

SECTION 9.4

JUNE 2005 TO MAY 2006

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Introduction

1. This Section addresses:

- the UK role in preparing for a referendum on Iraq's new Constitution and for Parliamentary elections on 15 December, leading to the appointment of an Iraqi Government led by Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki;
- plans for the phased withdrawal of UK forces, and parallel decisions on the UK response to the new US "ink-spot" strategy for Iraq and on the deployment of troops to Helmand province in Afghanistan;
- rising sectarian violence in Iraq and a growing UK focus on outreach to the Sunni community; and
- concerns about the risks of strategic failure and civil war in Iraq.

2. This Section does not address the UK contribution to the reconstruction of Iraq and reform of its security sector, 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.

June 2005

4. In June 2005, Mr Edward Chaplin, the first British Ambassador to Iraq since the early 1990s, was succeeded in post by Mr William Patey. At around the same time, Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad succeeded Ambassador John Negroponte as the US Ambassador to Iraq.

5. Giving evidence to the House of Commons Defence Committee in 2012, Sir William Patey said:

"When I was sent to Iraq was the first time I have ever had my objectives delivered directly to me by the Prime Minister. One of the objectives he set me was to get some troop withdrawals by the following year – by June 2006. It was clear to me that we were looking for extra troops, which we did not have, to send to Afghanistan."¹

6. Section 9.3 sets out UK views on the importance of participation by the Iraqi Sunni community in the political process, and the beginning of direct engagement with some individuals in pursuit of that aim.

7. The FCO had been considering the scope for broadening its earlier contact with Sunni insurgents with a further round of talks.² In early June, briefing on the options for further Sunni engagement was provided in response to a request from Mr Blair's

¹ House of Commons, *Corrected transcript of oral evidence*, 4 September 2012, 'Securing the Future of Afghanistan', page 4.

² Minute senior government official specialising in the Middle East to Quarrey, 2 June 2005, 'Iraq: Sunni engagement' and Minute senior government official specialising in the Middle East to Asquith, Richmond and Foreign Secretary, 1 July 2005, [name of operation].

Private Office. This time, the discussion would have the specific objective of agreeing a temporary cease-fire in part of Anbar province in the hope that this would help separate Sunni nationalists from foreign jihadists and act as a model for similar developments elsewhere in Iraq. It would be for the Iraqi Transitional Government (ITG) and the Multi-National Force (MNF) to decide whether any demands made in return for such a cease-fire could be met.

8. On 6 June, Sir Nigel Sheinwald, Mr Blair's Foreign Policy Adviser, sent a Note from Mr Blair to President Bush via Mr Stephen Hadley, the US National Security Advisor.³

9. The Note, which covered a wide range of countries and issues, was a reflection on "a huge opportunity ... to leave a clear and morally powerful agenda in place when we go".

10. On Iraq, Mr Blair wrote that:

"Iraq has been tough and we all know now the reserves of political and military strength required for any military action. The international community should be united behind us, urging us on, but they're not."

11. A brief for the visit by Mr Antony Phillipson, Mr Blair's Private Secretary for Foreign Affairs, suggested that the key point on Iraq was the need for the US to remain active and engaged in the detail, after a non-interventionist period between the election and the formation of the ITG "during which we lost valuable momentum".⁴

12. In practice, that meant the US and UK should press the ITG to deliver Sunni outreach (including sensitive handling of de-Ba'athification and a media strategy for the Sunni community) and be active in reaching out to Sunnis themselves.

13. On 7 June, Mr Blair and President Bush held talks on a range of foreign policy issues in the White House.⁵

14. In the discussion on Iraq, Mr Blair said that a stable, secure and democratic Iraq would have a "transforming effect" on Iran and Syria. But the increasing tension between Sunni and Shia needed to be watched. He judged that:

"Ultimately, without an improvement in security, little progress could be made."

15. Mr Blair commented that the Iraqisation process was "going OK". Mr Blair and Sir Nigel Sheinwald indicated that the UK hoped to start reducing troops in the next 12 months, and to make a more significant reduction in Multi-National Division (South East) (MND(SE)) in the first half of 2006. It was important to stick to the political timetable, as providing security for the next round of elections was a constraint on withdrawals.

³ Letter Sheinwald to Hadley, 6 June 2005, [untitled] attaching Note [Blair] to Bush, [undated], 'Note to President Bush'.

⁴ Minute Phillipson to Prime Minister, 3 June 2005, 'Visit to Washington, 7 June'.

⁵ Letter Phillipson to Adams, 7 June 2005, 'Prime Minister's talks with President Bush, 7 June'.

16. On 13 June, Mr Jack Straw, the Foreign Secretary, sent Mr Blair an update on progress towards a new Iraqi Constitution, including the procedural challenges ahead.⁶

17. Mr Straw reported that there had been progress. The National Assembly (TNA) had formed a Constitutional Committee, to which the UN had offered its expertise. But the detail had yet to be agreed.

18. In Mr Straw's view, the key challenges were to ensure that the draft text was seen to reflect the views of Iraq's three main communities (Shia Arabs, Sunni Arabs and Kurds) and sticking to the timetable set out in the Transitional Administrative Law (TAL).

19. The TAL said that a draft Constitution should be produced by 15 August, ahead of a referendum on 15 October and elections by 15 December.

20. Mr Straw described the UK urging key players to maintain momentum, while putting in place a process which would deliver a credible text on time. The UK would also provide practical assistance as necessary.

21. Attached to Mr Straw's minute was a paper written by the IPU at the request of the Iraq Strategy Group which provided more detail on the drafting process and what could be done to improve it.

22. The paper said that the Constitutional Committee had formed sub-committees tasked with particular themes (for example, federalism) and Prime Minister Ja'afari had appointed a Ministerial Constitutional Committee.

23. Mr Nicholas 'Fink' Haysom, Head of the UN Office of Constitutional Support (UNOCS), had offered the Constitutional Committee UN support and guidance, and initially received a "cautiously welcoming" response.

24. The IPU paper set out the two main challenges to the process. The first was ensuring credibility, by "correcting the Sunni Arab deficit" in the membership of the Constitutional Committee and starting public outreach early. The second was keeping to the schedule. If the timetable slipped, the UN's plan was to extend the drafting period and compress the time for consultation before the referendum on 15 October.

25. Prime Minister Ja'afari told Mr Patey that the Ministerial Committee was intended "to help drive the process forward" and so ensure completion on time.⁷

26. On 14 June, Mr Patey reported to the FCO that there remained no agreement on Sunni representation on the Constitutional Committee.⁸ Only two of its 55 members were Sunni Arabs.

⁶ Minute Straw to Prime Minister, 13 June 2005, 'Iraq: Constitution' attaching Paper IPU, 10 June 2005, 'Iraq: Improving the Constitution Process'.

⁷ eGram 6667/05 Baghdad to FCO London, 15 June 2005, 'Introductory Call on Prime Minister Ja'afari, 14 June 2005'.

⁸ eGram 6606/05 Baghdad to FCO London, 14 June 2005, 'Constitutional Committee Update'.

27. The Committee Chair, Sheikh Hummam Hammoudi, had indicated that a further 13 places might be allocated to Sunni members, but there remained pressure to increase this number.

28. Mr Patey wrote that he was “encouraging the Sunnis to be realistic in their demands”, taking into account that they made up around 20 percent of the Iraqi population. He suggested that “they cannot expect to achieve much more than parity with the Kurds”, who also accounted for about 20 percent of Iraq’s population.

29. Mr Patey also reported that the Committee had been “won over” to the idea of practical help from the UN and international community.

30. Mr Chaplin told the Inquiry that the UK lobbied Iraqi politicians on the need to ensure an adequate number of credible Sunni figures in the Committee.⁹

31. Mr Patey told the Inquiry that the UK also spent a lot of time trying to convince the TNA and Shia politicians that de-Ba’athification had gone too far, and that the de-Ba’athification provisions should be excluded from the Constitution.¹⁰

32. Mr Blair and President Bush spoke by video conference on 15 June.¹¹ Mr Blair said that the main issue was “making sure Sunni outreach went ahead in the right way”; it would be important to draw them into what was still a “very fragile” political process.

33. In discussion of plans for future speeches, Mr Blair suggested that it would become increasingly important to “flesh out” plans for transition to Iraqi leadership on security, and the drawdown of troops that would follow. By the elections in December, “the moderates in Iraq would need to be able to show that things were changing”.

34. Dr John Reid, the Defence Secretary, circulated a paper on the options for future UK force posture in Iraq to the Defence and Overseas Policy Committee (Iraq) (DOP(I)) on 16 June.¹²

35. Dr Reid explained that the existing policy position, which he did not see a reason to change, was that the UK should not:

- agree to any changes to the UK area of responsibility;
- agree to any significant deployments outside MND(SE); or
- agree to any significant increase in the roughly 8,500 UK service personnel currently deployed in Iraq.

36. Dr Reid noted that there was a “clear UK military aspiration” to transfer security responsibilities to Iraqi forces in Muthanna and Maysan in October 2005, with the

⁹ Public hearing, 7 December 2009, page 21.

¹⁰ Public hearing, 5 January 2010, page 6.

¹¹ Letter Quarrey to Siddiq, 15 June 2005, ‘Prime Minister’s VTC with President Bush: Iraq, MEPP and the UN’.

¹² [Paper Reid, 14 June 2005, ‘Options for future UK force posture in Iraq’.](#)

remaining MND(SE) provinces (Basra and Dhi Qar), following in April 2006. That was expected to lead to a significant reduction in the overall level of UK troops in Iraq to around 3,000 personnel.

37. The paper asked Ministers to agree that the UK should keep open the options of agreeing to a small scale, more flexible UK deployment from mid-2006 and that UK representatives at the June Multi-National Force – Iraq review should turn down any proposal to extend the UK Area of Responsibility. Dr Reid would provide more advice in late summer.

38. Members of DOP(I) considered Dr Reid’s paper on 16 June, alongside a briefing from Mr William Ehrman, Chairman of the Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC), on Sunni engagement and a discussion on progress of police reform and reconstruction in the justice sector.¹³

39. No specific conclusions about the UK’s future force posture were recorded, but Dr Reid was asked to report on US thinking on drawdown of the Multi-National Force – Iraq (MNF-I) at a future meeting. DOP(I) agreed that the UK should concentrate on “seeing progress” on the justice and policing sectors and should push for resolution of the question of Sunni involvement in the Constitutional Committee.

40. On 16 June, the British Embassy Washington reported that the US Administration was again coming under pressure on Iraq, with renewed calls from Democrat politicians for an exit strategy and a timeline for withdrawal of US troops from Iraq.¹⁴

41. Opinion polls showed dwindling public support for US involvement, with increasing concern about military overstretch and US casualties. The Embassy reported that the White House was planning to respond to these criticisms in a significant speech by the President, on the anniversary of the transfer of sovereignty at the end of June.

42. On 17 June, Mr Patey reported that the Constitutional Committee had agreed that 15 additional Sunni Arab representatives should be appointed as members, with a further 10 as expert advisers.¹⁵ He observed:

“This allows Sunni politicians to argue that they have secured agreement to their demand for the participation of 25 Sunni Arab representatives in the Committee whilst preserving the necessary balance between the different political and religious groups ...”

43. On 22 June, Mr Patey told the FCO that a list of 15 additional Sunni representatives had been submitted, and that he expected the main work of the Committee to begin

¹³ Minutes, 16 June 2005, DOP(I) meeting.

¹⁴ eGram 6982/05 Washington to FCO London, 16 June 2005, ‘Iraq: the US public debate’.

¹⁵ eGram 6916/05 Baghdad to FCO London, 17 June 2005, ‘Iraq: Agreement on Sunni Arab Inclusion in the Constitutional Committee’.

within the week.¹⁶ The UNOCS was pressing ahead with its programme of assistance and:

“We have agreed to identify Civil Service experts who might contribute to UN seminars. The UNOCS have asked if we can suggest an authority on military-civilian relations, and have intimated that further support from us in facilitating the access of experts would be most welcome.”

44. Air Chief Marshal Glenn Torpy, Chief of Joint Operations, submitted a paper entitled ‘Operational Transition in Iraq’ to the Chiefs of Staff on 22 June setting out a possible timeline for withdrawal of UK forces.¹⁷ In the paper he proposed a four-phase transition:

- “Security Assistance”, meaning active involvement in SSR;
- “Transfer to Provincial Iraqi Control with Tactical Overwatch”, meaning the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) would take the lead on security with the UK in support;
- “Operational Overwatch” meaning operating from a reduced number of MNF bases in order to reduce profile, while providing reinforcement to Iraqi forces; and
- “Strategic Overwatch”, described as “The Coalition posture that will underwrite Iraqi self-reliance and the normalisation of bilateral relationships.”

45. The second phase would be reached in Muthanna and Maysan in autumn 2005, and in Dhi Qar and Basra the following spring.

46. ACM Torpy stated: “The key condition that guides this time-based approach is the relative capacity of Iraqi provinces to assume full responsibility for their security.” He went on to explain that:

“Operational Transition depends on growing Iraqi capacity, which *must remain the dynamic, coherent and properly-funded Main Effort.*”

47. On 22 June, the British Embassy Baghdad reported that General George Casey, Commander of the MNF-I, had returned to the US in order to present his MNF-I Force Structure Review.¹⁸ That review did not envisage any fundamental changes in the Campaign Plan, and:

“The US, at the local military level, accept and understand UK plans in relation to MND(SE) including the point that any future changes in the level of UK forces in the south east would not (not) release troops for redeployment to other areas of Iraq.”

¹⁶ eGram 7276/05 Baghdad to FCO London, 22 June 2005, ‘Iraq: Constitution: Two Months and Counting’.

¹⁷ [Minute CJO to COSSEC, 22 June 2005, ‘Op Telic: Operational Transition in Iraq’](#).

¹⁸ eGram 7335/05 Baghdad to FCO London, 22 June 2005, ‘Iraq: MNF-I Campaign Assessment: Emerging [illegible]’.

48. The Embassy recorded that two points required consideration in relation to changes in UK troop levels in MND(SE); the provision of protection for all UK activity in the region and how to maintain the security of the oil infrastructure.

49. Mr Blair wrote to President Bush on 27 June, to share concerns raised with him by his human rights envoy, Ms Ann Clwyd, during her recent visit to Iraq.¹⁹

50. Ms Clwyd had observed that it would be important not to burden the Iraqi authorities with a very large volume of security detainees when responsibility for security was transferred and had therefore recommended that the UK and US seek to reduce the number held, possibly by way of an amnesty. Mr Blair wrote that: “A carefully managed process of releases could help our Sunni outreach efforts.”

51. Ms Clwyd had also raised concerns about the Iraqi Special Tribunal (IST), which had been set up to try members of the previous regime. Mr Blair commented that a credible IST process which delivered “justice for the appalling crimes of the previous regime” would have a major political impact but that the coalition may need to ensure that the IST did not “rush to try the most serious cases before they are ready”.

52. Mr Blair noted that both these issues would require careful handling and his and President Bush’s personal attention, not least because of their impact on Iraqi – and especially Sunni – opinion. Sir Nigel Sheinwald would follow up on the detail with Mr Hadley.

53. On 28 June, President Bush spoke to the US public from Fort Bragg, North Carolina.²⁰ He described Iraq as the “latest battlefield” in the Global War Against Terror and told listeners that:

“Our mission in Iraq is clear. We’re hunting down the terrorists. We’re helping Iraqis build a free nation that is an ally in the war on terror. We’re advancing freedom in the broader Middle East. We are removing a source of violence and instability ...”

54. President Bush emphasised the importance that the coalition was placing on training the ISF and the new steps that US forces were taking to make this process more effective. On the question of when US troops would be withdrawn, he said:

“I recognize that Americans want our troops to come home as quickly as possible. So do I. Some contend that we should set a deadline for withdrawing US forces. Let me explain why that would be a serious mistake. Setting an artificial timetable would send the wrong message to the Iraqis, who need to know that America will not leave before the job is done. It would send the wrong message to our troops, who need to know that we are serious about completing the mission they are risking their lives to achieve. And it would send the wrong message to the enemy, who would know that

¹⁹ Letter Sheinwald to Hadley, 27 June 2005, ‘Iraq’ [attaching Note Blair to Bush, \[undated\]](#), ‘Note from the Prime Minister to President Bush’.

²⁰ The White House, 28 June 2005, ‘President addresses nation, discusses Iraq, war on terror’.

all they have to do is wait us out. We will stay in Iraq as long as we are needed, and not a day longer.”

55. The Chiefs of Staff considered ACM Torpy’s paper ‘Operational Transition in Iraq’ on 29 June.²¹ They were broadly content with the paper, though noted that consideration would need to be given to sustaining Iraqi capacity building during the drawdown phase, including the work that other government departments (primarily the FCO and DFID) were doing in Iraq.

56. The Chiefs considered that:

“The UK was in a good position to force the pace of drawdown in the comparatively benign MND(SE), but it was essential that this did not create a perception of break-up within the coalition, or undermine UK/US relations, particularly as early transition would be possible in all areas except those in which the US were operating, since they tended to be the more difficult ... The UK plan needed to be presented as the lead element of the overall Transition plan from Iraq; the US position was likely to be that no exit strategy was planned for Iraq as a whole, but rather that a gradual drawdown from parts of Iraq would occur on a conditional basis.”

57. On 29 June, at the request of the Cabinet Office Overseas and Defence Secretariat, the JIC looked specifically at the role of Islamist jihadists in Iraq.²²

58. The JIC judged that jihad in Iraq was “getting worse” and that the MNF were not yet degrading the jihadists’ campaign:

“Islamist jihadists represent a small but growing proportion of the insurgency. Their suicide bombing campaign is intensifying and having disproportionate impact on the security situation ... This has affected international public opinion and damaged the credibility and confidence of the Iraqi Transitional Government ...

“Most suicide bombers are foreigners, but the Iraqi component of the jihad is increasing. The jihadists’ extreme methods remain repellent to most Sunnis. But a combination of their successful attacks, anti-coalition/American stance and opposition to a perceived Shia and Iranian dominated government is attracting more support and enabling greater co-operation with some Iraqi Sunni Arab insurgents ...

“The viability of the jihadist campaign will only come under threat if the wider Sunni insurgency diminishes and the Iraqi Sunni Arabs are prepared, and able, to reject the foreign jihadists in their midst.”

²¹ Minutes, 29 June 2005, Chiefs of Staff meeting.

²² [JIC Assessment, 29 June 2005, ‘The Islamist Jihad in Iraq: Getting Worse’.](#)

59. After reading the JIC Assessment, Mr Blair commented:

“The absolute key is to divide the Sunnis from the jihadists. I need a proper submission on how this can be done with a detailed plan. I then want to get it agreed with GWB [President Bush].”²³

60. By the end of June, the names of the additional 15 Sunni representatives for the Constitutional Committee had not been agreed.²⁴ The British Embassy Baghdad was told that de-Ba’athification checks were not complete but pressed for the list to be accepted in full, on the basis that the conditions for membership must still be met. Any further delay would mean the Committee had fewer than six weeks to complete its task.

July 2005

61. On 5 July, Mr Patey reported that the TNA had formally endorsed the Constitutional Committee (now re-named a Commission) with its additional 15 Sunni representatives.²⁵ The first full meeting of all 71 members was scheduled for the following day.

62. Mr Straw wrote to Mr Blair with an update on the constitutional process on 5 July.²⁶ He reported that the timetable remained “tight, but doable”. The UK would need to maintain pressure on the constitutional drafters and senior Iraqi politicians to stick to the principle of consensus and work towards agreement on a document which reflected the values and aspirations of all Iraqis.

63. Mr Straw enclosed a paper produced by the FCO Research Analysts which set out the substantive issues that the Constitutional Commission needed to address. They were:

- Fundamental rights, including freedom of religion, expression, movement and assembly, and equality of all citizens before the law.
- Using the TAL as the basis of the new Constitution. It was essential that the constitutional process was Iraqi-led “using the TAL where helpful but not being ‘cut and pasted’ from it”.
- The inclusion of language on how the Constitution could be amended; this was particularly important given concern among Sunni Arabs that they had not had sufficient involvement in its development.
- De-Ba’athification – in the interests of national unity, the UK wanted to ensure these provisions did not become “more draconian” than the existing provisions in the TAL.

²³ Manuscript comment Blair on Minute Quarrey to Prime Minister, 1 July 2005, ‘Iraq Update’.

²⁴ eGram 7986/05 Baghdad to FCO London, 30 June 2005, ‘Iraq: Constitution: Nearing Crunch Point?’

²⁵ eGram 8222/05 Baghdad to FCO London, 5 July 2005, ‘Iraq: Agreement on Expanded Constitutional Commission’.

²⁶ Letter Straw to Prime Minister, 5 July 2005, ‘Iraq: Constitution’ attaching Paper Research Analysts, June 2005, ‘Constitutional Issues’.

- A “system in which the main communities can informally share the key senior positions, without sectarianism being formally entrenched”; the Research Analysts recognised that it might be difficult to reach agreement on this, commenting that the answer might be to retain the tripartite structures at the head of government – Presidency Council, Prime Minister and Speaker – which implied the division of roles between the three main communities but without a specific sectarian quota.
- Federalism – this was expected to be a key red line for each of the main communities and the source of most distrust; the UK had “a strong interest in avoiding any arrangement which would entrench sectarian divisions, eg a single large federation in the South”. The Kurds were expected to champion the devolution of oil revenues and the ability to manage their own economic development. Shia Arabs were increasingly calling for some sort of economic federalism of the South and a greater share of Iraq’s oil revenues.
- Religion and national identity – the UK wished to see language similar to the TAL, in which Islam was recognised as one source of legislation rather than the only source. It would also be essential for the drafters to find a way of expressing both Iraq’s identity as an Arab nation and the Kurdish desire for greater recognition.
- Militias – the question of whether the militias should be disbanded or integrated into the Iraqi Security Forces would need to be resolved at some point, though it was possible that this should happen separately from the development of the Constitution.
- The electoral system – although it was recognised that the Sunni Arabs, in particular, were likely to wish for changes in the electoral system (for example to move to a constituency-based arrangement). Any provision on this within the Constitution should not be framed in such a way as to require its implementation before the December elections, since that would mean delay.

64. Mr Blair met President Bush at the G8 Summit at Gleneagles on 7 July.²⁷ Mr Blair said that the US and UK objective should be to divide the Sunni insurgents from the foreign jihadists.

65. In Mr Blair’s view, a strong effort was needed to pull Iraqis away from the insurgency; he had no concern about talking to those on the fringes of the insurgency in order to achieve that.

66. Mr Blair suggested that it would be important to handle conversations about the issue of withdrawing the MNF with great care. He remained convinced that a “visible forward plan” was needed so that it was clear the MNF wanted to leave when they could, but were staying because of the scale of the insurgency. The plan would show a projection of the coalition’s drawdown as Iraqi forces built up. In MND(SE) Mr Blair

²⁷ Letter Sheinwald to Adams, 8 July 2005, ‘Prime Minister’s Meeting with President Bush, 7 July’.

said that coalition forces tried to stay in their barracks and were called into “population centres” only as necessary.

67. In his note of the discussion, Sir Nigel Sheinwald recorded that he would follow up with Mr Hadley in order to develop a coherent joint US/UK strategy on Iraq.

68. Speaking during an Adjournment Debate on “Defence in the World” on 7 July, Dr Reid told Parliament:

“We have not set down rigid time lines for the downsizing or withdrawal of troops. Rather, we have made that conditional upon progress on political development and security and, to a lesser extent ... economic development. This is not a prediction or a pledge, because our movement of troops will be conditional on the conditions ... but I have said that I envisage that the trained complement of the Iraqi army ... could begin the process of taking the lead ... in some parts of Iraq in the next 12 months. We would provide multi-national support for that as long as the Iraqi Government wish ...”²⁸

The London bombings

On Thursday 7 July, four suicide bombers struck in central London, killing 52 people and injuring more than 770 others.²⁹ Three of the bombs exploded on Underground trains and the fourth on a double-decker bus.

Exactly two weeks later, on 21 July, three further bombs were placed on Underground trains and a fourth on a bus.³⁰ None of those devices exploded. A fifth device was found two days later abandoned in bushes.

The Intelligence and Security Committee (ISC) examined the attacks and reported to Mr Blair on 30 March 2006.³¹ The *Report of the Official Account of the Bombings in London on 7th July 2005* was published on 11 May.

The ISC wrote that the motivations of the bombers remained “only partly clear”. The best indication of the group’s motivation was offered by a video statement made by one of the bombers, Mr Mohammad Sidique Khan, which had been first aired by the Al Jazeera network on 1 September 2005. The Report noted that the focus of the video was on “perceived injustices by the West against Muslims”.

Mr Khan’s statement included the passage:

“Your democratically elected governments continuously perpetuate atrocities against my people all over the world.

“And your support for them makes you directly responsible, just as I am directly responsible for protecting and avenging my Muslim brothers and sisters.

²⁸ House of Commons, *Official Report*, 7 July 2005, columns 472-473.

²⁹ *Report of the Official Account of the Bombings in London on 7th July 2005*, 11 May 2006, HC1087.

³⁰ *BBC News*, [undated], *London Attacks: In Depth, 21 July Attacks*.

³¹ *Report of the Official Account of the Bombings in London on 7th July 2005*, 11 May 2006, HC1087.

“Until we feel security, you will be our targets. And until you stop the bombing, gassing, imprisonment and torture of my people we will not stop this fight.

“We are at war and I am a soldier. Now you too will taste the reality of this situation.”³²

69. At its meeting on 13 July, the JIC reviewed the state of the insurgency in Iraq and, separately, the effectiveness of the ITG’s efforts to bring Sunni Arabs into the political process.³³

70. The JIC judged that the majority of Iraqi insurgents were Sunni Arabs, to whom a significant proportion of the Sunni community were sympathetic. Jihadists³⁴ remained in a minority but represented a growing proportion of the insurgency and the proportion of Iraqi jihadists was increasing.

71. Although Sunni insurgents and jihadists had some common aims – opposing the MNF and ITG – the JIC judged that most insurgents were not motivated by Islamist zeal and most ordinary Iraqi Sunnis wanted to be rid of the foreign jihadists. The Assessment said:

“Political engagement with the Sunnis will be key to exploiting this. Currently Sunni Arab insurgents have no strong reason to turn on the jihadists.

“Actions of the ITG will be critical. If political progress is slow and Sunni expectations not met, a significant insurgency in Sunni areas will persist and probably get worse through 2006 and beyond. To counter this, the Iraqi security forces (ISF) in hard core Sunni areas will need extensive MNF support through 2006 and beyond.”

72. The JIC also considered the wider security situation in Iraq, including the activities of the Shia militia and the situation in MND(SE). It judged that:

“Sectarian attacks are increasing but the presence of the MNF means that the danger of civil war is currently remote.

“Shia militias remain largely restrained. Muqtada al-Sadr is content for the movement to concentrate on the political process; any appetite within his organisation for a return to violence is being suppressed. We have no indications that this is about to change. A small minority of other Shia extremist groups continues to attack the MNF. Some have been trained by Iran.

³² *BBC News*, 1 September 2005, *London bomber: Text in full*.

³³ [JIC Assessment, 14 July 2005, ‘Iraq: State of the Insurgency’](#); [JIC Assessment, 14 July 2005, ‘Iraq: Outreach to Sunni Arabs’](#).

³⁴ The JIC used the term “jihadists” to describe extremists who believed they had a religious obligation to fight the West and apostate regimes and who described their attacks as “jihad”.

“Sporadic violence against the MNF in MND(SE) continues, but at a much lower level than in the Sunni areas: some 1 percent of all attacks in Iraq. There has been considerable development of the ISF in the South, but they remain largely untested.”

73. On engagement with Sunni Arabs, the JIC judged that:

“Winning over Iraq’s Sunni Arab population is key to reducing the insurgency over time. Outreach to them by the Shia-dominated Iraqi Transitional Government has been slow and in some cases reluctant. International pressure has helped create some momentum. But overall, outreach has been insufficient to reduce Sunni Arab concerns.

“Sunni attitudes to the political process are mixed. Sunni Arab political groupings remain fluid, and their politicians have not developed a common political platform. But there is a general perception that the Shia and Kurds are reluctant to share political power; that the national reconstruction effort is not benefitting Sunni areas; that some of the Iraqi Security Forces are targeting Sunnis; and that ministries are being purged of Sunnis under the guise of de-Ba’athification. While some of these claims have a basis of fact, many are exaggerated. A timetable for MNF withdrawal also features strongly among Sunni demands.

“The extent to which Sunni concerns are taken into account in next month’s draft Constitution (particularly about federalism and the need for them to benefit from natural resources); whether it is approved in October’s referendum; and the outcome of December’s elections will all be critical for establishing a sense of enfranchisement for the Sunnis. Even on the most optimistic scenario, their expectations will not be fully met. They have not become reconciled to their loss of dominance.

“There are links between some Sunni political figures and insurgent leaders, but we do not believe the Sunni political parties can yet exert enough influence to command a reduction in violence.”³⁵

74. The JIC assessed that many Sunnis believed that the Shia coalition that led the ITG was an Iranian stooge with an anti-Sunni agenda. At a local level, there was anecdotal evidence and allegations to suggest that Sunnis were being forced out of their homes in predominantly Shia areas and that some of the ISF (particularly those controlled by the Shia Minister of the Interior) were responsible for inflaming sectarian tensions by detaining and even killing Sunnis without justification. Although those reports and allegations could not be verified, and the JIC assessed that many of the claims that had been made were exaggerated, it judged that in Basra there was some justification for the feeling of discrimination and that the perception was reinforcing sectarian divisions.

³⁵ [JIC Assessment, 14 July 2005, ‘Iraq: Outreach to Sunni Arabs’.](#)

75. On 15 July, the Iraq Strategy Group (ISG) considered a draft version of a paper for DOP(I) from Dr Reid on operational transition in Iraq.³⁶

76. The paper described a process in which Iraqi Security Forces would take primacy province by province. The MNF would take on a reserve role as they did so. So long as Iraqi capacity continued to increase and the security situation did not deteriorate seriously, the transfer would be implemented from October in Maysan and Muthanna. Basra and Dhi Qar would follow in spring 2006. This would lead to a reduced profile for UK forces, and reductions in numbers to around 3,000 by summer 2006.

77. Dr Reid wrote that:

“The plans are entirely consistent with Multi-National Forces – Iraq (MNF-I) planning; General Casey (the US force commander in Iraq) has been briefed on them and is content.”

78. In the paper, Dr Reid asked DOP(I) to agree that detailed plans should be drawn up for explaining the process to the Iraqi people, the US, other allies, Parliament and the UK public.

79. After a discussion, the ISG concluded that the paper needed to:

- make clear that the process of force reduction was reversible;
- explain the degree of US concern about the possibility of “MND(SE) getting out in front”, which should not be over-emphasised;
- explain the context in terms of ISF development; and
- cover more clearly the implications for other government departments and international actors.³⁷

80. Dr Reid spoke to Mr Jonathan Powell, Mr Blair’s Chief of Staff, on 18 July about the arrangements for handling the paper, given the sensitivity surrounding the issue and the risk of leaks.³⁸ They agreed that it would be best for Dr Reid to produce a full paper for Mr Blair and a single page of recommendations for other Ministers who were members of DOP(I).

81. In the event, the full paper was circulated by the Cabinet Office to all DOP(I) members with the instruction that it should not be shared further.³⁹

82. Dr Reid described the principal risks to the timetable for drawdown as:

³⁶ Letter Cabinet Office [junior official] to Iraq Senior Officials, 15 July 2005, ‘MOD Paper on Operational Transition in Iraq’ attaching MOD Paper, ‘Operational Transition in Iraq’.

³⁷ Letter Cabinet Office [junior official] to Sheinwald, 15 July 2005, ‘Iraq Strategy Group’.

³⁸ [Letter Reid to Powell, 18 July 2005, ‘Operational Transition in Iraq’ attaching Paper Secretary of State for Defence, \[undated\], ‘Operational Transition in Iraq’.](#)

³⁹ Minute Aldred to DOP(I), 20 July 2005, ‘Note by the Secretaries’ attaching Paper Secretary of State for Defence, ‘Operational Transition in Iraq’.

- “a deterioration in the security situation resulting from a change in the Shia quiescence”;
- a failure to deliver an effective ISF (including police) and wider criminal justice capacity; and
- a prolonged delay in the political process, caused (for example) by the rejection of the draft Constitution in the October referendum.⁴⁰

83. Dr Reid recognised that drawdown could have an impact on the broader UK and international effort in the South:

“It is also possible that other (FCO and DFID) activity in Iraq aimed at developing the Iraqi Police Service and reconstruction will need to be curtailed or reduced, with consequent implications for HMG’s wider effort, because of the difficulties of running projects without UK military support and protection. This will need to be looked at in more detail with Other Government Departments.

...

“The announcement of any drawdown of UK forces in the South will have to be managed carefully to ensure that there is no loss of confidence by major NGOs (in particular the UN Agencies and the World Bank), which might lead them to postpone plans for greater engagement in Iraq.”

84. Dr Reid also recognised that although the drawdown was likely to deliver a significant cost saving to the military there would be a cost increase to other parts of the system:

“Other Government Departments operating in Iraq may ... face increased security costs as they are forced to seek commercial alternatives to military force protection.”

85. Mr Blair and President Bush spoke by video conference on 19 July.⁴¹

86. A brief for the discussion prepared by Mr Phillipson suggested that it should include an emerging UK strategy for supporting mainstream Islam internationally.⁴² Mr Phillipson recorded that:

“A key objective of this strategy will be to rebut claims that current terrorism is a result of our actions in Afghanistan and Iraq.”

87. In their conversation, Mr Blair commented to President Bush that there was a clear need to take on terrorist ideology after the London attacks. Terrorists should not be allowed to present themselves as the legitimate voice of Afghanistan and Iraq: “Defeating terrorism in Iraq was crucial to defeating it everywhere.”⁴³

⁴⁰ [Paper Secretary of State for Defence, 18 July 2005, ‘Operational Transition in Iraq’.](#)

⁴¹ Letter Quarrey to Siddiq, 19 July 2005, ‘Prime Minister’s videoconference with President Bush’.

⁴² Minute Phillipson to Prime Minister, 19 July 2005, ‘VTC with President Bush, 1405-1450 19 July’.

⁴³ Letter Quarrey to Siddiq, 19 July 2005, ‘Prime Minister’s videoconference with President Bush’.

- 88.** The two key issues in relation to Iraq were what more could be done on Sunni outreach and driving forward Iraqiisation in order to create the conditions for MNF transition.
- 89.** Also on 19 July, Mr Blair met Ambassador Negroponte, now the US Director of National Intelligence, at No.10.⁴⁴ Mr Negroponte said that it was important to keep the political process moving forward, and to ensure that the ISF were not torn apart by sectarian tensions.
- 90.** Mr Blair agreed, and said that a “key part of our strategy had to be keeping people’s attention properly focused”. Some commentators were beginning to suggest that, although their tactics were unacceptable, the aims of terrorist groups were legitimate.
- 91.** In a separate conversation, Sir Nigel Sheinwald told Ambassador Negroponte that the UK aimed to start handing over its provinces in Iraq by the end of the year.
- 92.** DOP(I) met on 21 July, chaired by Mr Blair, and considered Dr Reid’s paper on operational transition.⁴⁵
- 93.** The Chairman’s Brief, written by Cabinet Office officials for Mr Blair, suggested that he would “want to focus the meeting on **ensuring individual Departments drive forward work over the summer**”.⁴⁶ As the Committee would not meet again until after the Parliamentary recess, Mr Blair should “**emphasise that the UK effort must not lose impetus over the summer** as the preparations for key events in Iraq (Constitution, elections, and transition) will need to be well advanced.”
- 94.** DOP(I) agreed Dr Reid’s recommendation that, subject to the continuation of current trends in the capacity of the Iraqi security forces and to there being no major deterioration in the security situation, the UK should plan to implement transition to Iraqi control in two provinces of southern Iraq around October 2005, and in the other two around March 2006.⁴⁷
- 95.** Mr Blair emphasised the importance of avoiding giving the “erroneous impression that we intended to leave whatever the circumstances” and gave the instruction that no further written papers should be produced until there had been consultation with the US and the Iraqi Government.
- 96.** The second paper considered by DOP(I) on 21 July was written by the FCO and presented by Mr Patey. It was entitled ‘Iraq: Splitting the Jihadists from the National Opposition’.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ Letter Phillipson to Jeffrey, 19 July 2005, ‘Prime Minister’s Meeting with John Negroponte, 19 July’.

⁴⁵ Minutes, 21 July 2005, DOP(I) meeting.

⁴⁶ Minute Cabinet Office [junior official] to Prime Minister, 19 July 2005, ‘DOP(I) – Chairman’s Brief’.

⁴⁷ Minutes, 21 July 2005, DOP(I) meeting; [Paper Secretary of State for Defence, 18 July 2005, ‘Operational Transition in Iraq’](#).

⁴⁸ Paper FCO, 18 July 2005, ‘Iraq: Splitting the Jihadists from the National Opposition’.

97. The paper described jihadists as “principally foreigners, but an increasing number of Iraqis”. It recommended:

- continuing to demonstrate inclusivity in the drafting of the Constitution, committing to the timetable set out in the TAL, and being prepared to intervene if necessary;
- ensuring that the system used in the December elections was a province-based rather than a national-based one in order to maximise Sunni Arab participation;
- progressive release of detainees and improved regimes in detention facilities;
- pressing the ITG to relax the de-Ba’athification rules to allow disaffected former Army officers and officials back into the ISF and government institutions, and ensuring that de-Ba’athification decisions were based in a legal framework rather than a political one;
- reforming the judicial system, including increasing the capability of the Iraqi Special Tribunal and urging the appointment of a Human Rights Minister;
- redeploying members of the Multi-National Force away from sensitive areas and making clear there were no aspirations for long-term bases;
- identifying and brokering local cease-fires with those leaders in the Sunni community who were capable of being brought into the political process;
- implementing reconstruction projects rapidly following large-scale counter-insurgency operations or local cease-fires.

98. These were to be accompanied by a strong media strategy, aimed at undermining the jihadists’ “un-Islamic” message, and active engagement with neighbouring states.

99. DOP(I) agreed the broad approach proposed by the FCO.⁴⁹

100. A few hours after DOP(I) met on 21 July, the Defence and Overseas Policy Committee (DOP) also met, chaired by Mr Blair.

101. The MOD invited DOP to consider whether or not it wished to move the UK Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) from the north of Afghanistan to Helmand province and to decide what, if any, additional force package should be deployed to support it.⁵⁰

102. There was a brief mention towards the end of the paper for DOP on the possible impact of Iraq on the UK’s military operations in Afghanistan. It said that plans for UK military drawdown in Iraq were under consideration and remained both highly sensitive in the context of maintaining coalition cohesion and highly dependent on ISF capability. It was anticipated that it would be possible to manage a significant drawdown over the next two years.

⁴⁹ Minutes, 21 July 2005, DOP(I) meeting.

⁵⁰ Paper MOD officials, 19 July 2005, ‘Afghanistan: Resources and Strategic Planning’.

103. The paper concluded with a caution that:

“... any substantial prolongation of the UK military commitment in Iraq at current force levels would have significant impact on individual personnel, the logistic feasibility of any commitment in Afghanistan, and overall resourcing. If drawdown in Iraq were to slip significantly, the MOD would be able to resource Options 2 and 3 in terms of manpower and equipment, but the effects ... [on personnel, logistics and overall resourcing] would be exacerbated significantly.”

104. When the MOD paper was circulated to DOP members for consideration, it was accompanied by an appendix, produced by Cabinet Office officials, setting out the estimates of financial pressures associated with the Iraq campaign during the financial years 2005/06, 2006/07 and 2007/08.

105. The minutes of the DOP discussion on 21 July do not indicate that there was any discussion of the specific impact on the Iraq campaign of the proposed deployment to Helmand.⁵¹

106. Dr Reid argued that “sorting out Helmand” was central to resolving Afghanistan’s wider problems and that a UK deployment was a necessary, though “not sufficient”, element in this. Given the security situation, if the deployment went ahead, it would have to be on the basis of the largest option: a PRT with an infantry battlegroup and full helicopter support.

107. General Sir Michael Walker, Chief of the Defence Staff, did make reference to Iraq, and advised DOP that the risk of UK casualties in Helmand would be higher than in northern Afghanistan, but lower than in Iraq.

108. Mr Des Browne, the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, questioned whether the UK could afford to take on another substantial military operation, given the cost of operations in Iraq.

109. DOP agreed in principle to deploy the PRT to Helmand with an infantry battlegroup and full helicopter support.

110. The paper provided for DOP’s discussion said that this option comprised “around 2,500 personnel in total”.⁵²

111. On 22 July, Sir Nigel Sheinwald provided Mr Blair with a minute entitled ‘Iraq: A Comprehensive Strategy’.⁵³

⁵¹ Minutes, 21 July 2005, DOP meeting.

⁵² Paper MOD officials, 19 July 2005, ‘Afghanistan: Resources and Strategic Planning’.

⁵³ [Minute Sheinwald to Prime Minister, 22 July 2005, ‘Iraq: A Comprehensive Strategy’](#).

112. The minute began:

“You ask how alarmed you should be about Iraq. Of course we should be concerned – about the continuing high level of violence; lack of grip of the ITG; slow pace of reconstruction etc. It is difficult to see these things being remedied quickly.

“At the same time we need to make a hard-headed calculation: are we headed for strategic failure? I do **not** think we are, principally because the political process remains on track and, so far, the insurgents have not succeeded in fomenting any widespread sectarian conflict. Those are the bottom line strategic risks.”

113. Sir Nigel suggested that the objective over the next six months should be:

“... to build the right political and security platform so that:

- the elected Iraqi Government after the December elections can really take charge and govern the country; and
- the MNF can begin a substantial withdrawal next year, and leave the country in the hands of the ISF, without precipitating a civil war. At present there is no doubt that the presence of the MNF contains the sectarian violence.”

114. Achieving the objective required “a **comprehensive political strategy**”. Sir Nigel suggested that the FCO paper discussed at DOP(I) contained all the necessary elements of such a strategy. One of the key requirements was:

“A **delivery mechanism**: close co-ordination between the UK and US Ambassadors and military in Baghdad; Jack [Straw] and Condi [Rice] in charge of the political process; John [Reid] and Rumsfeld engaged on the security strategy.”

115. Attached to Sir Nigel’s advice was a draft note for Mr Blair to send to President Bush, prepared by Mr Blair’s Private Secretary.⁵⁴ It emphasised “if we are going to achieve decisive effect within the necessary timescale, we need clearer lines of responsibility for managing delivery”.

116. Mr Blair wrote in manuscript on Sir Nigel’s advice: “I agree strongly with your analysis. My concern is delivering the strategy.”⁵⁵

⁵⁴ [Minute Sheinwald to Prime Minister, 22 July 2005, ‘Iraq: A Comprehensive Strategy’](#) attaching ‘Note for President Bush, Iraq: A Comprehensive Political Strategy’.

⁵⁵ [Manuscript comment Blair to Sheinwald on Minute Sheinwald to Prime Minister, 22 July 2005, ‘Iraq: A Comprehensive Strategy’](#).

117. On 25 July, the TNA passed a referendum law which defined two conditions that must be met for a “yes” vote on the new Iraqi Constitution to be valid.⁵⁶ They were:

“Firstly, there is the positive condition that ‘a majority of the voters in Iraq approve’. Secondly, there is the negative condition that ‘two-thirds of the voters in three or more governorates do not reject it.’”

118. Mr Patey reported that debate had broken out over the meaning of the first condition; did it refer to a majority of those who voted, or of those on the electoral list? UN elections experts believed the former, as did the drafters. However, Mr Patey warned:

“If this ‘electoral list’ interpretation prevails, the risk that the Constitution will be rejected increases. On the basis that those sponsoring this reading will shortly realise their ploy is fraught with risk, we will seek to support UN efforts for a clarification in favour of the ‘votes cast’ interpretation by explaining to key interlocutors the dangers of gambling on a high turnout.”

119. On 25 July, Mr Patey informed the FCO that the first full draft of the Constitution had been circulated.⁵⁷

120. The text was “rough” and many issues of substance remained unresolved, including how the status of Kirkuk would be determined. Mr Patey also recorded concerns about the qualification of women’s rights by Shar’ia Law, “unnecessary and unhelpful” references to de-Ba’athification, and about judicial independence.

121. Passing Mr Patey’s telegram to Mr Straw, the IPU reported that a “gathering of senior Iraqis” was expected to thrash out the issues of substance later in the week.⁵⁸ There were positive signs of continued commitment to the drafting timetable.

122. The IPU also highlighted that control of natural resources was a key issue in the debate on federalism in the Constitution. Three options were on the table:

“Two of these stipulate resources will be managed by the federal government, with a portion allocated to the regions. The third allows the regions to exploit natural resources under supervision of the federal government.”

123. Mr Blair spoke to President Bush by video conference on 26 July and said that the US and UK needed to “knit our political and security strategies together”.⁵⁹ The ITG needed active support in reaching out to the Sunni community, and the UK and US should “press hard for a big push”, including with helpful partners in the region.

⁵⁶ eGram 9728/05 Baghdad to FCO London, 25 July 2005, ‘Iraq: Referendum Law Passed’.

⁵⁷ eGram 9738/05 Baghdad to FCO London, 25 July 2005, ‘Iraq: Constitution Update, 25 July’.

⁵⁸ Minute Fawcett to Foreign Secretary, 26 July 2005, ‘Iraq: Constitution: Update’.

⁵⁹ Letter Quarrey to Siddiq, 26 July 2005, ‘Prime Minister’s VTC with President Bush: 26 July 2005’.

124. On 31 July, in a report to Gen Walker, Lieutenant General Robin Brims, the Senior British Military Representative – Iraq (SBMR-I), reported that:

“At long last, and with much steering by the US and prompting by ourselves, the first meeting of the Joint Commission on Conditions-Based Transition will be this Tuesday and I will chair the coalition side after the first meeting (when General Casey will take the lead) ... The idea is to present agreed recommendations to the PM by 26 September with announcements after the constitutional referendum. Current thinking proposes not setting the conditions bar too high and is aiming for some early transfers of suitable cities from coalition forces to appropriate civil authorities – with all transfer decisions being joint ones.”⁶⁰

125. Lt Gen Brims also reported the establishment of a US/UK “Red Team” (or “Red Cell”). Its purpose was to examine counter-insurgency strategy critically and “determine which enemy is the greatest challenge and what they think of our strategy”.

126. Lt Gen Brims wrote that he saw the review as “a most important exercise to ensure we test and adjust our strategy as necessary”.

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127. On 2 August, Sir Nigel Sheinwald sent Mr Hadley a Note by Mr Blair for President Bush.⁶¹ It set out the things that Mr Blair considered “we need to work on urgently”, and suggested a discussion.

128. On Iraq, Mr Blair listed Sunni outreach, security transition and organisation as the three areas requiring attention.

129. Mr Blair identified Sunni participation as key to the success of December’s elections and wrote that “we will have to take over the Sunni outreach or at least the strategy behind it”. The component parts of that would be:

- some detainee releases;
- installing a provincial list system for the December elections;
- vigorous outreach by the ITG;
- a transparent and rules-based de-Ba’athification process;
- US/UK contacts with insurgents, which could “allow local cease-fires”;
- reconstruction; and
- drawing in “friendly neighbouring states”.

⁶⁰ Minute Brims to CDS, 31 July 2005, ‘SBMR-I Weekly Report (172) 31 July 2005’.

⁶¹ Letter Phillipson to Hadley, 2 August 2005, [untitled] [attaching Note TB \[Blair to Bush\], 2 August 2005, ‘Note’](#).

130. Under the heading “security transition”, Mr Blair wrote that the problem was:

“... if we look as if we’re wanting to go, that undermines our resolve; if we look as if we’re wanting to stay, that undermines our political strategy to help Iraq stand on its own feet as a democracy.”

131. The solution, he suggested, was an Iraqi-led transition plan before the elections, setting out “how we intend to proceed”, with a media strategy for its communication.

132. On organisation, Mr Blair stressed the need for effective political engagement and suggested that he and President Bush should receive a regular report from Mr Patey and Ambassador Khalilzad “specifically on the political outreach”.

133. Mr Blair spoke to President Bush on 5 August and suggested that an informal contact group was needed to take forward a conference to bring Sunni and Shia groups together.⁶² Mr Blair considered that the key was “to draw in the silent Sunni majority” and suggested that the UK and US Ambassadors should report progress on a weekly basis.

134. The British Embassy Baghdad reported a last-ditch attempt by key Iraqi politicians to achieve consensus on the Constitution on the eve of 15 August.⁶³ Discussion of the draft text continued into the night. The Embassy judged that a short extension to the drafting deadline was the most likely outcome.

135. Negotiations continued on 15 August, focused on the proposed process for achieving federal autonomy, and on natural resources.⁶⁴ Half an hour before the expiry of the deadline (at midnight) the Speaker of the TNA proposed an amendment to the TAL extending the drafting deadline to 22 August, which was passed unanimously by the TNA.

136. Following a visit to Iraq from 13 to 18 August, Mr Asquith commented that the constitutional negotiations had “exposed the crystalline brittleness of the political process”.⁶⁵ In his view, the Shia Islamist and Kurdish leaders had:

“... always known that they could achieve a Constitution (text and sufficient votes in a referendum) over the wishes of the Sunni, by trading with each other Islamist and federal language that satisfied their respective key objectives.”

137. Mr Asquith noted that both had, so far, pulled back from such a “bilateral stitch-up”. That was in his view significant, and should help to encourage Sunni participation in the referendum and elections, something which he considered of fundamental importance.

⁶² Letter Phillipson to Wilson, 5 August 2005, ‘Prime Minister’s VTC with President Bush, 5 August: Iraq, Syria, Iran, engaging mainstream Islam/tackling extremism’.

⁶³ eGram 11208/05 Baghdad to FCO London, 15 August 2005, ‘Iraq: Constitution: Hangs in the Balance’.

⁶⁴ eGram 11265/05 Baghdad to FCO London, 15 August 2005, ‘Iraq: Constitution: 7 More Days’.

⁶⁵ Minute Asquith to Howells, 22 August 2005, ‘Iraq: Visit 13-18 August 2005’.

138. Mr Asquith also described increasing tension at the heart of the Shia community over the question of federalism:

“The Sadrist trend is split, with Muqtada’s supporters siding with the Sunni anti-federalist tendency; the Shia federalists in the South-East don’t know what they want (decentralisation or federalism) ...”

139. On 22 August, the IPU alerted Mr Straw’s Private Secretary to the risk that the Shia and Kurdish representatives might reach agreement on the linked issues of federalism and control of natural resources which did not have Sunni buy-in.⁶⁶ The IPU proposed a joint US/UK demarche⁶⁷ on Shia and Kurdish leaders, to be agreed between Mr Straw and Dr Condoleezza Rice, US Secretary of State.

140. Mr Straw’s Private Secretary reported the conversation between Mr Straw and Secretary Rice later that evening.⁶⁸

141. During the discussion, Mr Straw had expressed concern over reports that the Shia and Kurds might “stitch up” a deal on federalism at the expense of the Sunnis. That, Mr Straw feared, would be destabilising. In his view any solution which involved merging provinces should be approved by the TNA. Secretary Rice said that she would speak to the US Ambassador to Iraq and then call back.

142. Mr Straw and Dr Rice again discussed progress on constitutional negotiations on 24 August.⁶⁹ Secretary Rice reported that agreement appeared close.

143. On federalism, the Shia were prepared to commit to take no steps towards forming newly federated regions for four years, on the basis of a firm assurance from the US that it would not oppose any measures to form a federation after that period, and that it would give due consideration to the needs of the South in providing financial assistance packages.

144. Secretary Rice added that “there appeared to be a latent suspicion that the UK would repeat the history of the 1920s and undercut agreements reached with the Iraqis”, and therefore suggested that the UK might also offer these firm assurances. Mr Straw discussed this point with Mr Blair, and agreed to sign up to these commitments. He commented that “we could not in any case prevent the Iraqis from forming federated regions and we actually channelled most of our aid to the South already”.

145. The ISG reviewed progress on the Constitution on 26 August.⁷⁰ It considered that although a deal seemed likely, the level of Sunni support for it was in serious doubt and

⁶⁶ Email IPU [junior official] to Siddiq, 22 August 2005, ‘Proposed FS call on Rice’.

⁶⁷ A formal diplomatic expression of displeasure.

⁶⁸ Email Siddiq to Asquith, 22 August 2005, ‘Iraq: FS Rice 21 Aug 2004 [sic]’.

⁶⁹ Minute Siddiq to Sawers, 24 August 2005, ‘The Foreign Secretary’s Conversation with the US Secretary of State, 24 August’.

⁷⁰ Letter Cabinet Office [junior official] to Sheinwald, 31 August 2005, ‘Iraq Strategy Group’.

that “presented corresponding risks for an increase in the insurgency and sectarian violence”.

146. The ISG also discussed the anticipated report of the Red Team and recognised that the UK would need to consider what its “legacy” in MND(SE) would be. The FCO and MOD were commissioned to produce an assessment of the UK legacy in MND(SE) one year on, for discussion at the next meeting.

147. In response to that commission, the IPU produced a paper on the UK’s objectives for MND(SE).⁷¹ The paper suggested that objectives for the South-East were that it should:

- identify itself as part of Iraq, connected to Baghdad;
- engage in a constructive but not servile relationship with Iran;
- have credible local government delivering effective services;
- have security forces loyal to the state and capable of providing sufficient law and order to “avert a descent into full-blown criminality and chaos”;
- improve the supply of services such as electricity in the short term and have a credible long-term development plan; and
- achieve economic sustainability.

148. The challenges to achieving those objectives included Saddam Hussein’s legacy of neglect in the South, significant differences in political vision, militia activity, poor local governance and tribal violence.

149. According to the paper:

“We cannot stay in Southern Iraq indefinitely and our aim remains to reduce our military presence over the next 12 months. Against our broader global strategy, our plans are to draw down significant numbers of personnel next Autumn. We therefore need to take decisions on what we should do in the interim to give the South-East the best possible chance of going it alone.”

150. A telegram from the British Embassy Office Basra was supplied to be read in conjunction with the IPU paper.⁷² On the UK legacy in MND(SE) it advised:

“The South cannot be seen in isolation from developments in Baghdad. Our ability to achieve anything will be affected by the outcome of the constitutional debate and the future balance of power following elections. The legacy we leave in the South will to a large part be dependent on outside factors, such as the Sunni reaction in central Iraq to the Constitution.

⁷¹ Paper Iraq Policy Unit, 26 August 2005, ‘MND(South East) in Autumn 2006: Discussion Paper’.

⁷² eGram 12326/05 Basra to FCO London, 1 September 2005, ‘Southern Iraq: The Legacy’.

“The legacy will be imperfect, but we should not be too defensive. The challenge was great, and the achievements are considerable. If we can contain the politicisation of the IPS from getting out of control, get the multilateral agencies more engaged, and plan now on some longer-term priorities, we can leave knowing that southern Iraq has the capability of realising its massive economic potential for the whole country. We should be able to leave with the goodwill of the majority of the population in southern Iraq (there would come a point when that is less certain). But we need to prepare the ground now to lower UK public and international expectations of what we are leaving behind.”

151. The Constitutional Commission presented the text of the draft Constitution to the TNA on 28 August.⁷³

152. Mr Patey described the document that had been produced as “an admirable document which contains much we should applaud”.⁷⁴ Its “key achievements” were “protection of fundamental rights including minorities and women” and it came closer to meeting Sunni concerns than the draft as it stood on 15 August.

153. The immediate Sunni reaction to the text was reported by Mr Patey to be “muted ... with many still considering their position”.⁷⁵ But a “key positive” was that “almost all are encouraging participation in the referendum thus acknowledging that influence is won more effectively by voting than by violence”.

154. In the period after the Constitutional Commission announced that it had reached agreement on the draft text, the US encouraged further discussion between parties aimed at increasing Sunni Arab support for the Constitution.⁷⁶

155. Sir Nigel Sheinwald told the Inquiry that Mr Blair’s aspirations for the Iraqi Constitution were:

“... that it should get agreed and the referendum should go ahead and it should have a very broad base of support in the population; that we should keep to the timetable, we should keep the show going, we shouldn’t get derailed by the violence which of course continued, intensified ...”⁷⁷

156. Mr Asquith told the Inquiry that the UK’s objectives for the Constitution were:

“To lay the basis for a representative democracy which kept the country together; which didn’t build in sectarian advantages or ethnic advantages; and which didn’t create a form of federalism which was going to increase the risk of the country

⁷³ Allawi AA. *The Occupation of Iraq: winning the war, losing the peace*. Yale University Press, 2007.

⁷⁴ eGram 12004/05 Baghdad to FCO London, 28 August 2005, ‘Iraq: Constitution; Worth Waiting For’.

⁷⁵ eGram 12058/05 Baghdad to FCO London, 30 August 2005, ‘Iraq: Constitution: Further Reaction from Sunni Arabs and Others’.

⁷⁶ Deeks AS & Burton MD. Iraq’s Constitution: A Drafting History. *Cornell International Law Journal*, Volume 40 (2007).

⁷⁷ Private hearing, 3 September 2010, page 73.

splitting, fundamentally; with, of course, a series of structures, both in terms of provincial, legislative structures and government structures, that could command the loyalty of Iraqis and respected the authority of government.”⁷⁸

157. In a telephone conversation on 29 August, Sir Nigel Sheinwald and Mr Hadley agreed that the draft Constitution was a good document, but that the outcome was “at best mixed in terms of bringing the Sunnis into the process”.⁷⁹ They agreed that the possibility of further changes should be kept open.

158. Commenting on the Constitution in conversation with Secretary Rice in late August 2005, Mr Straw said that he was:

“... very struck by the progress which had been made ... The fact that the decisions on further federalism had been parked to the new National Assembly ... had both down and up sides to it. The down side was that there was no built in protection by way of special majorities or special processes for the Sunni to make more difficult greater devolution of power which they feared. On the other hand, the fact that this question was going to be left to simple majorities of the National Assembly opened up the possibility for ... deals by simple majority to provide some of the protection which the Sunnis were seeking.”⁸⁰

159. Mr Patey reported to Mr Asquith on 31 August that he had delivered the commitment Secretary Rice had outlined to Mr Straw, explaining:

“I ... spoke to Adel Abdel Mehdi to tell him that we could align ourselves with US assurances. As you know, the UIA [United Iraqi Alliance] finally agreed that [the] issue of further federalism would be left to the next National Assembly. Adel has now followed up and asked for this in writing as promised.

“The US assurances turned out to be in the form of a commitment to use their good offices to hold the Kurds to a separate political agreement with the UIA on the content of new legislation. I have provided a similar commitment ...

“In passing our assurance on to Adel Abdel Mehdi, I have made it clear that this is not for publication. This would make it more difficult to convince Sunnis that the issue of future federalism was still open.”⁸¹

160. The Red Team established by Ambassador Khalilzad and Gen Casey in July reported at the end of August.⁸² The team’s objective had been to produce a strategy aimed at breaking the back of the insurgency within a year and defeating it within three.

⁷⁸ Private hearing, 15 June 2010, page 13.

⁷⁹ Letter Sheinwald to Hayes, 29 August 2005, ‘Conversation with US National Security Adviser, 29 August’.

⁸⁰ Letter Straw to Sheinwald, 30 August 2005, ‘Conversation with US Secretary of State, 29 August’.

⁸¹ Letter Patey to Asquith, 31 August 2005, [untitled].

⁸² Report US Red Team, 31 August 2005, ‘An integrated counterinsurgency strategy for Iraq’.

161. The Red Team assessed that the coalition’s current strategy, which focused on the transition of responsibility for security to the Iraqi Government, would enable coalition forces to disengage from Iraq but would leave Iraqi Security Forces that would not be able to defeat the insurgency in the foreseeable future.

162. The Red Team proposed a new strategy based on the “ink-spot” counter-insurgency model, with tighter integration of military and civilian efforts and additional resources for the political, economic and governance activities. It did not propose additional military resources, but considered that redeployment of some of the existing resources might help achieve greater effect.

163. The Red Team defined the ink-spot model as:

“... the integration of security, economic, social and political actions to achieve significant local control. The concept is to introduce sufficient security forces to control a defined area, use traditional counter-insurgency practices to establish persistent security, exploit intelligence provided by the local population, provide [the] local population with the benefits of economic development and better governance, and communicate effectively with local and national audiences.”

164. Once an area was secured, it could be expanded or new areas secured, so that the area under control was gradually extended. These local actions would be supported by action at the national level to develop an inclusive political process, provide economic opportunities, and improve governance.

165. The Report proposed that a Joint Inter-Agency Counter-Insurgency Task Force should be established to plan, co-ordinate and implement governance reform and economic sector development work in support of the counter-insurgency campaign, and that fully-staffed Provincial Support Teams should be established in each ink-spot.

166. Sir John Sawers, FCO Director General Political at the time of the Report’s publication, told the Inquiry that he would not have described the Red Team exercise as a major review like the one carried out by the Baker-Hamilton Commission a year later (see Section 9.5) which was “the real turning point in strategy”.⁸³ Rather, he saw the 2005 Red Team exercise as a good way of examining alternative approaches, which did not lead to significant changes.

167. Sir Nigel Sheinwald told the Inquiry:

“I think maybe what it did encapsulate was the greater readiness of the American system to approach this on a counter-insurgency basis and to understand the nature of what we were dealing with, to subjugate the military approach to political ends. And it combined with Ambassador Khalilzad’s own outreach to the Sunni community and so on, and that was in a critical moment in the run-up to the December 2005

⁸³ Public hearing, 16 December 2009, page 41.

elections. And we ourselves were engaging in various outreach events to the Sunni community during that period, both at Ministerial and official level. So I think if there was an encapsulation, it was that we were adopting a more politically sophisticated approach both to security and to politics in that critical period, or were trying to.”⁸⁴

September 2005

168. Mr Blair and President Bush spoke by video conference on 1 September.⁸⁵

169. Mr Blair proposed that the political strategy in Iraq should focus on the December elections and should have two strands:

- ensuring greater Sunni participation, by “activity in Iraq led by Khalilzad and William Patey” and by involving regional actors; and
- “building a moderate, secular platform which could succeed in the elections”.

170. Mr Blair said that it would become clear to voters in Iraq that they had a choice between a “strong unified and democratic Iraq” and one which was “weak, divided and sectarian”.

171. The 26 August IPU paper was discussed by the Iraq Strategy Group on 2 September.⁸⁶

172. The record of the meeting shows that Sir Nigel Sheinwald highlighted a number of issues emerging from the paper, for which clarity was needed on how they were being resolved, specifically:

- cancelled DFID programmes (see Section 10.2);
- lack of progress on the police (see Section 12.1); and
- a gap in funding for the Iraqi armed forces (see Section 12.1).

173. The FCO was commissioned to produce a revised paper by 14 September which would address in direct terms what the UK would be able to say it had achieved by early in 2006.

174. The ISG also considered Sunni reactions to the Constitution, and observed that they were “not united”.

175. The advice of Mr Patey was “to give the Sunnis a little more time to take stock, and to support them seeking some further final changes to the draft”.

⁸⁴ Public hearing, 16 December 2009, pages 41-42.

⁸⁵ Letter Quarrey to Siddiq, 1 September 2005, ‘Prime Minister’s VTC with President Bush’.

⁸⁶ Letter Cabinet Office [junior official] to Sheinwald, 6 September 2005, ‘Iraq Strategy Group’.

176. At a meeting of the Iraq Senior Officials Group (ISOG) on 9 September, attendees were told that:

“... we continued to push for final changes to meet Sunni concerns. The areas for possible movement were: Arab identity; and the electoral law. The UN was increasingly concerned that they would miss their deadline for distributing copies of the Constitution to the Iraqi population.”⁸⁷

177. As work to finalise the Constitution continued, concerns were mounting about security, including in MND(SE).

178. On 9 September, Mr Blair’s Private Secretary provided him with an update on Iraq.⁸⁸ He reported “further cause for concern”, including about:

- Lebanese and Iranian involvement in Iraq;
- the “apparent involvement of members of Basra Police in attacks against the MNF, and a claim from the Basra Chief of Police that only 500 out of 12,000 Basra Police are loyal to him”; and
- the key role being played by a breakaway group from the Jaysh al-Mahdi (JAM).

179. The Private Secretary wrote:

“We still do not have the comprehensive picture that we need of what is going on in Basra. Kim Howells [FCO Minister of State] visits next week. I have spoken to his office today and emphasised that you are personally very concerned about the situation and that we need a serious report from him on this.”

180. Mr Blair’s reply said:

“This is v. worrying. It all depends on the ISF being built up credibly. But we need strong messages to Iran, Lebanon and what do we do to disrupt Hizballah?”⁸⁹

181. At its meeting on 9 September the ISOG considered the Red Team Report.⁹⁰

182. Officials commented that the Report was not an alternative campaign plan, but a “set of ideas”. The MOD “did not see the report having great traction in Washington, except at the margins” on the question of how the MNF could pursue the current strategy more effectively.

183. The ISOG also observed that the Red Team’s Report contained “risks ... for the UK” as it suggested that “forces (coalition and Iraqi) should be moved from benign to difficult areas”. The FCO was tasked to provide comments on the Report.

⁸⁷ Letter Cabinet Office [junior official] to Asquith, 14 September 2005, ‘Iraq: Senior Officials’.

⁸⁸ Minute Quarrey to Prime Minister, 9 September 2005, ‘Iraq Update’.

⁸⁹ Manuscript comment Blair on Minute Quarrey to Prime Minister, 9 September 2005, ‘Iraq Update’.

⁹⁰ Letter Cabinet Office [junior official] to Asquith, 14 September 2005, ‘Iraq: Senior Officials’.

184. On 12 September, Dr Reid wrote to Mr Blair with the results of the most recent review of UK forces in Iraq.⁹¹ He explained that:

“... considerable progress has been made in training the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) since the last roulement in May. Consequently, an overall reduction of about 500 troops will be possible in ... October/November.”

185. That reduction would bring force levels down to around 8,000. Dr Reid noted that “incident levels have remained much lower than in other parts of Iraq, but attacks on UK forces have grown in sophistication”. He added: “It should be emphasised that agreeing to the roulement **does not** trigger implementation of our transition plans in MND(SE).”

186. On the same day, Dr Reid’s Assistant Private Secretary sought a specific assurance from Gen Walker that the MOD’s planning assumptions for deployment in Afghanistan – as presented to DOP in July 2005 – would be achievable in the event of a slower than expected drawdown of UK forces in Iraq.⁹²

187. In a bilateral meeting with President Bush in the margins of a summit on 14 September, Mr Blair said that he had read the Red Team Report and that “some of its conclusions were worrying, but at least it set out some clear ideas on the forward strategy”.⁹³ He suggested that the conclusions should be evaluated in London and Washington, and taken forward “where they made sense”.

188. On 14 September, Mr Paul Fox, Head of the IPU, wrote to Mr Straw’s Private Office on the implications of a Kurdish/Shia “deal” on the Constitution.⁹⁴

189. The deal stated that the issue of federalism would not be determined until after elections to the National Assembly, which would then decide the rules and procedures for forming federal regions. It stipulated that the National Assembly must consider federalism in the first weeks of its existence.

190. Mr Fox wrote:

“This deal and our assurances have a number of implications. It is a deal with two parties effectively cutting out the third, the Sunnis, and goes some way to closing the door to them on the issue of federalism ...

“While the deal, the assurances and their confidentiality are likely to hold this side of elections in December ... what follows could change that. If the elections lead to the fragmentation of the UIA and if Shia groups less enamoured of federalism gain a decent foothold in the assembly, then SCIRI [Supreme Council for Islamic

⁹¹ [Letter Reid to Blair, 12 September 2005, \[untitled\]](#).

⁹² [Minute Naworynsky to PSO/CDS, 12 September 2005, ‘Iraq/Afghanistan commitments’](#).

⁹³ Letter Quarrey to Hayes, 14 September 2005, ‘US Millennium Review Summit; bilateral with President Bush’.

⁹⁴ Minute Fox to Private Secretary [FCO], 14 September 2005, ‘Iraq’s Constitution: UK Assurances on a Kurdish/Shia deal’.

Revolution in Iraq] might be tempted to go public with these assurances to strengthen their hand. This would have a negative impact on the Sunnis but they would be in a stronger political position and therefore the impact would be less than it might otherwise have been. We would then make clear that we were not bound by these assurances, given the expressed will of the National Assembly chosen in free and fair elections. We would have to contend with the unhappiness of the UIA but they would have been warned of the consequences of such an action.”

Al Qaida declares war

On 14 September, the leader of Al Qaida in Iraq, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, declared an “all-out war” on Shia Muslims in Iraq in response to a US–Iraqi offensive on the town of Tal Afar.⁹⁵

On 18 September, Lt Gen Brims’ weekly report to Gen Walker recorded the impact of this declaration.⁹⁶

A series of 12 car bombs in Baghdad had increased the number of attacks there by almost half. The weekly casualty numbers rose by 122 percent, and 479 of the 782 people killed were civilians. Although al-Zarqawi claimed the attacks in Baghdad, Lt Gen Brims observed “we should not under-estimate the extent of involvement of local Iraqi insurgents in planning and executing many of the attacks”.

191. On 15 September, the JIC produced an Assessment covering the draft Constitution and Sunni violence, at the request of the ISOG.⁹⁷ Its Key Judgements included:

“I. Many leading Sunni figures are unhappy with aspects of the draft Constitution ... At the grass-roots many Sunnis wish to vote: most who do are likely to reject the draft.

“II. It is unlikely that the Sunnis can mobilise a two-thirds majority against the draft in the requisite three provinces ...

“III. Actions of the insurgents will be critical to the size of the Sunni vote. The hard core of the insurgents ... see the political process as a threat and will try to disrupt the referendum. Their continued violence will inhibit the turnout by Sunnis; less so by Shia.”

192. On 16 September, the IPU advised Mr Straw and Sir Michael Jay, FCO Permanent Under Secretary, that the frequency and sophistication of attacks in Basra was increasing and the British Embassy Office Basra was locked down.⁹⁸

⁹⁵ *Al Jazeera News*, 14 September 2005, *Al-Zarqawi declares war on Iraqi Shia*.

⁹⁶ Minute Brims to Walker, 18 September 2005, ‘SBMR-I Weekly Report (179) 18 September 05’.

⁹⁷ [JIC Assessment, 15 September 2005, ‘Iraq: the Draft Constitution and Sunni Violence’](#).

⁹⁸ Minute Jeffrey to PS [FCO], 16 September 2005, ‘Basra Security Situation’.

193. The IPU recommended that the number of staff be kept under review and that Sir Michael Jay press the MOD for a dedicated helicopter service.

194. On the same day, Mr Blair commented on an Iraq update from his Private Secretary to which reports of security in Iraq were attached:

“This shows the vital importance of renewing our focus and getting the Red Team report implemented.”⁹⁹

195. The update said that Sir Nigel Sheinwald was working on a paper for Mr Blair on the UK’s strategy and the structures for implementing it, to be submitted the following week.

196. On 17 September, UK forces detained two leading members of a JAM splinter group.¹⁰⁰

197. Mr Patey reported on 18 September that the TNA had adopted changes to the draft Constitution and had sent the text to the UN for printing.¹⁰¹

198. There had been some last minute problems with the published text when Sheikh Hammoudi, Chair of the Constitutional Committee, produced a foreword that made reference to the “religious maraj’iya”. The use of that phrase, which describes the highest religious authority in Shia Islam, was strongly opposed by Kurdish representatives and secular groups.

199. Mr Patey considered that the incident was likely to deepen the mistrust between the participants and might be:

“... indicative of shifting trends in the political process: from the even slight degree of engagement and private dialogue necessary to craft a Constitution, towards the outright public jockeying for position necessary to fight a referendum and elections.”

200. Lt Gen Brims reported on 18 September that Gen Casey had “commissioned work (coincidentally staffed largely by British colleagues) on some of the strategic policy implications of the Red Team Report” to inform MNF strategic thinking.¹⁰²

201. On 19 September, Mr Patey reported that the issue of what would constitute a “yes” vote in the referendum appeared to have been resolved.¹⁰³ Ms Carina Perelli, Head of the UN Electoral Affairs Division, had reported that the TNA’s Legal Affairs Committee had clarified that the referendum law referred to a majority of those who vote. The Embassy was seeking to confirm that was the case.

⁹⁹ Manuscript comment Blair on Minute Quarrey to Prime Minister, 16 September 2005, ‘Iraq Update’.

¹⁰⁰ Letter Naworynsky to Quarrey, 23 September 2005, ‘Iraq Update’ attaching COS MND(SE), ‘GOC MND(SE) – Southern Iraq update – 21 September’.

¹⁰¹ eGram 13580/05 Baghdad to FCO, 18 September 2005, ‘Iraq: Constitution: the Fat Lady Sings’.

¹⁰² Minute Brims to CDS, 18 September 2005, ‘SBMR-I Weekly Report (179) 18 September 05’.

¹⁰³ eGram 13644/05 Baghdad to FCO London, 19 September 2005, ‘Iraq: Elections: Update’.

202. Gen Walker's Private Office replied on 19 September to the request from Dr Reid's Private Office for an assurance that the MOD's planning assumptions for deployment in Afghanistan – as presented to DOP in July 2005 – would be achievable in the event of a slower than expected drawdown of UK forces in Iraq.¹⁰⁴ The minute said:

“The short answer is yes ... CJO [Chief of Joint Operations] ... is clear that our plans for Afghanistan are deliverable even if events slow down our Iraq disengagement; furthermore, DCDS(C) [Deputy Chief of the Defence Staff (Commitments)] has factored the possibility of such a slippage into the MOD's strategic planning for Afghanistan and our strategic intent for future commitments.”

203. Such a situation would lead to “some pain-and-grief”, in particular the pressure on already stretched services such as helicopter support would continue:

“But, our ability to fulfil our plan in Afghanistan is not predicated on withdrawal of such capabilities from Iraq and ... in the event that our ... plan for progressive disengagement from southern Iraq is delayed, we will still be able to deliver our ... mandated force levels in Afghanistan.”

204. Dr Reid told the Inquiry that he had asked for this assurance from General Walker because he was:

“... slightly worried that although there was a chronological coincidence with the downturn in Iraq, the downsizing of forces and the going into Helmand, I did not want one to be reliant upon the other, in case we couldn't get out of Iraq.”¹⁰⁵

205. Gen Walker's assurance had met his concern:

“... there wasn't a concern in my mind that this [going into Helmand] would result in a diminution of our resources in Iraq, personnel or otherwise. Why? Because I had asked that specific question and been told, 'No'.”¹⁰⁶

206. Sir Kevin Tebbit, MOD Permanent Under Secretary from 1998 to 2005, told the Inquiry:

“I was apprehensive [about the deployment of UK forces to Helmand] and I made my concerns known to my planning staff and to the Chiefs of Staff. I think their view was that they could do it and it was manageable ... since it was [the Chiefs of Staff] who would actually have to ensure they could do this, I did not press my objections fully.”¹⁰⁷

207. Dr Reid told the Inquiry that Sir Kevin had not shared his concerns on this issue with him.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁴ Minute PSO to APS2/SoS, 19 September 2005, 'Iraq/Afghanistan Commitments'.

¹⁰⁵ Public hearing, 3 February 2010, page 58.

¹⁰⁶ Public hearing, 3 February 2010, page 63.

¹⁰⁷ Public hearing, 3 February 2010, pages 15-16.

¹⁰⁸ Public hearing, 3 February 2010, pages 61-62.

208. On 19 September, after a discussion with senior Whitehall officials and Mr Patey in Baghdad, Sir Nigel Sheinwald produced detailed advice for Mr Blair on UK Iraq strategy and priorities for the next three to six months.¹⁰⁹

209. Sir Nigel identified an “underlying conflict” between the objective defined for the Red Team and the coalition’s current objective to:

“... hold to the political timetable (Constitution, referendum, elections in 2005) and build up Iraqi capabilities so that the coalition can begin a progressive withdrawal, starting next year.

“This involves a concept of ‘sufficiency’, i.e. we accept that the insurgency will go on for some time, but aim to contain it sufficiently for the political and security transition to be credible and for us to be able to draw down without appearing to cut and run dishonourably.”

210. Sir Nigel commented that the coalition’s current strategy recognised that in order to win over Sunni opinion, it would be necessary to show that the coalition would honour its commitment to withdraw and not occupy Iraq indefinitely.

211. In contrast, the Red Team’s approach implied additional US resources, which the US Administration might not be willing to provide, and no withdrawal for at least three years. It would also require “a massive Iraqi co-ordination effort, of which they are at present incapable”.

212. Sir Nigel observed that the “ink-spot” approach recommended by the Red Team was similar to the coalition’s current concept of operations in Fallujah, Samarra and other areas. To date there had been “**no** success stories in Sunni areas” and it was “not obvious how this would change quickly”. He continued:

“Arguably, this strategy comes two and a half years late. It might have been possible to try something like this immediately after the invasion, but to do so now, fifteen months after the Occupation formally ended, and with the definitive government about to be elected, is – to put it mildly – counter-intuitive.”

213. Sir Nigel wrote that the Red Team Report was nevertheless to be welcomed because:

- It is realistic in its assessment, and comprehensive in its scope;
- It insists on an integrated campaign (security, political, economic);
- It specifies actions that need to be taken, and demands active follow-through.”

214. On political priorities, Sir Nigel considered that the UK was facing two phases of activity. Until the end of 2005, “the bottom line requirement is to keep the show on the road, ie provide an environment in which the referendum and elections can take place”.

¹⁰⁹ [Minute Sheinwald to Prime Minister, 19 September 2005, ‘Iraq: UK strategy’.](#)

215. Sir Nigel wrote that, after the elections:

“... we have to focus on **outcomes**, not just **process** ... What we need is a **centrist** government capable of (a) **executive effectiveness** and (b) **political inclusiveness** or at least a government with a strong centrist/non-religious component. In present circumstances, the only person capable of fitting this bill, for all his faults, is **Ayad Allawi**. I see it as a legitimate aim of British policy to buttress him and others in the centre of Iraqi politics ...”

216. Sir Nigel concluded:

“Above all, we (ie Khalilzad and ourselves) will need to ensure that a **new Iraqi government** is formed **quickly** after the December elections and has the best possible composition from the point of view of our objectives.”

217. Sir Nigel recommended that the UK should continue its work on Sunni outreach, upgrade its political effort in Basra and provide “a clear demonstration that we are taking our legacy seriously”. The UK also needed to establish political channels to Muqtada al-Sadr and Grand Ayatollah al-Sistani.

218. On security, Sir Nigel noted that it would be important for the MNF to get the right balance both between ISF training and counter-insurgency work, and action against foreign fighters and dealing with “home-grown” Iraqi insurgents. He observed that:

“The key new point over the past few months has been **increased and vicious sectarianism**. Some of this is coming from the insurgents; some of it is coming from Shia elements within the police and armed forces, and from the Shia militia. This not only risks an escalation into a much bigger civil conflict, it is also changing the political climate, and eroding even further Sunni trust in the new political institutions. We have to come down very hard on the Iraqi government on this.”

219. Sir Nigel recommended strengthened US/UK and UK Ministerial co-ordination structures. There should be monthly meetings of DOP(I) chaired by Mr Blair, with fortnightly meetings in between chaired alternately by Mr Straw and Dr Reid which “should aggressively chase progress against our strategy”.

220. At the end of his minute, Sir Nigel concluded:

“In short, we have to cut our strategic cloth according to the environment we are now in and our resources. We cannot turn back the clock to May 2003. Overall, and in a rough and ready way, our best chance is to ensure that we prop up the centre in Iraqi politics, do all we can to get an effective government after December, focus on key improvements meanwhile to the ISF, and ensure an integrated political and security campaign in Iraq. On that basis we stand a reasonable chance of securing the political and security transition we want, including starting the draw-down of our forces next year.”

221. Sir Nigel asked Mr Blair whether he agreed with the approach he set out, or preferred the Red Team approach of “delaying the transition until the insurgency is significantly reduced”.

222. On 19 September, two UK soldiers were arrested by the Iraqi Police Service (IPS) in Basra.¹¹⁰

223. According to the account provided to No.10 by Dr Reid’s Private Office, the two soldiers had been parked at the side of a road when an unmarked vehicle with four men in plain clothes pulled up behind them. Two people got out of the car and walked towards the soldiers’ vehicle, cocking their weapons.

224. The two UK soldiers, believing they were “facing death or serious injury”, opened fire, killing one of the men and wounding the other. Not realising the men they had shot were police officers, the soldiers tried to escape but were blocked by police in several marked vehicles who opened fire. At this point, the two soldiers put down their weapons and produced their identification.

225. Although the uniformed police initially appeared willing to talk constructively with the soldiers, “the atmosphere changed significantly” when Iraqi plainclothes police arrived.

226. The two UK soldiers were reported to have been beaten and then taken to the Jameat police station, which was known to house a “notorious detention facility” and was the home of the serious crimes unit of the Basra police, “which had been infiltrated by militant elements, especially the Jaysh al-Mahdi and (by his own admission) were outside the control of the Chief of Police”.

227. Negotiations for the return of the arrested soldiers, in line with agreed practice when Iraqi Security Forces arrested members of the MNF, failed and the negotiators themselves were unable to leave the Jameat station.¹¹¹

228. The Governor and Chief of Police in Basra had made it clear that they were not in a position to offer any assistance and, despite explicit directions by the Chief of Police to release the two soldiers, the IPS refused to comply. Orders from the Ministry of the Interior in Baghdad were similarly disregarded.

229. A rescue operation was successfully mounted by MND(SE) using armed force to free the six negotiators and the two soldiers. This was achieved without casualties on either side but caused significant damage to the wall of the police station and several police vehicles. The two soldiers who had originally been arrested were found to have been taken to a house away from the police station and held by what was suspected

¹¹⁰ Letter Naworynsky to Quarrey, 23 September 2005, ‘Iraq Update’ attaching COS MND(SE), ‘GOC MND(SE) – Southern Iraq update – 21 September’.

¹¹¹ Minute DCDS(C) to APS/S of S [MOD], 21 September 2005, ‘Unrest in Basra – 19 Sep 2005’.

to be a mixture of JAM and IPS personnel. A further rescue operation was carried out successfully (again without casualties) to free them later that evening. The episode became known as “the Jameat incident”.

230. Dr Reid updated Cabinet on the incident on 20 September.¹¹² He emphasised the need to put the incident in context against the substantial progress made in Iraq, “which the media had not reported”, specifically the January elections and creation of the Constitution. Those who opposed the creation of a democratic state in Iraq were “engaged in frantic and frenetic activity” to stop the Constitution being agreed and the December elections.

231. Mr Blair invited the FCO, the MOD and No.10 to produce a note explaining the continuing policy of keeping the political process on track and building up the ISF, that the MNF were in Iraq in support of a UN resolution and that the insurgency “was not a struggle against occupying forces”.

232. On 21 September, Mr Blair’s Private Secretary for Foreign Affairs provided him with a minute setting out points to make in a phone call with President Bush that afternoon.¹¹³ In relation to the events at the Jameat police station it said:

“The incident confirms what we already knew: that Sadrists are a serious and malign force in the Basra Police; the civil authorities in Basra are either ineffectual in dealing with, or to some extent complicit in this, and that the central government’s influence is limited. We need a very strong response, both on the Police/armed forces and with the civil authorities, in both Baghdad and Basra.”

233. In their telephone conversation, Mr Blair told President Bush that the events in Basra showed that “an unrepresentative minority” in the city was prepared to use violence; a JAM splinter group was involved.¹¹⁴

234. Mr Blair judged that the basic strategy in Iraq remained the right one, with key tactical questions in the coming months being whether enough was being done on Sunni outreach and how to establish confidence in the development of the ISF.

235. On 21 September, Mr Powell sent Mr Blair a personal note in response to Sir Nigel’s advice of 19 September.¹¹⁵ It was not sent to anyone else.

¹¹² Cabinet Conclusions, 20 September 2005.

¹¹³ Minute Phillipson to Prime Minister, 21 September 2005, ‘Secure phonecall with President Bush, 1410 21 September’.

¹¹⁴ Letter Quarrey to Hayes, 21 September 2005, ‘Prime Minister’s Phone Call with Bush’.

¹¹⁵ [Minute Powell to Prime Minister, 21 September 2005, ‘Iraq: Strategy’](#).

236. Mr Powell commended Sir Nigel's paper as "a serious piece of work" which made "some good points". He agreed with the proposed next steps but disagreed with what he saw as Sir Nigel's "dismissal of the red team approach". Mr Powell wrote:

"The Red Team concludes – and no one seriously contests this – that we are in danger of strategic failure in Iraq, with the situation degenerating into civil war or even victory for the terrorists. If this is the case then we have to rethink our strategy and – as important – how we deliver it. The fundamental choice is between continuing as we are with the principal aim of getting our troops out and handing over to the Iraqis next year even though we do not believe that the Iraqi government and security forces will be able to survive alone in the face of the insurgent threat, or alternatively aiming at success (defined below) and making getting our troops out next year a subsidiary aim. Once you think about it, I do not think we can responsibly do anything other than aim at the latter ... Nor do I think muddling on is an option. We are losing the support of even those who supported the war, because they can see no light at the end of the tunnel. They think we are incompetent and have no plan to succeed in Iraq. We need a new strategy that people can see and believe is leading to success if we are to maintain public tolerance. That is why we should build on the red team analysis and – to a certain extent – their recommendations."

237. Mr Powell recommended:

- More focused and intensified Sunni outreach, splitting the "reconcilable" from the "irreconcilable" by tackling high unemployment in Sunni regions.
- Continuing to pursue Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, but without viewing his death or capture as a primary aim in itself because "even when we capture him the insurgency will not be over".
- Integrating the military, political and economic strategies and operations because "at the moment they are running on separate tracks with separate commands. We need a joint taskforce, as the paper recommends, with one person in charge. That person should be Khalilzad and he should be reporting back to you and Bush regularly. It is worth devoting a good deal of your and Bush's time to getting it right. We need to reduce the length of the command and control system and make it more flexible, so that if you and Bush give an instruction something actually happens on the ground."
- Ensuring that insurgents were not able to re-take cities after MNF operations – which meant both an increase in MNF troops and increasing the effectiveness of the ISF. Mr Powell commented: "Linked to this is the fundamental need, that you have been banging on about for ages, to have properly trained Iraqi armed forces and police. We still don't have either. Why not? ... There is no point in carrying on doing what we are doing at the moment if it is not producing what we need. In particular, we need to be able to announce a new initiative on the police within the next month." He added that it was important to "get something done ...

rather than talking about it. If that requires getting into the detail of it yourself, then do it”.

- Rebuilding Iraqi civil society – “we need to take capacity building seriously and reinforce the judiciary, Ministries etc. You should demand to see a plan.”
- Ensuring that the new Iraqi Government was firmly “in charge, even if this is difficult for us. We cannot count on Allawi winning, and indicating we support him is probably the kiss of death. But we do need a strong national unity government that puts an end to sectarianism. I am very uncomfortable about the secret guarantee we appear to have given the Kurds and Shia on federalism ... This could come back to haunt us in a big way.”
- Developing a new strategy for Basra “to be set by the military on the ground with stronger political support in the consulate [the British Embassy Office Basra]”.

238. Mr Powell also emphasised to Mr Blair the importance of making sure that the UK’s policy was properly understood:

“... you need to start making the argument again both internationally and domestically instead of keeping silent. We have to explain why this battle matters, and why it is not in the interest of the rest of the world to watch Iraq going down the tubes. You need to convince both audiences that there is light at the end of the tunnel, and that we have a plan for stabilising Iraq. You should define success. It does not mean an end to all terrorist attacks, any more than it does in NI [Northern Ireland] or Palestine. But it does mean that we split the reconcilable from the irreconcilable insurgents, that the Iraqi government and security forces can control the situation, that jobs are being created and that something resembling civil society is beginning to emerge under a democratically elected government.

“Announce a revised strategy ... we have lost credibility and you have to reassure people that there is a plan that will work ... Make your speech on Iraq – Lord Mayor’s Banquet – and then get a real debate going in the country and internationally rather than trying to stay silent. People have to understand why it matters to them. And challenge the UN and international community to play their role.”

239. Mr Powell’s note concluded:

“The people dealing with Iraq, particularly in the front line, are not surprisingly tired and discouraged. Nothing seems to work, and they have given up trying to come up with new ideas. A weary cynicism and feeling that it is all inevitable has sunk in. It always does in wars. The job of leadership is to raise their sights, inspire them with a vision of how the war can be won, set a new strategy, and then ensure it has public support. If we can’t do that, we are sunk. But it is doable, and we should not give up. A meeting right after Conference with JR [Dr Reid], JS [Mr Straw], military etc.”

240. On the front of Mr Powell's minute, Mr Blair wrote:

"I agree with all of this. You will have to spend much time pushing it through."¹¹⁶

241. On 23 September, Mr Straw chaired a meeting attended by Dr Reid, Mr Hilary Benn, the International Development Secretary (by telephone), Gen Walker, Sir Nigel Sheinwald and other officials from No.10, the MOD and the FCO to discuss advice on South-East Iraq, and in particular the impact of the Jameat incident.¹¹⁷

242. Mr Straw told those present that Mr Blair required a paper which "examined" current policy. Sir Nigel emphasised that advice was needed on how to deal with the political and security strands of the existing policy; Mr Blair was not expecting "a sudden lurch in any direction away from our current plan".

243. In his Iraq update on 23 September, Mr Blair's Private Secretary told Mr Blair that Sir Nigel had emphasised that the UK must not be complacent because "internationally – including in the Arab media and Washington – there were serious questions being asked about our strategy in the South-East".¹¹⁸ Sir Nigel was also reported to have said:

"... we were looking for a smarter and more effective strategy, which was likely to mean us being more active in certain areas. But no one was suggesting eg a significant increase in force levels."

244. A record of the meeting by Dr Reid's Private Secretary said that:

"During discussion it was stressed that the [Jameat] incident ... should be seen as a relatively minor one which had resulted in a great deal of media attention. But on the ground reporting had now confirmed that the atmospherics in Basra were returning to normal, though the Governor and Provincial Council were still refusing to engage with MNF-I. That said, the Consul [General] in Basra had reported that normal engagement and outreach should be possible by early next week. It was also clear that ... the IPS showed no diminution of support."¹¹⁹

245. The meeting agreed:

"... that the [Jameat] incident would probably prove to be a blip but it had highlighted the need to review the overall strategy and ensure we were on the right track."

¹¹⁶ Manuscript comment Blair to Powell on Minute Powell to Prime Minister, 21 September 2005, 'Iraq: Strategy'.

¹¹⁷ Letter Naworynsky to Asquith, 26 September 2005, 'Meeting to Discuss South East Iraq: Impact of Security Incident in Basrah'.

¹¹⁸ [Minute Quarrey to Prime Minister, 23 September 2005, 'Iraq Update'](#).

¹¹⁹ Letter Naworynsky to Asquith, 26 September 2005, 'Meeting to Discuss South East Iraq: Impact of Security Incident in Basrah'.

246. Mr Straw commented that:

“... a change in strategy was not a practical or realistic option. However, we might wish to adjust our activities on the ground and design ways of responding more effectively to evolving situations.”

247. It was agreed that a paper would be circulated by officials from the FCO, the MOD and DFID, and sent to Mr Blair the following week.

248. It was also agreed that the FCO should pursue the possibility of asking Sir Ronnie Flanagan, Her Majesty’s Chief Inspector of Constabulary for England, Wales and Northern Ireland, to provide an assessment of the IPS in MND(SE). That is addressed in Section 12.1.

249. The Jameat incident had repercussions within the MNF, as Lt Gen Brims’ weekly report on 25 September explained:

“I believe we acted most skilfully in Basra in how we handled last week’s events and conducted the operations correctly ... My focus was ... on the ‘Baghdad fall-out’ of the events, trying to assuage the concerns of General Casey and, together with the British Ambassador, dealing with the initial criticism of the British forces’ actions by senior figures in the Iraqi Transitional Government.

“General Casey initially received erroneous information on 19 September ... that the British had stormed Basra police station and he believed MND(SE) was acting under the direction of London rather than the coalition. He told me he had arranged for a plane to take me [Brims] to Basra to take command of the British battle space ... I gave him accurate information, which did calm him somewhat ... Nevertheless, there was a period when relations with Gen Casey were the most strained I have experienced, and I believe that the events of 19th September and a number of subsequent occurrences (including some media handling) has left him with a residual doubt about whether the UK element of MND(SE) is more under the direct operational command of London/PJHQ than of MNC-I and the coalition.”¹²⁰

250. Lt Gen Brims told the Inquiry that this perception had put him in a “slightly awkward position” and it had lingered for some time after the event.¹²¹

251. The ITG had also gained a negative impression of the UK’s actions in Basra on 19 September.¹²²

252. Lt Gen Brims emphasised that it was “vital” to prevent it souring the relationship and “making it much more difficult for us – and the Coalition generally – to operate”. At the same time, the ITG needed to be “confronted with the reality of militia-led elements

¹²⁰ Minute Brims to CDS, 25 September 2005, ‘SBMR-I Weekly Report (180) 25 September 05’.

¹²¹ Public hearing, 14 December 2009, page 32.

¹²² Minute Brims to CDS, 25 September 2005, ‘SBMR-I Weekly Report (180) 25 September 05’.

of the Security Forces acting illegally and beyond their control and that of the local Chief of Police or Governor”.

253. Although Lt Gen Brims reported that he and Mr Patey had “made some progress along these lines” in their meetings with senior Iraqi leaders, there remained concern about the way the UK had handled events, in particular the fact that the senior figures in the ITG had not been aware of the UK’s plans for the operation in which two leading members of a JAM splinter group had been arrested. A member of the ITG proposed that ground rules should be agreed for covert operations by the MNF, which Lt Gen Brims considered reasonable.

254. An FCO paper produced some time later, in April 2006, suggested that the UK recognised at the time of the Jameat incident that:

“... stability [in Basra] was threatened by intense rivalry among political parties and their militias who had an interest in criminality ... At that time, we recognised that our only real option was to maintain the course we had set and to see the job through. Asserting direct control over local government and institutions was, and remains, out of the question. Pulling out of Basra, and leaving a political and security vacuum in a key strategic area was equally unacceptable.”¹²³

255. On 22 September, a senior government official specialising in the Middle East wrote to Mr Asquith to explain that an approach had been received:

“... from Muqtada al-Sadr to establish a discreet dialogue with HMG following recent events in southern Iraq ... Subject to your views [a plan was being drawn up] to meet representatives of al-Sadr in Amman in the near future ...

“... the message he had received from al-Sadr was that he wanted to resolve the current difficulties in southern Iraq. He was prepared to make calming statements to his people, but could not do so with [JAM1]¹²⁴ in detention. [JAM1] was important to him and he needed him to be released. The reaction to events in Basra was upsetting his preparations for the elections in December. He was prepared to send senior representatives to Amman to meet British representatives and to discuss what could be done.”¹²⁵

256. The response had been that the UK Government could not negotiate over the detention of JAM1 because:

“We had evidence he was behind recent attacks on British troops in MND(SE) and linked to Lebanese Hizballah and the Iranians. We also said we were surprised

¹²³ Paper FCO, 27 April 2006, ‘DOP(I): Basra’.

¹²⁴ The name of this individual has been replaced with the cipher JAM1 throughout the Report, for security reasons.

¹²⁵ Minute senior government official specialising in the Middle East (1) to Asquith, 22 September 2005, ‘Overture from Muqtada al-Sadr’.

al-Sadr remained close to [JAM1], as we had understood [JAM1] was no longer under the control of al-Sadr. The action against [JAM1] had not been directed at al-Sadr, but at an organiser of lethal attacks against UK forces. HMG saw al-Sadr's increasing involvement in the political process as a positive development and one to be encouraged. [The organisation to which the senior official belonged] believed it would be in his [MAS1's] interests to distance himself from people such as [JAM1]."

257. The individual making the approach, to whom the Inquiry will refer as MAS1:

"... considered that when he passed back the message of no negotiation over the detention of [JAM1], al-Sadr would still be interested in his representatives meeting HMG officials ... without preconditions, to discuss the broader way ahead. [MAS1] felt that al-Sadr wanted to continue moving in to mainstream politics, but to do this he needed to resolve the conflicts in the South. His attempt to have [JAM1] released did not necessarily mean that they were still closely associated. It could be that al-Sadr was not strong enough to be seen publicly to abandon [JAM1]. If [there was confirmation] ... that HMG wanted to go ahead with a meeting, he would find out who would represent al-Sadr in advance. In return ... [MAS1] would need to confirm who was coming from HMG, ie officials from the FCO or ..."

258. Mr Asquith was advised that MAS1:

"... has sufficient track record to warrant taking this approach seriously. The value of proceeding with a meeting ... would depend on who was designated as al-Sadr's representative. But in current circumstances, I suggest it would be worthwhile establishing a channel to al-Sadr, if only to explain why UK forces took the action they did in Basra. If the channel develops, it could help to reduce tension in MND(SE) and, more broadly, assist in the political process as we move towards the referendum and elections. It would therefore act as a line of Shia outreach in parallel to those ... with the Sunnis."

259. The recommendation was for a meeting with Muqtada al-Sadr's representatives.

260. Mr Asquith wrote on the minute: "I agree the meeting should proceed."¹²⁶ He added that Mr Patey must be kept "fully in the picture" and that establishing a nominated representative of Muqtada al-Sadr in Basra was an important objective for the meeting.

261. On 27 September, Mr Patey sent a report to the FCO in London entitled 'Sadrist Outreach'.¹²⁷ In it he reported a meeting with MAS1, "a senior Sadrist understood to be close to Muqtada al-Sadr" who "claims [JAM1] innocent of charges against him and of attacks on British forces and asks for his immediate release" and suggested that "his continued detention will ensure the hostility of Jaysh al-Mahdi to British forces in Basra".

¹²⁶ Minute senior government official specialising in the Middle East (1) to Asquith, 22 September 2005, 'Overture from Muqtada al-Sadr' including manuscript comment Asquith.

¹²⁷ eGram 14221/05 Baghdad to FCO London, 27 September 2005, 'Iraq: Basra: call on Sadrist [MAS1]'.

262. Mr Patey said in response that the UK welcomed the participation of Sadrists in the political process and hoped to see it continue. But the UK “would not hesitate to respond firmly to those who attacked British troops”. JAM1 had been detained because the UK had credible evidence that he had been involved in such attacks. He was believed to have been operating outside the control of Muqtada al-Sadr and JAM. His detention “should be understood as action taken against a specific individual; it was not part of any broader policy to work against the Sadrist movement”.

263. Mr Patey reported that MAS1 had responded:

“[JAM1] was very popular in the Jaysh al-Mahdi. By detaining him, we would destroy any chance of winning over the Jaysh al-Mahdi in Basra and instead cause it to turn wholly against the UK forces. Rather than helping strengthen the national forces we said we wanted to support, UK action would be a reason for Iranian rejoicing.”

264. Mr Patey had “emphasised our concern to protect our troops” and that JAM1 had admitted, whilst in custody, participating in previous attacks against UK soldiers.

Mr Patey said that:

“We would look again at the information we held but [MAS1] should not be under any illusion – there was no chance that [JAM1] would be released any time soon ... it was important not to make too much of [JAM1]’s case against the wider backdrop.”

265. At the end of his report, Mr Patey commented:

“It was striking that [MAS1] did not once refer to Muqtada al-Sadr by name and it is difficult to assess the state of [MAS1]’s current relationship with al-Sadr. Most of the views he expressed reflect standard Sadrist lines but it may be that his defence of [JAM1] was stronger than that which al-Sadr himself might have offered. I am still waiting for the Minister of Transport (Sadrist) to return to Baghdad. When he does I will continue my Sadrist outreach campaign.”

266. Mr Straw’s Private Secretary confirmed on 29 September that Mr Straw had seen the minute from the senior official and “agrees with your proposal to open a channel to al-Sadr”.¹²⁸

267. At the end of September the JIC tasked itself to produce an Assessment of the security situation in southern Iraq.¹²⁹ It judged that:

“Despite an increase in the number of lethal attacks on the Coalition by a few Shia extremist groups, the overall security situation in southern Iraq has remained calm in comparison to other parts of the country. But this position is fragile: popular support

¹²⁸ Letter Hayes to senior government official specialising in the Middle East (1), 29 September 2005, ‘Overture from Muqtada al-Sadr’.

¹²⁹ [JIC Assessment, 28 September 2005, ‘Iraq: the Security Situation in the South’.](#)

for the Coalition presence is diminishing. Recent incidents in Basra will increase animosity to the Multi-National Forces (MNF) in some quarters ...

“Shia political factions, including some violent extremists, are able to exert strong influence on local Iraqi authorities and security forces. Most members of the security forces, particularly the police, have multiple loyalties. Under pressure their reliability will be doubtful. A significant number actively colludes with Shia extremist militias. The current Iraqi government has neither the will nor capacity to tackle these problems: this will probably not change after the elections.”

268. The JIC concluded that:

“In the South the widespread expectation of MNF withdrawal, together with the current focus on manoeuvring for December’s elections, is adding pressure to a complex political and security landscape ... The security situation is unlikely to improve in the build up to the elections. Shia politics in the South are deeply fractured ... Criminal groups will ... exploit the absence of effective civil authority. Shia extremists from all groups will resort to violence: against the MNF, rival factions, or the Sunni minority. Deepening sectarian tensions and further attacks by Sunni Arab insurgents and jihadists are likely. Managing these pressures will depend crucially on whether al Sadr encourages renewed violence or remains willing and able to restrain his followers.”

269. On 30 September, Mr Straw’s Principal Private Secretary sent Mr Blair’s Private Secretary a paper containing the advice of FCO, MOD and DFID officials on the implications of the Jameat incident.¹³⁰ Mr Straw had not yet seen and agreed their advice. The paper said:

“The ... incident ... highlights what was previously more opaque, that we face acute challenges in achieving our objectives in the South-East region. Stability in the South-East is being threatened by intense rivalry among political parties and their militias. Criminality, jockeying for patronage and leaders’ differing political visions are being exacerbated by tribalism and increasing religiosity. Specifically, this has a severe impact on the effectiveness of the police service. In better circumstances police training should by now have gone beyond the basics to deal with the broader problems posed by divergent loyalties to both militias and police.”

270. The paper observed that “alternative options to our current policy are limited”. As the UK was no longer an Occupying Power, “**asserting direct British control** over local

¹³⁰ [Letter Hayes to Quarrey, 30 September 2005, ‘Iraq: Basra’ attaching Paper FCO/MOD/DFID, 30 September 2005, ‘South-East Iraq: Impact of Security Incident in Basra’.](#)

government and rule of [law] institutions is out of the question” and pulling troops out more rapidly would leave a vacuum. The authors therefore concluded:

“Our only realistic option is to maintain our course and see the job through. But we need to make adjustments to our policy, while sticking to our strategic approach of ensuring in due course successful transition of responsibility for rule of law in the south-east to the Iraqis.”

271. The paper identified a practical problem; the possibility of reprisal attacks against UK personnel made it questionable when UK civilian trainers and mentors could return to work alongside Iraqis after their current period of lockdown.

272. The authors recommended a number of actions including:

- getting a “clear commitment from Baghdad politicians to grip the South-East”;
- persuading the Interior Minister to visit Basra immediately;
- demonstrating “to the international community (in particular, the US) that we can handle the situation”;
- putting an “effective Chief of Police in place”; and
- despatching “a senior UK police officer (eg Sir Ronnie Flanagan) with relevant background in such sectarian issues to audit the police in MND(SE)”.

273. The paper also cautioned that “we may not be able to deliver, by next year, the minimum standards required in rule of law and governance” and that “we will need to allocate more resources, which might include military resources, to security”.

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274. An Iraqi investigation into the Jameat incident concluded by early October that “80 percent of the blame was down to the British”.¹³¹ Mr Patey reported that the ITG was unlikely to publish the investigation report as “we will have no choice but to take issue with it”. Of most concern was the failure of the ITG to act on militia infiltration of the Basra police.

275. SIS3 told the Inquiry that the event was a “wake-up call” to what was happening in Basra, where the police had become integrated with the militias, and commented that:

“What we were looking for ... was Iraqisation. What we ended up with at this point was a different kind of Iraqisation ... In other words, we were pulling back and the Iraqi Government was not occupying the space, I think because it was too early for the Iraqi Government to be able to do that. So in that gap you ended up with a different kind of Iraqisation, which was militia-isation, criminalisation, intimidation,

¹³¹ eGram 14641/05 Baghdad to FCO London, 1 October 2005, ‘Iraq: Basra Investigation’.

control over key economic facilities and points in Basra by particular parties of political forces, whether it was JAM or Fadhila.”¹³²

276. Mr Blair considered the separate pieces of advice from Sir Nigel Sheinwald and Mr Powell on the implications of the US Red Team Report; the FCO/MOD/DFID advice on the implications of the Jameat incident; and the 28 September JIC Assessment over the weekend of 1 and 2 October.¹³³

277. In a note to No.10 staff dated 2 October, Mr Blair said that essentially he agreed with Sir Nigel’s advice, but he did not consider that the Red Team was advocating a different strategy, just a means of implementing the existing one.¹³⁴ Mr Blair wrote:

“We do need to have a posture of wanting to withdraw; but when the job is done. We should be able, on either case, to get some troops withdrawn next year but right now I don’t think that is the key. The key is effective implementation.”

278. In Mr Blair’s view, the insurgency had to be presented “clearly and plainly” as an obstacle to, not the pretext for, withdrawal. He added:

“The ‘ink-spot’ strategy is right. It isn’t what we’ve done so far ... This needs to be articulated, planned and followed through.”

279. Mr Blair also supported “behind-the-scenes” help for Mr Allawi, reaching out to the Sadrists to bring them “into some sort of understanding”, and emphasised that “we are totally underestimating the degree to which the present problems are the product of bad government”.

280. On the police, Mr Blair commented: “We need someone put in charge of sorting out this mess.” He supported the recommendation to strengthen the UK’s co-ordinating machinery at Ministerial level, proposing that he would chair fortnightly meetings.

281. Mr Blair wrote:

“I also favour giving JR [Reid] the lead as much as possible. We should split it up. JR on security, Iraqisation and to be out there defending the case. JS [Straw] on political outreach.”

282. Mr Blair and President Bush spoke by video conference on 3 October.¹³⁵

¹³² Private hearing, 2010, pages 54-58.

¹³³ Minute Quarrey to Prime Minister, 30 September 2005, ‘Iraq update’.

¹³⁴ [Note TB \[Blair\], 2 October 2005, ‘Note’](#).

¹³⁵ Letter Quarrey to Siddiq, 3 October 2005, ‘Prime Minister’s VTC with President Bush: Middle East issues’.

283. In discussion about Iraq, Mr Blair described the December election as “a one-off opportunity to deliver a strong, moderate central government” and identified four priorities for the period ahead:

- ensuring the Sunni outreach strategy was delivered;
- refining the coalition’s public message to be clear that it wanted to begin draw down the following year, depending on the state of the insurgency and the ISF;
- getting the police training strategy right; and
- drawing the right lessons from the Red Team Report about securing cities from which terrorists had been removed, including by developing local civil authorities.

284. On 3 October, a senior government official specialising in the Middle East (1) wrote to Mr Asquith with an account of the meeting that had been authorised in September.¹³⁶ He wrote that during the meeting it had become evident that MAS1 “was not speaking on behalf of al-Sadr and was pursuing a personal initiative to effect the release of [JAM1]”:

“[MAS1’s] stance was unequivocal: the detention of [JAM1] represented a major obstacle to stability in Basra and HMG could instead be encouraging Iraqi Shia, like [JAM1], who opposed Iranian interference in Iraq’s affairs. [JAM1]’s arrest sent a clear signal that HMG supported the unrepresentative ‘pro-Tehran’ government in Baghdad. Curiously, [MAS1] conceded that [JAM1] had British blood on his hands from an earlier stage of the conflict but said that, since OMS [Office of the Martyr Sadr]’s change of policy, these earlier crimes were no longer relevant.”

285. In response, MAS1 had been told that “[JAM1]’s arrest was in response to criminal activity and was not a political issue” and the senior official reported that no commitment was made, “beyond agreeing to convey [MAS1]’s concerns to London”.

286. It was unclear how good the relationship was between Muqtada al-Sadr and MAS1. In an attached report a different official said that there were indications elsewhere that senior OMS officials were lobbying current and former members of the Iraqi Government in an effort to secure JAM1’s release.

287. The senior official proposed to test the extent to which the exchange reflected the views of Muqtada al-Sadr, by sending a message through other means seeking confirmation of his support.

288. Mr Asquith responded to say that before doing so the senior official should check that Mr Patey was content.¹³⁷

¹³⁶ Minute senior government official specialising in the Middle East (1) to Asquith, 3 October 2005, ‘Overture from Muqtada al-Sadr’ plus attachment.

¹³⁷ Minute senior government official specialising in the Middle East (1) to Asquith, 3 October 2005, ‘Overture from Muqtada al-Sadr’ and attachment including manuscript comment Asquith.

289. On 4 October, Sir Nigel Sheinwald wrote to Mr Straw's Principal Private Secretary in response to the FCO/MOD/DFID paper of 30 September on the implications of the Jameat incident.¹³⁸ Copies of the letter were sent to Cabinet Office, MOD, DFID, FCO, Home Office and Treasury officials as well as to C, to GCHQ and to diplomatic posts in Iraq, the US, Brussels, and across the Middle East.

290. Sir Nigel wrote:

“The Prime Minister agrees that we do not need to change our overall strategy. He is convinced, however, that we need a major and sustained push over the next few months on the political and security lines of operation if we are to get what we need – the political process moving ahead on time and producing an effective and moderate Iraqi Government after the elections, with visible progress on the Iraqisation of security.

“This will require changes above all in the intensity of our work, in our (and the Americans’) implementation of policy, and the structures for delivering them, and will need to be underpinned by a more effective communications strategy.”

291. Sir Nigel went on to set out Mr Blair's views in relation to policy on the political process, on security and on reconstruction.

292. On the first, Sir Nigel reported that Mr Blair did not believe that the UK or US were active enough. In his view:

“Higher Sunni turn out in December's elections is the key to a successful political process, leading to an increased willingness by Sunni politicians to take part in a representative coalition government.”

293. Mr Blair considered that the situation required:

- a more vigorous and co-ordinated US and UK plan of activity focused on contact with Sunni politicians;
- continued engagement with Iraqi leaders who could play a leading role in effective government after the elections;
- pressure on Iraq's neighbours to support the political process;
- effective lines of communication to Grand Ayatollah al-Sistani and Muqtada al-Sadr;
- a revitalised UN effort on political dialogue; and
- a programme of high-level UK engagement in South-East Iraq, including Ministerial visits.

¹³⁸ [Letter Sheinwald to Hayes, 4 October 2005, 'Iraq Strategy'](#).

294. In order to repair the UK position following the Jameat incident, the MOD and the FCO were asked to work up a form of words “to draw a line under this issue and enable future co-operation”.

295. Mr Straw was asked to lead on drawing together and monitoring the implementation of the political strategy.

296. On security, Mr Blair looked forward to regular reports from Dr Reid, including analysis of the effectiveness of the new Iraqi forces. Mr Blair was concerned that the poor state of the IPS would be a drag on further progress and Sir Nigel wrote:

“It is clear that we need to review whether our police training strategy in the South-East is working, and whether the national policing strategy knits together.”

297. Sir Nigel reported that Mr Blair agreed Sir Ronnie Flanagan should be asked to visit Iraq and that he wanted a UK Minister to take ownership of the overall policing strategy, including liaison with the US over national strategy, supported by a dedicated team in London.

298. On the Red Team Report, Sir Nigel wrote:

“The ‘ink-spot strategy’ ... may not be exactly right. But it highlights the vulnerability of our efforts so far to reclaim key cities from the terrorists. It also, rightly in the Prime Minister’s view, stresses the importance of co-ordinated implementation, involving both the Coalition and the Iraqis ...

“There is still some uncertainty over the fate of the Red Team Report. We should press Khalilzad and Casey to agree an authoritative plan for the next few months, working with UK counterparts.”

299. Dr Reid was asked to oversee the overall security strategy. A video conference involving President Bush, Mr Blair, Gen Casey and Lt Gen Brims, Ambassador Khalilzad and Mr Patey would be held in the week of 10 October to “help focus on some of these issues”.

300. The minute said that Mr Blair was planning a major speech on Iraq, and that No.10 Press Office would co-ordinate other Ministerial media activity. A key challenge was to communicate that substantial troop withdrawals were planned in 2006, provided that Iraqi capabilities built up as planned.

301. On structures, Sir Nigel reported that Mr Blair planned to chair a meeting of DOP(I) every fortnight if possible. Sir Nigel would chair weekly meetings of senior officials. Mr Straw and Dr Reid were also to chair regular Ministerial meetings in their areas.

302. Sir Nigel would also be discussing more effective ways for the UK to join up with the US system, including the creation of a joint working group on political strategy in the run up to elections.

303. On 5 October, Lieutenant General Andrew Ridgway, the Chief of Defence Intelligence, sent an account of his recent visit to Iraq to Gen Walker and senior members of the MOD.¹³⁹

304. The report highlighted the “very apparent deterioration in the security situation in Baghdad over successive visits” and that sectarian tensions were at “an unprecedented level”. The “best figures” Lt Gen Ridgway could obtain were that some 150 bodies, mainly Sunni Arabs, were being found per week. AQ-I and others had benefited from the resulting backlash.

305. Lt Gen Ridgway wrote:

“Whichever way you look at the metrics of the insurrection in terms of attacks, bombings, killings, public opinion and so on, the clear conclusion is that the security situation is getting progressively worse. This is occurring despite the progress with the political process, the investment in infrastructure and the significant improvement in the capability of the ISF ... if the trend of the last two years continues the conclusions must be that, unless we do something very different, we will get progressively further away from the point where conditions are conducive to drawdown. Indeed even a very significant improvement will not begin to get us close to this sort of outcome.”

306. On 5 October, Mr Asquith sent advice to Mr Straw on key Iraq issues for the coming three months and how to tackle them.¹⁴⁰ He wrote:

“We need to keep the Sunni Arabs engaged in the political process by focusing them on the sixty-two laws required by the Constitution to regulate basic principles. Only by being represented in the Council of Representatives (the new National Assembly) will they be able to influence the legislative content.”

307. Mr Asquith judged that: “Domination of the political scene (and TNA) by a Shia Islamist and assertive Kurdish bloc has resulted in an imperfect Constitution”, and stressed the need to build the centre ground.

308. Other actions identified by Mr Asquith included building the centre ground in Iraqi politics, keeping the coalition together, securing a new Security Council resolution, building relationships with key US players and improving Whitehall mechanisms.

309. Mr Asquith advised that:

“The creation of a small group of Ministers (Foreign, Defence and International Development Secretaries) and senior officials ... meeting on a regular basis (eg fortnightly) might provide the opportunity to talk through complex and key

¹³⁹ Minute CDI to CDS, 5 October 2005, ‘CDI’s visit to Iraq 26-30 Sep 05’.

¹⁴⁰ Minute Asquith to Straw, 5 October 2005, ‘Iraq: The Next Three Months’.

issues, co-ordinate policy, reach common conclusions and recommend decisions in advance of PM-chaired DOP(I) Committees.”

310. Mr Straw’s Private Secretary replied to Mr Asquith two days later to report agreement to his proposals for informal meetings.¹⁴¹ Mr Straw also agreed that “we should continue to keep Sunni Arabs engaged in the political process”.

311. President Talabani and Mr Blair met at No.10 on 6 October.¹⁴² A record of the meeting said that the President suggested Sunni participation in the December elections would increase because they “regretted their boycott in January”. He agreed with Mr Blair that the UK must “do all we could to encourage greater Sunni participation, through contact work in Iraq and with the regional players, especially Jordan and Saudi Arabia”.

312. In a brief one-to-one exchange, President Talabani emphasised that “the UK had to be very active on the Sunni outreach agenda if [we] were to get the right outcome in December”.

313. Mr Blair asked President Talabani to take a personal interest in forced returns to Iraq from the UK as he “attached great importance to early progress” on the issue.

314. At the press conference after the meeting, Mr Blair told reporters that the continued presence of the MNF in Iraq was “about making sure that we remain until the Iraqi forces are capable of securing their own country and so that Iraq is then capable of becoming a proper functioning and sovereign democracy, as it should be”.¹⁴³

315. When President Talabani spoke he addressed those calling for a drawdown of UK troops:

“... we too want to see an end of the presence of the Multi-National Force, but the actions of the terrorists are keeping them there. An early pull-out would be a catastrophe for the people of Iraq and for the cause of democracy and it will be a win for terrorism.”

316. In the questions that followed, Mr Blair was asked about allegations of Iranian involvement in Iraq. He told reporters:

“What is clear is that there have been new explosive devices used, not just against British troops but elsewhere in Iraq. The particular nature of those devices lead us either to Iranian elements or to Hizballah ... that is funded and supported by Iran. However we cannot be sure of this at the present time.”

¹⁴¹ Minute Siddiq to Asquith, 7 October 2005, ‘Iraq: The Next Three Months’.

¹⁴² Letter Quarrey to Siddiq, 6 October 2005, ‘Iraq: Talabani’.

¹⁴³ Transcript of Press Conference Given by the Prime Minister, Mr Tony Blair, and the Iraqi President, Mr Jalal Talabani in London on Thursday, 6 October 2005.

317. Whilst British forces were in Iraq under a UN mandate, Mr Blair warned that “There is no justification for Iran or any other country interfering in Iraq ...”

318. On 10 October, Dr Reid told Parliament that in November 2005 the UK would be reducing the number of its troops in Iraq from approximately 8,500 to 8,000.¹⁴⁴ He explained that: “The United Kingdom is in Iraq for as long as we are needed and as long as we need to be there, and no longer.”

319. Dr Reid described the situation in Basra as “largely calm” after the Jameat incident, which he characterised as “an extremely complex operation in defence of our own soldiers”.

320. The change in the number of UK troops in Iraq reflected:

“... the closure of two small bases in Basra, the transfer of some training tasks to the Iraqi security forces and structural differences between the two brigades. These are relatively minor adjustments, however, and will not affect activities being carried out by United Kingdom forces.”

321. In October 2005, the Joint Committee to Transfer Security Responsibility (JCTSR) produced ‘Conditions for Provincial Transfer’, which set the framework for the MNF-I to transfer security responsibility to an Iraqi civilian authority.¹⁴⁵ The document set out a series of standards in four areas:

- the insurgency threat;
- ISF capability;
- governance capacity; and
- residual support from coalition forces.

322. For a province to be deemed ready for transfer to Iraqi control, the document said that the MNF-I, the Iraqi Ministries of Interior and Defence and the National Intelligence Co-ordination Council would all need to have assessed the terrorist/insurgent threat level (including external border security) in that province as “low” and either forecast it as “steady or on a downward trend”. The IPS’s crime assessment and the presence of armed groups must not materially change these assessments. Threats to critical infrastructure and communications should also be assessed as low, and a programme for handing in unauthorised weapons should be in place.

323. The standards set out for the IPS included that they should be assessed by the MOI and the MNF-I to have the capacity to maintain domestic order, to prevent a resurgence of terrorism, and to co-ordinate counter-insurgency (COIN) operations

¹⁴⁴ House of Commons, *Official Report*, 10 October 2005, columns 24-27.

¹⁴⁵ International Mandate Republic of Iraq National Security Council, 10 October 2005, ‘Joint Committee to Transfer Security Responsibility’.

with the Iraqi Army and Special Police. Border guards should be capable of interdicting cross-border support to insurgents and terrorists.

324. In relation to the Iraqi Army, standards included having the capability to lead COIN operations, and contain the insurgency in co-ordination with the IPS. Logistics systems capable of sustaining operations, with coalition assistance, should be in place, as should mechanisms to co-ordinate the response to requests for assistance from the IPS and to ensure the security of strategic infrastructure.

325. In governance terms, the Provincial Governor should be assessed as capable of overseeing security operations and the Provincial Joint Co-ordination Centre and Joint Operations Room should be in operation, to co-ordinate and monitor. Ministry structures and intelligence capabilities should be capable of supporting provincial operations, and systems for detention, trial and incarceration should be in place.

326. On coalition forces, the document specified that they should maintain the capability and posture to reinforce if ISF capabilities were exceeded, and to conduct counter-terrorism operations. They should co-ordinate civil construction activities and provide support and force protection for Transition Teams operating in the area.

327. During a visit to Washington from 10 to 11 October, Sir Nigel Sheinwald reported to Mr Hadley that Mr Blair considered “a surge of UK-US effort” was needed over the next few months, in capitals and in Iraq, starting with regular video conferences.¹⁴⁶ Mr Hadley “stressed the need for these to draw up detailed implementation plans and then ensure that there was the necessary follow-through”.

328. The Assessments Staff issued an intelligence update on prospects for the constitutional referendum on 11 October.¹⁴⁷ They judged:

“A majority of Iraqis from across all governorates intend to vote in the referendum, according to polling carried out by the US State Department, although the poll showed that public awareness of the content of the Constitution was limited.”

329. The Assessments Staff reported that the referendum coincided with Ramadan, which in previous years had been marked by increased violence. There were suggestions that some insurgents were trying to disrupt referendum preparations and intimidate voters.

330. The number of attacks across the country had risen to more than 100 a day from a daily average of about 75 four weeks earlier. The MNF predicted a surge of co-ordinated attacks closer to polling day, but there was no intelligence about insurgent tactics on the day itself.

¹⁴⁶ Letter Phillipson to Wilson, 12 October 2005, ‘Nigel Sheinwald’s Visit to Washington, 10/11 October’.

¹⁴⁷ [Paper Assessments Staff, 11 October 2005, ‘Iraq’s Constitution: Referendum Prospects’](#).

331. The Assessments Staff reported that Sunni political groups did not consider they had sufficient votes to veto the Constitution, and judged that “local Sunni tribal leaders will have considerable sway over the voters in their area; some have recommended a ‘no’ vote, but we do not know the views of many others”.

332. By 12 October, Iraqi parties agreed a series of amendments to the draft Constitution, including:

- strengthening the provisions guaranteeing the unity of Iraq;
- making clear that membership of the Ba’ath Party was not, in itself, a reason for exclusion from public office and providing that de-Ba’athification was to be subject to review by a separate body;
- clarification over the use of official languages (Arabic and Kurdish were designated national official languages throughout Iraq, though with the expectation that Kurdish would be used primarily within Kurdistan; Turcoman and Syrian were official languages within the areas where they were spoken); and
- providing for a constitutional review body to review the Constitution and make recommendations for change to the National Assembly within four months.¹⁴⁸

333. The last point met a long-standing Sunni Arab demand for a major role for the next National Assembly in approving the Constitution.

334. Dr Reid sent Mr Powell a draft of a paper on security for consideration by DOP(I) on 11 October, describing it as “inadequate, but a start”.¹⁴⁹

335. Dr Reid wrote that his paper was “meant as the first step in what is really required – which is a detailed and co-ordinated Implementation plan”.

336. DOP(I) met on 12 October and considered two papers: one from the IPU on the UK’s next steps in supporting the political process towards elections and Dr Reid’s paper on the security situation.¹⁵⁰

337. The IPU paper defined the UK Government’s main aim as maximising the electoral strength of the national and non-sectarian centre ground, so that the resulting government represented each of the ethnic and confessional groups and was committed to plurality, non-sectarianism and the unity of Iraq.¹⁵¹

338. The IPU paper contained Mr Asquith’s recommendation for a new meeting of Ministers and senior officials to be held in advance of DOP(I). He also reminded the

¹⁴⁸ Letter Straw to DOP(I) Committee Members, 13 October 2005, ‘Iraq: Constitution Paper’ attaching Paper IPU, ‘Constitution: Potential Points of Contention’; eGram 15446/05 Baghdad to FCO London, 12 October 2005, ‘Iraq: Constitution: Update, 12 October 2005’.

¹⁴⁹ Minute (handwritten) Reid to Powell, 11 October 2005, attaching Paper ‘Iraq Security Update’.

¹⁵⁰ Minutes, 12 October 2005, DOP(I) meeting.

¹⁵¹ Paper IPU, 10 October 2005, ‘Political Strategy: Next Steps’.

Committee that the legal framework for MNF operations in Iraq expired at the end of 2005. As a result:

“We need the ITG to state publicly its requirement for a continued MNF-I presence. This will be politically sensitive. We therefore need to distance the roll over from the electoral campaign. We have agreed with the US to present a short resolution ... to the UNSC [United Nations Security Council] soon after the referendum for adoption by the end of October. From lobbying of partners and UNSC members this looks achievable.”

339. Dr Reid reported in his paper that “the general level of activity among the insurgency remains broadly unchanged across Iraq”.¹⁵² Although there had been an increase in the number of lethal attacks on the MNF within MND(SE), the situation remained calm in comparison to other parts of Iraq:

“The position, however, is fragile with the militias able to promote unrest when they choose.”

340. Dr Reid judged that “successful Iraqiisation remains the key”. Progress with the Iraqi Security Forces was satisfactory, progress with the Iraqi Police Service less so. Dr Reid proposed that the UK should review its strategy on policing. If responsibility should fall to the MOD, then “it is imperative that the resource issue is resolved unequivocally”.

341. Dr Reid’s paper also commented on the Red Team Report:

“Whilst the report is accurate in its analysis, it defines a strategic approach that could only have been successful if it had been adopted at the outset of military operations; it is not consistent with either existing MNF strategy, or the scale of economic and military investment.

“It seems likely, however, that some elements of the plan (e.g. boosting Ministry capacity and greater co-ordination of military and non-military activity) will be followed up rather than the Red Team Report being adopted wholesale. **We will need to work with the US on incorporating these elements into an authoritative plan which can be agreed with the Iraqi government.**”

342. Dr Reid promised a plan for enhanced engagement with the US by MOD Ministers, the military and senior officials. He also committed to:

“Institute regular (weekly or fortnightly) ad hoc ministerial meetings in MOD to oversee Iraq security issues to which other government departments will be invited.”

¹⁵² [Paper Reid, 11 October 2005, ‘Iraq: Security Update’.](#)

343. Finally, Dr Reid's paper considered the UK's "overall Iraq strategy":

"Our overall approach on Iraq across Government needs more coherence.

The following steps would help:

- A highlighting of our objectives for the end of 2005 and for the end of 2006, along with any milestones in between.
- A definition of what would constitute success (preferably in measurable terms) in the political, military and social/reconstruction spheres.
- The establishment of an ad-hoc communications group chaired by a Minister to oversee our approach."

344. DOP(I) agreed that:

- the MOD should take the lead on police issues in Iraq as the situation called for paramilitary rather than civilian policing;
- Mr Blair should reinforce UK concerns about the need for a consistent approach to the insurgency during his next video conference with President Bush; and
- UK concerns about conditions in Iraqi detention facilities should be followed up with Iraqi authorities.¹⁵³

345. Mr Blair also agreed with Dr Reid's proposal that an increased focus on communications on Iraq was needed. Ministers agreed that Dr Reid should convene meetings on communications issues.

346. Mr Straw told DOP(I) that the next few months would be a crucial period for Iraq. Although the political process was on timetable, this was not the same as on track.

347. Mr Blair said that there were two essential objectives: to ensure good Sunni turn-out at the elections, and to ensure that any Shia or Iranian backlash against efforts to achieve a more inclusive, centrist government could be dealt with.

348. In discussion, Ministers noted that the Constitution was likely to be agreed by the referendum, although this could not be taken for granted. The UK needed to have fall-backs ready.

349. DOP(I) agreed that the UK should work even more closely with the US to deliver a significant Sunni turn-out at the elections and as centrist a government as possible, and that Mr Straw should update colleagues on progress against the objectives at subsequent DOP(I) meetings.

350. Mr Straw wrote to DOP(I) members the following day, advising them that "despite its inevitable deficiencies, the draft Constitution represents a major achievement".¹⁵⁴

¹⁵³ Minutes, 12 October 2005, DOP(I) meeting.

¹⁵⁴ Letter Foreign Secretary to DOP(I) Committee Members, 13 October 2005, 'Iraq: Constitution Paper'.

351. The paper attached to Mr Straw’s letter explained that the Constitution deferred critical decisions to a future elected Council of Representatives, which risked future conflicts between a weakened central government and increasingly assertive regions. The following areas were likely to be controversial:

- Federalism: the latitude that the Constitution gave regional authorities to maintain a significant armed force would increase the anxiety of Sunni Arabs and others who claimed that federalism would lead to fragmentation.
- Natural resources: the language of the Constitution was a “model of imprecision”.
- Role of Islam: the extent to which Islam would influence the legislative programme remained to be determined.
- Kirkuk: the Kurdish desire for a referendum was made explicit. Kirkuk would be free to form a region or join another region, and the potential for a rise in ethnic tension and violence was high.

352. Mr Straw’s letter was not shown to Mr Blair.¹⁵⁵

353. On 13 October, Mr Straw told Cabinet that “contrary to original expectations” the timetable for transition to democratic government in Iraq set out in resolution 1546 had “so far, kept to time”.¹⁵⁶ He commented that that was “impressive”.

354. Mr Straw expected that turnout for the constitutional referendum would be high, and there would be a two-thirds majority in most provinces.

355. Mr Blair said that he was encouraged by the political progress being made, although the security situation remained a cause for concern. He quoted a UN poll which showed the population split roughly 50/50 on whether things were getting better or worse. The main issue seemed to be lack of electricity.

356. General Sir Mike Jackson, Chief of the General Staff, visited Iraq from 10 to 13 October and sent an account of his visit to Gen Walker.¹⁵⁷ He commented:

“This was a sobering visit in comparison to my last one in April, when the post election-euphoria [sic] was still palpable and the campaign was being looked at through somewhat rose-tinted spectacles. I detected little such optimism on this visit: the atmosphere was rather more gritty ...

“My analysis will appear gloomy; intentionally so. Though there is no sense of defeatism in theatre, the possibility of strategic failure was mentioned in earnest on this visit more than on any before. Everyone agreed that the next 6-12 months would

¹⁵⁵ Letter Foreign Secretary to DOP(I) Committee Members, 13 October 2005, ‘Iraq: Constitution Paper’ including manuscript comments Quarrey and Sheinwald.

¹⁵⁶ Cabinet Conclusions, 13 October 2005.

¹⁵⁷ Minute CGS to CDS, 18 October 2005, ‘CGS visit to Iraq: 10-13 Oct 05’.

be critical and that it would take longer still to achieve the campaign objectives we have currently set ourselves.”

357. Gen Jackson went on to comment on the problems with reconstruction, Security Sector Reform and the military counter-insurgency strategy. He assessed that “the prognosis for the SE is more optimistic than elsewhere” and that the Jameat incident was “regarded now by the US as a little local difficulty, but indicative of the deep, widespread corruption in the IPS across Iraq”.

358. Gen Jackson wrote: “it is not to our credit that we have known about the inadequacies of the IPS for so long and yet failed to address them”.

359. He concluded with a reference to the pressure that the helicopter support fleet and the air bridge were facing, commenting “we really need to take stock of our AT [air transport] capability in the round, especially in light of our impending commitment to Afghanistan”. Gen Jackson’s report was sent only to senior military officers, not to Ministers nor to senior officials within the MOD.

360. The referendum on Iraq’s draft Constitution took place on 15 October.¹⁵⁸ Mr Patey reported that the day had “passed off largely peacefully across Iraq” with 89 attacks reported, significantly below the levels of violence experienced during the January elections. The early predictions were that the turnout had been over 60 percent.

361. Mr Patey reported to the FCO:

“The referendum process has gone as well as we could have hoped. If a turnout of over 60 percent is confirmed this will undermine the sceptics. It looks clear that there will be a high turnout in Sunni areas, which enhances the legitimacy of the result and bodes well for the elections in December.”

The Iraqi Constitution

The new Constitution comprised six sections, which covered:

- **Fundamental principles.** This defined the Republic of Iraq as “a single, federal, independent and full sovereign state” and Islam as its official religion such that “No law may be enacted that contradicts the established provisions of Islam.” Arabic and Kurdish were named as official languages, the “Saddamist Ba’ath” Party was banned and provision made for to the ISF to be “composed of the components of the Iraqi people, with due consideration given to their balance and representation without discrimination or exclusion”. The formation of militia groups was prohibited.
- **Rights and liberties.** This section enshrined equality before the law for all Iraqis, the right to “life, security and liberty”, rights to privacy, “so long as it does not contradict the rights of others and public morals”, conditions for citizenship, and the independence of the judiciary. This section contained protections for private property,

¹⁵⁸ eGram 15692/05 Baghdad to FCO London, 16 October 2005, ‘Iraq: Constitution: Referendum Day Passes Peacefully’.

public assets and freedom of movement. It guaranteed healthcare, including for “the handicapped and those with special needs”, education and environmental protection. It defined rights regarding freedom of expression, including “freedom of thought, conscience, and belief” and the free practice of religious rites “including the [Shia] Husseini rituals”.

- **Federal powers.** This section defined the division of legislative and executive power and described the roles of independent commissions. In relation to the Council of Representatives (the federal legislature), it said that “the representation of all components of the people shall be upheld in it”. It described the powers of the President, Council of Ministers, Higher Judicial Council and Supreme Court.
- **Powers of the Federal Government.** This section defined the areas in which the federal authorities had exclusive competence, including foreign policy, national security policy, fiscal and customs policy and the budget. It said Iraq’s oil and gas reserves would be managed by the federal government “with the producing governorates and regional governments”.
- **Powers of the regions.** The federal system was defined in this section as “made up of a decentralized capital, regions, and governorates, as well as local administrations”. One or more governorates could form a region following a referendum, and each region would adopt its own constitution, which should not contradict the national Constitution on areas in which the federal government was competent. An “equitable share” of revenues would be allocated to regions and governorates.
- **Final and transitional provisions.** This section defined the process by which the Constitution could be amended, including through the formation of a committee to recommend amendments comprising members of the Council of Representatives “representing the principal components of the Iraqi society”. It also stipulated that a “Presidency Council” should be “elected by one list and with a two-thirds majority” in the Council of Representatives, to undertake the role of the President in the first term after the Constitution was adopted.

362. The day after the referendum, President Talabani issued a decree, announcing that Parliamentary elections would take place on 15 December in accordance with the TAL.¹⁵⁹

363. Political negotiations about the possibility of postponing the December election had continued to the last moment. Mr Patey reported that the US and UK had lobbied hard against postponement as “the extra time would almost certainly not have helped”. In his view, “our pressure was crucial in keeping the various parties on track”.

364. On 16 October, Mr Blair had lunch at Chequers with Secretary Rice.¹⁶⁰

365. Mr Blair made clear that Iraq was the number one priority for the UK and that active UK and US work would be needed over the coming critical months.

¹⁵⁹ eGram 15761/05 Baghdad to FCO London, 17 October 2005, ‘Iraq: Elections’.

¹⁶⁰ Letter Sheinwald to Hayes, 16 October 2005, ‘Prime Minister’s meeting with US Secretary of State, 16 October 2005: Iraq’.

366. Mr Blair and Secretary Rice agreed on the need to step up contacts with Sunni groups and the importance of ensuring an effective, competent, centrist government after the elections. Mr Blair raised the issue of the future of the coalition forces, emphasising the importance of avoiding the impression both of cutting and running and of wanting to stay for ever. He had originally believed that the coalition should agree with the current Iraqi Government a clear plan for the build up of Iraqi forces and drawdown of coalition forces, but had concluded that it would be better to wait until the new government was formed.

367. The Chiefs of Staff considered strategy on Iraq when they met on 18 October.¹⁶¹ They concluded that the insurgency had continued to worsen and that: “Without a change in the coalition strategy or its implementation, this trend could be expected to continue.”

368. Although most of the attacks had been in Baghdad and the three Sunni-dominated northern provinces, “they might spread more widely if the insurgency continued to grow”.

369. The Chiefs considered that the UK’s main effort in Iraq should remain Security Sector Reform. The existing UK strategy was:

“... not fundamentally flawed, but its implementation was failing. Inadequate funding was contributing significantly to this and reflected a lack of cross-Government buy-in to the campaign and the incoherence of inter-Departmental activities. The military effort was well-resourced compared to the commitments by other Government departments to other Lines of Operation.”

370. The Chiefs also concluded that “Ministers needed to be clear that the campaign could potentially be heading for ‘strategic failure’, with grave national and international consequences if the appropriate actions were not taken”. They believed that “the establishment of well defined Ministerial ownership would be a key factor in addressing it”. Although the UK/US relationship was strong at the military level, “political connections needed to be strengthened”.

371. Lieutenant General Robert Fry, Deputy Chief of the Defence Staff (Commitments), was commissioned to produce two papers. The first was to set out the risk and nature of strategic failure in Iraq and “the importance of ensuring that the PM was clear about these issues and could therefore be expected to direct appropriate cross-Government action”. The second paper would set out the links needed to improve UK engagement with the US and “energise the cross-Whitehall approach to Iraq”.

¹⁶¹ Minutes, 18 October 2005, Chiefs of Staff meeting.

The Iraqi Special Tribunal

On 19 October, the Iraqi Special Tribunal (IST) began the first trial of Saddam Hussein. He and a number of his senior aides were charged with killing 148 Shia men from Dujail in 1982, following an attempt there on Saddam Hussein's life.¹⁶² All eight defendants pleaded not guilty. The trial was adjourned until 28 November.

Although Human Rights Watch raised concerns about prospects for a fair trial, a spokesman for the Iraqi Government said:

“Iraqis have not forgotten yet that the reason why the country is in such a mess, it's because one man stole the will of 27 million people for 35 years and pushed them into wars and misery.”

Two defence counsel were killed, and a third wounded, in two separate incidents on 20 October and 8 November.¹⁶³ As a result the trial was adjourned once again to 5 December to allow time for replacement counsel to be found.¹⁶⁴

Lord Goldsmith, the Attorney General, told Cabinet on 27 October that there were huge challenges in providing security for the court and protection for those participating.¹⁶⁵ The trial was not, as some alleged, being orchestrated by the US and the UK – “we had simply provided support for the Iraqis”.

A second set of proceedings against Saddam Hussein commenced on 21 August 2006. These concerned the accusation of genocide against the Kurds in the Anfal campaign in the late 1980s, for which Saddam Hussein and six other defendants stood accused.

While the proceedings in relation to the Anfal charges were continuing (and before what was expected to be a series of other proceedings against Saddam Hussein had been commenced), the IST reached its verdict on the first (Dujail) trial. On 5 November 2006, Saddam Hussein was sentenced to death for the Dujail killings. He was executed on 30 December 2006.

372. On 19 October, Secretary Rice told the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee that she believed the US could “assure victory” in Iraq, by majoring on the “clear-hold-build” concept.¹⁶⁶ She explained:

“We are moving from a stage of transition toward the strategy to prepare a permanent Iraqi government for a decisive victory ... With our Iraqi allies, we are working to:

- Clear the toughest places – no sanctuaries to the enemy – and disrupt foreign support for the insurgents.

¹⁶² *BBC News*, 19 October 2005, *Defiant Saddam pleads not guilty*.

¹⁶³ *BBC News*, 21 October 2005, *Saddam trial lawyer is found dead*; *BBC News*, 8 November 2005, *Saddam trial lawyer is shot dead*.

¹⁶⁴ *BBC News*, 28 November 2005, *Saddam team looks for new lawyers*.

¹⁶⁵ Cabinet Conclusions, 27 October 2005.

¹⁶⁶ ‘Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice Iraq and US Policy to US Senate Committee on Foreign Relations’, 19 October 2005.

- Hold and steadily enlarge the secure areas, integrating political and economic outreach with our military operations.
- Build truly national institutions working with more capable provincial and local authorities. Embodying a national compact – not tools of a particular sect or ethnic group – these Iraqi institutions must sustain security forces, bring rule of law, visibly deliver essential services, and offer the Iraqi people hope for a better economic future.

None of these elements can be achieved by military action alone. None are purely civilian. All require an integrated civil-military partnership.”

373. Secretary Rice observed that compromise and politics were replacing violence and repression within Iraq, but argued the Iraqi Government needed to build more effective international links. She also announced that the US intended to introduce Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) in Iraq, building on the successful model that had been used in Afghanistan.

374. The British Embassy Washington reported that, despite pressure from Senators, Secretary Rice refused to give a timetable for troop withdrawal, and that the questions underlined increasing scepticism that the policy was working:

“Rice conceded to Senator Obama (Democrat) that the political and military process ‘might not work, but every day we have to get up and work our hardest to make it work. And that everything thus far suggests that they’re trying to hold it together.’”¹⁶⁷

375. On 20 October, Mr Phillipson told Mr Blair that the referendum vote in Ninawa was looking closer than expected.¹⁶⁸ Since more than two-thirds of voters in two other provinces had voted “no”, the Ninawa vote brought a real possibility of the Constitution being rejected. The UN was investigating allegations of irregularities in the province.

376. If the Constitution was rejected, Mr Phillipson wrote:

“... the elections in December will be for another Transitional Government, which will have to repeat the Constitution-drafting process.”

377. Mr Blair suggested to President Bush in their video conference on 20 October that if the Constitution was rejected “we should emphasise that there was a process and that the Sunnis had made their views count”.¹⁶⁹

378. If it passed, “it would be important to stress the new arrangements available for reviewing the Constitution after the election”.

¹⁶⁷ eGram 16119 Washington to FCO London, 20 October 2005, ‘US: Iraq: Rice at the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, 19 October 2005’.

¹⁶⁸ Minute Phillipson to Prime Minister, 20 October 2005, ‘VTC with President Bush, 1335 20 October’.

¹⁶⁹ Letter Quarrey to Siddiq, 20 October 2005, ‘Prime Minister’s VTC with President Bush, 20 October’.

379. Iraqi leaders should be encouraged to say that Sunni views expressed in the referendum would be taken into account to “soften the edges” of a positive, but close, result.

380. Mr Blair and President Bush spoke by video link on 25 October.¹⁷⁰ Mr Straw, Mr Powell, Sir Nigel Sheinwald and Lt Gen Fry also joined the discussion as did Vice President Dick Cheney, Secretary Rumsfeld and Secretary Rice, Mr Hadley and Ambassador Khalilzad. Mr Patey, Gen Casey and others joined from Baghdad.

381. Two key priorities for the political track were identified:

- splitting off the rejectionists from the Saddamists and the jihadists; and
- getting maximum turnout in the elections so that they led to a broad-based, centrist government.

382. Mr Patey cautioned that there were “formidable challenges” to come and that the UK and US should not take increased Sunni participation in the December elections for granted. Mr Straw and Secretary Rice advocated pressing Kurdish and Shia leaders to signal future amendments to the Constitution, to show that the process for amending it was a real one.

383. In response to a question from President Bush about the situation in the South, Mr Patey said that the political process had exposed deep divisions within the Shia community which had impacted on local government. Local “turf wars” were not being restrained by central government. Lieutenant General Nicholas Houghton, the SBMR-I, said that the security situation remained calmer in the South, which might be able to lead the process of security transition.

384. Mr Blair agreed with the need to challenge increasing Iranian interference in Central and South Iraq, which would sharpen if the elections went well. He concluded by reiterating the point that Sunni outreach would be crucial in the coming weeks and that this would mean “digging some way into the insurgency”.

385. The referendum results were formally released on 25 October, confirming that the Constitution had been passed.¹⁷¹

386. Nationally, the “Yes” vote was 78.59 percent, with a total turnout of more than 63 percent. There was a majority “Yes” vote in 15 of the 18 governorates (in 12 of these, the ‘Yes’ vote was more than 90 percent). Although it was rejected by a majority in the three remaining provinces (Anbar, Salah ad Din and Ninawa), in only two of these (Anbar and Salah ad Din) was the two-thirds rejection threshold passed.

¹⁷⁰ Letter Quarrey to Siddiq, 25 October 2005, ‘Iraq: London/Washington/Baghdad VTC’.

¹⁷¹ eGram 16570/05 Baghdad to FCO London, 26 October 2005, ‘Iraq: Constitution Passes: Final Referendum Results’.

387. Reflecting on the results, Mr Patey commented:

“On the plus side, this result demonstrates overwhelming Iraqi popular support for the draft Constitution and opens the way to the election of a permanent, four-year government ... The process was well-run and robust enough to strongly resist any allegations that fraud or other kinds of irregularities materially affected the overall result.

“On the negative side, the vote was highly polarised, with almost all Shia and Kurds voting in favour and almost all Sunni Arabs voting against. We should not forget that small numbers of all three major communities voted against the mainstream, including in those areas where they would have been under fierce social pressure to vote the other way (e.g. Anbar). The Shia turnout overall was significantly down on the January elections and we must assume that, in addition to apathy, at least some of those who stayed away did so because they did not support the Constitution. We continue to warn Shia and Kurds against the dangers of triumphalism, and are urging them to temper their response, [and] acknowledge publicly Sunni dissatisfaction ...

“We will continue to work closely with the US to encourage maximum Sunni participation in the elections, including through intensive political engagement with the Sunnis themselves ...”¹⁷²

388. Mr Straw reported to Cabinet on the outcome of the referendum on 27 October.¹⁷³ He commented that the decisions of key Sunni parties to support the constitutional process was a step forward, but most Sunnis had voted against the Constitution.

389. Security incidents on election day had been “only a third of the level on 30 January”. The next milestone was the election on 15 December, meanwhile the UK was “working hard” with the US and others to “provide support to Iraqi politicians in developing the democratic process, building alliances and considering coalitions for government”.

Assessment of the Constitution

Mr Asquith told the Inquiry that the Constitution did not command the support of the Sunni Arab community, principally because they had boycotted the January 2005 elections, and to a large extent had therefore written themselves out of the political programme thereafter until the next set of elections.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷² eGram 16570/05 Baghdad to FCO London, 26 October 2005, ‘Iraq: Constitution Passes: Final Referendum Results’.

¹⁷³ Cabinet Conclusions, 27 October 2005.

¹⁷⁴ Private hearing, 15 June 2010, page 13.

Mr Ali A Allawi judged that:

“The Iraqi Constitution of 2005 was not the national compact that many had thought necessary and desirable, but a document arising from a series of political deals. It was seen as a necessary step in the political process and was not vested with the quasi-sacred status that such documents had in other countries. Nevertheless, it enshrined basic rights and opened up the possibility of a different type of Iraqi state than the one that had gone so disastrously awry.”

Dr Rice judged in her memoir that the size of the Iraqi ‘yes’ vote sent “a firm signal about those citizens’ yearning for democratic governance.”¹⁷⁵

President Bush went further, describing it as “the most progressive constitution in the Arab world – a document that guaranteed equal rights for all and protected the freedoms of religion, assembly and expression.”¹⁷⁶

390. After the discussion by video conference on 25 October, Mr Blair asked the FCO to produce a paper on “how we can intensify our efforts on Sunni Arab outreach in the run-up to and beyond the December elections and formation of the next Government”.¹⁷⁷

391. Mr Straw’s Private Secretary sent a paper, cleared by Mr Straw, to Mr Blair’s Private Secretary on 27 October. The paper set out actions for the UK and US in order to:

- identify more of those who control or influence the insurgency;
- determine what they wanted and what could reasonably be offered;
- prepare them for direct dialogue with the Shia and Kurds;
- bring the Shia and Kurds to the dialogue;
- hold all sides to the deals they struck; and
- take supporting action.

392. The paper acknowledged that “exploring the less savoury reaches of the opposition risks alienating Shia and Kurdish politicians”, and that there would be difficulties “selling this to the Americans who remain cautious of dealing with those who, when offered a choice between violence and politics, will choose both”.

393. If Mr Blair agreed with the paper’s approach, then the FCO aimed to instigate direct and indirect contact between Sunni Arabs, Shia Arabs and Kurds, both inside and outside Iraq plus “supporting action in the media ... focusing Sunni Arabs on the process ahead and the incentives for participating in the next elections”.

394. Mr Blair responded that the paper was “good. We need now to action it comprehensively, and in concert with the Americans.”¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁵ Rice C. *No Higher Honour: A Memoir of My Years in Washington*. Simon & Schuster, 2011.

¹⁷⁶ Bush GW. *Decision Points*. Virgin Books, 2010.

¹⁷⁷ Letter Siddiq to Quarrey, 27 October 2005, ‘Iraq: Sunni Arab Outreach’ attaching IPU Paper, 27 October 2005, ‘Sunni Arab outreach’.

¹⁷⁸ Manuscript comment Blair on Minute Quarrey to Blair, 28 October 2005, ‘Iraq Update’.

395. Following a meeting between Mr Blair and President Massoud Barzani on 31 October, Mr Quarrey reported to Mr Straw's Private Secretary that:

"The Prime Minister wants us to keep Sunni outreach as our number one priority on the political track in the coming weeks ... He wants us to get on and implement the strategy ... as quickly as possible."¹⁷⁹

396. In October 2005 a senior government official specialising in the Middle East (1) proposed that an independent link to Muqtada al-Sadr and to one or two other leading Sadrists should be established.¹⁸⁰

397. Mr Asquith,¹⁸¹ Mr David Richmond (FCO Director General Defence and Intelligence),¹⁸² and Mr Straw¹⁸³ all agreed the advice.

398. In advance of a video conference with President Bush on 1 November, Mr Phillipson advised Mr Blair that he should focus the discussion on confirming the President's support for "a vigorous programme of Sunni outreach" including agreement to some specific activities, such as a regional contact group.¹⁸⁴

399. Mr Phillipson advised that Mr Blair should reassure President Bush that the UK was looking at what needed to be done in MND(SE) in response, including trying to identify moderate political leaders and "the combination of a tough approach to militia penetration of the Police with a more effective Police training programme".

November 2005

400. In conversation with President Bush, on 1 November Mr Blair made the case that the US and UK should "push ahead in a big way" with Sunni outreach before the elections.¹⁸⁵

401. In response to a request from No.10, advice was provided in early November on how the UK might best target its efforts to engage those close to the Sunni insurgency to avoid duplicating other initiatives in Iraq to engage with the Sunni community and its militias.¹⁸⁶

¹⁷⁹ Letter Quarrey to Siddiq, 31 October 2005, 'Iraq: Barzani and Next Steps'.

¹⁸⁰ Minute senior government official specialising in the Middle East (1) to Asquith, Richmond & Foreign Secretary, 28 October 2005, '[NAME OF OPERATION]'.

¹⁸¹ Minute senior government official specialising in the Middle East (1) to Asquith, Richmond & Foreign Secretary, 28 October 2005, '[NAME OF OPERATION]' including manuscript comment Asquith.

¹⁸² Minute senior government official specialising in the Middle East (1) to Asquith, Richmond & Foreign Secretary, 28 October 2005, '[NAME OF OPERATION]' including manuscript comment Richmond.

¹⁸³ Minute senior government official specialising in the Middle East (1) to Asquith, Richmond & Foreign Secretary, 28 October 2005, '[NAME OF OPERATION]' including manuscript comment Straw.

¹⁸⁴ Letter Phillipson to Prime Minister, 1 November 2005, 'VTC with President Bush, 1355 1 November'.

¹⁸⁵ Letter Quarrey to Siddiq, 1 November 2005, 'Prime Minister's VTC with President Bush'.

¹⁸⁶ Letter senior government official specialising in the Middle East to Quarrey, 4 November 2005, '[...] insurgents'.

402. It was envisaged that the Sunni insurgent leaders were likely to wish to discuss, among other things, a timetable for MNF withdrawal from Iraq and the conditions under which it might be possible. They might also wish to discuss prisoner releases, an end to house raids, possible future amnesties, the conduct and integrity of the elections, federalism, and employment in the Iraqi armed forces and security forces.

403. On 4 November, the ISOG commissioned a number of papers for the meeting of DOP(I) on 15 November.¹⁸⁷ These included papers on Sunni outreach, election prospects, “the centrists” and the security strategy in the South (including Iraqiisation).

404. The ISOG also discussed the variety of plans and matrices being maintained by departments to track activity in Iraq. They acknowledged that it was not practical to join them all together, but the point was made that “any work reflected in the matrices should be ‘real’ and funded” and should reflect UK work only.

405. The ISOG also commissioned a review of the 2005 Iraq Strategy, to be led by the Cabinet Office.

406. On 8 November, the UN Security Council adopted resolution 1637 (2005).¹⁸⁸

407. Annexed to the resolution was a letter from Prime Minister Ja’afari to the President of the Security Council requesting an extension of the mandate for international forces in Iraq, and by a letter from Secretary Rice confirming that they would stay as requested.

408. Prime Minister Ja’afari wrote that:

“The Iraqi security forces, which are growing in size, capacity and experience day by day, need more time to fill out their ranks, fully equip themselves and complete their training with a view to assuming responsibility for all security matters and providing adequate security for the Iraqi people. Until such time as Iraqi security forces assume full responsibility for Iraq’s security, we need the continued support of the international community, including the participation of the Multi-National Force, in order to establish lasting peace and security in Iraq.”

409. The resolution extended the mandate for the MNF established by resolution 1546 until 31 December 2006. The mandate would be reviewed either at the request of the Government of Iraq or no later than 15 June 2006. As in resolution 1546, the new resolution also declared that the Security Council would terminate the mandate “earlier if requested by the Government of Iraq”.

¹⁸⁷ Letter Cabinet Office [junior official] to Sheinwald, 8 November 2005, ‘Iraq Senior Officials Group’.

¹⁸⁸ UN Security Council Resolution 1637 (2005).

410. On 8 November, the JIC issued an Assessment of Al Qaida's strategy.¹⁸⁹ The JIC judged that:

"Iraq is currently central to the core Al Qaida leadership's focus of effort. The situation there has significantly increased ... [their] opportunities to confront Western, particularly US, interests. It has also provided access to extremist networks across Europe that may extend the core Al Qaida leadership's ability to conduct terrorist attacks, including in the UK. The core Al Qaida leadership sees an opportunity to establish a base in an ungoverned and exploitable space in the Sunni areas of Iraq."

411. On 10 November, Dr Reid wrote to Mr Blair about the transition to Iraqi responsibility for security in Muthanna and Maysan.¹⁹⁰ His letter said:

"Military judgement remains that it would, in principle, be possible to hand over responsibility for security for the Iraqis in Muthanna and Maysan provinces by around February 2006."

412. The letter explained that two factors implied a need to extend that timetable: the failure of the Iraqi Government to set out the context for transition and the US desire to maintain a Japanese presence in Iraq combined with unwillingness by the Japanese to move away from Muthanna.

413. Dr Reid reported that Prime Minister Ja'afari had agreed the conditions for transfer set out by the JCTSR and that a public handling strategy for their release was being developed. The assessment of provinces and cities that were likely to move to Iraqi security control was unlikely to take place until after the December election.

414. On force levels, Dr Reid wrote:

"The extension to the timeline for the handover of security to the Iraqis in MND(SE) has force level implications. Assuming security conditions allow, reductions in UK force numbers which might have been possible from around February might now be deferred to early summer (May), when we should be able to reduce our troop numbers in MND(SE)."

415. Mr Straw visited Baghdad from 10 to 11 November.¹⁹¹ He saw representatives from the two main Sunni Arab coalitions, the Iraqi Front for National Dialogue and the National Consensus Front, and urged them to take full advantage of the opportunity offered by the elections.

¹⁸⁹ JIC Assessment, 8 November 2005, 'Al Qaida's Grand Strategy'.

¹⁹⁰ [Letter Reid to Blair, 10 November 2005, \[untitled\]](#).

¹⁹¹ eGram 18079/05 Baghdad to FCO London, 14 November 2005, 'Iraq: Visit by Secretary of State, 10-11 November: Sunni Arab Outreach, Electoral Process'.

416. In a report to Mr Blair of his visit, Mr Straw described:

“Qualified optimism that Sunni participation in the elections may be sustained through to the formation of a new government. But the situation requires active management. The default setting of the Sunnis is angry resentment at their dispossession. A key danger period will be following the results (late December). The Constitution allows for three months (90 days) to form a government; in certain circumstances four months.”¹⁹²

417. On 13 November, members of the US military visited a Ministry of the Interior (MOI) controlled detention facility in Baghdad, known as the Jadiriyah bunker, to facilitate the release of a detainee.¹⁹³ Upon entering the facility they discovered around 170 detainees in an emaciated state. Instruments of torture, including belts, rubber hoses, electrical cable and truncheons were recovered and there was evidence of links to the Badr Corps militia.

418. The discovery, and the response of the Minister of the Interior, are described in more detail in Section 12.1.

419. In a speech at the Lord Mayor’s Banquet on 14 November, Mr Blair discussed the challenges of globalisation, highlighting international terrorism as “the most obvious”.¹⁹⁴ He said:

“What is obvious now to all is that this [terrorism] is a global movement and requires global action in response, of which the successful completion of a democratic process in Afghanistan and Iraq is a major component.”

420. A senior government official specialising in the Middle East (1) wrote to Mr Asquith again on 14 November to inform him that lines of communication had been established to both Grand Ayatollah al-Sistani and Muqtada al-Sadr.¹⁹⁵ He also reported that attempts would be made to maintain and develop the link to MAS1:

“My letter to you of 3 October 2005 described [the] encounter with him ... [MAS1] said he was disenchanted with al-Sadr and considered him too close to the Iranian regime. [MAS1] claimed to represent the Arab, Iraqi nationalist section of the Sadrist movement ...”

421. The senior official asked for Mr Asquith’s views on messages to be passed through the new lines of communication to Grand Ayatollah al-Sistani and Muqtada al-Sadr and suggested that they should be tested before seeking to utilise them at short notice “eg to help reduce any sudden increase in tension in MND(SE)”.

¹⁹² Letter Straw to Prime Minister, 14 November 2005, ‘Iraq’.

¹⁹³ Telegram 18170 Baghdad to FCO London, 14 November 2005, ‘Iraq: Detainees Found in Bunker’.

¹⁹⁴ National Archive, Prime Minister’s Office, ‘Lord Mayor’s Banquet Speech 14 November 2005’.

¹⁹⁵ Minute senior government official specialising in the Middle East (1) to Asquith, 14 November 2005, ‘Lines to the Shia’.

422. Mr Asquith suggested:

“Sistani – don’t promote UIC alone; caution about large federal region in south; Constitutional Commission – must be taken seriously (45 percent Shia did not vote)

“MAS – Iran: no friend of yours.”

423. As commissioned by the ISOG, the IPU provided a paper on Sunni outreach, for the 15 November meeting of DOP(I).¹⁹⁶

424. The IPU said that the British Embassy Baghdad had intensified its focus on Sunni Arab politicians, including those who were believed to have some influence with the insurgency. Plans were in hand for Sir Nigel Sheinwald to meet a combination of harder-line Sunni nationalist leaders and local insurgent leaders later in the month.

425. Sunni Arab demands remained the same: less robust US military practices, detainee releases and an amnesty; the appointment of Sunni Arabs to the Iraqi Security Forces; a more level electoral playing field; and a timetable for transition.

426. The IPU reported some progress, both on detainee releases and with the announcement by Iraqi Defence Minister Mr Saadoun al-Dulaimi that all former army personnel, up to and including the rank of Major, were invited to re-apply to join the ISF. The IPU commented that the latter was “a start, but not what former Generals in the insurgency will settle for”. The IPU judged that more work was needed to encourage Iraqi politicians to repeal the de-Ba’athification law and abolish the de-Ba’athification Commission.

427. The IPU commented that it was clear that the US Administration was prepared to countenance a broad swathe of US and UK outreach activity, but on the condition that the US should be “careful not to ‘pick winners’”.

428. A Cabinet Office official provided Mr Blair with a Chairman’s brief for the meeting of DOP(I).¹⁹⁷ It said:

“We **have made progress since your last meeting** ... We now have the basic tools ... to run an outreach strategy ... But, your **conversation with Khalilzad showed we don’t yet have an agreed US/UK operational plan** – we need to fix this.”

429. At the meeting Mr Straw summarised his impressions from his recent discussions with Sunni leaders in Iraq.¹⁹⁸ He felt that the Sunnis now understood that boycotting the elections had been a mistake, and wanted to enter the political process. In discussion it was observed that Sunnis were starting to realise that the coalition were “the best available guarantors of their interests”.

¹⁹⁶ Paper IPU, 10 November 2005, ‘Sunni Arab Outreach: Update as of 10 November 2005’.

¹⁹⁷ Minute Cabinet Office [junior official] to Blair, 14 November 2005, ‘DOP(I) – Chairman’s Brief’.

¹⁹⁸ Minutes, 15 November 2005, DOP(I) meeting.

430. Members of DOP(I) also discussed an MOD paper on the UK's contribution to the "overall Iraq security strategy".¹⁹⁹ The paper identified the different strategic end states adopted by the UK Government and the MNF-I (see Section 9.3), and defined the following as key outcomes:

- delivering security in the run up to the December 2005 elections (the immediate focus);
- delivering a secure environment in MND(SE) which permitted training of the ISF to the point that they can take on responsibility for security (the short-term focus); and
- delivering Iraqi Security Force "self-reliance" (the medium-term focus).

431. The MOD said that those outcomes would be achieved through a cross-departmental effort, focused on: establishing a secure environment; transitioning tactical, operational and strategic oversight; developing an effective and self-sufficient IPS; and building the capacity of key Ministries within the security sector.

432. At the DOP(I) meeting, Sir Nigel Sheinwald handed Dr Reid's letter of 10 November on transition in Muthanna and Maysan to Mr Blair.²⁰⁰

433. Dr Reid told members of DOP(I) that the UK's exit from Muthanna and Maysan had been delayed until May 2006, reflecting the UK's commitment to the Japanese.²⁰¹ Dr Reid hoped it would be possible to complete the handover within this timescale in order to start reducing the UK's troop commitment in Iraq during 2006.

434. Members of DOP(I) were also given a paper on the 'Iraq Communications Strategy for the UK Audience', which was not discussed at the meeting.²⁰²

435. The paper recorded the creation of the Iraq Communications Group (Ministerial),²⁰³ which brought together No.10, DFID, the FCO and the MOD to co-ordinate the Iraq message for the domestic audience.

436. The paper said:

"... there are relatively few resources dedicated specifically to Iraq communications. This is a poor reflection of the magnitude of the issue and its importance to HMG and needs to change."

¹⁹⁹ Paper MOD officials, [undated], 'Strategy for the UK's Contribution to Iraq Security'.

²⁰⁰ [Manuscript comment Sheinwald on Letter Reid to Blair, 10 November 2005, \[untitled\]](#).

²⁰¹ Minutes, 15 November 2005, DOP(I) meeting.

²⁰² Paper, [undated], 'Update on the Iraq Communications Strategy for the UK Audience' attaching 'Iraq – Core Script' and 'Core Script'.

²⁰³ This group was not a Cabinet Sub-Committee.

437. Attached to the paper was a core script on Iraq, and one on the December elections, which said:

“We have a strategy and it has remained constant. It is to participate alongside the international community in supporting the development of democracy, peace and security in Iraq ...

“Any immediate withdrawal, or one determined by arbitrary timeliness or under the threat of terror, would hand over Iraq to the terrorists and be a victory for terrorism – not only in Iraq but in wider international terms.”

438. On 16 November, at the request of the ISOG, the JIC considered the prospects for the election.²⁰⁴ It assessed that:

“Even with international pressure, the process of forming a new Iraqi cabinet after December’s election is unlikely to be swift: we expect a period of protracted wrangling, well into early 2006, during which time there will be no effective government. Negotiations will centre on the number of Ministerial slots for each political group; the relative importance of each slot; and the personalities of individual candidates. We expect vigorous arguments from Sunni Arabs to keep out ‘Iranian-backed’ politicians, and from Shia to deny ‘Ba’athists’ senior office.”

439. The JIC judged that the new Assembly was likely to be more politically complex than the TNA, with greater influence wielded by both Sunni Arabs and Sadrists.

440. The new Ministerial team would need to reflect that complexity. On the one hand, this would demonstrate a more inclusive approach, which would undermine the causes of the Sunni insurgency; on the other, the inclusion of credible Sunni figures would add to the government’s fragility.

441. In a telegram to London reflecting on the likely departure of Prime Minister Ja’afari and who might succeed him, Mr Patey wrote:

“Like the TAL, the Constitution provides for a weak Prime Minister, dependent on consensus. Any successor to Ja’afari will have a hard time managing what will still be a large, unwieldy and ill-disciplined coalition and increasingly independent and self-confident institutions.”²⁰⁵

442. In a video conference on 22 November, Mr Blair reported to President Bush that Sunni outreach activity seemed to be bearing fruit.²⁰⁶

²⁰⁴ JIC Assessment, 16 November 2005, ‘Iraq: Election Prospects’.

²⁰⁵ eGram 18722/05 Baghdad to FCO London, 19 November 2005, ‘Iraq: After Ja’afari, What Next?’.

²⁰⁶ Letter Quarrey to Siddiq, 22 November 2005, ‘Prime Minister’s VTC with President Bush: Iraq’.

443. The minute given to Mr Blair by his Private Secretary in preparation for the discussion said:

“Some of our Sunnis [sic] contacts have raised the possibility of co-ordinated cease-fires in the run-up to the elections. We need to be careful not to signal any equivalence between MNF/ISF activity on the one hand and the insurgency on the other. But we should explore the scope for local deals which would help draw in those who are close to the insurgency but politically biddable”.²⁰⁷

444. The Private Secretary also suggested that the possibility of detainee releases should be considered as part of the approach to Sunni outreach.

445. A senior government official specialising in the Middle East (1) wrote on 25 November with an update, and reported that:

“A senior Sadrist close to Muqtada al-Sadr, who is a member of the Iraqi nationalist trend opposed to Iranian influence in Iraq, has confirmed through a UK-based intermediary that he is prepared to meet [one of the senior official’s colleagues] in either [another location] or London ... He may be able to act as a channel from HMG to al-Sadr but could also shed light on the fractures within the Sadrist movement. I have previously suggested the need for us to test out this channel if we are to seek to rely on it in case of security need in MND(SE).”²⁰⁸

446. On 25 November, Gen Walker wrote to Dr Reid with an outline of the main issues he had identified during a visit to Iraq from 22 to 23 November.²⁰⁹

447. Gen Walker reported:

“Levels of consent from MNF presence were slowly declining throughout the AOR [Area of Operations]. When considering military activity in the AOR, broadly 60 percent of our effort was devoted to force protection and sustainment of the UK laydown, 30 percent to SSR [Security Sector Reform] and just five percent or so to UK COIN [counter-insurgency].”

448. Under the heading “Where Are We?” Gen Walker reported that an Iraqi insurgency remained active and was targeting the political process. The new Constitution was not viewed as a national compact, although the majority of the Sunni population was committed to the political process. The upcoming election and perceptions of sectarian conduct by some Ministries were inhibiting progress.

²⁰⁷ Minute Phillipson to Prime Minister, 22 November 2005, ‘VTC with President Bush’.

²⁰⁸ Minute senior government official specialising in the Middle East (1) to Asquith, 25 November 2005, ‘[NAME OF OPERATION] update II: [Plan] to influence the Electoral outcome in Iraq’.

²⁰⁹ Minute CDS to SofS [MOD], 25 November 2005, ‘CDS’s Visit to Iraq 22-23 Nov 05’.

449. Looking ahead, Gen Walker told Dr Reid that a new campaign plan had been drafted by Gen Casey and Ambassador Khalilzad, which sought to:

- develop processes and machinery to remove corrupt officials;
- seize the resources of terrorists and foreign fighters;
- address sectarian, corrupt or subversive activities by the ISF;
- create an electricity plan for the next year;
- ensure that food reached the most needy and test the elimination of subsidies for food and fuel; and
- disrupt the flow of illegal resources into Iraq, particularly from Iran and Syria.

450. Gen Walker advised Dr Reid that:

“The jury is out on the pilot PRTs – both amongst the military and the diplomats. Whatever the outcome, I recommend an early bid to run them in the four MND(SE) provinces to save us heartache later. If we don’t, they have the potential to fix us through force protection requirements at places and for periods not of our choosing.”

451. On transition, Gen Walker wrote:

“Nothing I heard indicated that our transition aspirations are flights of fancy. Gen Babakir may have been optimistic in his assessment of the speed with which the IA would be in a position to assume the security role (by late 06) but I suspect much will hinge on the view of the new government.”

The kidnapping of Mr Norman Kember

On 26 November, at 1430 local time, Mr Norman Kember and three others – Mr Harmmeet Singh Sooden and Mr James Loney, both Canadian, and US citizen Mr Tom Fox – were kidnapped in Baghdad.²¹⁰ The van in which they were travelling was hijacked in the northwest part of the city after a leaving a meeting with members of the Muslim Ulema Council.

Two of the four worked for an NGO called Christian Peacemaker Teams (CPT), and the other two, including Mr Kember, were in Iraq as guests of CPT.

The UK Government’s emergency response mechanism – COBR – was activated in relation to Mr Kember’s kidnap.

The body of Mr Fox was found in the Mansour district of Baghdad on 9 March 2006.²¹¹

Two weeks later Mr Kember, Mr Sooden and Mr Loney were rescued from captivity in a house in western Baghdad in an operation involving UK, US and Canadian forces.

²¹⁰ Briefing [unattributed], 28 November 2005, ‘Kidnapping of Norman Kember – Baghdad, Iraq – Saturday 26 November 2005’.

²¹¹ *BBC News*, 23 March 2006, *British Iraq hostage Kember freed*.

452. President Bush set out his strategy for Iraq in a speech to the US Naval Academy in Annapolis on 30 November.²¹²

453. The British Embassy Washington commented that he had invoked the spirit of Churchill and Roosevelt: the US objective in Iraq was “nothing less than complete victory”. He had acknowledged the validity of debate but said that an “artificial timetable” would be wrong. President Bush had anticipated US troop reductions as Iraqi forces stood up, but had avoided timelines.

454. In parallel with the President’s speech, the National Security Council published its “National Strategy for Victory in Iraq”.²¹³

455. The strategy set out three stages of victory in Iraq:

- Short term, Iraq is making steady progress in fighting terrorists, meeting political milestones, building democratic institutions, and standing up security forces.
- Medium term, Iraq is in the lead defeating terrorists and providing its own security, with a fully constitutional government in place, and on its way to achieving its economic potential.
- Longer term, Iraq is peaceful, united, stable, and secure, well integrated into the international community, and a full partner in the global war on terrorism.”

456. The strategy was “conditions based” and did not set a date by which it would be achieved because:

“No war has ever been won on a timetable and neither will this one.”

457. The strategy said that US force posture would change with conditions in Iraq. It was expected that some changes in posture would take place over the following year “as the political process advances and Iraqi security forces grow and gain experience”.

458. At the FCO’s request, the JIC considered the relationship between Iran and Iraq on 30 November.²¹⁴

459. The Assessment reiterated earlier JIC judgements that the Iranian leadership aspired to:

“... help create a stable and unified Iraq which is Shia-led with a strong Islamic identity; open to Iranian political and commercial influence; unable to pose a military threat and inclined to defer to Iran over issues of mutual interest; and free of significant Western influence.”

²¹² eGram 19675/05 Washington to FCO London, 1 December 2005, ‘Iraq/US: Bush’s speech and the public debate’.

²¹³ National Security Council, November 2005, ‘National Strategy for Victory in Iraq’.

²¹⁴ JIC Assessment, 30 November 2005, ‘Iran and Iraq’.

460. The JIC judged that Iran would continue to encourage some Shia extremists to attack coalition forces with the aim of deterring further Western military involvement in the region. But in pursuit of long-term stability, a Shia-led government was likely to have Iranian support in tackling Sunni insurgency, including the jihadist campaign. Although the next Iraqi government might be less sensitive to Iranian interests than the ITG, the JIC judged that the Iranians would:

“... work hard to maintain and if possible improve their position, keeping up links ... with its existing Shia allies ... [and] Kurdish parties, and seeking new ones, perhaps even with some Sunni Arab groups. Of all Iraq’s neighbours, Iran will maintain the greatest influence.”

December 2005

461. On 1 December, members of DOP(I) considered a paper on introducing PRTs.²¹⁵

462. A paper written by the IPU recommended that the UK should establish a PRT structure in southern Iraq, adapting the US model to suit the circumstances in each province.²¹⁶ The IPU recommended creating one (“mini”) PRT in each province, then moving to a “single super-PRT” in Basra. The first could be up and running by February 2006.

463. The IPU anticipated only “benefits at the margins” from the new structure.

464. Mr Straw explained that the paper “proposed that we went along with the United States’ proposal for the creation of PRTs across Iraq but without disrupting our own plans for military transition”.²¹⁷

465. Dr Reid agreed that the UK response should be positive, but stressed the need to keep control of and tailor developing PRT plans in the provinces where the UK was directly involved.

466. Sir Nigel Sheinwald held a series of meetings with senior Sunni representatives outside Iraq from 7 to 8 December.²¹⁸ In each discussion, he set out that:

“The Prime Minister wanted a stable, united, democratic and prosperous Iraq. A true democracy respected the views of the majority but also protected the rights of minorities. If the Sunni community wanted a fair share of power we would work to support that objective. But we would not support a return to domination. We were under attack primarily from the Sunni community, even though we were their best guarantors of a fair outcome, as the constitutional negotiations showed. Sunni violence was counter-productive. It could not defeat the MNF or change the

²¹⁵ Minutes, 1 December 2005, DOP(I) meeting.

²¹⁶ Paper IPU, 28 November 2005, ‘Iraq: Provincial Reconstruction Teams’.

²¹⁷ Minutes, 1 December 2005, DOP(I) meeting.

²¹⁸ Letter Quarrey to Siddiq, 9 December 2005, ‘Iraq: Sunni Outreach’.

international community's approach. But it did drive the Shia further toward Iranian influence and prolong the presence of the MNF.

"The Sunnis had made a mistake in not taking part in January's elections. We welcomed the recent change of mood. We wanted full participation in December's elections, leading to an effective and representative government.

"We wanted the Sunni leadership to commit to: encouraging participation in the political process; reducing violence before the elections and sustaining the calm after the elections; removing foreign fighters; and using their influence to release hostages and end the practice of kidnapping, which did grave damage to Iraq's reputation. In return we were prepared to discuss transition (though this would remain conditions based – we would not leave a security vacuum), MNF tactics, de-Ba'athification and detainee releases.

"The Prime Minister was committed to taking forward this dialogue, which he had discussed with President Bush. Bush was aware of these meetings. In summary, we wanted to develop a shared, balanced agenda with Sunni leaders."

467. Following Sir Nigel Sheinwald's meetings, Mr Blair asked officials to keep in touch with those he had spoken to and to consider whether Sir Nigel should have a further series of meetings in early 2006.²¹⁹

468. Mr Blair also asked Mr Patey and Lt Gen Houghton to relay specific messages to their US interlocutors on the need for the MNF to give the Sunnis space before the elections; to work for local cease-fires and avoid major offensive operations afterwards; and to look at some detainee cases with a view to early release if the names given to Sir Nigel presented no significant security threat.

469. The British Embassy Baghdad, in concert with the US, called on Sunni Arab interlocutors to halt attacks on the MNF and on Iraqi Security Forces over the period of the December 2005 Iraqi elections.²²⁰

470. Gen Casey promised to suspend major operations during the elections; in return, the National Consensus Front called on 12 December for jihadists and insurgents to cease operations between 13 and 18 December. There were two significant releases of detainees.

471. On 12 December, Major General James Dutton, GOC MND(SE), sent his end of tour report to ACM Torpy.²²¹

472. Maj Gen Dutton described the victim-initiated Passive Infrared Explosively Formed Projectile as the "dominant feature" of his last four months in Iraq. It had restricted

²¹⁹ Letter Quarrey to Siddiq, 12 December 2005, 'Iraq: Sunni Outreach'.

²²⁰ eGram 21055/05 Baghdad to FCO London, 17 December 2005, 'Iraq: Sunni Arab Outreach'.

²²¹ [Report Dutton to Torpy, 12 December 2005, 'June to December 2005 – Hauldown Report'](#).

freedom of manoeuvre and inhibited SSR by necessitating the movement of military resources away from SSR and onto security and stability operations and self-protection.

473. On Basra province, Maj Gen Dutton wrote:

“... there is still much work to be done (in particular with the Police) but we are going to remain in Basra for the longest time. I continue to believe that we can assist in an internal reformation of the Basra Police if we really want to ... The more resources we can apply, the quicker they [the Iraqis] can be ready to take control themselves.”

474. Mr Blair and President Bush spoke by video conference on 13 December, two days before the Iraqi election.²²² Mr Blair said things were “looking good” for the election and proposed pushing for a new government to be in place by the end of January. He felt that “there was a sense of ordinary politics for the first time”.

475. Mr Blair also felt that a “turning point” may have been reached on Sunni engagement, with some Sunni leaders distancing themselves from the insurgency and wanting to participate in the political process.

476. On 14 December, the eve of the Iraqi election, the JIC updated its July 2005 assessment of the Sunni insurgency in Iraq.²²³ Its Key Judgements included:

“I. In Sunni areas of central and northern Iraq the insurgency is firmly entrenched and shows no sign of diminishing. The underlying long-term trend of attacks has been upwards. Sectarian violence has also continued to escalate.

“II. The driving force of the insurgency are **Iraqi Arab Sunni nationalists**. They are responsible for most attacks ... dialogue between Sunni insurgents and politicians is increasing and they share some political goals. Improved Sunni political cohesion could strengthen the ability of Sunni politicians to influence the insurgents ...

...

“IV. Not all Sunni expectations will be met but if the next Iraqi government could deliver on at least some, alienation of the Sunni community could be reduced ... The possibility of isolating the jihadists and other hard-core rejectionists could be enhanced, although the risk of sectarian violence will remain.

“V. In such circumstances the Iraqi Sunni Arab nationalist insurgency might slowly begin to reduce. But a hard-core is likely to remain irreconcilable and reject the political process. We continue to judge that a significant insurgency in Sunni areas will persist beyond 2006.

“VI. The **jihadists** also reject the political process and are determined to fight on. They are a minority within the overall insurgency but have disproportionate impact:

²²² Letter Quarrey to Siddiq, 13 December 2005, ‘Prime Minister’s VTC with President Bush: Middle East’.

²²³ [JIC Assessment, 14 December 2005, ‘The Iraqi Sunni Insurgency: Where Next?’](#)

they are responsible for most suicide attacks. Jihadist groups are now predominantly Iraqi. We see no sign that their campaign is abating.”

477. Iraq’s parliamentary election took place on 15 December. Mr Patey reported to the FCO that the day had passed off peacefully with no major security events.²²⁴

478. Initial predictions of turnout were that it had been significantly higher than for the January 2005 elections, particularly in Sunni Arab areas, including Anbar.

479. The election was monitored by more than 300,000 observers and the initial assessment of the International Mission for Iraqi Elections was that it had generally met international standards.

480. Mr Asquith told the Inquiry:

“I think we did enough to get them [Sunni Arabs] to vote in December 2005. Did we do enough thereafter in continuing that relationship? Possibly not. In retrospect, I think we thought we had done the job.”²²⁵

481. Mr Straw and Secretary Rice discussed the election on 17 December.²²⁶

482. Mr Straw said that DOP(I) was concerned that the Iraqi parties should have access to expertise on forming a coalition, including developing a coalition agreement and methods of dispute resolution. The UK was talking to the Italians and the Germans about what expertise they might offer.

483. Papers for the final DOP(I) meeting of 2005, on 20 December, included a post-election work plan by the IPU, an update on progress with Iraqisation and a note on the handover of security responsibility.²²⁷

484. The work plan described the UK’s immediate objectives post-election as:

- “• **A short and well-managed** interregnum between Transitional Government and the next Government, leading to;
- **Rapid formation of a competent and representative Government**, legitimate in the eyes of all Iraq’s communities, followed by;
- **A limited number of key decisions** (which serve the Iraqi people and partnership between Iraq and the coalition) taken quickly and visibly, in parallel with;
- Increasing Sunni Arab political participation and;
- Smooth progress in the South-East towards transition

²²⁴ eGram 20961/05 Baghdad to FCO London, 16 December 2005, ‘Iraq: Elections: Election Day’.

²²⁵ Private hearing, 15 June 2010, page 50.

²²⁶ Letter Straw to Sheinwald, 19 December 2005, ‘Conversation with US Secretary of State, 17 December’.

²²⁷ Agenda Cabinet Office, 20 December 2005, ‘DOP(I) Meeting: Agenda’.

- Visible **international commitment**, in context of 2006 partnership with Iraq.”²²⁸

485. The IPU hoped that it might be possible for an Iraqi government to be formed by the end of January, six weeks after the election.

486. At DOP(I) on 20 December, Mr Patey cautioned that there could be a tension between the desire for a representative and effective government and the hope that it could be achieved rapidly.²²⁹ If that were the case, he judged that a representative and effective government would be more important than speed.

487. Mr Blair told DOP(I) that he had discussed US/UK engagement in forming the new government with President Bush. They were agreed that full engagement was necessary and legitimate. Ambassador Khalilzad and Mr Patey:

“... should be clear that they had a mandate to send a tough message to the Iraqis, particularly to the Kurds, about our expectation that they should use their bargaining power to push for a moderate, centrist government. Our support for them rested on them doing so.”

488. In a paper on the handover of security responsibility, the MOD reported that the development of the ISF was “broadly on track”. The two key challenges remained agreeing what the role of the Iraqi Government should be in defining the handover plan; and the capacity of the Iraqi administration and Security Forces to assume responsibility, given the risk of increasing sectarianism and militia infiltration.²³⁰

489. Lt Gen Houghton spoke to the MOD paper at the meeting.²³¹ He reported that the development of the ISF in southern Iraq was “going well”. The Iraqi Army in particular had progressed well although they would need support for another year and further work was needed on counter-insurgency operations and logistics. Police capacity lagged behind, as per the original US military plan for ISF development.

490. The record of Mr Blair’s video conference with President Bush on 20 December shows that Mr Blair argued that communication with the Sunni community needed to continue: “We needed a sense that we were starting to split people away from the insurgency.”²³²

491. Mr Blair suggested that a reduction in the level of violence would have a dramatic political impact and that it was important to “set out the forward perspective” on security, in order to “cement the changes brought by the election”.

²²⁸ Paper IPU, 16 December 2005, ‘Iraq: Post-Election: UK Work Plan’.

²²⁹ Minutes, 20 December 2005, DOP(I) meeting.

²³⁰ Paper MOD, [undated], ‘Ensuring the Iraqis are Ready for a Handover of Security Responsibility’.

²³¹ Minutes, 20 December 2005, DOP(I) meeting.

²³² Letter Quarrey to Siddiq, 20 December 2005, ‘Prime Minister’s VTC with President Bush: Middle East Issues’.

492. Sir Nigel Sheinwald sent the UK's post-election work plan to Mr Hadley on 21 December.²³³ Sir Nigel observed that "early action will be needed with Shia and Kurdish politicians to promote the broad-based and inclusive government the Prime Minister and President want".

493. On 21 December, ACM Torpy warned Lt Gen Fry that "we need to press ahead rapidly, to keep the initiative" on PRTs.²³⁴

494. ACM Torpy wrote that MOD funding might be needed if "as first indications suggest, neither FCO nor DFID can find any further financial resources". He observed that "we will also need to push the other Departments to deploy the staff necessary to get the PRTs off the ground quickly".

495. Mr Straw spoke by telephone to President Talabani on 21 December. He emphasised:

"... the process of de-Ba'athification should not be allowed to derail the formation of a new Government. It was important that Sunni Arabs did not feel excluded, with the risk that the insurgency would continue and escalate to civil war."²³⁵

496. Mr Blair visited Basra on 22 December to meet British troops and civilians based there.²³⁶ He also had a discussion about the political process following the election and about security issues with senior UK and US diplomats and military officers including Gen Walker and Gen Casey.

497. Mr Blair's Private Secretary reported that:

"The Prime Minister said we needed to keep the political and military strategies in synch. What were the prospects for eg further detainee releases and negotiated local cease-fires? Casey said the US were working on further, large-scale releases. But these had to be part of a wider reconciliation process and secure some movement from the other side. We would also have to look carefully at the reintegration process, as detainees were often radicalised by their experience of detention."

498. Mr Blair told the group of diplomats and military officers that the US and UK would need to work quickly with the new government "on a forward perspective", covering security and Iraqisation and MNF drawdown as well as the government's broad programme which "could serve as a rallying point for international support to the new government".

²³³ Letter Sheinwald to Hadley, 21 December 2005, 'Iraq'.

²³⁴ Minute CJO to DCDS(C), 21 December 2005, 'Key Operational Issues for Early 2006'.

²³⁵ Email Wilson to Asquith, 22 December 2005, 'Foreign Secretary's Call to Talabani: 21 Dec'.

²³⁶ Letter Quarrey to Hayes, 22 December 2005, 'Iraq: Prime Minister's Visit to Basra'.

499. On 23 December, Mr Blair sent a Note to President Bush.²³⁷ It began:

“We are agreed on the strategy: hands-on; to form a unity government; with a competent team in charge, especially of MOI and MOD. How?”

500. In answer to that question, Mr Blair proposed that:

- US and UK political teams should be highly active, which he commented was “clearly happening”;
- Sunni outreach should be maintained so that the Sunni community knew that “whatever happens in the election we are the guarantors that they won’t be cut out”;
- Mr Allawi should be “bound in to a role”;
- neighbouring Arab states should be encouraged to support Iraqi Sunnis;
- the Kurds should be told to engage constructively;
- the US and UK should respond to Grand Ayatollah al-Sistani’s legitimate concern about too rapid a withdrawal of the MNF by making clear that “the price of our staying is a ‘unity Government’”;
- the US and UK should reach out to Muqtada al-Sadr; and
- the UN should play a “real role”, including by endorsing the unity government approach.

501. Mr Blair suggested that these actions should be “tracked and reported on” by the US and UK on a weekly basis. He wrote:

“I came back convinced, more than ever, that this is ‘make or break’, with Iraqis basically wanting unity but lacking the guidance to get there. We should be the guides.”

502. In the final section of his Note, Mr Blair wrote: “Part of the whole business is about communication.” He considered that in Iraq there was still a “massive level of misunderstanding” of coalition motives and proposed that as soon as possible after a new government had been formed “we publish a roadmap or forward vision” as the joint work of the Iraqis and the coalition, endorsed by the UN.

503. That should set out a programme for completing Iraqi security capability, a phased drawdown of the MNF with conditional timelines, a programme of reconstruction and a set of political goals. Mr Blair concluded: “Of course, it all depends on getting a good government!”

504. On the last day of 2005, Mr Patey reported:

“There are a number of contenders for the post of Prime Minister in the new government ... Realistically we expect the battle to come down to a showdown

²³⁷ Letter Quarrey to O’Sullivan, 23 December 2005, ‘Iraq’ [attaching Note \[Blair to Bush\]. \[undated\]. ‘Iraq’](#).

between the two principal UIA contenders, Adel Abdul Mehdi (SCIRI) and Ibrahim Ja'afari (Dawa). We see little sign of any willingness from any of the principal parties in the UIA ... to switch their support from their first choice candidate ... and no chance that they would allow even a Shia outsider ... to take the job.”²³⁸

505. Mr Patey advised that the UK should not express a preference for a particular candidate but should continue to encourage all the parties to agree a broad-based representative coalition.

506. Mr Patey reported that he had been:

“... pressed by some for an indication of the UK’s preferences, particularly on candidates for Prime Minister. I have emphasised to all my interlocutors that, while the UK has a clear interest in the outcome, our priority is for an acceptable overall package ensuring a broadly effective and balanced government, containing competent Ministers who should be non-sectarian, particularly where the key security positions are concerned.”

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507. Lt Gen Houghton reported to Gen Walker on 1 January that Gen Casey was considering how best to prioritise and implement the various elements of the military campaign (defeating terrorism, neutralising the Sunni insurgency and supporting transition to effective ISF) in 2006 and how to respond to US political aspirations for significant troop level reductions.²³⁹

508. In Lt Gen Houghton’s view, “the principal focus for 2006 should be the support to Transition” with a campaign that focused on:

- building ISF capacity, with particular focus on the police and the security ministries;
- reducing MNF presence and visibility and putting ISF increasingly in the lead;
- resourcing the stabilisation (principally by ISF) of the nine strategic cities;
- increased use of the “soft elements of power rather than a kinetic approach”;
- addressing the problem of militias; and
- accelerating progress in establishing the Rule of Law.

509. Lt Gen Houghton indicated that he thought that this type of focus on transition was likely to be Gen Casey’s preferred approach, but “it may not play well to US aspirations for the defeat of terrorism”. He also commented that he thought that Gen Casey was

²³⁸ eGram 21805/05 Baghdad to FCO London, 31 December 2005, ‘Iraq: Formation of New Government’.

²³⁹ Minute Houghton to CDS, 1 January 2006, ‘SBMR-I Weekly Report (193) 01 January 06’.

unlikely to wish to reduce US force levels by more than five brigades by the autumn. He concluded:

“Of course, the Iraqis also have a vote – and I continue to judge that accelerated transition (aka an end to occupation) will be their determined intent.”

510. Lt Gen Houghton also reported “widespread, largely Sunni, demonstrations against electoral fraud”.

511. In a meeting with former Prime Minister Allawi in early January, Mr Blair emphasised that the UK intended to be much more “hands on” in helping to form a government this time round:

“It was essential to promote the emergence of a unity government ... The US/UK could not of course force the formation of an NUG [National Unity Government] but there was strong international support for this among regional governments and from the UN ... as well as the coalition. Within Iraq also, there was strong disposition for an NUG ...”²⁴⁰

512. In discussion with President Bush on 10 January, Mr Blair said that it would help to unlock outstanding aid pledges if the new government set out a “forward programme” covering security, coalition posture and reconstruction, which the UN and the coalition could get behind:

“This would allow us to explain again that we were only in Iraq to help a democratic government withstand anti-government forces, and that a reduction in violence would make it easier for us to draw down.”²⁴¹

513. Mr Straw visited Basra and Baghdad in early January.²⁴² He met representatives of political parties from all the main communities, reinforcing the need for a unity government. In his view, achieving that mattered more than who became Prime Minister.

514. Mr Straw reported to Mr Blair that some Sunni representatives told him that they had been “cheated out of seats”. He responded that “they must accept the election results once confirmed or they will be pitting themselves against the whole international community”.

515. In preparation for a discussion at DOP(I) on 12 January 2006, the British Embassy Baghdad submitted “a plan for engagement with Sadrists”.²⁴³ The Embassy proposed to approach senior figures with Sadrist links who could ultimately persuade Muqtada al-Sadr that dialogue would be in his interests.

²⁴⁰ Letter Prentice to Quarrey, 3 January 2006, ‘Prime Minister’s meeting with Iyad Allawi, Amman, 2 January’.

²⁴¹ Letter Quarrey to Siddiq, 10 January 2006, ‘Prime Minister’s VTC with President Bush: Middle East issues’.

²⁴² Letter Straw to Prime Minister, 11 January 2006, ‘Iraq: Post-Elections and Government Formation’.

²⁴³ eGram 343/06 Baghdad to FCO London, 8 January 2006, ‘Iraq: Sadrist Outreach’.

516. At DOP(I) on 12 January, Mr Straw said that “the key issue was how we encouraged the creation of a credible, sustainable government of national unity in Iraq”.²⁴⁴

517. During his recent visit, Shia contacts had told him that they were finding it “increasingly difficult to restrain their community in the face of Sunni insurgent activity” and felt the UK and the coalition were showing too much partiality to the Sunnis.

518. In discussion, (unidentified) attendees made the points that:

“The longer the political vacuum continued, the greater the risk of losing momentum and of seeing a further deterioration in security. However, it was essential to get the new Iraqi government right and this might result in delay.

“We should continue to emphasise to the Shia that the Sunnis must participate in the next government as of right, on the basis of the results of the elections.”

519. On 15 January, Lt Gen Houghton reported that Gen Casey had returned from Washington with “political cover” for two key issues: that transition would be the central focus of the Campaign Plan during 2006 and that there would be no political demand for troop reductions beyond what Gen Casey was content with.²⁴⁵

520. Lt Gen Houghton wrote that:

“The emphasis on transition has had the effect of bringing some of the practicalities and difficulties into sharp focus. From the perspective of MND(SE) there are a number of local challenges: the Japanese, PRTs, logistic practicalities and US concerns regarding the Iranian border. I judge that all of these can be finessed ... The major threat to UK aspirations for transition is one of timing and derives from the desire for the Iraqi government to be the authority for making the decisions on provincial transfer. It is in this context that the early seating of the next government is important ... for every week beyond the end of February that the government fails to form, a further week must be added to the anticipated timing of transfer ...

“What we must avoid doing at all costs, I judge, is to do our own thing (unilaterally) regardless of the niceties of the internal Iraqi process. I say this for two primary reasons:

- a. First the UK is acknowledged to be the USA’s primary strategic partner in Iraq, with a proportionate political and military investment. To break company with the US on the process of transition would be to risk undermining that strategic partnership ...

²⁴⁴ Minutes, 12 January 2006, DOP(I) meeting.

²⁴⁵ Minute Houghton to CDS, 15 January 2006, ‘SBMR-I Weekly Report (195) 15 January 06’.

- b. Second, the Iraqis believe in the UK's commitment to their newly won Iraqi sovereignty. They anticipate that we will depart, not in the manner of our arrival, but at the invitation of the sovereign government.

“Against this background, it is very important that MND(SE) are forward leaning in selling their transition plan up the coalition chain of command. There is a lingering suspicion in Baghdad, borne of events last September, that MND(SE) is an independent UK fiefdom run from London, rather than a fully integrated coalition partner. It is important that our coalition credentials are immaculate during what will be an occasionally fractious period.”

521. On 17 January, Mr Blair suggested to President Bush that “most Iraqis” wanted a unity government but “were not sure how to get there”.²⁴⁶

522. The Italian Government announced on 19 January 2006 that it hoped to withdraw Italian troops from the province of Dhi Qar by the end of the year.²⁴⁷

523. The uncertified results of December's election were announced on 20 January.²⁴⁸

524. The United Iraqi Alliance gained the highest number of seats (128) but fell short of the 138 required for an absolute majority. Mr Patey reported that the abnormally high turnout figures for some areas suggested either inaccurate voter registration or electoral fraud, which would need to be addressed before further elections could be held.

²⁴⁶ Letter Quarrey to Siddiq, 17 January 2006, 'Prime Minister's VTC with President Bush: Middle East issues'.

²⁴⁷ *BBC News*, 19 January 2006, *Italy to pull out of Iraq in 2006*.

²⁴⁸ eGram 1344/06 Baghdad to FCO London, 23 January 2006, 'Iraq: Elections: Announcement of Uncertified Results'.

Table 1: December 2005 election results

Party	% votes	Seats won
United Iraqi Alliance	41.2%	128
Kurdish Alliance	21.7%	53
Iraqi Tawafuq (Consensus) Front	15.1%	44
National Iraqiya List	8.0%	25
Iraqi Front for National Dialogue (Hiwar)	4.1%	11
Kurdish Islamic Union	1.3%	5
Al-Risaliyun (Progressives)	1.2%	2
Liberation & Reconciliation Gathering	1.1%	3
Iraqi Turkmen Front	0.7%	1
Al-Rafidain (Assyrian Christians)	0.4%	1
Mithal Al-Alousi	0.3%	1
Yezidi Movement	0.2%	1
Other parties/invalid votes	4.8%	0
TOTAL	–	275

525. Visiting Washington on 20 January, Sir Nigel Sheinwald told all of his interlocutors (from the National Security Council, State Department and Department of Defense) that Mr Blair placed importance on “seizing the opportunity presented by the elections”.²⁴⁹

526. That meant moving quickly to form a genuine unity government, with capacity to make and implement decisions. Sunni outreach should continue, and the new government should make “an early, comprehensive statement of their programme”. That would set the context for a “conditions-based drawdown of forces in MND(SE)”.

527. Diplomatic reporting from Baghdad in early 2006 was heavily focused on the formation of a new government. As the reports contained accounts of private discussions with individual politicians, many of whom remain active in Iraqi politics, the Inquiry will not give a detailed description of them.

528. Mr Asquith told the Inquiry that after the election “there was a series of visits from the Foreign Secretary, and from senior officials to Iraq, to Baghdad, to try and persuade the politicians, the Iraqi politicians, to come to agreement”.²⁵⁰

²⁴⁹ Letter Phillipson to Hayes, 21 January 2006, ‘Nigel Sheinwald’s talks in Washington, 20 January: Middle East issues and Afghanistan’.

²⁵⁰ Private hearing, 15 June 2010, page 21.

529. Evidence seen by the Inquiry confirms that in January and February the UK stepped up its efforts to encourage the Iraqis to form a broad and inclusive government of national unity through high-level visits and rounds of phone calls.²⁵¹

530. On 17 January, Dr Roger Hutton, MOD Director Joint Commitments Policy, provided Dr Reid with advice on the timing and detail of the deployment of UK forces to Helmand province.²⁵²

531. Dr Hutton advised that the Chiefs of Staff recommended the immediate deployment of the full Helmand Task Force (HTF), and that they believed the three conditions for this set by Dr Reid had now been satisfied; there was a coherent UK force posture in Helmand; there was a coherent NATO force posture for Afghanistan; and other UK government departments were prepared to engage in a coherent cross-departmental effort in Helmand.

532. The Chiefs of Staff's recommendation was "also crucially dependent" on fulfilling three criteria, including:

"Achievability within current UK commitments. The HTF, taken together with the HQ ARRC [Allied Rapid Reaction Corps] deployment, calls on a variety of capabilities, and a lengthy and complex logistic tail. With the continued commitment to Iraq through 2006, this presents significant but manageable challenges, particularly for logistic enablers (including air transport). During this period we will still be able to undertake immediate contingency operations, but on a limited basis."

533. The advice was considered by a group of Ministers and officials, known colloquially as the "Reid Group", on 18 January, and they agreed to recommend that the UK proceed with the immediate deployment of the full HTF.

534. Dr Reid wrote to Mr Blair the following day, to say that the Ad Hoc Ministerial Group recommended to Cabinet that the UK should proceed with a full deployment of the HTF to Afghanistan.²⁵³ Dr Reid would be seeking a discussion and decision at Cabinet on 26 January.

535. Dr Reid's letter recalled the assurances he had been given, including that "UK forces can meet the planned level of commitments in Iraq and Afghanistan, though some capabilities will be tight". He recognised that Mr Browne was "disappointed" at the anticipated additional call on the Reserve, but explained:

"I have assured him that we will look at how the changing complexion of our operations in Iraq and the Balkans might, with the agreement of Other Government

²⁵¹ eGram 359/06 Baghdad to FCO London, 9 January 2006, 'Iraq: Visit by Foreign Secretary, 6-7 January 2006: Elections and Formatio[n]'; eGram 3684/06 Baghdad to FCO London, 22 February 2006, 'Iraq: Foreign Secretary's visit, 20-21 February 2006: Formation of Govern[ment]'; Minute Bayley to Foreign Secretary, 16 January 2006, 'Iraq: Keeping up the Momentum – Proposed Telephone Calls/Visit'.

²⁵² Minute Hutton to APS/SofS [MOD], 17 January 2006, 'Afghanistan Deployments'.

²⁵³ Letter Reid to Blair, 19 January 2006, [untitled].

Departments, provide savings against the Reserve over the period of the Helmand deployment.”

536. Lord Walker told the Inquiry:

“We were being asked can we do this, and we said, ‘Yes, we can do it and this is the penalty we pay’ but none of those penalties were sufficient, I think, for us to say ‘Those are so grave that you should not do this.’ So we were giving them the advice, which they were following. I don’t think we had any difficulty with that.”²⁵⁴

537. Lt Gen Fry told the Inquiry that, although some people argued that further commitments should not be taken on until it was clear that the UK could draw down significantly in Iraq, there were a lot of competing arguments, including “a view within the British army that they could have more success in Afghanistan than they could have in Iraq”.²⁵⁵

538. As planning for transition continued, Mr James Tansley, the British Consul General in Basra, reported on 20 January that:

“There is some nervousness, particularly in US circles, that if the British military leave Maysan then the border would become more porous to the smuggling of weapons. But this argument pre-supposes that MND(SE) have control over the border, which they do not (and nor realistically could they with current resources). Their efforts have rather been on building capacity in the DBE [Department of Border Enforcement], which is likely to continue post-election. There is also a less defined concern about Iranian influence. But again it is difficult to see how military transition would affect that.”²⁵⁶

539. Mr Tansley added:

“The situation ... in Maysan and Muthanna underlines why PRTs in those provinces are not required. Military transition will mean no international staff will be stationed in Maysan and Muthanna, and travel there by them is likely to be only possible with military escort (it would likely require a battle group).”

540. On 24 January, Gen Walker wrote to Lieutenant General David Richards, Commander of the ARRC, to summarise the UK’s position.²⁵⁷ Gen Walker described:

“... the very tight capability and resource position that HMG and the British Armed Forces currently face, with two concurrent medium scale operations in prospect soon in Iraq (UK’s top foreign policy priority) and Afghanistan, together with a range

²⁵⁴ Public hearing, 1 February 2010, pages 57-58.

²⁵⁵ Public hearing, 16 December 2009, pages 96-97.

²⁵⁶ eGram 1266/06 Basra to FCO London, 20 January 2006, ‘Iraq: Military Transition in Maysan and Muthanna’.

²⁵⁷ Letter Walker to Richards, 24 January 2006, [untitled].

of other concurrent commitments around the world including an enduring small scale deployment in the Balkans.”

541. Gen Walker returned to the issue of resources later in his letter:

“Militarily, the UK force structure is already stretched and, with two concurrent medium scale operations in prospect, will soon become exceptionally so in niche areas.”

542. When he spoke to President Bush on 24 January, Mr Blair suggested that they should maintain a very firm line that only a national unity government would be acceptable.²⁵⁸

543. The decision to deploy to Helmand was approved in Cabinet on 26 January 2006.²⁵⁹

544. The minutes record that Dr Reid “was looking carefully at where the burden on our troops could be reduced, including in Iraq and Bosnia and hoped to be able to report troop and cost reductions in coming months”.

545. Mr Blair concluded that:

“The Ministry of Defence and FCO should continue to discuss with Her Majesty’s Treasury the opportunities to draw down force levels in other operational areas, including the Balkans.”

546. That afternoon, in a statement to Parliament, Dr Reid announced that the UK was “preparing for a deployment to southern Afghanistan” which included a PRT as “part of a larger, more than 3,300-strong British force providing the security framework”.²⁶⁰

547. Dr Reid explained that the total number of UK troops in Afghanistan would fluctuate over the next few months, peaking at 5,700 before reducing to fewer than 4,700 and that:

“The size and structure of the task force has been guided by a careful assessment of the likely tasks and threats that it will face. What matters is that we put the right forces in to do the job and to do it safely and well, and I make no apology if that requires more soldiers than some people originally envisaged.”

548. Dr Reid stated that “careful account” had been taken of the UK’s other commitments, when determining the size of the deployment: “This deployment is manageable alongside those other, wider commitments, including Iraq. It does not

²⁵⁸ Letter Quarrey to Siddiq, 24 January 2006, ‘Prime Minister’s VTC with President Bush: Middle East Issues’.

²⁵⁹ Cabinet Conclusions, 26 January 2006.

²⁶⁰ House of Commons, *Official Report*, 26 January 2006, columns 1529-1533.

require draw down in Iraq. As we have said continually, that will be based on conditions in Iraq itself.”

549. In the debate that followed, Dr Reid commented that he did not consider that “building a modern Afghanistan ... will be an easy or a short process”.²⁶¹ Part of the reason, in his view, was that “unlike Iraq”, Afghanistan lacked:

- a central corporate governance, in tradition and structure;
- a developed middle class; and
- mineral resources.

550. Mr Blair told the Inquiry that the proposal to deploy significant numbers to Afghanistan had come from the MOD:

“... they said it is going to be tough for us, but they said we can do it and we should do it. So in a sense, right at the moment it was difficult in Iraq, we were prepared to make the additional commitment to Afghanistan.”²⁶²

551. In his weekly report on 29 January, Lt Gen Houghton wrote:

“I am aware that there are many in London who would like a greater degree of certainty about the viability of UK transition plans. I judge that, for the moment, I am not able to give such reassurances ... the process for the transfer of security control in the provinces must rest on political and security decisions made in Baghdad ... and both decisions have attendant problems:

- a. Political – The (Iraqi) political problem regarding decision-making is primarily one of timing. If the new government is not seated until April, then the desired window for the transfer of Maysan will come under severe pressure. But at least the decision itself will be an easy one since the new government are likely to seize on the political benefits that derive from the early transition of certain provinces.
- b. Security – The security decision is a more complex one. It is less an issue of meeting the stipulated conditions and more an issue of whether or not General Casey is content with our plan. The most disturbing element of the plan – as viewed through US eyes – is the intent to physically vacate Maysan Province, with the (potentially wrongly) inferred possibility of a less secure border ... My judgement is that our plan is sound and will result in a situation in which the border could receive more focused attention and the likelihood of violence will reduce, since so much of it is simply an emotive response to our presence. But we should not underestimate the US concerns about Iranian influence.”²⁶³

²⁶¹ House of Commons, *Official Report*, 26 January 2006, columns 1529-1533.

²⁶² Public hearing, 29 January 2010, page 224.

²⁶³ Minute Houghton to CDS, 29 January 2006, ‘SMBR-I Weekly Report (196) 29 January 06’.

552. Mr Blair met Secretary Rice on 30 January and set out a proposal that the new Iraqi Government should announce a forward programme, including security transition, soon after it had been formed.²⁶⁴ Secretary Rice was reported to have agreed.

553. In a video conference with President Bush on the same day, Mr Blair said that he was concerned about the length of time it was taking to form a new government.²⁶⁵

February 2006

554. Gen Walker advised DOP(I) on 2 February that, although Gen Casey remained content that the UK should continue to aim for transition in Muthanna and Maysan in May, Gen Casey had raised concerns about the approach during a recent visit to MND(SE).²⁶⁶

555. In particular, Gen Casey was worried about “opening up the coalition’s flank to Iran”. He had also questioned whether the proposed “one-step” model for transition would set an unhelpful precedent for the rest of Iraq.

556. DOP(I) commissioned the MOD to produce a paper reflecting cross-departmental concerns about the handover “based on a robust assessment of the conditions in the two provinces”.

557. The following day, a Private Secretary advised Mr Blair that what was needed was for the MOD to “produce a thorough and rigorous analysis of the conditions in Muthanna and Maysan, setting out why these allow for hand over”.²⁶⁷

558. Mr Blair commented that “there must be no sense of our cutting back unless it is consistent with the state of security”.²⁶⁸

559. On 3 February, an update for Mr Blair on forming the new government said:

“Little progress this week, though the main party leaders are now meeting. There is a danger that, in London at least, the system is too focused on security transition ... and not enough on government formation ... We keep pressing for new thinking on possible forcing mechanisms.”²⁶⁹

560. Mr Blair signalled with a tick that he agreed a proposal to write to members of DOP(I) expressing concern about the pace of government formation and explaining it should be the main effort in coming weeks.

²⁶⁴ Letter Sheinwald to Hayes, 31 January 2006, ‘Prime Minister’s meeting with US Secretary of State, 30 January’.

²⁶⁵ Letter Quarrey to Siddiq, 31 January 2006, ‘Prime Minister’s VTC with President Bush: Middle East Issues’.

²⁶⁶ Minutes, 2 February 2006, DOP(I) meeting.

²⁶⁷ Minute Quarrey to Prime Minister, 3 February 2006, ‘Iraq update’.

²⁶⁸ Manuscript comment Blair on Minute Quarrey to Prime Minister, 3 February 2006, ‘Iraq update’.

²⁶⁹ Minute Quarrey to Prime Minister, 3 February 2006, ‘Iraq Update’.

561. Lt Gen Houghton reported similar concerns expressed by Gen Casey in his weekly report on 5 February, but:

“The good news is that, so long as the conditions are met, he [Casey] is absolutely content with the timeframe for and principle of transition in Maysan and Muthanna. We can brief that to our Ministers with confidence.”²⁷⁰

562. Dr Reid presented a paper on transition in Maysan and Muthanna to DOP(I) on 15 February.²⁷¹ He recommended that, as part of a longer-term plan to achieve a small residual MNF presence in MND(SE) by the end of 2006, both provinces should make the transition in May, which would require a firm decision in early March. Delay would risk a further erosion of Iraqi consent.

563. To assuage US concerns, the plan had been adapted to include a residual UK military presence (of approximately 120 troops) to provide ongoing support and mentoring to the Iraqi army. Dr Reid’s paper acknowledged, however, that the MNF had only limited control of the 285km border with Iran.

564. DOP(I) agreed the approach set out in the paper.²⁷²

565. Mr Blair made clear that his key concern was that the UK should be able to demonstrate clearly that the conditions for transition had been met and that this was as a result of the increasing capacity of the Iraqi Security Forces. The UK should not be handing over for political reasons.

566. In the same meeting Dr Reid, explained that he was concerned to maintain the morale of UK troops in Iraq. While this was, at present, “adequate” and did not affect effectiveness, he believed that the troops felt that they were fighting an asymmetric battle in which the enemy was increasingly bold and their own actions were increasingly constrained.

567. Mr Blair told DOP(I) that a delay in the formation of a government was not necessarily disadvantageous, as it presented an opportunity to exploit underlying splits in the UIA.

568. DOP(I) agreed to pursue contact with Muqtada al-Sadr.

569. Mr Straw visited Baghdad once again from 20 to 21 February, with objectives “squarely on government formation”.²⁷³ With all his interlocutors he pressed the case for rapid formation of a government of national unity.²⁷⁴

²⁷⁰ Minute Houghton to CDS, 5 February 2006, ‘SBMR-I Weekly Report (197) 5 February 06’.

²⁷¹ Paper Secretary of State [MOD], 14 February 2006, ‘Iraq: Handover of Security in Maysan and al Muthanna Provinces’.

²⁷² Minutes, 15 February 2006, DOP(I) meeting.

²⁷³ Briefing FCO, 17 February 2006, ‘Iraq: Foreign Secretary’s Visit, 20-21 February 2006’.

²⁷⁴ eGram 3684/06 Baghdad to FCO London, 22 February 2006, ‘Iraq: Foreign Secretary’s Visit, 20-21 February 2006: Formation of Govern[ment]’.

570. Mr Blair gave instructions on 20 February to push forward plans to reach out to al-Sadr, focusing initially on his inner circle, but making clear that an invitation for direct talks was on the table.²⁷⁵

571. As the period of time taken to form a new government extended, British military commanders in Iraq observed an increase in violence.²⁷⁶

572. Lieutenant General John Cooper, GOC MND(SE) from December 2005 to July 2006, told the Inquiry that the lack of a new national government following the elections in December 2005 created a vacuum “and on the security side, everything was containable but there was this sense of increasing military activity, particularly from the Jaysh al-Mahdi.²⁷⁷ JAM was increasingly active and better equipped, and benefiting from direct assistance from Iran.

573. On 22 February, the al-Askari mosque in Samarra, the fourth most revered shrine in Shia Islam and the only major Shia shrine under sole Sunni protection, was bombed.²⁷⁸

574. Early in the morning, a group of men dressed as Iraqi Police Commandos entered the mosque and detonated explosives beneath its dome, bringing it down.²⁷⁹

575. In a video conference with President Bush later that day, Mr Blair commented that an event such as the bombing could become either a moment of unity or a further step into sectarianism.²⁸⁰ It was important that Shia and Sunni leaders should come together. The US and UK should expose and oppose the terrorists’ aim to promote sectarianism, and should consider providing funds for the reconstruction of the shrine.

576. A minute on the bombing written for Mr Blair by his Private Secretary on 23 February said:

“This could serve as a catalyst for overcoming sectarianism and securing national unity. But there is a risk that (if mismanaged) violence could escalate. The Iraqi Government’s response will be crucial. A curfew is in place in Baghdad and Samarra. All police on leave have been recalled: aim is to ensure top security around Friday’s prayers in Samarra.”²⁸¹

²⁷⁵ Letter Banner to Wade, 20 February 2006, ‘Iraq: Muqtada al-Sadr’.

²⁷⁶ Public hearing Houghton and Style, 5 January 2010, pages 8-9.

²⁷⁷ Public hearing, 15 December 2009, pages 17-18.

²⁷⁸ Minute Banner to Prime Minister, 23 February 2006, ‘Samarra Shrine Bombing – Background and Update’.

²⁷⁹ CNN, 22 February 2006, *Explosion heavily damages Shiite holy shrine*.

²⁸⁰ Letter Banner to Siddiq, 22 February 2006, ‘Prime Minister’s VTC with President Bush, 22 February: Iraq’.

²⁸¹ Minute Banner to Prime Minister, 23 February 2006, ‘Samarra Shrine Bombing – Background and Update’.

577. The British Embassy Washington reported on 23 February that President Bush had strongly condemned the al-Askari attack.²⁸² His statement also urged the Iraqi people to exercise restraint, and “to pursue justice in accordance with the laws and Constitution of Iraq”.

578. An official from the National Security Council had told Embassy officials:

“Notwithstanding blanket US media coverage depicting imminent civil war, the Administration were reserving judgement on whether counter-attacks on Sunni mosques and demonstration represented a total breakdown along sectarian lines. The conduct of Friday prayers could be a litmus test of which way events would turn.”

579. The JIC reviewed the state of the jihad in Iraq on 23 February.²⁸³ It recorded that the number of suicide bombings in Iraq had fallen by 25 percent since October, but did not know why.

580. The JIC’s Key Judgements included:

“II. al-Zarqawi’s Al Qaida in Iraq (AQ-I) and other jihadist groups remain a potent, confident force with proven resilience ...

“III. Jihadist groups are now predominantly Iraqi and Iraqi-led. Increasing numbers of Iraqis are becoming suicide bombers. Foreign fighters continue to travel to Iraq but the jihad in Iraq is becoming self-sustaining in manpower, although external funding is still important.

...

“V. Many Iraqi jihadists (and certainly Zarqawi and most foreign fighters) will never be reconciled to the current political process. But some of their Iraqi followers might be, if the new government includes credible Sunni representation and is able to deliver on at least some Sunni expectations. Conversely, continuing Sunni alienation will drive the jihadists and nationalists closer together.”

581. The JIC judged that not all members of the Iraqi jihadist groups were driven by Islamist extremism:

“... the jihadist message of uncompromising resistance to ‘occupation’ and a government perceived as dominated by Shia and Iran resonates strongly with many Sunnis. The activities of the Ministry of Interior (MOI) security forces, widely believed by Sunnis to be behind a campaign of sectarian assassinations, and the human rights abuses revealed at the MOI detention centres, have served to increase support.”

²⁸² eGram 3812/06 Washington to FCO London, 23 February 2006, ‘Iraq: Attack on the Al-Askariya Shrine: US Reactions’.

²⁸³ [JIC Assessment, 23 February 2006, ‘The State of the Jihad in Iraq’.](#)

582. The JIC assessed that a minority of Sunnis regarded suicide attacks on Shia targets as justified. AQ-I was capitalising on the increasing sectarian tensions, and was claiming to have assassinated 26 Badr members since the start of the year under the guise of protecting the Sunni community.

583. On 25 February, the British Embassy Baghdad reported to the FCO on the aftermath of the al-Askari bombing.²⁸⁴ Mr Patey summarised the situation as:

“Iraqi politicians begin to pull together. Agreement to a first meeting of the broadly-based National Advisory Committee this evening, 25 February. Khalilzad and I will attend. Level of violence now significantly lower with imposition of curfew helping to reduce number of incidents. 119 confirmed civilian deaths in total to date. But situation remains fragile and vulnerable to a terrorist spectacular.”

584. Mr Patey also reported a “well-received” press conference by Prime Minister Ja’afari, “in which he highlighted that those behind the recent violence were using sectarian tensions to provoke a civil war in the country”. He had announced the deployment of armed forces to the most affected areas and special measures to protect places of worship across Iraq. Unconfirmed figures suggested that 51 mosques had been attacked in a wave of violence following the al-Askari bombing.

585. Sir Nigel Sheinwald continued his efforts to reach out to those close to the Sunni insurgency with another round of talks in mid-February.²⁸⁵

586. The following week he wrote to Mr Hadley explaining that the aim of the talks was to maintain the dialogue and to expand the group, an aim he had achieved.

587. In particular, Sir Nigel had wanted to persuade his interlocutors to stick with the political process despite its frustrations and their concerns over Iran and rising sectarianism. With the exception of the Ba’athists, all those with whom he spoke had reiterated their commitment to the political process and promised to use their influence with the insurgents.

March 2006

588. Dr Howells told DOP(I) on 2 March that, although it had been hoped that the al-Askari bombing would have “a positive catalytic effect on Iraqi politicians, and push them toward the early formation of a unity government”, unfortunately that did not appear to be happening and the security situation remained “tense”.²⁸⁶ Further delay was possible in the formation of a government.

²⁸⁴ eGram 3932/06 Baghdad to FCO London, 25 February 2006, ‘Iraq: Al-Askariya Aftermath’.

²⁸⁵ Letter Sheinwald to Hadley, 28 February 2006, ‘Meetings with Iraqi Sunnis’.

²⁸⁶ Minutes, 2 March 2006, DOP(I) meeting.

589. In discussion, it was proposed that the UK should take a view on next steps in the political process. Was it better to hold out for a strong government, or have a government as quickly as possible? Ministers agreed that “we should establish a clear British view on next steps in the political process”.

590. In his weekly report on 5 March, Lt Gen Houghton reflected on whether Iraq was at risk of civil war:

“The potential for civil war in Iraq does have to be thought through, if only to plan more thoroughly to avert it. Assessments here indicate that the underlying conditions conducive to civil war exist in Iraq now, but not yet at a level of severity which makes civil war either imminent or inevitable. The main conditions ... are: ethno-sectarian divisions; high levels of violence; an erosion of central authority; and the rise of competing centres of authority. Many of the underlying indicators which presage a move towards civil war are becoming more evident. Specifically, there has been a change in the character of the violence: it is now more sectarian and less anti-coalition. There is some ethno-sectarian mobilisation of militias and some minor movement of populations. The indicators are worrying.

“But the innate resistance to civil war in Iraq is strong, as evidenced most recently by the reaction to the destruction of the Golden Mosque in Samarra. Whatever the ultimate statistics are for the extent of the subsequent sectarian violence, it was relatively restrained, indicating the power of Shia religious leadership to control their people in the interests of Iraq as a whole. Coalition presence (military and diplomatic) also acts as a block against the underlying conditions becoming more acute. But, given the planned and anticipated reductions in coalition presence, the importance of sustaining central authority becomes ever clearer. The current government is not ... perceived as even-handed in security issues. Its continuation in power makes civil war more likely. I therefore see the early seating of a strong, representative, national government as vital.”²⁸⁷

591. On 7 March, Mr Blair told President Bush that in forming the new government it was important to get the balance right between speed and quality.²⁸⁸ He suggested that it was important to try and secure a new government that month, and then for the US and UK to support it and explain that it really was a national unity government.

592. On 9 March, Mr Straw’s Private Secretary reported to Sir Nigel Sheinwald that the focus on Sunni outreach was on Anbar province, where work was in hand to bring up levels of Sunni participation in the police and the army, and significant releases of detainees were planned.²⁸⁹

²⁸⁷ Minute Houghton to CDS, 5 March 2006, ‘SBMR-I Weekly Report (201) 5 March 06’.

²⁸⁸ Letter Banner to Siddiq, 7 March 2006, ‘VTC with President Bush: Middle East issues’.

²⁸⁹ Letter Siddiq to Sheinwald, 9 March 2006, ‘Iraq: Sunni Outreach’.

593. Dr Reid wrote to Mr Blair on 9 March that, as a result of the latest Force Level Review, troop levels would be reduced in May 2006, from approximately 8,000 to around 7,200.²⁹⁰

594. The reduction had been made possible by the “completion of various security sector reform tasks, a reduction in the support levels for those tasks, and recent efficiency measures in theatre”.

595. Dr Reid wrote that he intended to announce the new force package in the House of Commons on 13 March, and would make clear that “this is not a formal handover of security responsibility” but would also “trail that the Joint Iraqi/coalition assessment phase to look at future handover will begin shortly”.

596. That would leave the way clear for a statement by the Iraqi Prime Minister on security, so enabling the UK to confirm its intention to hand over in Muthanna and Maysan in May/June.

597. Dr Reid told DOP(I) on 9 March that the assessment of conditions in Maysan and Muthanna would take place formally in April on a timetable that allowed handover to take place in May.²⁹¹ He observed that emerging security problems might have an impact on this.

598. On 10 March, the JIC assessed the Islamist terrorist threat in the UK.²⁹²

599. The JIC assessed that the conflict in Iraq fitted easily into the jihadists’ “single narrative” that a Zionist-Christian alliance was waging a war against Islam and that Muslims must therefore take up arms against this alliance and its supporters, confirming the belief of extremists that Islam was under attack and needed to be defended using force. That reinforced the determination of terrorists who were already committed to attacking the West and motivated others who were not.

600. The JIC judged that:

“Iraq is likely to be an important factor for some time to come in the radicalisation of British Muslims and in motivating those extremists who view attacks against the UK as legitimate.”

601. Other conflicts – such as Bosnia, Chechnya and Palestine – had served a similar purpose, but the UK’s profile in Iraq and Afghanistan was much higher.

602. On 13 March, Dr Reid made a statement in the House of Commons about operations and force levels in Iraq.²⁹³ He announced that from May 2006 UK force levels would reduce to “just over 7,000”, a reduction of around 800 personnel.

²⁹⁰ Letter Reid to Blair, 9 March 2006, ‘Iraq: Force Level Review and Announcement’.

²⁹¹ Minutes, 9 March 2006, DOP(I) meeting.

²⁹² JIC Assessment, 10 March 2006, ‘The Islamist Terrorist Threat in the UK’.

²⁹³ House of Commons, *Official Report*, 13 March 2006, columns 1151-1153.

603. Dr Reid told the House:

“That reflects the completion of our security sector reform tasks to develop the capability of the Iraqi forces, including training the trainers and those involved in guarding their own institutions. The reduction also reflects improvements in the way we configure our own forces.”

604. In relation to the al-Askari bombing, Dr Reid said:

“Some commentators have suggested that that act of terror will lead to a slide into civil war. Those acts of terrorism are cruel and barbaric but they are not mindless. They have a purpose: to undermine the efforts of the vast majority of the Iraqi people who seek peace, stability and democracy in their country, and to try to break the will of the coalition forces supporting them in that quest.

“... Our analysis is that civil war is neither imminent nor inevitable. However, in some areas of Iraq, including Baghdad, there has been an increase in sectarian violence.”

605. On 13 March, Mr Asquith updated the Iraq Strategy Group on the latest developments in forming an Iraqi government.²⁹⁴ The meeting of the Council of Representatives planned for 12 March had been delayed by a week and it remained uncertain who would be Prime Minister.

606. Sir Nigel Sheinwald observed that:

“In our messages to the Iraqis, we should be clear about the political difficulties the continuing political vacuum was causing the US and UK. We should also press for Condoleezza Rice to visit Iraq to inject momentum into the process.”

607. Lt Gen Fry, who had taken up post as SBMR-I on 9 March, told the Iraq Strategy Group that Iraq was not yet in a state of civil war and that although there were real risks, “a significant event” would be required to tip the balance. US Central Command’s view was that “Iraq was still some way off being in an irrecoverable position”.

608. On 15 March, at the request of the FCO and the MOD, the JIC assessed the security situation in southern Iraq.²⁹⁵

609. The JIC judged that:

“I. Levels of violence in southern Iraq are much lower than in Baghdad and Sunni areas in the centre and north ...

“II. The greatest potential for widespread violence lies in tensions between SCIRI’s Badr organisation and Muqtada al-Sadr’s Jaysh al-Mahdi militia ...

²⁹⁴ Letter Cabinet Office [junior official] to Sheinwald, 13 March 2006, ‘Iraq Strategy Group’.

²⁹⁵ [JIC Assessment, 15 March 2006, ‘Iraq: the Security Situation in the South’.](#)

“III. Across the South, there is no strong administrative machinery to promote security and stability ...

“IV. The Iraqi security forces can cope with the low level of threat posed by the Sunni Arab nationalist insurgents and jihadists. Their readiness to deal with the activities of Shia extremists or intra-Shia violence is more uncertain. Army command, control and logistics capabilities are all still developing, making major operations without MNF support difficult. The police are a greater concern: they have multiple loyalties and have taken sides in intra-Shia clashes. A minority of police, particularly in Basra, is involved in attacks on the MNF, the assassination of Sunnis and organised crime.”

610. The JIC considered the background, motives and objectives of Muqtada al-Sadr on 16 March.²⁹⁶

611. The JIC judged that al-Sadr had emerged from the December election with “great political clout” because Prime Minister Ja’afari depended on him to secure his nomination.

612. In terms of motivation, the JIC assessed:

“Sadr’s overriding priority is to increase his own power. He probably wants to be a leading Shia religious authority, above party politics but able to influence key government policies. He has a genuine desire to see (and get credit for) improvements in the quality of life for his core constituency; his declared goals also include: maintaining the unity of Iraq and delaying federalism; ensuring the centrality of religion in politics; and securing a timetable for the departure of ‘occupation forces’.”

613. The majority of JAM members were, in the JIC’s judgement, loyal to al-Sadr’s directives, but a minority were under no effective control and continued to attack the MNF.

614. The JIC assessed that al-Sadr had consistently refused direct contact with representatives of the coalition and judged that this reluctance was “unlikely to change in the foreseeable future”.

615. In his weekly report on 19 March, Lt Gen Fry reported that the MNF-I command group had “wargamed” the implications of a “genuine civil war” in Iraq.²⁹⁷

616. The command group had concluded that civil war was not inevitable; a properly constituted government of national unity could still defuse sectarian tension. But the longer Iraq continued without such a government, the more likely civil war became. Empirical evidence of civil war was growing but not yet conclusive. The level of violence

²⁹⁶ [JIC Assessment, 16 March 2006, ‘Muqtada al-Sadr’.](#)

²⁹⁷ Minute Fry to CDS, 19 March 2006, ‘SBMR-I Weekly Report (203) 19 March 06’ attaching Paper “Civil War”.

could be high, but neither side had the capacity to deliver a decisive level of combat power. Violence was concentrated in Baghdad and areas around it; other parts of country could be peaceful.

617. Civil war would further complicate the coalition’s mission, which was already balanced, “rather uneasily”, between counter-insurgency and counter-terrorism.

618. Lt Gen Fry wrote:

“We can talk ourselves into civil war, but my assessment is that we are some way short of it at the moment. More importantly, given the limitations in sectarian interface and combat power, it is difficult to see the condition in which civil war would be an appropriate description. I judge that we are currently in a condition of sectarian conflict characterised by insidious but relatively limited violence, and that an escalation into the larger scale operations prosecuted by more formally defined military entities which would constitute civil war is unlikely. This is not just military semantics: civil war is an emotive, inflammatory and technically inaccurate description, and we need to say so. A clear message to our domestic audience, coalition partners and the Iraqi political classes would put the record straight, counter speculation and stiffen the resolve of those in need of reassurance.”

619. Lieutenant General Sir Robert Fry told the Inquiry:

“I see this with greater clarity in retrospect, but I think at the time what was actually happening is that incoherent insurgency was becoming much more coherent, and also there were reciprocal acts of provocation and violence between the Sunni and the Shia communities which were leading to this rapidly escalating process ... it looked very much like civil war at the time.”²⁹⁸

620. Dr Reid visited Iraq from 17 to 20 March, beginning in Baghdad and then spending time in the South.²⁹⁹

621. In discussion with Gen Casey, Dr Reid noted that there had been “a real retreat into sectarianism” in Iraq. Gen Casey agreed, but was of the view that Iraq was not in the grip of civil war. He listed five conditions that would have to be met for a state of civil war to exist:

- “• It had to be widespread ...
- It had to be sustained ...
- It had to be intense ...
- The Government would have to fail ...
- The Armed Forces also had to fail ...”

²⁹⁸ Public hearing, 16 December 2009, page 103.

²⁹⁹ Minute McNeil to PS/Policy Director, 21 March 2006, ‘Secretary of State’s Visit to Iraq’.

622. In the South, Dr Reid met Maj Gen Cooper who:

“... noted that corruption and intimidation were on the rise as was the murder rate. Basra City was becoming a ‘criminal kingdom’. Outside this however there were hopeful signs, with Muthanna progressing very well towards handover.”

623. Dr Reid then visited Muthanna, where his Assistant Private Secretary recorded that:

“The clear impression from commanders and troops alike was that the job ... was largely done and that the Iraqi security forces there were ready and able to take on the task.”

624. In preparation for a video conference with President Bush, on 21 March Mr Phillipson told Mr Blair that:

“The security situation remains difficult. Since the Samarra bombing, [the] number of murders has more than doubled to around 28 per day, with a significant proportion ‘execution style’. It’s impossible to say how many of these are ‘sectarian’, but there is wider evidence – internal refugees, obvious and active militias – which suggest [sic] an upsurge in strictly sectarian violence. But it is not a civil war, and the sort of escalation of combat activity that would be needed to justify that description is unlikely to happen.”³⁰⁰

625. Mr Blair and President Bush did not discuss sectarian violence in their video conference on the same day.³⁰¹

626. Mr Blair said that it would be important to have a clear communications strategy for the immediate aftermath of the formation of a new Iraqi Government. Iraqi politicians would need to stress that they were part of a national unity government and that they welcomed the presence of the MNF. A programme setting out what work the US/UK and Iraqis would do to take forward security and reconstruction should then be developed rapidly.

627. At Cabinet on 23 March, Dr Reid reported that there was a growing sectarian divide in Iraq, with increasing militia and sectarian killings.³⁰² Much of it was based on deliberate provocation from Al Qaida-associated terrorists, many of whom were foreigners, or supporters of the former regime who were massacring Iraqi Shia and attacking their holy sites. In response, the Shia were beginning to kill Sunnis, many of whom were not associated with the violence. Dr Reid did not believe, however, that the violence constituted a civil war. That was also the view of every Iraqi politician he had met.

³⁰⁰ Minute Phillipson to Prime Minister, 21 March 2006, ‘VTC with President Bush, 1335 21 March 2006’.

³⁰¹ Letter Banner to Siddiq, 21 March 2006, ‘Prime Minister’s VTC with President Bush, 21 March: Middle East issues’.

³⁰² Cabinet Conclusions, 23 March 2006.

628. Mr Benn reported to Cabinet that Prime Minister Ja'afari had promised a new government would be formed by the end of April. Dr Reid said that he was confident that a government of national unity would be formed.

629. By the end of March, Mr Blair regarded the problem of forming a government in Iraq as the top foreign policy for the UK and US governments.³⁰³

630. Sir Nigel Sheinwald and Mr Straw were to visit Iraq to try and add momentum to the process. Mr Blair did not rule out a personal visit, if it would help.

631. Mr Straw spoke to Secretary Rice on 29 March and agreed that they would visit Baghdad together. Mr Straw observed that they:

“... would have to threaten the Iraqi leaders that US and UK support was not unconditional and that we might be put in a position where we had to reconsider our presence in Iraq.”³⁰⁴

632. On 30 March, Dr Reid reported to DOP(I) that the operational conditions for handover in Maysan and Muthanna existed and that the UK should continue to press for an accelerated process in theatre while showing due concern for the views of the Iraqis and other allies.³⁰⁵

633. Mr Blair did not attend DOP(I) on 30 March.

634. On the following day, Mr Blair's Private Secretary advised the MOD that Mr Blair had been considering the issue of transition in the light of DOP(I)'s agreement that the UK should continue to press for an accelerated transition process and:

“He feels strongly that we should avoid pushing too hard on transition timescales, and avoid any appearance that UK planning is based on our own internal priorities rather than those of the Iraqis.”³⁰⁶

635. The note asked for an assessment of the realistic timeframe for transition, in the light of the emerging delays to the process, for Mr Blair's weekend box.

April 2006

636. Mr Blair postponed a visit to Washington, planned for early April, because he believed that it would be better to wait until after a new Iraqi Government had been formed.³⁰⁷

³⁰³ Minute Sheinwald to Straw, 28 March 2006, 'Iraq'.

³⁰⁴ Letter Siddiq to Sheinwald, 29 March 2006, 'The Foreign Secretary's Telephone Call with the US Secretary of State, 29 March'.

³⁰⁵ Minutes, 30 March 2006, DOP(I) meeting.

³⁰⁶ Letter Banner to McNeil, 31 March 2006, 'Iraq: Transition'.

³⁰⁷ Minute Sheinwald to Phillipson, 29 March 2006, 'US/UK/Iraq'.

637. Sir Nigel Sheinwald explained to Mr Hadley that Mr Blair believed the “main effort had to be to get the government formed quickly and then put a major effort into the public presentation”.

638. On 1 April, Sir Nigel sent Mr Hadley a Note from Mr Blair to President Bush and asked that it be passed to the President in advance of a planned telephone conversation.³⁰⁸

639. Mr Blair wrote that the purpose of his note was to consider how the political context in both the US and UK might be changed. It covered other foreign policy issues as well as Iraq. Mr Blair explained that he would have welcomed a discussion in person, but had concluded that the political context was not right for a visit to the US.

640. Mr Blair observed to President Bush that “Iraq pulls us down” and that the weight of “propaganda” obscured an “inherently strong” case.

641. Mr Blair considered that people considered the coalition to be “right in theory” since the Iraqi people wanted democracy, but that in practice sectarian violence and the lack of a government meant that “the facts on the ground beat the argument”.

642. Mr Blair continued:

“We can’t afford for this to continue. I think it is time we started to take risks. We need to put Iraq in a different place and then build out from there. I want to suggest a strategy.”

643. That strategy was:

- Go “all out” to get a unity government in Iraq, including a high quality and neutral Minister of the Interior who would send the message that Shia violence would not be tolerated.
- Publish a programme for the new Iraqi Government and for security transition from the MNF to full Iraqi control which would create “a huge collective sense of moving forward” and needed to be “a complete turning point.”

644. Mr Blair proposed that “we should asap then build out from there” and use the “renewed credibility of Iraq” to act in other areas including the Middle East Peace Process, world trade, energy and climate change and Sudan. This would only be as persuasive as it could be if Iraq was in better shape. Mr Blair argued that “this is the time to go for it; to take risks. To strive and fail is so much better than not striving. But actually, I think it could just succeed.”

³⁰⁸ Letter Sheinwald to Hadley, 1 April 2006, [untitled] [attaching Note TB \[Blair to Bush\], 1 April 2006, ‘Note’](#).

645. In his phone call with President Bush on 2 April, Mr Blair reiterated the message that “we had to go all out for a unity Government”.³⁰⁹ Once it was formed the key was to set out a “coherent programme” in particular on security. It would also be necessary to provide help “on the media side”.

646. Mr Straw and Secretary Rice visited Baghdad on 2 April to try to add momentum to the political process.³¹⁰

647. The IPU briefing for the visit advised that the focus should be “squarely on government formation”, with the objective of pushing the Iraqis to agree a permanent government.

648. The British Embassy Baghdad reported that Mr Straw and Secretary Rice called on President Talabani on 2 April.³¹¹

649. After acknowledging that President Talabani and other Iraqi leaders were facing a difficult moment, Secretary Rice said that:

“She and the Foreign Secretary were in Iraq to urge them to finish the job of forming the government quickly. The Iraqi people were becoming impatient and increasingly concerned about stability. The ability of the country to sustain another event similar to the Samarra mosque bombing was questionable. Every day that passed without the formation of a new government increased that risk. Talabani knew how much the US wanted Iraq to succeed. But the patience of the American people was being exhausted and a democratic leader could do little without the support of his people.

“Key to making progress was to break the deadlock over agreeing the Prime Minister. The US and UK shared the assessment of others that it was not going to be possible for Ja’afari to secure the position. He did not have the necessary cross-party support nor the full support of his own Alliance. It was clear that the choice of Prime Minister was one for Iraqis to make. But it was equally clear that a decision needed to be made on this as soon as possible.”

650. President Talabani was reported to have welcomed the visit and “asserted that most of the main issues surrounding the structure of the new government had now been resolved”. He agreed that Dr Ja’afari was not the right person to lead Iraq at that time:

“But matters needed to proceed step by step if they were to reach a successful conclusion. Perhaps with the help of this visit progress on the Prime Ministerial nomination could be made in a matter of days.”

³⁰⁹ Letter Phillipson to Hayes, 3 April 2006, ‘Prime Minister’s phonecall with President Bush, 2 April’.

³¹⁰ Briefing FCO, 31 March 2006, ‘Iraq: Foreign Secretary’s visit, 2-3 April 2006’.

³¹¹ eGram 9200/06 Baghdad to FCO London, 3 April 2006, ‘Iraq: Joint Visit by US Secretary of State and the Foreign Secretary, 2-3 April 2006: Talabani’.

651. In her memoir, Secretary Rice described meeting Dr Ja’afari during this visit:

“Jack and I had agreed that we’d take turns making the argument that he had to end his pursuit of the prime minister position: I would go through the basic facts of the situation, and Jack would appeal to him politician to politician. Everything we tried met with stubbornness and obtuseness ... I held my tongue and let Jack try again. After a while, though, I just said to Ja’afari, ‘You aren’t going to be prime minister. You have to step down. This isn’t because the United States wants it this way. The Iraqis don’t want you, and that’s what matters.’ Jack appeared a little taken aback, but I’d learned to be direct with Ja’afari, who now looked hurt as the translation rolled forward. But he held his ground.

“... Not convinced that we’d gotten through, we went back to Ja’afari, and this time, with only our interpreter in the room, delivered the message again. Even though he resisted, we knew we’d gotten through this time.”³¹²

652. In his weekly report on 2 April, Lt Gen Fry wrote:

“Sectarian tension and the possibility of civil war has tended to attract our attention recently, but I judge the insidious and increasingly pervasive influence of the militias to be the greatest single security challenge facing Iraq. This is particularly the case where they provide not only gunmen on the street, but also an integrated political/ military organisation with the capacity to provide rudimentary social services: essentially a state within a state.”³¹³

653. Mr Blair met Secretary Rice on the evening of 3 April before she returned to Washington after her visit to Iraq.³¹⁴

654. They agreed on the need for rapid formation of an acceptable government of national unity. Mr Blair explained the centrality of Iraq to the rest of the US and UK agenda; without an Iraqi Government he and President Bush would get no traction for their arguments on Iraq or other major international issues. Once a government was formed it would be “desirable to build outwards and make ambitious moves in other parts of the agenda in order to regain the political initiative”.

655. On 4 April, Mr Patey sent an update to the FCO on the formation of a new Iraqi Government following the visit by Secretary Rice and Mr Straw.³¹⁵ Although the visitors had “delivered a strong message to Ja’afari”, he had nonetheless “affirmed his determination to continue the fight to stay in situ”.

³¹² Rice C. *No Higher Honour: A Memoir of My Years in Washington*. Simon & Schuster, 2011.

³¹³ Report SBMR-I to CDS, 2 April 2006, ‘SBMR-I Weekly Report (205) 2 April 2006’.

³¹⁴ Letter Sheinwald to Hayes, 4 April 2006, ‘Prime Minister’s meeting with US Secretary of State Rice, 3 April’.

³¹⁵ eGram 9415/06 Baghdad to FCO London, 4 April 2006, ‘Iraq: Government Formation: Follow-Up to Visit by Foreign Secretary and US Secretary Rice, 2-3 April’.

656. Mr Patey and Mr Sawers, who was visiting Baghdad, were therefore conducting an “immediate and intensive” round of talks with those Iraqi politicians “committed to getting a replacement to Ja’afari” to encourage them to say that they would not support him in a Parliamentary vote.

657. Mr Patey judged that:

“We will need to press the parties to reach clear agreement on who they will support if Ja’afari is removed to avoid another uncomfortably close or split vote rather than the broad cross-party consensus necessary to give a new government of national unity the strongest possible start in the circumstances.”

658. Mr Patey also commented:

“... in the long run we needed to get away from reliance on sectarian based parties and to reach out to moderates from all communities”.

659. On 5 April, the JIC reviewed sectarianism in Iraq.³¹⁶

660. The JIC judged that ethnic and sectarian rivalries had been a feature of Iraqi society since the foundation of the state and had been exacerbated by Saddam Hussein’s predominantly Sunni regime. Since his removal in 2003, tensions had resurfaced.

661. The JIC judged that:

“I. Sectarian violence in Iraq has been increasing since mid-2005: it has intensified in the aftermath of the Samarra mosque bombing. Much of the violence is concentrated among the mixed populations of Baghdad and its satellite towns. Thousands of people – both Sunni and Shia – have been displaced.

“II. Al-Zarqawi’s Al Qaida in Iraq (AQ-I) initiated the anti-Shia campaign, exploiting existing deep-seated tensions. Although AQ-I remains dominant, some Sunni Arab nationalist insurgents are also carrying out sectarian attacks, in response to ordinary Sunnis’ resentment of what they see as a Shia-dominated government backed by Iran.

“III. The public Shia response to the increasing sectarian violence has been restrained. Grand Ayatollah al-Sistani remains an important moderating figure. But Shia patience may be wearing thin. Further attacks on Shia shrines or leading political and spiritual leaders, are likely, and will severely test Shia resolve.

“IV. The greatest potential for large-scale street disorder aimed at Sunnis comes from Muqtada al-Sadr’s Jaysh al-Mahdi (JAM) militia, particularly in Baghdad where they are in de facto control in parts of Sadr City. But the most disciplined anti-Sunni campaign is being run by the SCIRI party’s paramilitary Badr organisation, which

³¹⁶ [JIC Assessment, 5 April 2006, ‘Iraq: Sectarianism’.](#)

they have systematically embedded into state security structures, particularly the Ministry of Interior (Mol) ...

“V. Sectarian tension will not diminish: in some areas the violence has gained its own momentum. Mol forces, the police and, to a lesser extent the Army, have their own ethnic and sectarian fault-lines: if conflict deepens, their cohesion would be in doubt, particularly in areas of religious diversity such as Baghdad. They would be unable to cope in such areas without significant and close Multi-National Force support.”

662. The JIC concluded that the issues facing Iraq’s politicians in the coming months – federalism, de-Ba’athification and the influence of the Shia militias in the security forces – were ones that were likely to increase sectarian divisions still further, despite the anti-sectarian rhetoric of the politicians and that: “Reversing the growing trend of sectarianism will take many years.”

663. Dr Reid’s Private Secretary wrote to Mr Blair’s Private Secretary on 6 April in response to his letter of 31 March which set out Mr Blair’s views about accelerating transition.³¹⁷

664. Dr Reid’s Private Secretary wrote:

“The Secretary of State agrees that we need to avoid the perception that we are pressing too hard on transition timescales for national reasons, but he is anxious that we do as much as possible to avoid further delays ...”

665. The Private Secretary explained that MND(SE) had submitted its first assessment results for the four southern provinces to the MNF command in Baghdad; the results for Muthanna, in particular, were encouraging. It was unlikely that MNF command would reach a decision before 22 April, when Gen Casey would meet his Divisional Commanders.

666. The timetable for military transition was discussed at the Iraq Strategy Group on 7 April, with Mr Martin Howard, MOD Director General Operational Policy, reporting that while the Governor of Muthanna had signed off the assessment for transition there, the Governor of Maysan had not yet done so.³¹⁸

667. Mr Asquith reported that the rocket attacks on Basra Palace on 4 April and the continuing non-co-operation by the local authorities there meant that some of the civilian staff were unable to operate effectively and an audit had indicated that there was “no added value” from keeping them there. The FCO and DFID planned to recommend to their Ministers a drawdown of civilian staff from Basra Palace until conditions on the ground had improved.

³¹⁷ Letter Beadle to Banner, 6 April 2006, ‘Iraq: Transition’.

³¹⁸ Letter Cabinet Office [junior official] to Sheinwald, 10 April 2006, ‘Iraq Strategy Group: 7 April 2006’.

668. Sir Nigel Sheinwald observed that this was a significant development and asked the FCO and DFID to “consult more widely than their respective Secretaries of State”. The subsequent advice to Ministers should make clear that:

“Set against the issue of not keeping people somewhere they could not operate, there was the problem of re-entry [getting civilian staff back once they had withdrawn] and the political or practical fall-out of the UK being driven out of the Basra Palace by terrorists. A decision to locate our civilian presence at the airport would represent a major failure.”

669. In relation to the formation of the new Iraqi Government, Mr Asquith briefed the Iraq Strategy Group that “the action had shifted to Najaf”. UK input to the debate was difficult to manage, given the lack of a direct channel to Grand Ayatollah al-Sistani. The Group considered plans to send a letter from Mr Blair directly to the Grand Ayatollah.

670. A draft of that letter intended to be “a clear request to help move events forward” was provided to Mr Blair a few days later; he signed it on 12 April.³¹⁹

671. Mr Blair wrote:

“... as leader of a country which has made huge sacrifices for Iraq, I trust it is understandable that we attach great importance to there being an effective government of national unity.”³²⁰

672. Mr Blair asked Grand Ayatollah al-Sistani:

“... to encourage leaders of the Shia community to recognise the need for urgent agreement, in the next few days, on who should lead the next government.”

673. Mr Blair’s letter was sent via an intermediary, and the UK could not be sure that it would reach him.³²¹

674. On 13 April, Sir Nigel told Mr Hadley:

“... despite the momentum created by the Straw/Rice visit, there was a risk of things getting bogged down again. We needed to keep up the pressure and try to use the meeting of the Council of Representatives planned for Monday as a further stimulus to get the Shia to make a firm decision.”³²²

675. Sir Nigel proposed that he and Mr Hadley should visit Baghdad together “in order to keep up the external pressure”.

³¹⁹ Minute Banner to Prime Minister, 11 April 2006, ‘Letter to Sistani’.

³²⁰ [Letter Blair to Sistani, 12 April 2006, \[untitled\]](#).

³²¹ Minute Banner to Prime Minister, 11 April 2006, ‘Letter to Sistani’.

³²² Letter Sheinwald to Hayes, 13 April 2006, ‘Conversation with US National Security Adviser, 13 April 2006’.

676. In his weekly report on 16 April, Lt Gen Fry commented:

“The continued debate about the nature of sectarian violence and the possibility of civil war habitually misses a central point: the failure of AQ-I strategy. The organisation has conducted a series of devastating attacks against the Shia community ... Whether their motive has been to disrupt the political process or provoke civil war is irrelevant; on either count they have failed. Indeed, the most interesting question is not ‘are we in civil war’ but ‘why are we not in civil war, given the provocations?’ The answer has something to do with the resilience of Iraqi society, residual hope in a better future and the orchestration of popular response by senior leadership ... Despite a run of attacks which have killed hundreds and destroyed several places of worship there has been no large scale response and it may be that the larger prize of a Shia government has imposed its own discipline. Equally intriguing is what happens when this constraint no longer applies.”³²³

677. Discussions between the UK and US on the need for a new government continued on 16 April when Mr Straw and Secretary Rice spoke by telephone.³²⁴

678. Mr Straw was “very worried indeed about the endless delays” and said that “we had to keep up the pressure on the Iraqis, though the levers we had were limited”. He and Secretary Rice agreed to make more phone calls to Iraqi politicians.

679. At DOP(I) on 20 April, Mr Straw summarised the latest developments on government formation.³²⁵

680. Although there was agreement on the candidates for President and Vice President, the nominee for Prime Minister was yet to be agreed. In discussion it was observed that the reasserting “the writ of government over ‘the street’” was becoming critical.

681. Dr Reid reported that the readiness assessment for handover in Muthanna and Maysan had been downgraded to “amber” by a senior US military officer on the basis of “political uncertainty at the centre” and the risk of “the Sadrists causing problems in the South”.

682. Dr Reid considered that there were “real political risks” to any delay; local Iraqi politicians and the public would be frustrated when it became clear that an assessment of readiness had been overturned. There was also a risk of Shia resentment if the Kurdish provinces in the North were handed over first.

683. Mr Blair agreed with Dr Reid’s assessment and thought that concerns would be largely resolved by the anticipated appointment of capable Ministers of Interior and Defence.

³²³ Minute Fry to PSO/CDS, 16 April 2006, ‘SBMR-I Weekly Report (207): 16 April 2006’.

³²⁴ Note Straw to Sheinwald, 16 April 2006, Rice call – Sunday 16 April 2006 6.00PM’.

³²⁵ Minutes, 20 April 2006, DOP(I) meeting.

684. A review of the UK's Sunni outreach efforts dated 21 April concluded that "a wide range of Sunni politicians are now involved in the politics around government formation, and a swathe of Sunnis with links to the nationalist insurgency have direct contact with the coalition".³²⁶

685. Those developments were not necessarily a direct consequence of the UK's efforts, but there was a belief that the UK had contributed.

686. Late on 21 April, the United Iraqi Alliance announced the selection of Mr Nuri al-Maliki from the Dawa party as its candidate for Prime Minister.³²⁷

687. Mr Patey told the Inquiry that Mr Maliki was a "surprise candidate" for the UK.³²⁸

688. Mr Asquith said that the UK had missed him as a potential contender because he was not a prominent political figure in the Dawa party, and had occupied no position in which the UK had to deal with him.³²⁹ Section 9.3 contains more information on the Dawa party.

689. In Mr Asquith's view, Mr Maliki was selected because the supporters of the other candidates would not switch their votes to alternatives, except for him.³³⁰

690. The BBC reported President Bush's congratulations for this "milestone on Iraq's path to democracy".³³¹

691. President Talabani was elected to a second term in post and Mr Blair spoke to him on 24 April to offer his congratulations.³³²

692. Mr Blair "hoped that the rest of the Government could now be formed quickly – this would bring a renewed sense of hope to Iraq". President Talabani estimated that it would take two weeks to finalise the Ministerial team.

693. Sir Nigel Sheinwald visited Baghdad from 22 to 25 April and urged senior Iraqi politicians to move quickly to complete the formation of the Government. It would then "need to set out a positive vision – communicating this effectively to its own people and to the international community – including on security".³³³

694. Mr Patey reported that the visit was "a timely opportunity to urge the politicians to seize this moment to give real momentum to the political process after months of delay".

³²⁶ Letter senior government official specialising in the Middle East to Banner, 21 April 2006, '[...]: Way Ahead'.

³²⁷ eGram 13011/06 Baghdad to FCO London, 24 April 2006, 'Iraq: Formation of the New Government: Al-Maliki Nominated by UIA as Prime Minister'.

³²⁸ Public hearing, 5 January 2010, page 37.

³²⁹ Private hearing, 15 June 2010, pages 21-22.

³³⁰ Private hearing, 15 June 2010, page 22.

³³¹ *BBC News*, 22 April 2006, *Maliki endorsed as new Iraqi PM*.

³³² Letter Phillipson to Siddiq, 24 April 2006, 'Prime Minister's Phonecall with President Talabani, 24 April'.

³³³ eGram 13972/06 Baghdad to FCO London, 27 April 2006, 'Iraq: Visit by Prime Minister's Foreign Policy Adviser'.

695. In a video conference with President Bush on 25 April, Mr Blair reported a sense of optimism from Iraqi politicians.³³⁴ He thought that if strong Sunni Ministers could be brought into the Government there could be a real change for the better. Once that had happened the US and UK would need to persuade the new Government to set out a forward programme that would “make it clear to the international community that we had started a new chapter”.

696. On 27 April, Sir Nigel Sheinwald sent Mr Blair an account of his visit to Iraq.³³⁵ Sir Nigel wrote that:

“We are widely seen as having played a major part in getting Sunni outreach going. Casey and Zal [Khalilzad] will continue with it. I pressed them to try to move quickly into a structured dialogue aimed at agreeing a ‘cease-fire’. Casey agrees with the aim, but is moving cautiously.”

697. In relation to the new Iraqi Government, Sir Nigel assessed that: “This is – so far – a **real government of national unity**.”

698. Sir Nigel set out a package of proposed support for the new Government including policy officials, press officers and advisers for the new Defence Minister (see Section 10.2 for further details). Sir Nigel also reported:

“I said bluntly that we needed a right of veto over the Defence and Interior Ministries. This was not contested.”

699. Sir Nigel’s report concluded:

“This is the last big moment in the political timetable we created in 2004 and have, despite all the problems, stuck to. The next few months will decide whether it is possible to form a durable and effective unity government; and whether they can construct a political and security strategy which bears down quickly on the sectarian violence.

“If so, Iraq could look very different by the end of the year.”

700. Mr Blair annotated Sir Nigel’s advice: “We need a lot more work on their programme, the transition, and a plan of communications inside and outside of Iraq.” He asked Sir Nigel to supervise that work personally.

701. Sir Nigel Sheinwald told the Inquiry that Sunni outreach:

“... was one of the areas where the Americans consistently thought that the UK – because of history, because it was one of our political and diplomatic talents ... they regarded it as something where we had a voice and needed to be allowed to get

³³⁴ Letter Phillipson to Hayes, 25 April 2006, ‘Prime Minister’s VTC with President Bush, 25 April: Middle East issues’.

³³⁵ Minute Sheinwald to Prime Minister, 27 April 2006, ‘Visit to Iraq’ including manuscript comment Blair.

on with it and were worth listening to anyway. I would say this, the political process generally, the external and international aspects of handling Iraq, whether it was the UN, the regional groupings, working with the neighbours, the Saudis and others; I think these were all areas where there was a British expertise and experience which the Americans paid attention to.”³³⁶

702. Mr Blair spoke to Mr Maliki on 28 April to congratulate him and assure him that the UK would do everything possible to support and help him as he addressed the challenging situation facing him.³³⁷

703. Mr Blair added that the UK needed Mr Maliki’s assistance in addressing the political situation in Basra. Mr Maliki said that he was doing his best to achieve reconciliation between all parties and would continue to work at it. In return, he asked the UK to accelerate the training of Iraqi Security Forces.

May 2006

704. On 1 May, US forces symbolically handed over responsibility for security in Helmand Province, southern Afghanistan, to UK troops taking command of its Provincial Reconstruction Team.³³⁸ The full complement of 3,300 UK troops, led by 16 Air Assault Brigade, was due to be in place by June.

705. Dr Reid described their mission as “to protect the reconstruction and development of the Afghan economy, democratic government and security forces”.

706. In preparation for a video conference with President Bush, on 2 May Mr Phillipson told Mr Blair that:

“We’ve heard rumblings from the US system about UK failure to grip the security situation in what they regard as a strategically vital part of Iraq ...”³³⁹

707. In the video conference with President Bush, Mr Blair said that once a new Iraqi Government was in place, the next step would be “to persuade the Sunni insurgency to wind itself down, building on Sunni inclusion in a government for national security”.³⁴⁰

³³⁶ Private hearing, 3 September 2010, pages 85-86.

³³⁷ Letter Banner to Siddiq, 28 April 2006, ‘Nouri al-Maliki’.

³³⁸ *BBC News*, 1 May 2006, *UK troops take over Afghan duties*.

³³⁹ Minute Phillipson to Prime Minister, 2 May 2006, ‘VTC with President Bush, 1615 2 May 2006’.

³⁴⁰ Letter Banner to Hayes, 2 May 2006, ‘Prime Minister’s VTC with President Bush, 2 May: Middle East issues’.

Loss of a Lynx and its crew in Basra

On 6 May, a Lynx helicopter exploded in mid-air over Basra, killing all five of its crew.³⁴¹ There were difficulties recovering the wreckage and the bodies of those killed because of public disorder, attributed to increasing hostility towards UK forces in Basra at the time.

Eye-witness accounts suggested that the explosion was caused by the aircraft being fired on from the ground.

Maj Gen Cooper reported that the crowds had numbered only 200-300 individuals at their height and the situation had been brought under control within two or three hours.³⁴² It seemed likely that the attack had been “perpetrated by rogue elements of JAM”.

Maj Gen Cooper reminded colleagues in London that, despite the significance and tragedy of the loss of the Lynx and its crew, “in tactical terms the threat remains higher on the ground than in the air”.³⁴³

The Board of Inquiry into the Lynx crash concluded in June 2006 that the helicopter had been shot down in a hostile attack, using man-portable surface to air missile (MANPAD) technology.³⁴⁴

708. There was concern that the Lynx incident was evidence of technology transfer. Lt Gen Fry observed in his weekly report that:

“... if there is evidence of MANPAD technology transfer following the route established by EFP [Explosively Formed Projectile] it will certainly ... reinforce the Zelikow³⁴⁵ hypothesis that Basra is vital ground, to be held by coalition forces until the latter stages of the campaign”.³⁴⁶

709. Lt Gen Fry reported that Gen Casey had recommended a security initiative in Basra to match those in Baghdad and Ramadi.

710. After visiting Iraq in early May, Air Chief Marshal Jock Stirrup, who had become Chief of the Defence Staff in April 2006, reported to Dr Reid that:

“... there was no Basra insurgency, levels of violence in the city were well down on the other ‘red provinces’, and with different provincial leadership the prospects could improve significantly.”³⁴⁷

³⁴¹ Final report JHC/4022, 20 June 2006, ‘Aircraft Crash – Lynx AH Mk 7(XZ614) of 847 NAS in Basra, Iraq 06 May 06’. Those killed were Wing Commander John Coxen, Lieutenant Commander Darren Chapman, Captain David Dobson, Flight Lieutenant Sarah-Jayne Mulvihill and Marine Paul Collins.

³⁴² Letter McNeil to Banner, 12 May 2006, ‘Iraq: Update’ attaching ‘GOC MND(SE) – Southern Iraq update – 10 May 2006’.

³⁴³ Minute Cooper, 10 May 2006, ‘Iraq: Update’ attaching ‘GOC MND(SE) – Southern Iraq Update – 10 May 2006’.

³⁴⁴ Final report JHC/2022, 20 June 2006, ‘Aircraft crash – Lynx AH Mk 7(XZ614) of 847 NAS in Basra, Iraq 06 May 06’.

³⁴⁵ Philip Zelikow, then a Counsellor at the US State Department.

³⁴⁶ Minute Fry to PSO/CDS, 7 May 2006, ‘SBMR-I Weekly Report (210): 7 May 2006’.

³⁴⁷ Minute Stirrup to SofS [MOD], 8 May 2006, ‘CDS Visit to Iraq and Afghanistan – 5-7 May 06’.

711. During the visit, ACM Stirrup was briefed by Gen Casey on his updated campaign plan, which included a reduction from 14 US brigades to 10 by the end of 2005 and five by the end of 2007, subject to successful build-up of the Iraqi Security Forces.

712. Despite the growing problems in Basra, ACM Stirrup judged that there was:

“... no logic for precipitate change in our military plans. Indeed there are compelling reasons why security handover remains the right strategy. Militarily, in Maysan and Muthanna the Iraqi Security Forces are ready, and there is political appetite. And progress in those provinces will set the conditions for Basra, which is the key. The obstacles there are: 1) militias, and 2) governance. Neither is substantially in our hands, and we need firm action by the government in Baghdad. But as consent continues to reduce (as we have always foreseen it would), so too does our ability to effect further (significant) improvement. The law of diminishing returns is now firmly in play, and there is an increasing risk that we become part of the problem, rather than of the solution. So, for these reasons and for reasons of momentum, I judge that we should press on ...”

713. ACM Stirrup visited Afghanistan as part of the same trip, and concluded:

“... the main similarity between both theatres is that, whilst we will continue militarily to hold the ring as best we can, ultimate success can only be delivered by non-military instruments of government, be they UK, international or indigenous. But it is the contrasts between the two campaigns that struck me most. In Iraq, our forces sit within a well found and well organised US-led force, with immense combat power, effective command and control, coherent political oversight (in the form of the US and UK embassies), and a coalition comprised of countries that ... are prepared to accept the costs, in blood and treasure, of operations in Iraq. This is just as well for the coalition is viewed popularly as a force of occupation, suffers inexorably declining levels of popular consent, and faces a multi-faceted, but sophisticated and dangerous enemy.”

714. ACM Stirrup contrasted circumstances in Iraq with the situation in Afghanistan where the UK position in Helmand was “sound – indeed exemplary” but it was positioned within a NATO force with insufficient combat power and a difficult command and control structure. He asked:

“So what? In Iraq, we are in clear ‘law of diminishing returns’ territory. Even if we were invited to stay (which looks improbable) it is difficult to see what military advantage might flow from our remaining in any significant numbers beyond 2007. That said, the security picture, particularly in Basra but also in Maysan, may not look at all appetising as we pull out, and astute conditioning of the UK public may be necessary if we are to avoid the charge of strategic failure. In Afghanistan, we face immediate opportunity, tempered by uncertainty ...”

“Should anything be done differently? At the operational level, I judge not. We need to maintain the momentum of security handover in Iraq, and continue our build up in Afghanistan, but stay alert and agile. At the strategic level, there are at least two areas worth our early attention. In Iraq, and I recognise that this is essentially a political issue, there will be the need to think through the presentational challenge of a post-security handover Iraq – and particularly Basra – that retains some fairly ugly aspects. In Afghanistan, the issue is NATO’s capability ...”

715. ACM Stirrup also reported the views of UK staff based in Baghdad that “the remainder of 2006 would be both decisive and challenging, with the trajectory depending principally on the new Iraqi Government’s effectiveness”.

716. On 10 May, Maj Gen Cooper reported that the Basra Provincial Council announced that it was ending an official boycott of engagement with the Multi-National Force (MNF), which had complicated relations between the MNF and local authorities since the Jameat incident in September 2005.³⁴⁸

717. The British Consul General and local Brigade Commander had been invited to attend the Governor’s Provincial Security Committee on 9 May.

718. On 10 May, the JIC reviewed the recent trends in violence in Iraq and a possible change of attitude among Sunni insurgents towards the MNF and jihadist groups.³⁴⁹

719. The JIC’s Key Judgements included:

“I. Violence in Iraq has been rising since the start of the year, mainly in the Sunni heartlands and Baghdad. The sustained violence in April has been unprecedented, maintaining levels only previously seen in spikes associated with the January election and constitutional referendum in October 2005. Increased sectarian violence shows no sign of reducing.”

720. The JIC assessed that there had been some change in the nature of the violence, with more Iraqis being killed. Attacks on the Iraqi Security Forces accounted for around 15 percent of all attacks and sectarian violence had risen sharply since the bombing of the al-Askari mosque in Samarra in February.

721. The JIC judged that the “commitment of Sunni Arab nationalists to a violent campaign is largely undiminished” and that support among the general Sunni population for attacks on the MNF “remains strong”. In addition:

“III. In many areas co-operation between Sunni Arab nationalist insurgents and jihadists is growing. The distinction between some groups is becoming increasingly

³⁴⁸ Minute Cooper, 10 May 2006, ‘Iraq: Update’ attaching ‘GOC MND(SE) – Southern Iraq Update – 10 May 2006’.

³⁴⁹ [JIC Assessment, 10 May 2006, ‘Iraq: How is the Sunni Insurgency Evolving?’](#)

blurred. Al Qaida in Iraq (AQ-I) is the most prominent jihadist group, with the greatest organisational capacity ...

“IV. There are limited signs that a small number of Sunni insurgents are considering drawing away from violence, at least against the MNF. An enduring theme from them is the need to combat the activities of AQ-I and the Iranians. Coalition outreach has identified some Sunni insurgent leaders willing to engage ... The ability of these tentative contacts to affect broader insurgent violence is unknown.

“V. The strength of the insurgency is in part affected by Sunni participation in the political process ... Much will depend on the actions of the new government in addressing broader Sunni concerns: federalism, de-Ba’athification, reform of the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF), MNF withdrawal, security and detainees, and improvement in the quality of life.

“VI. Many insurgents have probably already decided that the political process will not give them influence or benefit, or at least see no contradiction in pursuing a twin-track approach of political participation and violence. A hard core of Sunni Arabs will remain irreconcilable and join the jihadists in rejecting the political process. A strong Sunni Arab insurgency is likely to persist beyond 2006.”

722. On 12 May, a view of the situation in Basra was provided to Mr Tim Dowse, Chief of the Assessments Staff.³⁵⁰ It said:

“... the general security situation in Basra is in steady, if generally unspectacular, decline ... There are now 8-10 assassination-style murders a day, usually of Sunnis. Religious, criminal and politically motivated intimidation is prevalent ... The situation is aggravated by the growing heat resulting in armed demonstrations at night against the local authorities complaining of lack of electricity and other services ... Political life in Basra revolves around money, patronage and intimidation ... The capacity of local militias to influence politics through a show or threat of force was apparent during the December elections ... The police and Iraqi army have shown no appetite to confront JAM and their capability to do so is untested.”

723. The brief provided to Mr Dowse considered that the attacks on UK forces in Basra were being conducted in part by elements of JAM and in part by renegade elements within the Iraqi Security Forces:

“The problem of renegade security forces requires an Iraqi solution that depends on tackling corruption and militia penetration of the Iraqi Security Forces and increasing the influence of the central government over the provincial government in Basra.”

³⁵⁰ Minute senior government official specialising in the Middle East to Dowse, 12 May 2006, ‘Situation in Basrah’.

724. In a video conference with President Bush on 16 May, Mr Blair said that the UK felt the Iraqi Government was beginning to “shape up well”.³⁵¹ The next step would be for the US and UK to present, jointly with Prime Minister Maliki, a strong programme for the government, including “a very clear forward perspective on security transition”.

725. The following week insurgents in MND(SE) detonated a command wire Improvised Explosive Device (IED).^{352,353} This was the first successful such attack in Iraq since December 2005 and the first instance of an IED of this type in MND(SE). Maj Gen Cooper observed that this reversion to an older form of technology represented a change in the insurgents’ tactics, possibly in response to MNF counter-IED advances.

726. On 20 May, Prime Minister Maliki presented his Cabinet (minus the Ministers for Interior, Security and Defence) to the Council of Representatives.³⁵⁴ All were approved.

727. Mr Patey described the Maliki government as a “genuine government of national unity”.³⁵⁵ Although it was, in his view, “not quite the technocratic powerhouse we hoped for”, he was clear that it included “a fair number of highly competent individuals in key positions”.

728. Gen Jackson visited Iraq from 15 to 18 May and observed:

“The key challenge is governance ...

“Yet even given a backdrop of good governance, the security challenges are still daunting ... With our understandable focus on the relatively peaceful MND(SE), it is easy to forget the extreme levels of violence that are common place in Baghdad and its environs ...

“Whilst there is no doubt that the US Military will do ‘whatever it takes’ to contain the security situation ... Lieutenant General Chiarelli [Commander of the Multi-National Corps – Iraq] remarked that another 50,000 troops would be needed to really improve security in Baghdad alone ... This is a precarious position to be in ...”³⁵⁶

729. Gen Jackson went on to describe a growing US frustration with perceived UK objectives:

“My final point from Baghdad is rather unpalatable but, given the strength with which it was put across to me and the fact that it has never been far from the surface on previous visits, I feel compelled to raise it here. The perception, right or wrong, in some – if not all – US military circles is that the UK is motivated more by the

³⁵¹ Letter Banner to Hayes, 16 May 2006, ‘Prime Minister’s VTC with President Bush, 16 May: Middle East issues’.

³⁵² An Improvised Explosive Device detonated by the user through a hard-wired electrical cable.

³⁵³ Minute Cooper, 17 May 2006, ‘Iraq: Update’ attaching ‘GOC MND(SE) – Southern Iraq update – 17 May 2006’.

³⁵⁴ *BBC News*, 20 May 2006, *Iraqi Parliament approves Cabinet*.

³⁵⁵ eGram 19337/06 Baghdad to FCO London, 22 May 2006, ‘Iraq: The New Government’.

³⁵⁶ Minute CGS to CDS, 22 May 2006, ‘CGS visit to Iraq: 15-18 May 06’.

short-term political gain of early withdrawal than by the long-term importance of mission accomplishment; and that, as a result, MND(SE)'s operational posture is too laissez faire and lacks initiative ...”

730. Gen Jackson warned:

“... if US opinion is allowed to drift down its current course, we risk sacrificing the grand strategic aim (the UK/US special relationship) of our whole engagement in Iraq, for the sake of short term domestic ... expediency.”

731. Looking ahead to the future, Gen Jackson continued:

“As ever, the campaign prognosis from Basra's perspective is somewhat rosier than that from Baghdad; though the difference is less marked than on previous visits ...

“The Governor of Basra aside, GOC MND(SE) was reasonably optimistic about political progress in the South East though much hinges on continuing Shia political coherence ...

“If the Shia fault-lines are torn asunder, which is not inconceivable, all bets are off.

“From the military perspective, MND(SE)'s very clear focus remains rightly upon transition in its four provinces. Muthanna is certainly ripe for Provincial Iraqi Control (PIC) ... In Basra, PIC is some way off, not only due to the malign influence of Governor Wahili, but also because the local IPS is particularly weak ... In Dhi Qar, progress towards PIC is steady ...

“Lastly, in Maysan, there continues to be a serious difference of US and UK opinion over transition ... it was clear that MNC-I do not yet believe that the appropriate conditions have been set ... On the other hand, GOC MND(SE)'s argument in favour of early transition in Maysan is compelling ... First, there is a level of expectation in Maysan that they will be granted PIC as a reward for good behaviour ... Should this aspiration not be met, we can expect a violent backlash. Second, and probably more persuasive, is GOC MND(SE)'s argument about diminishing returns ... Indeed, his view that *'standing still is going backwards'* suggests that we are approaching the stage in Maysan where our presence will be seen as part of the problem not the solution.”

732. Gen Jackson's visit report concluded:

“My final reflection from this visit ... is that even if we deliver the agenda of transition laid out by the campaign plan, what we will leave behind will not look much like strategic success. Ten years hence our strategy may fully bear fruit. But in the short term Iraq will most probably be characterised by spikes of violence, continuing sectarian strife, fragile governance and stuttering economic development ... I agree that we need to start shaping the views of domestic and political audiences accordingly.”

733. Reporting a discussion with Lt Gen Chiarelli on 17 May, Maj Gen Cooper elaborated his argument, pointing out that “if conditions were not right now, what would change in the timeframe envisaged for transition in the coming months?”³⁵⁷

734. On 22 May, the ISOG discussed how to draw together a strategic plan to deliver the UK’s objectives in Basra.³⁵⁸

735. The objectives were to ensure that Basra:

- was on track to being assessed as suitable for transition by the end of 2006 or early 2007;
- had mechanisms in place that were able to develop and deliver governance and security policies through institutions that were broadly acceptable to the local population and effectively linked to the Iraqi central authorities;
- enjoyed an improving level of basic services;
- was attracting appropriate investment and other economic assistance;
- had “levels of corruption, criminality and criminal and sectarian violence below the point at which they would seriously undermine governance, security and economic development and popular support for Iraqi governmental institutions”; and
- was not subject to malign Iranian influence.

736. The ISOG concluded that achieving these objectives required:

- continued engagement on SSR (see Section 12.1);
- a demonstration of grip by the Iraqi Government;
- strengthened provincial government;
- an Iraqi Government development strategy that supported Basra’s role;
- external investment;
- containing corruption to a level that was not undermining; and
- the UK to identify policies for security, governance and economic development that “can reasonably be expected to lead to strategic success”.

737. Ms Margaret Aldred, Deputy Head of the Overseas and Defence Secretariat in the Cabinet Office, wrote to UK officers and officials working in Basra on 23 May to seek their input on “how success can best be achieved”.³⁵⁹

³⁵⁷ Minute Cooper 17 May 2006, ‘GOC MND (SE) – Southern Iraq Update – 17 May 2006’.

³⁵⁸ [Letter Aldred to Lamb, 23 May 2006, ‘Basra: The Way Forward’ attaching Note, \[undated\], ‘Getting Basra Better: A Strategic Agenda for Action’.](#)

³⁵⁹ [Letter Aldred to Lamb, 23 May 2006, ‘Basra: The Way Forward’.](#)

738. Mr Blair visited Iraq on 22 May.³⁶⁰ He met President Talabani and, separately, Prime Minister Maliki.

739. Both men asked Mr Blair whether media reports that the UK was looking to withdraw from Iraq were accurate. Mr Blair responded that the UK:

“... had the same objective as the Iraqi government: to go when the latter’s forces were ready to take over.”

740. A joint statement issued by the two Prime Ministers at a press conference after their meeting said that the:

“... process of transition would start in some provinces in the coming months, and by the end of the year responsibility for much of Iraq’s territorial security should have been transferred to Iraqi control.”³⁶¹

741. The statement recorded agreement to continue efforts to widen the countries engaged in Iraq:

“The Iraqi Government for its part would provide a compelling vision of the way ahead showing how international assistance would complement its actions in pursuit of the common goal of a stable Iraq at peace with its neighbours.”

742. Mr Blair and Prime Minister Maliki had “discussed the situation in Basra and agreed to work closely on ensuring greater security and stability there”. A high-level Iraqi delegation would visit Basra soon.

743. After the press conference, it was reported that:

“Mr Maliki surprised Mr Blair’s team at the press conference by saying the UK handover to Iraqi forces could begin in June. British officials later corrected this, saying that the planned date was actually July.”³⁶²

744. Maj Gen Cooper reported that the statement had “aroused understandable interest in Provincial political circles” where it “certainly raised expectations”.³⁶³

³⁶⁰ Letter Banner to Siddiq, 22 May 2006, ‘Iraq: Prime Minister’s Meeting with Talabani’; Letter Banner to Siddiq, 22 May 2006, ‘Iraq: Prime Minister’s Meeting with Nouri al-Maliki’ attaching ‘Joint statement about the visit of the UK Prime Minister’.

³⁶¹ Letter Banner to Siddiq, 22 May 2006, ‘Iraq: Prime Minister’s Meeting with Nouri al-Maliki’ attaching ‘Joint statement about the visit of the UK Prime Minister’.

³⁶² *The Guardian*, 23 May 2006, *Troop pull-out from Iraq to be speeded up*.

³⁶³ Minute Cooper, 24 May 2006, ‘GOC MND(SE) – Southern Iraq Update – 24 May 2006’.

745. On the way back to the UK after the visit, Sir Nigel Sheinwald sent Mr Hadley a note for President Bush from Mr Blair.³⁶⁴ It said:

“I left Iraq, on balance, more optimistic not less ... The Government obviously has a real sense of mission. Not one [member of the government] ... said we should go now ... All want us to stay to get the job done. **If** we have a clear plan, properly executed and communicated to the Iraqi people, we will succeed.

“Now for the challenge: the nature of the insurgency is changing; we do not, on our own, have the force capability to defeat it; as the Sunni become convinced we are non-sectarian, they welcome it and conversely as the more extreme Shia come to the same conclusion, they don’t. Hence Basra becoming a problem. In addition, very simply put: the security is so bad in and around Baghdad for ordinary folk, that it stops improvement in services, we get blamed (in part) and people start looking to militias to protect them. Al Qaida kill Shia. Shia kill Sunni, and sectarian violence increases.”

746. Mr Blair set out five suggestions for a plan to draw together and focus effort in Iraq to address the “vicious spiral” described above:

- publishing a conditional timetable for withdrawal of the MNF;
- a “better, stronger ISF build-up”;
- prioritising Baghdad security and electricity production;
- doing deals with the insurgents to enter the political process; and
- shaming the international community into supporting the new Iraqi Government, through a big UN-led donor conference.

747. The day after leaving Iraq, Sir Nigel Sheinwald wrote to Mr Straw’s Principal Private Secretary to set out Mr Blair’s view of priorities for Iraq, which mirrored the suggestions he sent to President Bush.³⁶⁵ The key elements included:

- Drawing up a **timetable with conditions** setting out the potential path to MNF withdrawal. This should address the desire of Iraqis for clarity over two issues: that the MNF will stay until Iraqi security forces are capable of acting independently; and that the MNF will go once that has been achieved. Any timetable should include dates, but each one should be conditional on ISF build-up of capability and overall violence levels ... **Action: The Prime Minister will discuss with President Bush in Washington. Thereafter MOD/BE Baghdad/FCO.**
- To ensure improved **ISF build-up**. We need to make sure that Iraqi forces really are capable of dealing with the threat, including from AQ ... The Prime Minister heard a number of disquieting comments on this score from Iraqis and others.

³⁶⁴ Letter Sheinwald to Hadley, 22 May 2006, ‘Iraq’, [attaching Note TB \[Blair to Bush\], 22 May 2006, ‘Note’](#).

³⁶⁵ [Letter Sheinwald to Hayes, 23 May 2006, ‘Iraq’](#).

We therefore need a candid analysis of the gap between current capabilities and future requirements ... and a **plan** for closing the gap. **Action: MOD**

- Backing the Baghdad security and electricity plans ... **Action: MOD/DFID.**
- Turning around the situation in **Basra**, following the Prime Minister’s private conversation with Maliki. This will require
 - a political understanding with parties representing the spectrum of political opinion there;
 - a package of UK and international reconstruction assistance;
 - a larger role and presence for the Iraqi forces, working alongside UK forces.
- The Prime Minister has asked that a senior individual be tasked with taking this process forward in Basra, working with designated interlocutors from the Iraqi government. **Action: FCO/MOD/DFID/BCG Basra. The Prime Minister hopes that the Defence Secretary will personally supervise the military aspects of this.**
- Promoting **international support** for the new government ... **Action: FCO.** The Prime Minister would like the Foreign Secretary to personally direct this work ...
- Stepping up our **outreach** activities to both Sunni and Shia militants, to ensure that they are given opportunity and incentives to participate in the political process. **Action: FCO.”**

748. Sir Nigel’s letter alerted members of DOP(I) that Mr Blair was likely to want to discuss these issues when next they met.

749. After leaving Baghdad, Mr Blair visited the US to make a speech at Georgetown University in which he called for reform of the UN. On 25 May he met President Bush for talks on a range of foreign policy issues at the White House.³⁶⁶

750. On withdrawing troops from Iraq, Mr Blair thought that the way forward was to “give an indication of our intentions, but make sure they were conditions based”. Mr Blair said it was important that there was no hint of “cutting and running”. Security and electricity supply were key, but above all the momentum must be kept going.

751. Mr Blair proposed a conference in the autumn to get support from the international community for the effort in Iraq. There was “a prospect of a new deal for Iraq, including withdrawal of the MNF”.

752. Mr Blair and President Bush held a joint press conference in which Mr Blair told reporters he had left Iraq “thinking the challenge is still immense” but he was “more certain than ever that we should rise to it”.³⁶⁷

³⁶⁶ Letter Phillipson to Hayes, 26 May 2006, ‘Prime Minister’s Talks with President Bush: 25 May’.

³⁶⁷ CNN, 26 May 2006, *Bush, Blair: Iraq war not as smooth as hoped.*

753. DOP(I) met on 25 May.³⁶⁸ Mr Blair told the meeting that the UK should focus on:

- the development of the Iraqi Security Forces;
- seeing progress in Basra; and
- supporting the Iraqi Government's efforts to restore security and electricity provision in Baghdad.

754. In relation to Basra, Mr Blair said that “we needed clarity over our troops' activities. They should not simply be in Basra to provide a target or justification for the activities of violent groups.”

755. Ministers agreed that the action points set out in Sir Nigel Sheinwald's letter of 23 May should be pursued.

756. Prime Minister Maliki and Vice President Tariq Hashemi visited Basra on 31 May.³⁶⁹ Maj Gen Cooper described it as “an entirely Iraqi affair, with MNF and diplomatic personnel not involved”.

757. During his visit, Prime Minister Maliki declared a state of emergency in Basra, lasting a month.³⁷⁰

758. *The Guardian* reported that:

“He denounced a series of killings and kidnappings that Sunni religious leaders have blamed on Shia-run death squads, saying: ‘We will beat with an iron fist on the heads of gangs who are manipulating security’.”

³⁶⁸ Minutes, 25 May 2006, DOP(I) meeting.

³⁶⁹ Minute Cooper, 1 June 2006, ‘MND(SE) – Southern Iraq Update – 1 June 2006’.

³⁷⁰ *The Guardian*, 31 May 2006, *State of emergency for Basra*.