wilks to Bowers and Baker, 27 July 2009, ‘UK-Iraq Military Agreement – Call on PM’s Chief of Staff’.

personnel were withdrawing from Iraq to Kuwait for two weeks, after which point they would go on to the UK.

463. Mr Wilks identified two options until the Council of Representatives returned in late September and could again be asked to ratify the agreement:

- a letter from the Iraqi Government extending the UK's previous security agreement for two months; or
- a letter from the Iraqi Government creating a new temporary agreement, for the UK naval training team.

464. Prime Minister Maliki's Chief of Staff recommended writing to Prime Minister Maliki with these proposals.

465. A Cabinet Office official discussed the options with Mr McDonald on the same day, who considered that an extension of the current agreement was the best interim option.¹⁸⁸ He asked that no decision on permanent withdrawal of UK staff be taken before the situation was reviewed at the end of September.

466. Mr Wilks, "emphasising the PM's interest in reaching an interim agreement", delivered a letter proposing the two interim options to Prime Minister Maliki's Chief of Staff on 29 July.¹⁸⁹ He asked whether the UK would consider bringing its training under the agreement signed between the Iraqi Government and NATO. Mr Wilks explained that it would not be feasible to re-open the NATO agreement.

467. Mr Wilks also provided the Cabinet Office with an assessment of the chances for a successful vote in the Council of Representatives in the autumn. He suggested that the prospects looked good – there were indications that a majority of MPs supported the agreement, though also that opponents were consolidating their support. There was a risk that:

"... as negotiations on electoral alliances continue over Ramadan, the Sadrists will make opposition to our agreement a pre-condition for their joining an alliance. This could tip the balance among MPs against our agreement if the Sadrists were to join a large alliance."

468. On 30 July, Sir John Chilcot formally launched the Iraq Inquiry.¹⁹⁰ The full text of Sir John's statement can be read on the Inquiry's website. In it he emphasised the Inquiry's focus on establishing what happened and identifying what lessons can be learned. Sir John said that hearings would be held in public and inquisitorial in nature.

¹⁸⁸ Email Cabinet Office [junior official] to Forber, 28 July 2009, 'Iraq: UK Defence Agreement – Next Steps'.

¹⁸⁹ Email Wilks to Cabinet Office [junior official], 29 July 2009, 'Re: Iraq: UK Defence Agreement – Next Steps'.

¹⁹⁰ Statement Chilcot, 30 July 2009, 'Statement by Sir John Chilcot, Chairman of the Iraq Inquiry, at a news conference on Thursday, 30 July 2009'.

He also described meeting the families of those who died in the conflict as one of the Inquiry's first priorities.

469. Mr Forber advised Mr Hutton's Private Secretary on the way ahead for the defence agreement on 31 July.¹⁹¹ In addition to the two options put forward by Mr Wilks, he identified a third:

"The Government of Iraq and NATO agree that the UK maritime training activity should in future come under the NATO mission."

470. Mr Forber assessed that this option would:

"... not allow for protection of Iraqi oil platforms/territorial waters, it would meet all our requirements for training of the Iraqi navy including jurisdictional immunities – the NATO agreement has slightly better immunities than the UK agreement as we ensured it explicitly included Umm Qasr as a potential location to cover just such an eventuality."

471. On 31 July, Mr McDonald called Prime Minister Maliki's Chief of Staff to press for rapid progress on an interim agreement.¹⁹² He observed that "UK media was portraying this as a problem in our bilateral relationship". Prime Minister Maliki's Chief of Staff said that the Iraq Government would "continue to work on trying to find appropriate ways forward".

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472. On 5 August, the JIC again considered Iranian influence in Iraq, and Iraq's reaction to it.¹⁹³ It judged:

"Iraq can stand up to Iranian political interference and will begin to reject it as it exercises its sovereignty with increasing confidence. Iraq can also withstand Iranian military interference through its strategic defence agreement with the US, improvement of its armed forces and political accommodation with the Shia militants that Iran supports ...

"In the longer term, Iran's increasing trade and investment are laying the foundations for 'soft power' by establishing dependency in areas where Iraqi and Iranian interests coincide. The planned withdrawal of large numbers of US forces in 2011 will be a particularly testing time for the Iraqi Government and armed forces ...

"Iraqis, even most Shia, consider Iran to be their biggest strategic threat, but many also see Iranian money and investment as an opportunity for personal gain and national economic well-being. Friction between the two countries is inevitable, but

¹⁹¹ Minute Forber to PS/Secretary of State [MOD], 31 July 2009, 'Iraq: UK Defence Agreement'.

¹⁹² Email Wilks to [various], 31 July 2009, 'Iraq: Security Agreement and Hostages: Simon McDonald call on Tariq Abdallah, Maliki's CoS'.

¹⁹³ JIC Assessment, 5 August 2009, 'Can Iraq Stand Up to Iran?'

Iran understands that an Iraq ruled by a Shia government is unlikely to pose a threat to the Iranian regime.”

473. Mr McDonald called Prime Minister Maliki’s Chief Political Adviser on 6 August, and asked whether the Iraqi Government could provide an answer on whether they would extend the former security agreement.¹⁹⁴ Prime Minister Maliki’s Political Adviser said that legal advice was that the Council of Ministers could not do so; the Council of Representatives must agree.

474. In the absence of an agreement, Mr McDonald proposed that four naval trainers and one naval operational commander should be appointed as naval attachés to the British Embassy. Their names had already been submitted through the normal process. Mr McDonald “emphasised this was a key point for us, this matter was entirely in Gol hands, and the signal sent by this would be serious in our eyes”.

475. On 18 August, Mr Hutton’s Private Secretary wrote to Mr Brown’s Assistant Private Secretary with an update on the defence agreement.¹⁹⁵ He explained that the Iraqi Government had made it clear they were not prepared to offer an interim agreement and that all military personnel except five liaison officers in Kuwait had returned to the UK. US teams would take over the UK tasks in approximately late September, but would step aside if the UK/Iraq agreement was signed in October.

476. Mr Prentice had discussed bringing UK activity at Umm Qasr under NATO auspices with the US commander, who was enthusiastic provided it did not breach the 300-person ceiling allowed by the NATO-Iraq agreement. As a result:

“We are now working with the US to identify the minimum number of UK personnel required to do the training task. If the UK/Iraq defence agreement fails to have its third reading by mid-October, US commanders will then go to the Iraqi Defence Minister and invite him to decide whether to incorporate the Umm Qasr activity permanently under NATO (using UK trainers) and accept compensating reductions elsewhere in the NATO establishment.”

477. The Private Secretary added: “Defence Secretary is content with this approach provided that the Government of Iraq explicitly agree and that other NATO allies are also content.”

478. Mr Brown spoke to Prime Minister Maliki on 23 August, and said that the defence agreement was “unfinished business which we trusted could be resolved”.¹⁹⁶ Prime Minister Maliki indicated his support, but suggested that the Iraqi Parliament’s actions were “politically motivated”.

¹⁹⁴ Email Wilks to Cabinet Office [junior official], 6 August 2009, ‘Simon McDonald call on Sadiq al-Rikabi: UK/Iraq Training Agreement’.

¹⁹⁵ Letter Ferguson to Catsaras, 18 August 2009, ‘Iraq: UK Defence Agreement’.

¹⁹⁶ Letter Catsaras to Brooker, 24 August 2009, ‘Prime Minister’s Call with Iraqi Prime Minister, 23 August’.

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479. In early September, Prime Minister Maliki's Chief of Staff informed Mr Wilks that diplomatic status for the five-man naval team had been approved.¹⁹⁷

480. On 15 October, Mr Prentice reported to the FCO in London that the UK-Iraq "training and maritime support agreement" had completed its third and final reading in the Council of Representatives.¹⁹⁸ It passed with 99 votes in favour and 40 against or abstaining.

481. Mr Prentice wrote:

"All the elements of our broad-based relationship are now in place. Symbolically, the ratification by the Iraqi parliament of this agreement confirms the will of a majority of Iraqi political groups to continue a special relationship with the UK, including in the security field."

482. He concluded:

"We are well-placed to be a prime partner for Iraq, as overall security improvements and Iraq's slowly growing political and economic capacity enable it for the first time in the last six years to begin to fulfil its vast potential."

The end of Op TELIC

483. The UK maintained a small national presence in Iraq until 22 May 2011, when the final 81 members of a Royal Navy training team left the country.¹⁹⁹ Op TELIC formally ended with their departure.

484. A small number of UK personnel remained in Iraq working as part of the NATO training mission.

Troop numbers 2003 to 2009

485. The table below records changes in the number of UK troops in Iraq between the start of Op TELIC I in 2003 and the withdrawal of the last UK Service Personnel from Iraq in 2011.

¹⁹⁷ Paper [unattributed], [undated], 'Op Telic PJHQ Chronology 2009'.

¹⁹⁸ eGram 35899/09 Baghdad to FCO London, 15 October 2009, 'UK/Iraq: Training and Maritime Support Agreement Ratified by the CoR, 13 October'.

¹⁹⁹ *BBC News*, 22 May 2011, *UK's Operation Telic mission in Iraq ends*.

Table 3: UK Service personnel deployed to Iraq

	Time period	Number of UK Service personnel deployed
Op TELIC I	“March/April” 2003	46,000 ²⁰⁰
	Mid May	25,000-30,000 ²⁰¹
	31 May	18,000 ²⁰²
	11 June	17,000 ²⁰³
	25 June	14,000 ²⁰⁴
	10 July	12,000 ²⁰⁵
Op TELIC II	4 August	10,000 ²⁰⁶
Op TELIC III	17 November	10,500 ²⁰⁷
	29 March 2004	8,827 ²⁰⁸

²⁰⁰ The National Archives, [undated], ‘Operations in Iraq: Facts and Figures’. The figure includes support staff stationed outside Iraq.

²⁰¹ House of Commons, *Official Report*, 30 April 2003, column 16WS. The figure describes UK Service Personnel deployed in the Gulf region.

²⁰² The National Archives, [undated], ‘Operations in Iraq: Facts and Figures’. The figure describes UK military personnel deployed in Iraq.

²⁰³ House of Commons, *Official Report*, 11 June 2003, column 51WS. The figure describes UK servicemen and women in the Gulf region.

²⁰⁴ House of Lords, *Official Report*, 25 June 2003, column 307. The figure describes the number of personnel in Iraq and Kuwait.

²⁰⁵ Letter Williams to Rycroft, 10 July 2003, ‘UK Force Levels in Iraq’. The figure refers to personnel deployed in the Gulf region on activities related to Op TELIC.

²⁰⁶ Letter MOD [junior official] to Rycroft, 4 August 2003, ‘Iraq: Force Level Review’. The figure describes the total deployed strength.

²⁰⁷ Ministry of Defence, *Operations in Iraq: Lessons for the Future*, December 2003. The figure describes forces “in theatre” at 17 November 2003.

²⁰⁸ House of Commons, *Official Report*, 29 March 2004, column 1256. The figure refers to Armed Forces personnel serving in Iraq.

Op TELIC IV	31 May	8,600 ²⁰⁹
	17 June	9,200 ²¹⁰
	21 July	8,500 ²¹¹
	21 October	8,500 ²¹²
	25 October	8,100 ²¹³
Op TELIC V	29 November	Just under 9,000 ²¹⁴
	21 January 2005	Some 8,100 ²¹⁵
	7 February	About 8,150 ²¹⁶
Op TELIC VI	25 May	Around 8,100 ²¹⁷
	31 May	8,500 ²¹⁸
	10 October	About 8,500 ²¹⁹
Op TELIC VII	November	Around 8,000 ²²⁰
	9 March 2006	8,000 ²²¹
	13 March	8,000 ²²²

²⁰⁹ The National Archives, [undated], 'Operations in Iraq: Facts and Figures'. The figure describes UK military personnel deployed in Iraq.

²¹⁰ House of Commons, *Official Report*, 17 June 2004, column 49WS. The figure includes a net increase of around 270 personnel "in theatre".

²¹¹ House of Lords, *Official Report*, 21 July 2004, column WA45. The figure describes British troops deployed in Iraq.

²¹² House of Lords, *Official Report*, 21 October 2004, column 980. The figure describes "our deployment in Iraq".

²¹³ House of Commons, *Official Report*, 25 October 2004, column 1128. The figure describes UK Armed Forces personnel deployed in Iraq.

²¹⁴ House of Commons, *Official Report*, 29 November 2004, column 343. The figure describes UK troops deployed in Iraq.

²¹⁵ Minute DJC AD Pol 1 to APS/SofS [MOD], 21 January 2005, 'Iraq: Planning for the Replacement of Dutch Forces in Al Muthanna'. The document refers to a further 800 personnel supporting Op TELIC elsewhere.

²¹⁶ House of Commons, *Official Report*, 7 February 2005, columns 1168-1169. The figure refers to troops in Iraq.

²¹⁷ House of Lords, *Official Report*, 25 May 2005, column WS11. The figure describes troops in Iraq.

²¹⁸ The National Archives, [undated], 'Operations in Iraq: Facts and Figures'. The figure describes UK military personnel deployed in Iraq; House of Commons, *Official Report*, 25 May 2005, column 15WS.

²¹⁹ House of Lords, *Official Report*, 10 October 2005, column 35. The figure describes troops in Iraq.

²²⁰ House of Lords, *Official Report*, 10 October 2005, column 35. The figure describes troops in Iraq.

²²¹ Minute SofS [MOD] to Prime Minister, 9 March 2006, 'Iraq: Force Level Review and Announcement'. The figure describes overall numbers of personnel in theatre.

²²² House of Lords, *Official Report*, 13 March 2006, columns 1008-1009. The figure is constructed from description of a reduction of 800 personnel to just over 7,000 British forces in Iraq.

Op TELIC VIII	31 May	7,200 ²²³
	18 July	Approx 7,100 ²²⁴
	September	Approx 7,460 ²²⁵
Op TELIC IX	21 February 2007	7,100 ²²⁶
	31 May	5,500 ²²⁷
Op TELIC X	September	5,500 ²²⁸ 5,200 ²²⁹
	October	5,100 ²³⁰
	November	4,500 ²³¹
Op TELIC XI	December	4,910 ²³² 4,500 ²³³
	7 March 2008	4,100 ²³⁴
	31 May	4,100 ²³⁵
Op TELIC XII	22 July	4,100 ²³⁶
	13 October	4,100 ²³⁷

²²³ The National Archives, [undated], 'Operations in Iraq: Facts and Figures'. The figure describes UK military personnel deployed in Iraq.

²²⁴ House of Lords, *Official Report*, 18 July 2006, column WS83. The figure describes the total number of UK troops in Iraq.

²²⁵ House of Commons, *Official Report*, 11 September 2006, column 111WS; House of Commons, *Official Report*, 10 October 2006, columns 172-173. This figure describes the UK force package, including a temporary deployment of 360 troops between September 2006 and January 2007.

²²⁶ House of Commons, *Official Report*, 21 February 2007, column 264. This figure refers to number of forces.

²²⁷ The National Archives, 'Operations in Iraq: Facts and Figures'. The figure describes UK military personnel deployed in Iraq.

²²⁸ House of Commons, *Official Report*, 8 October 2007, column 30. The figure describes troops in Iraq.

²²⁹ House of Commons, *Official Report*, 14 January 2008, column 885W. Figure calculated by subtracting the 300 troops referred to in the table from 5,500.

²³⁰ House of Commons, *Official Report*, 14 January 2008, column 885W. Figure calculated by subtracting the reduction of 100 troops referred to in the table from 5,200.

²³¹ House of Commons, *Official Report*, 14 January 2008, column 885W. Figure calculated by subtracting the reduction of 600 troops referred to in the table from 5,100.

²³² House of Commons, *Official Report*, 5 December 2007, column 1224W. The figure describes the number of personnel deployed to Iraq.

²³³ House of Commons, *Official Report*, 14 January 2008, column 885W.

²³⁴ House of Commons, *Official Report*, 7 March 2008, column 2849W. The figure describes UK force levels in southern Iraq.

²³⁵ The National Archives, [undated], 'Operations in Iraq: Facts and Figures'. The figure describes UK military personnel deployed in Iraq.

²³⁶ House of Lords, *Official Report*, 22 July 2008, column 1677. The figure describes UK forces in southern Iraq.

²³⁷ *The Times*, 13 October 2008, *Thank You, and Goodbye*.

Op TELIC XIII	2 February 2009	4,350 ²³⁸
	30 March	4,100 ²³⁹
	31 May	4,100 ²⁴⁰
	15 June	Fewer than 500 ²⁴¹
Training Missions	31 January 2010	150 ²⁴²
	January 2010 – 22 May 2011	128 ²⁴³
	23 May 2011 – 31 December 2011	44 ²⁴⁴

²³⁸ House of Commons, *Official Report*, 2 February 2009, columns 869W-870W. The figure describes endorsed force levels for UK military operations in southern Iraq and Baghdad.

²³⁹ House of Commons, *Official Report*, 30 March 2009, column 874W. Figure refers to members of the UK forces deployed on land in southern Iraq.

²⁴⁰ The National Archives, 'Operations in Iraq: Facts and Figures'. The figure describes UK military personnel deployed in Iraq.

²⁴¹ House of Commons, *Official Report*, 15 June 2009, column 22.

²⁴² The National Archives, [undated], 'Operations in Iraq: British Forces in Iraq'. Figure describes British military personnel in Iraq.

²⁴³ House of Commons, *Official Report*, 18 May 2011, column 19WS; *BBC News*, 22 May 2011, *UK's Operation Telic mission in Iraq ends*. Report states that 128 staff remained in Iraq: 81 Navy trainers; 44 engaged on the NATO Training Mission; and three personnel in Baghdad.

²⁴⁴ *BBC News*, 22 May 2011, *UK's Operation Telic mission in Iraq ends*; www.NATO.int, 1 September 2015, 'NATO in Iraq: the Evolution of NATO's Training Effort in Iraq'.