

## SECTION 9.6

### 27 JUNE 2007 TO APRIL 2008

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## Introduction

**1.** This Section addresses:

- the decision to withdraw UK forces from Basra Palace, including the development of the negotiations to ensure a safe exit and UK plans for the future deployment of its troops;
- the UK's role in the transition to Provincial Iraqi Control (PIC) in Basra; and
- the UK's relationship with the Iraqi Government, including steps to safeguard the legal status of UK forces, and responses to the Charge of the Knights in Basra.

**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 2007: The Brown Government

**4.** Mr Gordon Brown succeeded Mr Blair as Prime Minister on 27 June 2007. In his new Cabinet he appointed Mr David Miliband as Foreign Secretary and Mr Douglas Alexander as International Development Secretary. Mr Des Browne remained in post as Defence Secretary. Baroness Scotland became the Attorney General.

**5.** Mr Brown also reorganised the structure of Cabinet Committees, as is usually the case when a new Prime Minister takes office. Iraq fell within the remit of the Committee on National Security, International Relations and Defence (NSID), and specifically its Overseas and Defence Sub-Committee (NSID(OD)).

**6.** Mr Brown spoke to President Bush on the telephone shortly after he arrived at No.10.<sup>1</sup> Mr Brown said that he believed there were a number of ways forward in Iraq and looked forward to further discussions with the President, including by continuing Mr Blair's practice of holding regular video conferences.

**7.** Mr Brown told the Inquiry that he had talked to President Bush both before and after becoming Prime Minister about the UK's future plans for Iraq, making clear the commitment to "finish the job" in Basra:

"Over time we would be reducing the number of troops but only as the Iraqis were capable of taking control of law and order ... And he was perfectly satisfied with what we were doing ... We had a series of phone calls as well during the summer of 2007 as we developed this new strategy ..."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Letter Henderson to Hayes, 27 June 2007, 'Prime Minister's Phone Call with President Bush'.

<sup>2</sup> Public hearing, 5 March 2010, page 153.

**8.** On 27 June, at the request of the MOD, the Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC) considered the state of the Iraqi Security Forces (see Section 12.1 for more detail on Security Sector Reform).<sup>3</sup>

**9.** The JIC's Key Judgements included:

"I. Work is under way in Prime Minister Maliki's government to develop a national security strategy, but it is unlikely to make a difference to Iraq's security as long as the government remains factionalised and fails to make progress on national reconciliation ...

"II. Policy incoherence is exacerbated by a plethora of competing and ineffectual committees operating with little central co-ordination ...

"III. The army continues to develop slowly ... [Quality] varies markedly between units and there are still serious systemic problems: leadership is weak; under-manning remains common; logistic support is poor; many units lack key items of equipment.

"IV. The local Iraqi Police Service is at best ineffective. In many areas the police are synonymous with militia or insurgents ... Corruption is endemic. Many police are probably unreformable."

**10.** The JIC also considered that in the "likely event of serious intra-Shia fighting the police would probably take sides ... and the army would try to remain on the sidelines". In Anbar, locally-raised Sunni tribal units had been successful in reducing violence, but it was "unrelenting" in Baghdad, Diyala and other mixed provinces around the capital.

**11.** The JIC assessed that: "In the absence of a significant reduction in the threat, the Iraqi security forces will be unable to cope" without combat support from the Multi-National Force (MNF) well beyond February 2008.

**12.** On 29 June, Mr Brown's Private Secretary provided him with an update on Iraq.<sup>4</sup> Attached to it was a note described as:

"... draft new language, which you may want to use at PMQs [Prime Minister's Questions] ... which aims to strike a realistic, more downbeat, tone on the situation in Iraq and to put the onus for positive change firmly on the Iraqi Government."

**13.** The update characterised Iraqi politics as "tense and obstructed" and complicated by tensions between the Sunni and other groups.

**14.** In the South, the note said, the situation remained "difficult" but the appointment of a new police chief, Major General Jalil, and a new head of the Basra Operations Command, General Mohan, was good news.

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<sup>3</sup> [JIC Assessment, 27 June 2007, 'Iraqi Security Forces and Structures: Quantity not Quality'](#).

<sup>4</sup> Minute Banner to Prime Minister, 29 June 2007, 'Iraq – Update'.

**15.** The Private Secretary reported concern within the military “that the UK Battlegroup deployed in Maysan province, primarily to cover the huge border with Iran, is not achieving any military effect”. Officials were working on a paper “on the issues around (and implications of) moving out of the Basra Palace site, and security transition in the South”.

**16.** At Cabinet on 29 June, Mr Browne described three separate incidents involving British forces in Basra the previous day and observed that British forces were facing the brunt of violence in South-East Iraq.<sup>5</sup> Cabinet expressed sympathy for the soldiers and their families.

**17.** Mr Dominic Asquith, British Ambassador to Iraq, reported on 29 June that Sunni distrust of the political process was becoming increasingly focused on Prime Minister Maliki personally.<sup>6</sup> Despite this “atmosphere of mistrust”, discussions were continuing among the parties on restructuring the government around an Executive Council (consisting of the President, two Vice Presidents and the Prime Minister) and a moderate front involving five partners.<sup>7</sup>

**18.** Mr Asquith noted that there was a disconnect between the US and Iraqi approaches to the political process. Iraqis were arguing that the parties needed time to build trust while the US saw that process halting progress towards achieving their most pressing benchmarks: political agreement to the draft Hydrocarbons Law<sup>8</sup> and revenue sharing arrangements. Mr Asquith commented:

“Managing this disconnect will require maintaining the focus on discrete elements of the programme that might be salvageable:

- the benchmark legislation, including a return to the de-Ba’athification draft, which I shall be discussing further with the Americans;
- the constitutional review, on which we are in discussion with the CRC [Constitutional Review Committee] chairs ...;
- continuing the schedule of Executive Council meetings with the aim of securing agreement at least on how it will operate;
- proceeding with preparations for provincial elections.”

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<sup>5</sup> Cabinet Conclusions, 29 June 2007.

<sup>6</sup> eGram 28011/07 Baghdad to FCO London, 29 June 2007, ‘Iraq: Weekly Assessment’.

<sup>7</sup> The Kurdish PUK and KDP, the Shia Dawa and ISCI and the Sunni IIP.

<sup>8</sup> This would describe the governance and development of the energy sector in Iraq.

### Terrorist incidents in London and Glasgow

On 29 June 2007, two cars containing gas canisters, explosives and nails were found in central London, one outside a busy nightclub on Haymarket.<sup>9</sup>

The following day, two men drove a blazing car into the main terminal building at Glasgow airport.<sup>10</sup> The airport was evacuated and flights suspended.

After a meeting of COBR, the Government's emergency committee, Mr Brown raised the UK threat level for international terrorism to 'Critical', its highest level.

SIS5 told the Inquiry that one threat to the UK came from people, from a range of backgrounds, who had been radicalised and motivated by what they had seen reported about Iraq.<sup>11</sup> In SIS5's view, the attacks in London and Glasgow in June 2007 fell into that category.

## July 2007

**19.** The security situation in Baghdad remained a cause for concern. On 1 July, Mr Asquith observed that, while the number of some events (for example, suicide attacks) had gone down, "public perceptions from polls and our own informal soundings ... remains sharply negative".<sup>12</sup>

**20.** Lieutenant General Graeme Lamb, the Senior British Military Representative – Iraq (SBMR-I) reported that there was "much relief" that a planned march, organised by supporters of Muqtada al-Sadr, had been called off.<sup>13</sup> Lt Gen Lamb considered that, had the march gone ahead, there would have been a "major sectarian clash" the impact of which might have been a "terminal challenge" to the Iraqi Government and to "the ability of the coalition forces to affect the outcome". Work was in hand to "understand exactly how and whose political pressure was brought to bear" in calling off the march.

**21.** Mr Jon Day, MOD Director General Operational Policy from August 2007 to October 2008, told the Inquiry that:

"... there were contacts between the UK and the Sadrists in Basra from the spring of 2007, and that as a result of this continuing dialogue, a series of – I think I prefer to use the word "understandings" were reached with core elements of the Sadrist JAM [Jaysh a-Mahdi] militias in Basra. These understandings ran from mid-June 2007 and they therefore pre-dated and were separate from the national JAM cease-fire in late August."<sup>14</sup>

<sup>9</sup> *The Guardian*, 1 July 2007, *Terror threat 'critical' as Glasgow attacked*.

<sup>10</sup> *BBC News*, 30 June 2007, *Blazing car crashes into airport*.

<sup>11</sup> Private hearing, 2010, pages 43-44.

<sup>12</sup> eGram 28201/07 Baghdad to FCO London, 1 July 2007, 'Iraq: Baghdad Security Plan'.

<sup>13</sup> Minute Lamb to CDS, 1 July 2007, 'SBMR-I Weekly Report (259) 1 July 07'.

<sup>14</sup> Public hearing, 6 January 2010, page 32.

**22.** Mr Day considered that the UK had a number of motives for entering into a dialogue with JAM:

- to contribute to the coalition’s overall outreach effort to groups involved in violence, in line with what was happening with Sunni groups further north;
- to encourage mainstream JAM (who it was believed were “looking for a way out of violence”) to move towards a commitment to democracy, particularly with the provincial elections expected in 2008;
- to drive a wedge between the mainstream JAM core (who were nationalists and believed to be “reconcilable”) and the largely Iranian-sponsored JAM Special Groups (who were following an Iranian agenda);
- to encourage a reduction in the level of violence, to make time for the Iraqi Army to develop its capability to enable it to confront the unreconciled militias successfully; and
- to reduce the threat to UK and other coalition forces.

**23.** The process of seeking Ministerial agreement for continued dialogue with an individual (JAM1) was interrupted by the formation of the new government (see Section 9.5), and had to be re-started in early July.

**24.** On 2 July, an official working closely with the military reported:

“HMA [the British Ambassador to Iraq] and SBMR-I ... judge that US and Gol [Government of Iraq] will reject the deal.

“To summarise a lengthy and detailed discussion: SBMR-I repeated that he could see some of the opportunities offered by [JAM1]. As such he would like to be able to write supportive comments on a submission. But as the submission currently stood – he would have to comment that he did not believe that either the Gol nor US would support the proposal. He was concerned that this would lead to Ministers not agreeing the submission, and would like to avoid this if possible.”<sup>15</sup>

**25.** Although he could see the benefits of reducing indirect fire (IDF) and allowing transition to PIC to happen, US views reportedly remained a major concern for Lt Gen Lamb because:

“... such a deal in the South would represent an about-turn of the policy that had only months ago convinced them to establish [another operational body]. In short the suggestion of a no-strike agreement in the South was at loggerheads with the active targeting policy conducted against Iranian proxies by MNF-I [Multi-National Force – Iraq] and MNC-I [Multi-National Corps – Iraq] elsewhere in Iraq.”

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<sup>15</sup> Minute official working closely with the military, 2 July 2007, ‘New [NAME OF OPERATION] Submission: [...]’.

**26.** Lt Gen Lamb was reported to be concerned that “we might be giving up broader strategic interests for the future of Basra” and that this would be seen as “a hollow victory, gained for fixed British rather than strategic interests”. He therefore suggested either holding the submission back and continuing discussions with JAM1 to better define the options, or re-writing it to focus on broaching the issue with the US and Iraqi Government as an initial objective.

**27.** The official concluded:

“In sum, both HMA and SBMR-I believe the deal struck needs to be tougher; that it is not clear to them to what extent control of Basra will be handed over to JAM; that there will be serious reservations over the release of ‘red’ detainees without a better deal being struck, and that neither [General David] PETRAEUS [Commanding General MNF-I] or the Gol will agree to the proposal as it currently stands.”

**28.** On 3 July, Mr Simon McDonald, Mr Brown’s Foreign Policy Adviser, spoke to Mr Stephen Hadley, the US National Security Advisor, by telephone.<sup>16</sup> Mr McDonald said that Mr Brown’s “analysis of the situation on the ground would be tough; he was likely to stress the importance of Maliki and his government improving their performance”.

**29.** Air Marshal Stuart Peach, Chief of Defence Intelligence, briefed the Chiefs of Staff on 3 July that it was “unlikely that ISF [Iraqi Security Forces] would have sufficient capacity to assume responsibility for security across Iraq by February 2008, in accordance with current plans”.<sup>17</sup>

**30.** Mr Brown’s Private Secretary advised the Iraq Senior Officials Group on 3 July that he had “indicated that he would stick broadly to the strategy outlined by Mr Blair in February”, but was keen that there should not be a significant gap between the handover of Basra Palace and transition to PIC.<sup>18</sup> Mr Brown was currently occupied with domestic and counter-terrorism issues but would address strategies for both Iraq and Afghanistan soon.

**31.** Mr Brown told the Inquiry that his focus was on the area of Iraq for which the UK was responsible:

“... my determination was that we created the context in which Iraqis, that is the people of Basra, had more control over their own affairs. So we had to build up the training of the Iraqi forces and the training of the Iraqi police, and we did that ...

“Then we had to make sure that local government elections took place, so that there was some stability ... And then we had to do something about economic development ... So through ... 2007 ... we were planning what we called ‘overwatch’, where we would move from what was called ‘tactical overwatch’,

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<sup>16</sup> Letter McDonald to Hayes, 3 July 2007, ‘Conversation with US National Security Adviser’.

<sup>17</sup> Minutes, 3 July 2007, Chiefs of Staff meeting.

<sup>18</sup> Minute Cabinet Office [junior official] to McDonald, 3 July 2007, ‘Iraq Senior Officials Group’.

where we were there as the forces but Iraqis were involved in the maintenance of stability and law and order; and then we would move to what we called 'operational overwatch', which gave the Iraqis far more control themselves of their own affairs; and we moved then to 'strategic overwatch', which is what we eventually did, where we stood back, the Iraqis had control of their own security but we had a re-intervention capability if it was at all necessary."<sup>19</sup>

**32.** Air Chief Marshal Jock Stirrup, Chief of the Defence Staff, visited Baghdad and Basra from 1 to 3 July.<sup>20</sup> In Basra, Major General Jonathan Shaw, General Officer Commanding Multi-National Division (South-East) (MND(SE)), told ACM Stirrup that he was confident the conditions set for PIC had been met; there was little military advantage in retaining a presence at Basra Palace with the exception of retaining a base for strike operations and for situational awareness. Maj Gen Shaw therefore advocated relocating to Basra Air Station at "the earliest practicable point". ACM Stirrup agreed, observing that only "in extremis" would UK forces then re-enter the city, and then only in support of the Iraqi Army.

**33.** Gen Petraeus and Ambassador Ryan Crocker, US Ambassador to Iraq, remained "circumspect" on the timing of PIC in Basra. They considered that there remained "significant problems" associated with "unstable politics" and "JAM infiltration" and advocated the need for "a few 'wins'" before formal transfer.

**34.** ACM Stirrup told them that the violence in Basra was "all about money and power, rather than sectarianism" and he considered that UK forces vacating the city centre could undermine the level of Iranian influence in the city. He argued that:

"PIC represented a catch 22 situation in which it was difficult to demonstrate the ability of the provincial authorities to assume responsibility for security without having handed over responsibility."

**35.** Mr Robert Tinline, Deputy British Consul General in Basra, briefed ACM Stirrup that the UK had "done as much as we can in Basra" and reported that although General Mohan wanted UK forces out of Basra City he did not want full PIC.

**36.** Lieutenant General Nicholas Houghton, Chief of Joint Operations, briefed the Chiefs of Staff on 3 July that General Mohan:

"... appeared to have formed a clear, objective and accurate assessment of the security and social situation in Basra, which chimed with the UK's position. He believed that the MNF-I presence distorted the loyalties of Basrawis and supported Provincial Iraqi Control (PIC) as a precursor to turning Iraqi nationalism against malign Iranian influence."<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Public hearing, 5 March 2010, pages 151-152.

<sup>20</sup> [Minute Kyd to PS/SofS \[MOD\], 5 July 2007, 'CDS Visit to Iraq 1-3 Jul 07'](#).

<sup>21</sup> Minutes, 3 July 2007, Chiefs of Staff meeting.

**37.** In his weekly update on 5 July, Maj Gen Shaw reported on the meeting between General Mohan and ACM Stirrup, who had concluded that “this was an individual with a plan” and that it was mainly coherent and well considered.<sup>22</sup>

**38.** Maj Gen Shaw explained:

“Mohan’s vision regarding Shia reconciliation cites MNF as a distorting factor for Iraqi nationalist loyalties ... Mohan is quite resolute in what he believes is the solution: MNF to adopt a *de facto* PIC overwatch posture, moving out of the city but able to provide support and training as required. This will allow him to harness the motivation and mindset of the fundamentally nationalist population, a violent minority of which is currently distracted by the MNF ‘occupiers’ and mark those who work for MNF as collaborators. Mohan recognises that security in Basra cannot be achieved by military means alone and wishes to focus on Shia reconciliation with an aspiration to utilise Shia Iraqi Nationalism to drive a wedge between mainstream/nationalist JAM and militant JAM, exposing its Iranian proxies and tackling the longer term Iranian threat ... his focus on the will of the people is one I fully support ...”

**39.** But Maj Gen Shaw cautioned:

“What is unclear is how ... we will retain situational awareness should we, as he suggests, leave the city. Until PIC our *de jure* responsibility for security remains; keeping ISF as the first line of response is compatible with moving out of Basra Palace, and we have, as directed since February, successfully de-linked PIC and BP [Basra Palace] in the US and GOI planning, the UK driver being strategic sustainment. To re-link PIC and BP on the basis of the tactical advantages of a BP presence risks compromising our stated strategic position and might provide a US hook for our posture that we might regret ... The PJCC [Provincial Joint Co-ordination Centre] however provides us with situation awareness ... of the city, something I am loathe to give up as long as *de jure* PIC responsibility remains. Nonetheless today my preference is to move from the PJCC and BP at the same time. But this is fluid ... This whole Basra posture is a bargaining chip to get Mohan to support Basra PIC in August. For wider reasons I am prepared to accept the risk of security responsibility for Basra without troops in BP/PJCC for two months. Longer than that and the risk of my successor being exposed rises; in this case, strategic top cover might be required to protect our reputation with the US ...”

**40.** Maj Gen Shaw reported his assessment that for the past month Basra had met the conditions for PIC set by Lieutenant General Raymond Odierno, Commander MNC-I. He considered that this argued strongly for Basra being granted PIC in July, though he had picked up some US and Iraqi concern about this timeline:

“The Iraqis, having finally taken Basra security seriously, may wish to see new security structures ... For the US, I sense that a reluctance to take risk, and a desire

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<sup>22</sup> Minute Shaw to CJO, 5 July 2007, ‘GOC HQ MND(SE) – Southern Iraq Update – 05 July 2007’.

to shore up the coalition through to September looms large. Neither argument is entirely rational and all UK levers will need to be applied to persuade them their fears are unfounded and that it is in the interests of GOI and US to grant PIC to Basra.”

**41.** Maj Gen Shaw told the Inquiry that:

“Our attempt to choreograph the granting of PIC and the withdrawal of troops and the handing over of Basra Palace just crashed and burned because of course we didn’t own the turf ... We owned the troop levels, and I was still trying to hang on to that. The Iraqis suddenly owned Basra Palace, and then it was the Iraqis and Americans that owned PIC. That sort of confusion of C2 [command and control] meant that choreographing those three was very difficult.”<sup>23</sup>

**42.** On 4 July, Mr Brown answered the first set of Prime Minister’s Questions of his term in office.<sup>24</sup> Asked about whether he would set a timetable for withdrawing UK troops from Iraq, Mr Brown said that it would be:

“... wrong to set a timetable at this stage. What we have done is reduce the number of troops from 44,000 to 5,500 and move from combat to overwatch in three provinces of Iraq. What we await is a decision to move to overwatch in the fourth province of Basra, but we have obligations, which we have accepted, both to the United Nations and the Iraqi Government, and we are not going to break those obligations at this stage.”

**43.** On 4 July, a senior official specialising in the Middle East sent advice to Mr David Richmond, FCO Director General Defence and Intelligence, for onward submission to Mr Miliband.<sup>25</sup> It was copied to Mr Desmond Bowen, MOD Policy Director, and Vice Admiral Charles Style, Deputy Chief of the Defence Staff (Commitments).

**44.** The senior official wrote that he sought:

“... authority for HMG officials to discuss an opportunity to bring about a reduction in violence from Jaysh al-Mahdi (JAM) in Basra, with the Government of Iraq (GoI) and General Petraeus, the (US) Commanding General Multi-National Force Iraq (CG MNF-I). Subject to GoI and US views, [UK officials] would aim to negotiate an initial month-long reduction in violence from JAM on satisfactory terms and, consulting continuously as appropriate, would then explore options for extending this reduction in violence and folding it into broader political engagement with JAM and the Sadrist movement.

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<sup>23</sup> Private hearing, 21 June 2010, pages 35-36.

<sup>24</sup> House of Commons, *Official Report*, 4 July 2007, column 953.

<sup>25</sup> Minute senior official specialising in the Middle East to Richmond, 4 July 2007, ‘[NAME OF OPERATION]: Negotiations with JAM in Basrah’.

“Clearance to proceed is sought urgently, as the opportunity for negotiations with JAM will not remain open indefinitely.”

**45.** The advice was not explicit about what would constitute “satisfactory terms” for such an agreement, but recorded that JAM1 had “insisted” on the release of two detainees at the start of the month and asked for suspension of MND(SE) strike operations for the duration. He was likely to seek the release of two further detainees at the end of the month but would be given “no guarantee on these releases at the outset”. The advice did not say what level of reduction in JAM violence would be considered to be satisfactory.

**46.** The senior official recommended that the discussions should proceed. He reiterated the background information provided by a colleague on 20 June about the trial cease-fire and subsequent discussions (Section 9.5), and reported views from UK officials in Iraq:

“From the local perspective, GOC MND(SE) and HMCG [the British Consul General] Basra strongly support moving to the next phase (i.e. the release of the two ‘orange’ detainees and initiation of a further, month-long mutual reduction in violence). HMA and SBMR-I, from their Baghdad perspective, understand the attractions of engagement with JAM1 but believe that these negotiations need to be considered in the wider coalition and Iraq context. In particular, they are concerned that the Gol could be suspicious, and that General Petraeus would want to consider how to integrate this proposal with wider coalition efforts at engagement, which have been directed mainly at Sunni elements but include Shia parties and groups. SBMR-I states that any suspension of strike activity in Basra Province and the release of the two ‘red’ detainees would require General Petraeus’ consent (since US forces in reality operate independently in MND(SE)). SBMR-I warns that General Petraeus would be unlikely to agree to suspend US strike operations in MND(SE). SBMR-I and HMA also suggest ... drive a harder bargain with JAM1, limiting the cease-fire to Basra City (rather than the whole Province), and insisting he take responsibility for stopping EFP [Explosively Formed Projectile] attacks as well as mortar and rocket attacks (which otherwise would require MND(SE) strike action in response).”

**47.** The senior official explained that if Mr Miliband agreed, Lt Gen Lamb would brief Gen Petraeus and the Iraqi Government. Subject to their views, and “further negotiation” with JAM1 on terms, the two “orange” detainees would be released to trigger the month-long reduction of violence. During that month there would be discussion of further detainee releases. The senior official wrote that conduct of the discussion would be agreed between GOC MND(SE), SBMR-I, the British Consul General in Basra and the British Ambassador to Iraq, and that Mr Richmond, Mr Bowen and VAdm Style in London would consult Ministers as appropriate.

**48.** Risks of the proposal were that the Iraqi Government would reject and react badly to it (judged to be “significant”); that Gen Petraeus would reject it; that divisions within JAM could be used as an excuse for continued attacks in Basra; that the talks would prompt attacks from other groups, who saw them as a threat to their position in Basra; and that

the media might find out and present the arrangements as a symptom of weakness in MND(SE).

**49.** The senior official reported that Mr Asquith had commented:

“The political context for securing GoI and US agreement to this proposal is unhelpful. Maliki’s relationship with Muqtada and JAM is at an all time low ... Meanwhile, Tawafuq’s suspension of participation in cabinet threatens the end to Maliki’s government, though this may take time to unravel.

“As for the US side, they remain convinced we are looking for a quick exit from Basra. They expect us to respect the conditionality required for PIC but will be likely to see this proposal as an attempt by us to create ‘security stability’, for just enough time to justify withdrawal.

“In the case of Anbar/Sunni tribal engagement, Petraeus wants MORE than cease-fires ... He is looking for evidence of a commitment to support the political process. Moreover he would not see the deal with [JAM1] as being analogous to Anbar, where the locals are actively collaborating with the US against the ‘bad guys’. He will be very aware, also, of the risk that the [JAM1] releases will merely move out of MND(SE) AOR [Area of Responsibility] to attack US forces elsewhere.

“That is why I will continue to argue for tougher conditions in the proposed deal with [JAM1]:

- a. The coalition should additionally make clear that strike operations will continue against JAM where evidence exists that individuals are about to/ planning to commit IDF and EFP attacks.
- b. We should be very careful to avoid giving [JAM1] any grounds to expect the release of the ‘red’ detainees as an inevitable part of this deal. We should therefore say that in circumstances in which attacks halt against coalition forces chances of releases obviously significantly improve.”

**50.** Lt Gen Lamb was reported to have said:

“I support the continuation of an engagement dialogue with [JAM1], with a view to exploring opportunities to reduce the level of violence in Basra, and indirect attacks in particular. The proposal as it stands seeks a level of support from GOI and MNF-I which should not be assumed at this early stage, however; furthermore it suggests a level of commitment to [JAM1] which is unreasonable, I believe, given the uncertainty of [JAM1]’s authority across a most complicated and multi-militia environment ... The Iranian influence, interference and control are cause for continued concern; thus a restriction on manoeuvre and strike operations at tactical, operational and strategic levels would be unwelcome at this stage.”

**51.** On 5 July, Mr Richmond annotated the advice:

“As the comments from HMA Baghdad and ... General Lamb ... make clear, this may well raise difficult issues in our relations with the US and the Iraqi Government. But you would only be authorising discussion at this stage (and MOD officials have confirmed that the Defence Secretary is keen to press ahead). I therefore recommend that you agree to the proposal. Nigel Casey, the Acting Director for Iraq, concurs.”<sup>26</sup>

**52.** On 6 July, Mr Miliband’s Private Secretary wrote to the senior official who wrote the 4 July advice to say that Mr Miliband agreed that the discussion should “proceed as proposed”.<sup>27</sup>

**53.** Mr Brown spoke to Prime Minister Maliki on 5 July.<sup>28</sup> He welcomed the recent security appointments in Basra and hoped that they would pave the way for further progress towards transition to Iraqi control of security. Mr Brown said that he would like to discuss the scope for economic initiatives (see Section 10.2).

**54.** Prime Minister Maliki said that he hoped it would be possible to reduce the burden on UK forces and for Iraqi forces to take the lead within three months. He hoped that UK forces would support this and not seek to take the lead themselves. It was important for the new Iraqi military commander in Basra to establish his authority, not least because Iraqi forces would soon have to take action against “troublemakers” there.

**55.** The weekly Iraq update for Mr Brown on 6 July set out the range of views on transition to PIC in Basra:

“Maliki seemed content with a target date of September, which would allow greater progress on Iraqi Security Forces’ readiness. US Ambassador Crocker and General Petraeus were very negative about early transition to PIC, without a significant effort to embed new Iraqi security strictures and visible political progress.

“Both General Mohan and ... Mowaffaq Al-Rubaie [Iraqi National Security Adviser] focused on the advantages of early handover.”<sup>29</sup>

**56.** The update also said:

“There have been some signs ... of a ‘cease-fire’ in Basra. But this can be overdone. [Government officials working closely with the military] and MND(SE) have been talking for some time to ... [JAM1], about agreeing a ‘cease-fire’ in return for limited prisoner releases ... There has been intelligence chatter to the effect that this is now

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<sup>26</sup> Minute senior official specialising in the Middle East to Richmond/Miliband, 4 July 2007, ‘[NAME OF OPERATION]: Negotiations with JAM in Basrah’ including manuscript comment Richmond.

<sup>27</sup> Letter Hayes to senior official specialising in the Middle East, 6 July 2007, ‘[NAME OF OPERATION]: Negotiations with JAM in Basrah’.

<sup>28</sup> Letter Banner to Hickey, 5 July 2007, ‘Conversation with Iraqi Prime Minister’.

<sup>29</sup> Minute Banner to Brown, 6 July 2007, ‘Iraq – Weekly Update’.

in place. But equally, senior JAM figures do not feel bound by it or him. Although attack levels dipped slightly over the period dealt with in the reporting this could be a normal statistical variation and there have been some particularly significant and well-planned attacks ...”

**57.** On 8 July, Lt Gen Lamb reported that there were increasing signs of progress in Anbar province, where the Sunni “Awakening” was gaining momentum, and slowly shifting the security situation against Al Qaida in Iraq (AQ-I).<sup>30</sup> Lt Gen Lamb commented that the engagement was significant, but there remained risks for each of the four partners engaged in the process:

- For the Iraqi Government, there were concerns about being able to control locally-employed security forces, of which a large proportion were Sunni; the question of whether, and how, to integrate the “Awakening” movement within the Iraqi Security Forces was to remain a matter of debate in the months ahead (see Section 12.1).
- The tribes and former Sunni insurgents wanted to be sure that the Iraqi Government would support them and that the MNF would remain in Iraq long enough to reduce the threat from AQ-I, at least to a point that AQ would be unable to return in any strength.
- There was a risk for the MNC-I of being fixated by short-term gains and failing to manage the longer-term expectations of the tribal forces being raised.
- More widely for the coalition, there was concern that the developments in Anbar might lead to federalism or too great a degree of provincial independence, creating a risk that Iraq would fragment.

**58.** On 8 July, Mr Asquith reported that he had raised the renewal of the UN Security Council resolution governing the coalition’s activity in Iraq with Mr Hoshyar Zebari, Iraqi Foreign Minister, and Vice President Adel Abdul Mehdi.<sup>31</sup>

**59.** Mr Zebari said the Iraqi Government would want to include in that resolution “a commitment to the start of a coalition drawdown and the perspective of long-term security arrangements with the coalition”.

**60.** Vice President Mehdi said the problem with resolution 1723 (2006) was “the limits it imposed on Gol authority and Iraqi sovereignty”. Another way would have to be found of giving coalition forces cover for operations in Iraq.

**61.** Mr Asquith wrote that he would work with the US to press for substantive talks by August.

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<sup>30</sup> Minute Lamb to CDS, 8 July 2007, ‘SBMR-I Weekly Report (260) 8 July 07’.

<sup>31</sup> eGram 29226/07 Baghdad to FCO London, 8 July 2007, ‘Iraq: Update on Renewal of UNSCR’.

**62.** Mr Brown discussed Iraq with President Bush by video link on 9 July.<sup>32</sup> Mr Brown commented that the Iraqi Government was making slow progress. Faster action was needed on the Hydrocarbons Law and on “democratisation”. Mr Brown indicated his intention to talk to Prime Minister Maliki regularly, and that he hoped to persuade him to work with the Executive Group.

**63.** Mr McDonald told the Iraq Strategy Group (ISG) on 9 July that contacts with the US indicated that they recognised there would be a need to move from a combat to a support role following the Congressional assessment (see Section 9.5).<sup>33</sup> Mr Brown’s instincts were reported to be “to keep close to the US”.

**64.** The ISG also discussed a paper on leaving Basra Palace. The question of when departure should happen was not resolved, but the Group concluded that “ideally, there should not be a large gap between leaving Basra Palace and moving to PIC”.

**65.** Mr McDonald told the ISG that NSID(OD) was provisionally scheduled to meet for the first time on 19 July.

**66.** Lt Gen Houghton reported to the Chiefs of Staff on 10 July that the number of incidents in MND(SE) had reduced from 123 to 85, of which 58 were attacks against MNF-I and 83 were in Basra.<sup>34</sup> Although IDF was the most prevalent form of attack, the threat from Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) on mobile patrols and strike operations was more dangerous and caused the most casualties.

**67.** The Chiefs of Staff noted that Maj Gen Shaw:

“... now considered that the issue of force posture in Basra should be de-coupled from the timeline for transition to PIC. Relocating from Basra Palace and the Provincial Joint Command Centre would degrade the granularity of our situational awareness, reducing our ability to conduct strike operations or intervene to provide security. However, such contingencies were to be conducted only *in extremis*. A successful withdrawal from Basra was predicated on the engagement of Iraqis, including the Palace Protection Force, who would assume responsibility for security. A clear plan for the handover of facilities and security responsibility was required. CJO [Lt Gen Houghton] was to outline the plan for the transition, including the arrangements for gifting of assets, the key Iraqi organisations and individuals who would be involved, the impact of Umm Qasr and the supporting Information Operations plan.”

**68.** In an interview on the *Today Programme* on 11 July, Mr Brown was asked whether he planned to change the UK’s strategy in Iraq. Mr Brown explained that the strategy the UK was pursuing focused on building security, trying to achieve political reconciliation and build democracy and providing the people of Iraq with a “stake in the future” by

<sup>32</sup> Letter Henderson to Hayes, 9 July 2007, ‘Iraq/Afghanistan: Prime Minister’s VTC with President Bush’.

<sup>33</sup> Minute Cabinet Office [junior official] to McDonald, 11 July 2007, ‘Iraq Strategy Group, 9 July’.

<sup>34</sup> Minutes, 10 July 2007, Chiefs of Staff meeting.

helping the economic development of the country.<sup>35</sup> He attributed the UK's early failures in Iraq to insufficient resources being applied to help with economic reconstruction.

**69.** In advance of the NSID(OD) meeting planned for 19 July, Mr Bowen advised Mr Browne that there were indications that No.10 was keen to use it to reach a decision in principle on the UK's longer-term engagement in Iraq. An announcement would then be timed for late September, after the report to Congress by Gen Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker.<sup>36</sup>

**70.** Mr Bowen reported that it had also been suggested that the withdrawal from Basra Palace should be delayed to the same timescale, and be wrapped up in a single announcement. Mr Bowen recognised that this was a “seductive picture” but there were “substantial risks” that Mr Browne would want to weigh:

“To begin with, there could be real problems in linking the Basra Palace decision to a much bigger decision on the UK presence as a whole. First ... keeping a substantial presence in the Palace longer than is militarily necessary could, and probably would, cost lives and injuries. Second, leaving it until after the Crocker/Petraeus report will not necessarily make it any easier to handle with the US ...

“The bigger problem is how we handle the very significant political fall-out that would follow a decision and announcement of UK terms for MND(SE). There is a serious risk of major damage to US/UK relations across a range of security issues ... Moreover, we run the risk of undermining our trustworthiness as a close ally with the permanent organs of the US state and armed forces in a way which would do lasting damage to our security ... interests.

“Ironically enough, it could easily be that by the autumn, the US political picture could have changed sufficiently to make it less difficult for us to make such a decision/announcement by doing it in a way which goes with the grain of US/coalition planning. The problem with reaching a decision next week is that:

- a. it is difficult to see how the PM could not tell the President ...
- b. although we might plan to delay any announcement ... there is a strong chance that the decision in principle could leak.”

**71.** At the request of the FCO, on 12 July the JIC assessed the internal dynamics within the Sadrist movement, Muqtada al-Sadr's political strategy and his attitude to violence.<sup>37</sup>

**72.** The JIC judged that al-Sadr's immediate priority was “to secure (and get credit for) a timetable for the departure of ‘occupation forces’” and that his consistent refusal to

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<sup>35</sup> *BBC Radio 4*, 11 July 2007, *Today Programme*.

<sup>36</sup> Minute Bowen to PSSC/Secretary of State [MOD], 11 July 2007, ‘Iraq: Basra Palace and the Longer Term UK Posture’.

<sup>37</sup> [JIC Assessment, 12 July 2007, ‘Muqtada al-Sadr: Keeping His Distance’](#).

engage in direct contact with representatives of the coalition was likely to continue “at least so long as there is no timetable for MNF withdrawal”.

**73.** The JIC’s Key Judgements included:

“I. Muqtada al-Sadr’s leadership of his movement will not face serious challenge: he has no obvious successor. But his followers are likely to remain fractious: deep seated animosities have been managed rather than resolved. As a political force, Sadrism will probably not survive Sadr himself: ...

...

“III. Backed by his Jaysh al-Mahdi (JAM) militia, Sadr continues to exercise considerable political clout in Baghdad and across large parts of the South. His relations with Prime Minister Maliki have soured. Although withdrawing from government, Sadr wishes to remain politically engaged ... Sadr, like others, is positioning himself to benefit from any change of Prime Minister.

“IV. Sadr’s relationship with other Shia political figures is equally fraught. Rivalry is particularly intense with ISCI [Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq], reinforced by a long standing dynastic feud. But neither side appears willing yet to risk Shia unity by forming an alternative alliance. ISCI and others in the Shia United Iraqi Alliance (UIA) are also nervous of Sadr’s ability to mobilise mass support to general widespread disorder.

...

“VI. Sadr uses violence as a political tool. He probably also has to accept some JAM violence to maintain its cohesion and his popular support. However, Sadr will try to calibrate anti-coalition attacks and prevent any return to large-scale sectarian conflict. To date he has intervened quickly to prevent intra-Shia violence from escalating: if he cannot prevent it, he will try to exploit it.”

**74.** The JIC judged that al-Sadr’s relationship with Iran was “complex”, he had “spent much of this year in hiding in Iran”, but he and the Iranians were “likely to remain uncomfortable partners”.

**75.** The JIC assessed that al-Sadr was also motivated by “a genuine desire to see improvements in the quality of life for his core constituency among Iraq’s Shia poor”. Popular appeal would make the Sadrists well placed to take seats on local councils in future provincial elections, in which they would be participating for the first time. The JIC assessed that JAM would be used to intimidate the Sadrists’ rivals and the electorate.

**76.** Members of the House of Commons Defence Select Committee visited Iraq from 8 to 11 July, focusing particularly on the UK military role in Basra, transition timing, the consequences of UK withdrawal and the readiness of the ISF.<sup>38</sup>

**77.** Mr Asquith reported that during a visit to Basra the Committee had asked their Basrawi interlocutors about the current security situation in the city and the likely consequences of a UK withdrawal within 12 months:

“The Basrawis were clear: services and reconstruction were improving but the main problem was that the ISF were under-funded, unqualified and security was deteriorating. The British Government had promised a lot when it liberated Iraq, but had not delivered. Militias were more of a concern than criminal gangs. The provincial authorities were not able to confront the militias because the security forces owed their loyalty to political parties rather than the State ... Pulling no punches, they said a British withdrawal would ‘be followed by chaos sweeping the province like a hurricane’.”

**78.** The Committee asked Ambassador Crocker and Gen Petraeus about whether UK forces had a continuing role in Basra. They both made clear that conditions should determine the force numbers, not timelines. The continued presence of UK forces was necessary for security stabilisation, capacity building with the ISF and to allow the political situation with the Governor to be resolved. This should allow Basra to make the transition to PIC by the end of the year and, as bases were closed or handed over, UK troop numbers could fall. It was essential that Basra Palace was handed over without it becoming a JAM Party HQ, to demonstrate that Basra was stable enough for PIC.

**79.** Mr Asquith reported that Prime Minister Maliki had told the Committee that Basra would be ready for PIC in August or September. He did not think that UK military support would be required for much longer, and considered that there would be no effect from UK withdrawal in 12 months.

**80.** In advance of the NSID(OD) meeting planned for 19 July, FCO and MOD officials produced a joint paper setting out the latest “assessments and plans on security transition and the associated re-posturing and drawdown of UK troops in Basra”.<sup>39</sup>

**81.** The paper had been discussed, in draft, at the ISG on 9 July, which considered that there should not be a large gap between leaving Basra Palace and moving to PIC.<sup>40</sup>

**82.** The paper set out a series of key judgements:

- “• The political process in Iraq is not currently delivering what is needed to generate confidence that the country faces a sustainable future;

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<sup>38</sup> eGram 30010/07 Baghdad to FCO London, 13 July 2007, ‘Iraq: Visit of House of Commons Defence Committee, 8-11 July’.

<sup>39</sup> [Paper FCO and MOD, 12 July 2007, ‘Iraq: Transition in Basra’.](#)

<sup>40</sup> Minute Cabinet Office [junior official] to McDonald, 11 July 2007, ‘Iraq Strategy Group, 9 July’.

- It is likely that debate in Washington about the results of the ‘surge’ [see Section 9.5] will result in an announcement this autumn that US troop draw down will begin either late in 2007, or in early 2008;
- The best way forward for us remains sticking to the transition strategy we have consistently followed, and handing over the fourth and last province in our sector, Basra, to Iraqi security control this autumn;
- The final decision on when Basra should be transferred to lead Iraqi security control lies in Iraqi and US hands. The actual handover will take place at the earliest in September;
- Thereafter, our engagement in Southern Iraq will move into a distinct new phase. Our effort is already reaping diminishing returns. This trend will accelerate once we move into ‘Overwatch’ mode in Basra. The threats we face will remain. Our ability to deliver military and civilian effect will be limited both by the security environment and Iraqi appetite for UK support. We therefore believe that we should see the period of ‘Overwatch’ lasting for a matter of months, not longer;
- Sustaining our presence at Basra Palace and the Provincial Joint Co-ordination Centre is already putting our forces at very high risk. The strong military recommendation is that we do not remain at these sites for any longer than is necessary. But before we leave Basra Palace, a robust Iraqi security force must be in place to prevent looting;
- When we leave Basra Palace, we will need to leave the Provincial Joint Co-ordination Centre too (meaning no UK presence in the city).<sup>41</sup>

**83.** The paper provided an assessment of progress against the UK’s objectives in Iraq:

“Four years on ... we have achieved only some of our objectives. Iraq has the forms of democracy: a new Constitution ... a freely elected Parliament ... a Government of National Unity ... On paper, Iraq has the machinery of Government in place, and security forces over 350,000 strong (Police 160,000, Army 157,000).

“But behind these outward signs of progress lie deep-seated problems. The constituent parts of the Iraqi Government are not working together in pursuit of a genuine national unity agenda. Lip service is paid to the need for reconciliation between Iraq’s main communities, notably between Shia and Sunni Arabs ...

“There has been little progress on the major political issues that have divided Iraqis since 2003: the Constitution (in particular the degree to which Iraq should be a federal state); the management of the oil & gas sector and how its proceeds should be distributed; the extent to which former members of the Ba’ath Party should be excluded from public life.

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<sup>41</sup> [Paper FCO and MOD, 12 July 2007, ‘Iraq: Transition in Basra’.](#)

“... The loyalties of key institutions to the Iraqi state is mixed at best. Some 40 percent of the Iraqi Police Service is thought to owe loyalty to militias linked to political parties. Other security bodies ... have become personal militias for Ministers or Provincial Governors.”

**84.** In relation to the impact of the US surge, the paper said it had:

“... so far delivered mixed results. The US military has been taking the fight to AQ-I ... US troops are getting into areas ... they have not been in for some time. But US commanders are worried that the Iraqi Security Forces are not up to the job of holding onto the ground they have won – suggesting that the security gains from the surge may prove unsustainable when US troop levels begin to reduce.”

**85.** The paper also explained:

“One consequence of the surge and benchmarks has been that the earlier shared US/UK emphasis on transferring security responsibility to the Iraqis has been sidelined in favour of a short-term focus on improving security.

“General Petraeus ... and his staff now believe transition was happening too quickly in 2006 – indeed that the previous coalition strategy represented a ‘rush to failure’.”

**86.** As a result, the context in which transition in Basra was being considered had changed:

“The US are more, not less risk-averse. They are intensely nervous about transition in Basra. They believe the local Iraqi Security Forces are not robust enough to handle security without our direct support. They see pervasive, malign Iranian influence. And even the Iraqi Government, who had earlier been pressing for transition, has recently been more ambivalent.

“The US fear that the handover of the last province in the UK sector will signal a UK decision to withdraw entirely from Iraq in the near future, precipitating similar moves by other coalition members. And they fear that doing this in August would pose significant risks for the credibility of their attempt in September to persuade Congress to extend the surge.”

**87.** The paper explained the process and conditions that needed to be met to achieve PIC, and said:

“One further important consideration has informed our (but not US) thinking about the timing of PIC ... is about the balance of risk in retaining or handing over security responsibility. Do we assess that we have reached the stage where the benefits of retaining security responsibility are outweighed by the downsides? Is there any prospect that by holding on, we can hope either to effect further positive change, or to provide the time needed by the Iraqis to meet the challenges themselves?”

**88.** The paper reported that Maj Gen Shaw considered that Basra was ready for PIC and had made that recommendation to the MNF command. Lt Gen Odierno had turned down the proposal, arguing that the new Basra security and leadership structures needed time to demonstrate positive progress; he thought PIC in October might be achievable, based on a decision in September. The paper said:

“... we will need to continue to hold Iraqi and US feet to the fire if we wish to achieve PIC in the autumn ...

“The risk ... remains that if we try to force a positive decision in the teeth of US opposition and lukewarm Iraqi attitudes, we will reinforce the American belief that we are doing so for political reasons, driven by our desire to reduce UK troop levels.”

**89.** The paper explained that the next key decision for Ministers was the timing of the withdrawal from Basra Palace, the “most heavily mortared and rocketed place in Iraq”. That was complicated because:

- Withdrawing from Basra Palace “will mark *de facto* handover of responsibility” to the ISF; re-intervention by UK forces from the Air Station would happen only in extremis. A gap of a month or two between withdrawal and PIC “should be manageable” but a “significantly longer gap would put UK forces in a difficult position: responsible for security in Basra City, but unable to deliver it except at high risk”.
- The potential for an upsurge in violence surrounding the withdrawal, and the impact that might have in Washington in the run-up to Gen Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker’s Congress hearing in September.
- The risk of looting – “it would be disastrous for our reputation if our departure were followed by the sort of looting at Basra Palace which happened at bases in Muthanna and Maysan provinces after we handed them to the Iraqis”. It was therefore essential that a credible ISF guard force was in place before the UK could withdraw.
- The impact on the UK’s Security Sector Reform (SSR) effort in Basra, currently co-ordinated from the PJCC, where 100 UK troops and seven UK police advisers were based. The threat to these staff if there were no significant MND(SE) presence at Basra Palace would be impossibly high because “there would be no quick way to get reinforcements to the site or to evacuate UK personnel in an emergency”. As a result, the paper concluded that a withdrawal from Basra Palace would mean closing the UK base at PJCC, and so halting SSR work and losing “situational intelligence within Basra City”.

**90.** Considering the scope for the UK to make a contribution to Basra’s development in the period beyond PIC, the paper observed that the situation was likely to remain challenging. UK activity within Basra was “already heavily circumscribed” by both the security situation and the willingness of the population to engage with UK personnel. This was likely to increase after PIC.

**91.** The paper said that there was “no coalition-agreed blueprint” for how long the post-PIC “overwatch” phase should last, observing: “The US has not addressed this in earnest, in part because they see themselves maintaining a significant military presence in Iraq for years to come (and tend to assume we will do likewise).”

**92.** The paper continued:

“But ... we already face a clear trend toward diminishing returns from our efforts in Southern Iraq across the board. This is bound to accelerate when we withdraw from Basra City ...

“So we do not believe the ‘overwatch’ period in Southern Iraq should be envisaged as lasting more than a matter of months from the date of PIC in Basra ...

“Our planning should assume that the UK civilian presence in Basra will have to be wound up shortly before the removal of the UK military envelope which enables it to operate (though if the US were to decide to move a military presence of their own to Basra Air Station, and to retain a US civilian presence, we could expect US pressure for us to maintain some sort of ongoing commitment to the Basra Provincial Reconstruction Team).”

**93.** The paper recommended early engagement with the US on a renewed political strategy, including a “change of Iraqi Government” and setting a date for coalition troop withdrawal.

**94.** In the longer term, the FCO and the MOD suggested that the UK would need to examine its “core interests in Iraq ... the assets at our disposal, and the likely major ongoing US commitment”. Those core interests were likely to be:

- preventing AQ from establishing a base in Iraq from which to attack UK interests;
- maintaining Iraq’s territorial integrity and deterring intervention by its neighbours; and
- preserving the stability of the region, and preventing disruption to energy supplies.

**95.** The paper argued for “a long-term UK commitment in Iraq”, which might include:

- niche contributions to the US-led fight against AQ-I or in conducting air strike operations;
- supporting the Iraqi Navy in ensuring the security of the Northern Gulf and the protection of key Iraqi oil infrastructure;
- influencing the Iraqi Government and supporting the long-term development of its capacity, in particular through the provision of advice to central government Ministries in Baghdad; and
- developing a bilateral defence relationship with the Iraqi Government.

**96.** In his weekly update on 13 July, Maj Gen Shaw reported that:

“Gen PETRAEUS considers himself to be the approval authority for PIC in Basra, he will personally make the decision when the conditions are right, and currently he does not consider that we are even close.”<sup>42</sup>

**97.** Gen Petraeus was reported to be nervous about the readiness of the ISF to assume full security responsibilities. As a consequence:

“Given that the ISF are unlikely on their own to be sufficient to deliver security in Basra, the onus will be on the Gol to develop its confidence in its full suite of governmental/Shia levers and then to over-ride US advice and seize PIC as is their right.”

**98.** Maj Gen Shaw felt that the Iraqi Government would need “encouragement” to do so as “no shift in US attitude is expected before September, and one is not certain even then”.

**99.** Maj Gen Shaw took the opportunity to discuss prospects for PIC in Basra with Lt Gen Odierno and Gen Petraeus during the Corps Conference on 14 July.<sup>43</sup> He reported that Lt Gen Odierno had been “upbeat” and saw the South as “an area in which risk should be taken”. On PIC, Lt Gen Odierno considered that it would be important to give the new structures time to bed in before transferring security to them, to give the Iraqis the best chance of success. Gen Petraeus was clearly focused on how his September “Honest Assessment” to Congress would be received and relayed US political concerns about possible UK announcements on troop numbers beforehand. Maj Gen Shaw commented:

“What came across strongly from both Gen Petraeus and Lt Gen Odierno was an acceptance of our respective force level and political constraints; but no acceptance yet of the limitations of the utility of MNF, and the differences in the utility of our respective forces, derived from the difference in the challenges we face. There is still no agreed coalition prognosis of the future ... Persuading MNC-I and MNF-I that our projected force plans are justified by the conditions on the ground represents a major challenge ... it remains a hard sell.”

**100.** Maj Gen Shaw reported that Gen Mohan presented his initial report on the security situation in Basra to the Iraqi Ministerial Committee on National Security (MCNS). He painted a bleak picture: insufficient manning and equipment in the Iraqi Army, a corrupt police force, 24 heavily armed militias backed by Iran and organised Mafia-style criminality.

**101.** Maj Gen Shaw reported that Gen Mohan had “stated categorically ... that the security situation in Basra would be greatly improved by a British redeployment out

<sup>42</sup> Minute Shaw to CJO, 13 July 2007, ‘GOC HQ MND(SE) – Southern Iraq Update – 13 July 2007’.

<sup>43</sup> Minute Shaw to CJO, 19 July 2007, ‘GOC HQ MND(SE) – Southern Iraq Update – 19 July 2007’.

of the city". This would help to legitimise the Iraqi authorities and remove much of the motivation for the current Sadrist attacks.

**102.** Maj Gen Shaw reported that he had commissioned a piece of work from the Southern Iraq Steering Group on what the South might look like after the MNF left. The conclusions were, in his view, optimistic for the long term; "the macro drivers are positive, but the micro issues will be messy in resolution". He sent a copy to MNC-I and MNF-I headquarters and to the Permanent Joint Headquarters as a contribution to what Maj Gen Shaw hoped would be a piece of JIC work on the same subject, to enable political judgements to be taken on the basis of a fully informed assessment.

**103.** On 15 July, Lt Gen Lamb reported that Gen Mohan and Maj Gen Jalil's focus on Basra had brought a degree of "much needed clarity to the situation".<sup>44</sup> He suspected that a recent IED attack on Maj Gen Jalil had been the work of an Iranian-backed JAM Special Group, "wishing to stop what they see as an unwelcome interference in their affairs down in Basra".

**104.** The Chiefs of Staff noted, at their meeting on 17 July, that "it was clear from discussion at the MCNS that Iraqi priorities would lie in establishing security for Baghdad and Diyala; security to enable PIC for Basra would need to compete with these higher priorities".<sup>45</sup>

**105.** On 17 July, the Iraq Policy Unit sent a minute to Mr Miliband, in preparation for the NSID(OD) meeting on 19 July.<sup>46</sup> It said that there were arguments for sticking with the plan to hand over in August:

"Chiefs of Staff are clear that the cost in casualties of maintaining a presence at the Palace far outweighs the operational effect. The troop reductions ... are also needed in order to ensure the sustainability of our deployments in Afghanistan."

**106.** However, because of the difficulties in intervening within the city of Basra from the Air Station, the IPU recognised that:

"... reposturing from the Palace would represent *de facto* PIC. The prospect of this taking place several months ahead of *de jure* PIC is uncomfortable. We would continue to be formally responsible for security, while in reality having very little control."

**107.** Although the US Administration was likely to be "nervous" about the prospect of the UK leaving Basra Palace, and the consequent reduction in troops, the FCO's view was that such concerns "should be manageable". The FCO was more concerned at "the potential divergence in US and UK thinking on PIC, and on our military planning

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<sup>44</sup> Minute Lamb to CDS, 15 July 2007, 'SBMR-I Weekly Report (261) 15 July 07'.

<sup>45</sup> Minutes, 17 July 2007, Chiefs of Staff meeting.

<sup>46</sup> [Minute Lever to Private Secretary \[FCO\], 17 July 2007, 'Iraq: Ministerial Meeting, 19 July'](#).

thereafter". Although the length of the "overwatch" period had not been formally defined, the US was:

"... likely to expect 'overwatch' in the South to be delivered through a long-term (one year plus), substantive UK military commitment ... This is at odds with much UK military thinking ... The military does not want an open-ended commitment, with our forces at BAS [Basra Air Station] confined to carrying out a limited range of training tasks for the ISF while exposed to continuing high levels of rocket and mortar fire. They believe we should enter overwatch with a clear plan for its nature and duration: effectively, a timetable for withdrawal."

**108.** The IPU reported that the impact on civilian activity in Basra City would be considerable since:

"... our diplomatic mission in Basra will not be able to continue after UK forces leave. We will similarly have to make plans for our post-PIC political and civilian capacity-building role in the South which take this reality into account."

**109.** Mr McDonald visited Washington from 17 to 18 July and met a number of senior members of the US Administration, including Dr Condoleezza Rice, the Secretary of State, Mr Hadley and Mr Robert Gates, the Defense Secretary.<sup>47</sup> They reported that "the military aspects of the surge were going well" and that Gen Petraeus was likely to report on progress in early September. Thereafter, the direction of US policy was not clear, but:

"... we would definitely enter a new phase, in which the coalition would protect the Iraqi population in a new role. The US was not simply going to 'stay the course'."

**110.** Mr McDonald told his US interlocutors that:

"... the UK objective was not to change its posture in Iraq until September. There was no difference between the approach of Gordon Brown and that of his predecessor. But the Government was under huge pressure to move after that, and to get ahead of the US. We needed to manage our own transition in a way that worked for Iraq, and worked for Transatlantic relations."

**111.** Reflecting on the report of Mr McDonald's visit, Maj Gen Shaw observed that he was "struck by the predominant mood of uncertainty and apprehension" in the US Administration.<sup>48</sup>

**112.** In his own account of a dinner with Mr Hadley and Secretary Rice, Mr McDonald recorded a discussion about Basra Palace:

"Dr Rice said she had told Crocker to pull his civilians out just as soon as accommodation was ready at the airport. They had already suffered too many

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<sup>47</sup> Letter Gould to Hayes, 20 July 2007, 'US: Simon McDonald's trip to Washington: 17/18 July'.

<sup>48</sup> Minute Shaw to CJO, 26 July 2007, 'GOC MND(SE) – Southern Iraq Update – 26 July 2007'.

losses. But when it came to leaving the Palace completely, Dr Rice said she hesitated: the situation was too delicate to predict; a spike in unrest in Basra would be most unwelcome ... Hadley said he hoped there would be no announcement about departure before the Prime Minister and President discussed Iraq when they met at the end of the month.”<sup>49</sup>

**113.** On 17 July, Mr McDonald sent a minute to Mr Brown in advance of the planned NSID(OD) meeting on 19 July.<sup>50</sup> He explained that when Ministers agreed in February that in principle the military should withdraw from Basra Palace, it had been assumed that a residual presence would be retained at the Warren site to maintain situational awareness and to continue training and mentoring. As the FCO and MOD paper explained, the deteriorating security situation meant that it would no longer be possible to do that. Accordingly, the UK’s ability to re-intervene successfully if required would be “greatly diminished”.

**114.** Although the previous planning assumption had been for a significant UK presence in MND(SE) for most of 2008, Mr McDonald wrote:

“... given the serious questions about our ability to deliver either security or significant training or mentoring programmes post-PIC in Basra, those assumptions now look unrealistic. And the significant risks to our forces are likely to outweigh the security or other benefits derived from keeping them in Iraq. In these circumstances, there is a case for planning for the withdrawal of the majority of British troops from Southern Iraq to a much more rapid timetable.”

**115.** Mr McDonald argued that if the UK withdrew from Basra City in August as planned, very shortly afterwards there would be a need to explain to the US that UK would be withdrawing from MND(SE) altogether in spring 2008, meaning that “we would hit the US with unwelcome news twice at a politically sensitive time”.

**116.** Alternatively, if the UK were to delay withdrawal until September, it would be possible to present both “unwelcome message[s]” to the US simultaneously.

**117.** The NSID(OD) meeting planned for 19 July was cancelled and was not reinstated.<sup>51</sup>

**118.** A report sent to Lt Gen Houghton on 19 July said that Gen Mohan had given an expanded version of his MNCS presentation to a specially convened meeting of the Crisis Action Cell.<sup>52</sup> This group usually focused exclusively on Baghdad security and was chaired by Dr Rubaie.

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<sup>49</sup> Letter McDonald to Hayes, 19 July 2007, ‘Dinner with US Secretary of State and National Security Adviser: 17 July’.

<sup>50</sup> [Minute McDonald to Prime Minister, 17 July 2007, ‘Iraq Transition in Basra: Meeting of NSID\(OD\), 19th July’.](#)

<sup>51</sup> Note Cabinet Office, 11 February 2010 [sic], ‘Cancellation Note’.

<sup>52</sup> Minute Berragan to CJO, 19 July 2007, ‘MNC-I Update – 19 Jul 07’.

**119.** Dr Rubaie asked Gen Mohan to pull together all his requirements into a formal plan, “copied to MOD and MOI [Ministry of the Interior] to enable them to attempt to resource it”.

**120.** On 19 July, the Assessments Staff reported to Mr McDonald on the probability that JAM in Basra would consider the coming UK withdrawal from Basra Palace as a significant victory and use it to intensify attacks until UK forces were driven out of Iraq.<sup>53</sup> JAM appeared confident of being able to take control of Basra City soon and felt no need to negotiate with Iraqi or UK authorities.

**121.** Mr McDonald prepared further advice on transition for Mr Brown on 20 July.<sup>54</sup> He advised that the overwatch phase, conducted from Basra Air Station, should be time-limited from the outset. He estimated that withdrawing the majority of UK forces and moving to a purely training mission in Basra would take around six months.

**122.** Once withdrawal from the Air Station was complete, the UK “would have to persuade the Americans to house and protect our training forces”, possibly in Dhi Qar province, where Australian and Romanian training teams were already operating from a US base. Mr McDonald proposed that the UK should continue its other contributions to the wider Iraq theatre (a “niche contribution” to action against AQ-I in Balad, a naval deployment in the Gulf and a contribution to air strike operations).

**123.** Mr McDonald said that his proposals had not been discussed with government departments but he judged the military would support them “because they are keen to get out of Basra and MND(SE) but see the importance for alliance reasons of maintaining a presence in 2008”. President Bush was unlikely to be pleased but the rest of the US Administration “see that things are changing”. Mr McDonald judged:

“Only the Iraqis can fulfil the key task of political reconciliation. It seems that they won’t feel the necessary pressure to get on with the job until the coalition begins to leave; and, as they try to do that job, they will need continued training and mentoring. This plan would be compatible with that.”

**124.** The weekly Iraq update for Mr Brown on 20 July said that in Basra “a downbeat assessment of the security situation means that Provincial Iraqi Control is unlikely before October/November”.<sup>55</sup>

**125.** Maj Gen Shaw and government officials working closely with the military met JAM1 on 25 July.<sup>56</sup> At the meeting JAM1 noted the success of the trial cease-fire from 15 to 17 June and said that he was still prepared to negotiate with MNF to bring about further reductions in violence. However, the stalling of negotiations since that cease-fire had

<sup>53</sup> Minute Burrell to McDonald, 19 July 2007, ‘Iraq intelligence update – 19 July 2007’.

<sup>54</sup> [Minute McDonald to Prime Minister, 20 July 2007, ‘Iraq – transition’](#).

<sup>55</sup> Minute Cabinet Office [junior official] to Prime Minister, 20 July 2007, ‘Iraq – weekly update’.

<sup>56</sup> Minute senior government official specialising in the Middle East (1) to Leslie, 10 August 2007, ‘[NAME OF OPERATION]: update on negotiations with JAM in Basrah’.

cost him credibility with JAM, making additional detainee releases essential to enable him to re-assert control. As well as the two “orange” detainees whose release he had previously requested, he therefore asked for two “red” detainees to be released and said that this was a pre-condition for the start of the month-long cease-fire.

**126.** A senior government official reported that: “Despite this hardening of his position [JAM1] maintained he was still committed to a negotiated de-escalation of violence with MNF-I in Basra Province.” He wrote that all of the detainees held by MND(SE) would have to be released at some point, meaning that: “Obtaining a quid pro quo for detainee releases while we still have detainees to release is a factor in the equation.”

**127.** Maj Gen Shaw told the Inquiry that in this conversation with JAM1 it was interesting that:

“... his motivations entirely agreed with mine. He wanted the place to prosper. He was a strong Iraqi nationalist.”<sup>57</sup>

**128.** A government official who worked closely with the military told the Inquiry that JAM1’s “motivations were, of course, wholly different” from the UK’s.<sup>58</sup>

**129.** On 25 July, at the request of the FCO, the JIC assessed AQ-I’s external ambitions, its relationship with AQ core and other groups, and the threat it posed to the UK.<sup>59</sup> Its Key Judgements included:

“I. The relationship between the Pakistan-based Al Qaida (AQ) senior leadership (‘AQ core’) and Al Qaida in Iraq (AQ-I) remains complex: AQ core can exert influence but has not succeeded in controlling AQ-I. AQ core and AQ-I view Iraq as the major theatre for jihad, presenting a realistic opportunity to gain control of ungoverned space; their intent remains to use this space to launch terrorist attacks elsewhere in the region and beyond.

“II. Significant pressure from intensified Multi-National Force (MNF) activity, the success of the Sunni tribal groups against AQ-I, the death of AQ-I leader Zarqawi and the adverse publicity for AQ-I’s Amman bombing may all have helped deter AQ-I from mounting the sustained campaign of external attacks envisaged by AQ core: it has not launched an attack from Iraq since November 2005. AQ core now wants AQ-I to concentrate firmly on Iraq as the immediate strategic priority.”

**130.** The JIC assessed that:

“The investigation into the attempted bomb attacks in London and Glasgow last month has revealed ... links between the two attackers – Bilal Abdullah and Kafeel Ahmed – and known Iraq-based extremists ... At this stage there are no indications

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<sup>57</sup> Private hearing, 21 June 2010, page 23.

<sup>58</sup> Private hearing [government official who worked closely with the military], 2011.

<sup>59</sup> [JIC Assessment, 25 July 2007, ‘Al Qaida in Iraq: External Ambitions’.](#)

that Iraq-based extremists played any role in the direction or planning of the attacks. But the war in Iraq may have been a factor in the radicalisation of the two attackers ...”

**131.** Under the heading “Prospects”, the JIC judged that:

“For the immediate future AQ-I will continue to focus their attentions on Iraq: we judge they will attempt to intensify operations in the lead up to the September Congressional report in the US. AQ-I will aspire to conduct external operations – including in the UK – if an opportunity arises; we judge, at least in the short term, they will look for AQ core endorsement of any major plans outside of Iraq. We judge AQ-I will be able to resist pressure from the MNF and the Iraqis into 2008. As the MNF presence diminishes, AQ-I will seek to regain lost ground, establishing firm bases in Sunni areas and using them increasingly to reinvigorate its external attack capabilities.”

**132.** On 25 July, Lieutenant General William Rollo, who had succeeded Lt Gen Lamb as SBMR-I, sent a minute to ACM Stirrup recording his first impressions “after spending a month getting my head round this vast and multi-faceted operation”.<sup>60</sup>

**133.** Lt Gen Rollo identified the key challenge as “to convert tactical into operational and strategic success”. The inability of Prime Minister Maliki to pass critical legislation and to spend money in provinces where Government control had been limited both raised a “risk of reversal”.

**134.** Lt Gen Rollo continued:

“The South, conversely, and in marked contrast to the situation three years ago, looks more problematic. Shia infighting between JAM and Badr, ineffective and corrupt governors, divided loyalties within the ISF, and infiltration/proxy war by IRGC [Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps] have all degraded governance and the GOI’s view had changed over the last eight months from disinterest and complacency ... to concern, particularly over Basra.”

**135.** In relation to timing of the handover of Basra Palace and subsequently of transition to PIC, Lt Gen Rollo did not detect “untoward concerns”, but observed that “we need to have plans robust enough to cope with whatever events unfold”.

**136.** Officials specialising in the Middle East sent briefing on Iraq for Mr Brown to No.10 on 26 July.<sup>61</sup> The briefing said that recent reporting suggested that JAM viewed UK plans to withdraw from Basra as a victory and believed that they were on the verge of taking control of Basra. The brief recorded that JAM intended to continue attacks on Basra Air Station until UK forces had completely left Iraq.

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<sup>60</sup> Minute Rollo to CDS, 25 July 2007, ‘First Impressions’.

<sup>61</sup> Briefing government officials specialising in the Middle East, 26 July 2007, ‘Further [...] Briefing for PM’.

**137.** Under the heading “National Reconciliation”, the brief reported that government officials working closely with the military were continuing to work on initiatives to split and isolate Iranian special groups from criminal and nationalist elements of JAM, in an attempt to reduce attacks on MND(SE) and counter Iranian influence in Iraq. It was suggested that “elements of JAM are encouraged by recent detainee releases and would consider negotiating a cease-fire”.

**138.** In his weekly update on 26 July, Maj Gen Shaw commented that the US suggestion that the UK should retain a presence in Basra Palace in order to avoid giving the impression that JAM and Iran had triumphed was “both risk averse but also a recipe for UK remaining in its current posture and force levels”.<sup>62</sup>

**139.** Maj Gen Shaw argued that such an approach would preclude “the middle ground of harnessing latent Iraqi nationalism, allowing the Shia Iraqis to sort their internal problems out for themselves”. There was no news from the US commanders in Iraq about whether or not they would agree to UK withdrawal from Basra Palace in the timescale proposed, beyond Gen Petraeus making clear that the decision on the readiness of the Palace Protection Force was for him to take.

**140.** Maj Gen Shaw cautioned against assuming that silence from the US indicated assent.

**141.** The Assessments Staff reported to Mr McDonald on 26 July that the number of attacks had remained steady at just over 900 in the preceding week.<sup>63</sup> Indirect fire attacks by Shia militias had continued against Basra Air Station and Basra Palace, killing four UK Service Personnel in separate incidents. There were some indications that JAM leaders were seeking to influence the police not to intervene in JAM attacks on coalition forces.

**142.** Mr Brown met ACM Stirrup on 27 July. The Government has been unable to supply a record of this meeting, and believes that no minute was in fact produced.<sup>64</sup>

**143.** Mr McDonald reported to Mr Brown that he met ACM Stirrup after their conversation to follow up on the UK’s training contribution after the overwatch phase.<sup>65</sup> They agreed that Mr Brown’s line to take at a forthcoming press conference should be that the final decision had not yet been taken but that the UK would not leave Basra Palace until military commanders were satisfied that the necessary conditions for departure had been met.

**144.** Those conditions were that the Iraqi forces were able to protect the compound and were capable of taking lead responsibility for security in Basra City centre.

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<sup>62</sup> Minute Shaw to CJO, 26 July 2007, ‘GOC HQ MND(SE) – Southern Iraq Update – 26 July 2007’.

<sup>63</sup> Minute Tillbrook to McDonald, 26 July 2007, ‘Iraq Intelligence Update – 26 July 2007’.

<sup>64</sup> Email Cabinet Office [junior official] to Hammond, 16 June 2014, ‘Possible missing document’.

<sup>65</sup> Minute McDonald to Prime Minister, 27 July 2007, ‘Iraq’.

**145.** Pressed by Mr McDonald on the size of the UK's training contribution, ACM Stirrup characterised it as "whatever is necessary to carry out whatever tasks are decided". But those troops would need to rely on US life support as there would be no UK force protection.

**146.** ACM Stirrup had suggested that Mr Brown should tell President Bush that the UK was "prepared to provide some hundreds, provided the tasks are there". Mr McDonald observed that ACM Stirrup "was clearly reluctant to provide over 500".

**147.** Mr Brown discussed Iraq with President Bush at Camp David on 30 July.<sup>66</sup> The meeting note drafted by Mr Brown's Private Secretary recorded only that Mr Brown welcomed the common ground between himself and President Bush on Iraq and had outlined the UK's proposals for a "development agency" in Basra.

**148.** During the visit, Mr Brown and President Bush also met privately over dinner and breakfast. Over dinner they "discussed the progress in the provinces overseen by the UK now moving to overwatch" but the content of the discussion was not recorded.

**149.** Mr McDonald provided Mr Brown with a substantial 'Steering Brief' on Iraq for the Camp David meeting.<sup>67</sup> In it he wrote that, on the Iraqi political process:

"Bush is habitually optimistic about the prospects. But in reality, the picture is bleak. The political process is not delivering even gradual progress, as we hoped it would ..."

**150.** Mr McDonald wrote that the US surge had delivered mixed results, and that doubts over ISF capability raised concerns about the sustainability of the gains which had been made. In Basra, it was important that PIC should happen before November, when the next roulement of troops would take place, but Gen Petraeus was believed to be sceptical about the ability of the local ISF to handle the city's security.

**151.** In a press conference after the meeting on 30 July, President Bush told reporters that:

"There is no doubt in my mind that Gordon Brown understands that failure in Iraq would be a disaster for the security of our own countries, that failure in Iraq would embolden extremist movements throughout the Middle East, that failure in Iraq would basically say to you know people sitting on the fence around the region that al Qaeda is powerful enough to drive great countries like Great Britain and America out of Iraq before the mission is done."<sup>68</sup>

**152.** Mr Brown re-emphasised the UK's obligations to the Iraqi people and the United Nations and his hope that the UK would shortly be able to transfer security responsibility

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<sup>66</sup> Letter Clunes to Gould, 31 July 2007, 'Prime Minister's Meeting with President Bush: Iraq [...]'.

<sup>67</sup> Minute McDonald, [undated], 'Iraq: Steering Brief'.

<sup>68</sup> Camp David Press Conference, 30 July 2007.

in the fourth of its four provinces. He told reporters that a decision would be made on the “the military advice of our commanders on the ground”.

**153.** At the end of July, Lt Gen Rollo commented to ACM Stirrup that Lt Gen Lamb’s “energy and initiative acted as a catalyst for a marked change in the coalition approach”.<sup>69</sup>

**154.** Lt Gen Rollo saw the various strands of work (including engagement with Iraqi tribes, with those close to the Sunni insurgency and with Shia militias) developing at different speeds but the rate at which the Sunni were joining the fight against AQ-I continued to accelerate and showed no sign of abating. The challenge, in Lt Gen Rollo’s view, was “no longer how to inspire such ‘awakenings’ outside Anbar, but how to manage the flood”. He commented:

“The future is all about turning engagement into reconciliation. Much effort is going into the reintroduction of governance and economic assistance in Al Anbar, as a way of further emphasising the advantages of returning to the Gol fold ... This is essential to limit the chances of regression, but will only probably go so far without progress on the major legislative items.”

**155.** Lt Gen Rollo reported that the progress on key pieces of legislation (for example, the Hydrocarbons Law) remained “opaque”.

## August 2007

**156.** On 1 August, Mr Asquith met Prime Minister Maliki to deliver a letter from Mr Brown on economic reconstruction (see Section 10.2) and to discuss politics in Basra and nationally.<sup>70</sup>

**157.** Mr Asquith stressed the importance of a stable security environment to making economic progress. In relation to the “troublesome” Governor Waili in Basra, Prime Minister Maliki advised that he had been legally dismissed but was appealing that decision, causing a delay in his removal.

**158.** Prime Minister Maliki agreed with Gen Mohan’s assessment that the removal of UK forces from Basra City centre would help to simplify the security situation. He asked Mr Asquith whether the UK was ready to continue to provide operational support for the ISF from Basra Air Station, specifically in relation to the protection of infrastructure and ports. Mr Asquith said that in principle the UK would continue to work with and support the ISF, as it was doing at present. It would be important for Major General Graham Binns, who would be succeeding Maj Gen Shaw as GOC MND(SE), and Gen Mohan to discuss the details of what was required.

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<sup>69</sup> Minute Rollo to CDS, 30 July 2007, ‘SBMR-I’s Weekly Report (263) 30 Jul 07’.

<sup>70</sup> eGram 32637/07 Baghdad to FCO London, 1 August 2007, ‘Iraq: Meeting with Prime Minister Maliki, 1 August’.

**159.** Mr Asquith raised the threatened withdrawal of the (Sunni) Tawafuq Party from the Iraqi Government, to which he reported that Prime Minister Maliki seemed “resigned”. Mr Asquith advised him that:

“... the best chance of keeping all the communities in government would be to work on specific issues ... where agreement could be reached. The idea of signing up to broad principles seemed rather past its time; the parties had done all that on many occasions in the past.”

**160.** Between the end of the meeting and Mr Asquith’s report of the outcome to London, five Tawafuq Ministers and Deputy Prime Minister Zawba’i formally announced their withdrawal from the government.

**161.** On 2 August, Mr Asquith reported a “political crisis” in Iraq and that “real progress [is] only possible if Maliki addresses Sunni security concerns – and that means ceding some authority in an area he views as his sole preserve”.<sup>71</sup>

**162.** Following the resignations by Tawafuq Ministers a “leadership summit” was planned, covering “legislation, government business (including shared decision making, reform of the security institutions, militias, detainees and human rights), national reconciliation (including some form of amnesty ...) and establishing a political front”.

**163.** Mr Asquith again advised senior Iraqi politicians that “the time for statements of principles had now passed” and that action was needed, focused on key Sunni concerns (human rights abuses, detainees and the protection of Sunni areas in Baghdad). He concluded:

“The prospect is a period of floundering and activity – largely for its own sake – in the hope that a way will be found to bring Tawafuq back into ... government ... It might just work if the effort is directed at taking action on Sunni concerns. But those are all essentially in the security field ...”

**164.** Priorities and timescales following Mr Brown’s visit to the US were discussed at the Iraq Strategy Group on 2 August.<sup>72</sup> Mr McDonald reported that Mr Brown had told President Bush that the UK was planning to leave Basra Palace by 31 August if Gen Petraeus was content. The key issue would be Iraqi capability to continue to protect the site.

**165.** Mr McDonald told attendees that Mr Brown had stressed the successful transfer from combat to overwatch in three provinces in his public comments, but had made clear that there would be no announcement of any further changes to the UK’s posture or presence in Iraq before Parliament returned from its summer recess on 7 October.

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<sup>71</sup> eGram 32865/07 Baghdad to FCO London, 2 August 2007, ‘Iraq: Political Crisis: Where We Are’.

<sup>72</sup> Minute Blake to McDonald, 2 August 2007, ‘Iraq Strategy Group, 2 August’.

**166.** After recess, Mr Brown would want to make a statement setting out “the way ahead for overwatch and thereafter, this should focus not just on our military engagement but look at the shape of our overall relationship with Iraq, covering the diplomatic, economic and development aspects”.

**167.** To do so would require detailed work, but Mr McDonald “stressed the sensitivity of any discussions, including with the US, in advance of the Petraeus/Crocker testimony” and instructed that departments “should not actively take forward any work on our post-PIC military presence” other than exploring “economic deliverables”.

**168.** Officials in the MOD provided advice to Mr Browne on 3 August, setting out the same background and proposals as in the submission to Mr Richmond and Mr Miliband on 4 July.<sup>73</sup> They said that an early meeting with Gen Petraeus had indicated the proposal would be a “hard sell” to the US. Gen Petraeus had asked for the views of Lt Gen Odierno before reaching a view on the proposal himself. The MOD judged that “Gen Petraeus will need to be persuaded that this initiative will contribute to the longer term security of Basra rather than being a short-term fix”.

**169.** The advice said that in return for the cease-fire, JAM1 wanted four higher risk detainees (two of whom were suspected of involvement in the deaths of British personnel) released, plus a suspension of strike operations against JAM in MND(SE). Officials asked Mr Browne to agree that MND(SE) should continue to pursue this initiative, the first stage of which would be to raise the matter with senior US commanders and Iraqi Government Ministers in Baghdad, with the aim of obtaining their agreement:

“If US commanders and the Iraqi Government agree in principle, further advice will be submitted to ministers before any releases take place.”

**170.** On 4 August, Mr Browne gave his agreement over the telephone and two days later his Private Secretary confirmed it in writing, noting that further advice would be submitted before any releases took place.<sup>74</sup>

**171.** The MCNS discussed Basra briefly on 5 August.<sup>75</sup> Mr Abdul Qader, the Iraqi Defence Minister, gave Prime Minister Maliki a detailed report of his visit to Basra the previous week. He had been impressed by good co-ordination between Gen Mohan and Maj Gen Jalil, who were making a positive impact on the security situation and who were “enforcing law and order on the streets”.

**172.** Gen Petraeus’s brief for the MCNS meeting was reported to have predicted a date in November for transition to PIC in Basra. Governor Waili remained the “sticking point”.

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<sup>73</sup> Minute Vincent to APS2/SofS [MOD], 3 August 2007, ‘Negotiations with Jaysh Al Mehdi (JAM) in Basra’.

<sup>74</sup> Minute Houghton to DJC-AD Pol1, 6 August 2007, ‘Negotiations with Jaysh and Mehdi (JAM) in Basra’.

<sup>75</sup> eGram 33092/07 Baghdad to FCO London, 6 August 2007, ‘Iraq: Ministerial Committee on National Security, 5 August’.

**173.** Lt Gen Rollo reported to ACM Stirrup that the security situation in MND(SE) had been discussed at the MNF Commanders' Conference on 5 August where Gen Petraeus described Basra as "complex and difficult".<sup>76</sup> Maj Gen Shaw's "injection of an alternative view of the Shia south" had prompted "genuine debate". His view that only MNF withdrawal would allow the Iraqis to sort themselves out, had drawn:

"... a range of views – not overtly unsympathetic but querying some of the logic of execution. Petraeus's own comments were that no-one disputed the wisdom of drawing down forces in Basra, but how it was done was very important. Fleet St would not have our nuanced understanding of the situation and it could be presented as a defeat. We had to make sure that the ISF are adequate, that the Palace was not taken over and ransacked, that Mohan's plans were coherent and, thinking more long-term, that a Hizballah-type organisation did not take over the South."

**174.** Ambassador Crocker told the Conference that he was:

"... concerned over a failure of governance in Basra in the short term, and wanted to explore further the potential for the GOI to re-establish itself while we gained understanding of our own limited control and influence."

**175.** Lt Gen Rollo commented:

"Both responses are legitimate and we need to shape both the message and the substance of our actions.

"We also need to be careful not to seize on aspects of these comments that favour our own interpretation of potential events. In the short term our ability to hand over Basra Palace is likely to be assessed by Petraeus and the GOI not only on the state of the Palace Guard Force but on the overall security situation in Basra. This during August, which, even without the added potential dynamics of the possible forcible removal (by the Iraqis) of the Governor or our own withdrawal from the City, is always a volatile month. In the medium term PIC should be possible in the autumn, with careful co-ordination with both the Iraqis and MNF(I), better politics in Basra, including hopefully a new governor, a steady build up of Iraqi security forces and the isolation and reduction in influence of criminal and Iranian backed JAM. Conversely a Basra in which JAM have free rein and are busily settling scores with anyone who either co-operated with us or stands in the way of their own criminal purposes will provide a much less attractive backdrop to PIC for both the MNF(I) and the GOI. I mention this not in any way to play Cassandra but because I want to convey a sense of the range of events that we may have to contend with."

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<sup>76</sup> Minute Rollo to CDS, 6 August 2007, 'SBMR-I's Weekly Report (264) 6 Aug 07'.

**176.** Maj Gen Shaw's account of the discussion said that Gen Petraeus' key concern was the timing and method of withdrawal from Basra Palace, commenting "it must go well".<sup>77</sup>

**177.** Maj Gen Shaw's judgement was that the threat to the Palace was low and the Palace Protection Force would be ready to take over responsibility at the end of the month. He continued:

"But I detect an increasing chorus of demands for certainty, for an absence of risk. Let me be explicit – there is no risk-free option. If we go as planned at the end of the month, we are dependent upon Iraqis both within friendly and enemy forces for success – they have a vote. This is battle space and it is impossible to prove the negative that nothing will go wrong if we hand over. And if we stay, there will be the risk of more deaths. I am working to, and my successor will execute, the plan to leave by the end of the month."

**178.** Maj Gen Shaw also reported that the projected date for PIC in Basra had been deferred again, to a likely announcement in October followed by PIC in November. Maj Gen Shaw observed that this had implications for the proposed Parliamentary statement by Mr Brown in early October, which would be much easier if it followed an announcement about PIC. He reported, "General Petraeus acknowledges that in the end politics will overcome conditionality".

**179.** On 9 August, an official in the MOD asked Mr Browne to agree that the release of the four detainees identified by JAM1 could proceed.<sup>78</sup> They explained that after "some initial reluctance" Gen Petraeus had agreed, as did Gen Mohan and Dr Rubaie.

**180.** The advice said:

"As this is the only currently available plan to try and trigger a step change in the security dynamics in Basra, there is a good case for proceeding: there is no way radically to change the position on the ground without accepting some risks."

**181.** Mr Browne's Private Secretary responded the following day to say that Mr Browne agreed that the releases should proceed.<sup>79</sup>

**182.** On 10 August, a senior government official specialising in the Middle East (1) wrote to the FCO Director General Defence and Intelligence with an update on negotiations with JAM1.<sup>80</sup> The advice was copied to Mr Bowen, Lieutenant General Peter Wall (Deputy Chief of the Defence Staff (Commitments)), Mr McDonald and Ms Margaret Aldred (Deputy Head of the Overseas and Defence Secretariat).

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<sup>77</sup> Minute Shaw to CJO, 9 August 2007, 'GOC HQ MND(SE) – Southern Iraq Update – 09 August 2007'.

<sup>78</sup> Minute Vincent to PS/Secretary of State [MOD], 9 August 2007, 'Negotiations with Jaysh al Mehdi (JAM) in Basra'.

<sup>79</sup> Minute Forber to CJV-AD Pol1, 10 August 2007, 'Negotiations with Jaysh al Mehdi (JAM) in Basra'.

<sup>80</sup> Minute senior government official specialising in the Middle East (1) to Leslie, 10 August 2007, '[NAME OF OPERATION]: update on negotiations with JAM in Basrah'.

It said that Lt Gen Lamb had sought and received “approval to proceed” from both Dr Rubaie and Gen Petraeus.

**183.** The senior official’s advice also recorded the meeting between Maj Gen Shaw, government officials working closely with the military and JAM1 on 25 July.

### Assassinations in Diwaniyah

On 11 August, the Governor and the Provincial Director of Police in Diwaniyah were assassinated.<sup>81</sup> Lt Gen Rollo commented that the attacks were “unexpected” and that there was increasing evidence that JAM, using Iranian supplied weapons, was responsible. The motive for the attacks was unclear.

**184.** A senior government official specialising in the Middle East (1) wrote to the FCO Director General Defence and Intelligence on 20 August with an update on the negotiations with JAM1.<sup>82</sup> He reported that on 11 August, government officials working closely with the military met JAM1 “to establish that a deal was still on the table”. JAM1 confirmed that it was, provided the four nominated detainees were released in advance. Government officials working closely with the military confirmed that this had been approved. The senior official recorded that MOD Ministers had given their agreement to the releases and that they had been discussed in advance with the Iraqi Government and with Gen Petraeus.

**185.** Another meeting had followed on 12 August, at which JAM1 sought to reassure Maj Gen Shaw that the deal would work, although it would take some time to impose a full cease-fire. Maj Gen Shaw noted that there was widespread scepticism within the UK, US and Iraqi systems over JAM1’s ability to deliver and his motives. The success of the initiative would be measured by a significant reduction in IDF and attacks on supply convoys; and by respect for the ISF’s occupation of Basra Palace. What constituted a “significant reduction” was not defined. JAM1 warned that there were attacks planned against the convoys withdrawing from Basra Palace and it would take him 10 to 15 days to call them off.

**186.** In his own record of the discussion Maj Gen Shaw wrote:

“The meeting exceeded my expectations and left me more optimistic about his intent and the potential scope of the success this proposal might engender.”<sup>83</sup>

<sup>81</sup> Minute Rollo to CDS, 13 August 2007, ‘SBMR-I’s Weekly Report (265) 13 Aug 07’.

<sup>82</sup> Minute senior government official specialising in the Middle East (1) to Leslie, 20 August 2007, ‘[NAME OF OPERATION]: update on negotiations with JAM in Basrah’.

<sup>83</sup> Minute Shaw, 12 August 2007, ‘[JAM1]/GOC Meeting, 12 Aug 07’.

**187.** Maj Gen Shaw wrote that he had presented three tests “by which the viability of the deal might be judged”:

- IDF attacks on COB [Contingency Operating Base] and BP [Basra Palace].
- the safety of convoys from a week’s time re-posturing from BP.
- the safety of BP once it became a Gol property.

“The more he succeeded against these tests, the more he would show that he can deliver, that this deal works to the advantage of MNF and is no threat, indeed is supportive of Gol. All of which would give my successor confidence to continue with the deal.”

**188.** The senior government official reported that JAM1 had made clear that, when violence reduced, additional detainee releases would be his priority; he would need releases from across the Basra political and militia spectrum to avoid other groups disrupting the process.<sup>84</sup> He hoped for releases at a rate of 10 to 20 a month. The transfer of any detainees to US custody would end the initiative: this was a red line.

**189.** The senior official commented that while JAM1’s recognition of the wider political context in Basra was encouraging, it was tangible improvement on the ground that would matter. Maj Gen Shaw had established a working group in Basra, to be chaired by his successor, Maj Gen Binns. The group would meet regularly to review progress and the talks with JAM1, producing a report to be sent up the MNF-I chain of command to Gen Petraeus and to Lt Gen Rollo, Mr Christopher Prentice (who would be succeeding Mr Asquith as British Ambassador to Iraq), the MOD and the FCO. MND(SE) would keep Gen Mohan informed; Lt Gen Rollo and Mr Prentice would brief the Iraqi Government “as appropriate”.

**190.** Having seen the update, Lt Gen Rollo was reported to have commented: “I note the contrast between these negotiations and the situation elsewhere in Iraq where US policy towards JAM ill-behaviour is one of prompt retribution (while avoiding outright conflict). This may be mitigated by clear evidence that the process is contributing to overall stability in Basra.”

**191.** The account of the meeting produced by government officials on the ground working closely with the military on 13 August reported that it “figuratively signed and sealed the [NAME OF OPERATION] agreement”.<sup>85</sup>

**192.** On 13 August, MND(SE) released the four detainees nominated by JAM1.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Minute senior government official specialising in the Middle East (1) to Leslie, 10 August 2007, ‘[NAME OF OPERATION]: update on negotiations with JAM in Basrah’.

<sup>85</sup> Email official working closely with the military, 13 August 2007, ‘[NAME OF OPERATION]: JAM1 - 12 August Meeting’.

<sup>86</sup> Minute senior government official specialising in the Middle East (1) to Leslie, 10 August 2007, ‘[NAME OF OPERATION]: update on negotiations with JAM in Basrah’.

**193.** JAM in Basra called a month-long cease-fire, beginning on 13 August.<sup>87</sup>

Sir John Scarlett told the Inquiry that:

“... the cease-fire for a month on 13 August worked straight away. There was an immediate falling away of attacks, and it then carried on. It went beyond the month and it became effectively a permanent feature. So it was remarkably successful.”

**194.** The cease-fire was observed not just by mainstream JAM locally, but also by a number of the Special Groups.<sup>88</sup>

**195.** A summary of the negotiations with JAM1 written by a senior government official specialising in the Middle East (1) in November 2007, said that the reduction in violence:

“... began on 13 August, on the following terms:

- JAM in Basra would suspend their attacks on the coalition. [JAM1] would work to bring the Secret Cells under his control and in particular guarantee a peaceful withdrawal from Basra Palace. MND(SE) would suspend their detention campaign but would retain the right to strike anyone targeting coalition forces and to interdict weapons smugglers.
- MND(SE) released four JAM detainees as requested by [JAM1] to begin the process of de-escalation. If violence remained low, [JAM1] and MND(SE) would negotiate a timetable for the eventual release of all MND(SE) detainees, including [JAM1] himself. Discussions would continue on the political and development themes, with the aim of JAM and the Sadrists' full participation in the political process in Basra. GOC MND(SE) formed a steering group to guide the talks.”<sup>89</sup>

**196.** On 13 August, a government official working closely with the military commented on the “welcome gear change” brought by the releases:

“... we are keen to think ahead so that we are clear what we need to do – and how – once the month’s cease-fire period comes to an end. We sense that timing will be crucial at the end of this period so we will want to be prepared and not waste any time. For now, we need to ... work on ... who/how we inform/request permission at the end of the cease-fire period.”<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Private hearing, 10 June 2010, page 41.

<sup>88</sup> Private hearing SIS3, 2010, page 62.

<sup>89</sup> Minute senior government official specialising in the Middle East (1) to Lyall Grant, 9 November 2007, '[NAME OF OPERATION]: Negotiations with JAM in Basrah'.

<sup>90</sup> Email official working closely with the military, 13 August 2007, '[NAME OF OPERATION] - Looking Ahead'.

**197.** The official noted the importance of getting this right so as to maintain momentum, which might be lost if it was necessary to try and seek the views of all stakeholders at each stage:

“[We also need to] consider what next steps we will propose. Part of this will be giving thought to which of [JAM1]’s 16 detainees we would consider releasing and which not. If [JAM1] delivers and we see a significant decrease in IDF, it will be important that we are able to deliver a suitable reward/incentive to him in the form of further releases ... Similarly, if [JAM1] is less-than-successful in delivering a cease-fire and requests more detainee releases, how will we tweak our proposals accordingly?”

**198.** The day after they were released, government officials working closely with the military reported that two of the former detainees gave radio interviews in Basra.<sup>91</sup> One interview was believed to have been fairly “banal” but in the other the individual suggested that releases were part of a cease-fire agreement.

**199.** On 15 August, the same officials sent a note to JAM1 saying that they considered it unwise for the released individuals to be adopting a media profile and asking “please could they tone it down a bit”. A telephone conversation with JAM1 followed, in which he agreed that media appearances were not helpful and would advise “that they should exercise discretion”. The officials told JAM1 that there had been one IDF attack on Basra Palace the previous night, to which MND(SE) had responded. JAM1 was surprised at the attack and acknowledged that the response was within the terms of the agreement.

**200.** Maj Gen Shaw completed his posting as GOC MND(SE) on 14 August. Looking back over his seven-month tour in his last weekly update, he identified the death of Basra JAM commander Wissam Al Qadir on 25 May as a turning point (see Section 9.5).<sup>92</sup> After this point, JAM became “leaderless” and went into 40 days’ mourning. At the same time, there was a troop rotation within MND(SE):

“The enforced lull on both MNF and JAM coincided with the arrival of an Iraqi [General Mohan] with *wasta* [clout] ... and contacts in OMS [Office of the Martyr Sadr]/JAM who shared our vision of how to resolve the Basra security problem: re-task nationalist JAM violence away from MNF towards Iran. This political dynamic has set the context for ... operations which have continued ... to buy Mohan space to work on nationalist JAM. Our predicted move from BP by the end of the month ... is consistent with Mohan’s drive to clarify Iraqi nationalist loyalty. This sets the scene for my successor, with Basra *de facto* PIC’d, us firmly in support.”

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<sup>91</sup> Email government official working closely with the military, 15 August 2007, ‘[NAME OF OPERATION] Developments 15 Aug 07’.

<sup>92</sup> Minute Shaw to CJO, 14 August 2007, ‘GOC HQ MND(SE) – Southern Iraq Update – 14 August 2007’.

**201.** But the cost had been high:

“With 41 UK deaths so far this year, my command has overseen just shy of one quarter of the deaths incurred during the entirety of Op TELIC, including the war-fighting phase. A further 400+ have been injured, of which about half will not return to service.”

**202.** Maj Gen Shaw wrote that there continued to be uncertainty over whether the Iraqi Army 10th Division or the Palace Protection Force (PPF) would take over responsibility for Basra Palace when MND(SE) vacated it. Gen Petraeus favoured the PPF, which Maj Gen Shaw considered to be “on track to being capable of taking over by the end of the month”. Reports indicated that that OMS/JAM had no intent to attack the Palace once it became Iraqi Government property.

**203.** In his formal end of tour report to Lt Gen Houghton, Maj Gen Shaw reflected on the possibilities for and constraints on achieving strategic “success” in Iraq:

“The issue of ‘success’ has centred on the unspoken question: Iraqi success or coalition (US/UK) success? The gap between the coalition’s goals for Iraq and where we are now has been a constant source of tensions, not just with the press but in judgements about risk ...”<sup>93</sup>

**204.** On resources, Maj Gen Shaw reported:

“We have been hamstrung for resources throughout the tour, driven by the rising strategic significance of the Afghan deployment. The lack of clear Main Effort between the two theatres made a perpetual struggle of the bidding war for resources. This tour has reinforced my prior judgement that Iraq has more strategic significance than Afghanistan although our projected posture in the South is increasingly questionable.”

**205.** Despite these constraints, Maj Gen Shaw remained optimistic about the future of southern Iraq, concluding:

“... Shia unity makes violence in the South self-limiting; Iraqi nationalism will triumph over Iranian influence; the parties and factions, attracted by financial gain, will reach an accommodation in the South in a way that allows all to prosper from a functioning entity.”

**206.** On 16 August, the Iraq Senior Officials Group was told by an MOD official that handover of Basra Palace and the PJCC were both planned for 31 August, but a delay of a few days was possible to ensure that the PPF was properly equipped.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Letter Shaw to Houghton, 14 August 2007, ‘Post operation report Shawforce Jan-Aug 07’.

<sup>94</sup> Letter Cabinet Office [junior official] to Aldred, 16 August 2007, ‘Iraq Senior Officials Group’.

**207.** The MOD official explained that:

“The current plan envisaged our withdrawal from the PJCC four days before the handover of the Palace site; but we would leave the PJCC by 31 August whatever the state of play over the Palace.”

**208.** On 19 August Maj Gen Binns would give his assessment of readiness to Gen Petraeus, who “continued to take a rational approach” to the UK plans. Mr Asquith’s farewell calls in Baghdad also suggested Iraqi Government support for the handover.

**209.** The MOD official wrote that the leadership summit had not yet taken place, although “all the main players were in town and engaging in bilateral discussions”.

**210.** Lt Gen Rollo hoped that it would convene that week.<sup>95</sup> He also reported that there were well-developed plans for Baghdad to take further offensive action against insurgents in the run-up to the autumn: “Provided the politics can come right, or even not go badly wrong, there is a clear way ahead.”

**211.** On 16 August, Mr Asquith wrote a valedictory letter to Mr Miliband which characterised Iraq as “still wracked by the culture of fear, distrust and prejudice, obstructing political compromise”.<sup>96</sup>

**212.** Mr Asquith considered that:

“The surge has failed to create the space for politics to work because the military (tactical) successes (local sectarian security structures loyal to the MNF) conflict directly with the political objective (inclusive and integrated national Iraqi authority).”

**213.** The letter gave two reasons why each success was accompanied by “further complications”. First, “knowledge of what is happening on the ground is shockingly thin, particularly in Baghdad where the theatre policy is decided” which made analysing the significance of what was known “fragile”. Mr Asquith revealed that: “The [Multi-National] Force’s statistics on security – or even basic services – differ wildly from what our LE [locally engaged] staff (and the Iraqi media) report.”

**214.** Secondly, Mr Asquith wrote: “Domestic politics (and media coverage) have coloured the approach of the whole coalition, producing an ambivalence that has been corrosive.”

**215.** Mr Asquith considered that the benchmarks set by Congress were unlikely to reveal anything significant about Iraq because: “The timeframe ... has placed impossible demands on the Iraqi Government and coalition ... The lessons of the Constitution have been forgotten.”

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<sup>95</sup> Minute Rollo to CDS, 13 August 2007, ‘SBMR-I’s Weekly Report (265) 13 Aug 07’.

<sup>96</sup> [Letter Asquith to Miliband, 16 August 2007, ‘Iraq: Valedictory’](#).

**216.** Looking to the future, Mr Asquith considered that the coalition would need to continue to work with the Iraqi Government to increase Sunni engagement in the political process. The Executive Council was a useful start, but there was also need to address immediate Sunni concerns about security and human rights issues. This would include the need to “address much more systematically sectarianism in the ISF ... establishing proper data on abuses and infiltration and ensuring that action is taken”.

**217.** Friction would be reduced as Basra was handed over to PIC, allowing the UK to make a difference through:

“The high regard Iraqis have for our advice ... We also fulfil for them something of the role of the psychiatrist’s couch, helping them to face their problems. And they look on us as a key influencer of the US.”

**218.** Mr Asquith continued:

“But we will still need to commit resources. I remain of the small school that believes we should continue to have a reduced military component (beyond some important niche areas), grouped with other coalition allies in a southern base other than Basra able to provide rapidly deployable forces to carry out operations at the sharp end.

“Outside the military contribution, our favoured route has been through providing expertise. That will remain necessary, but insufficient.”

**219.** On the UK’s ability to influence the wider effort in Iraq, Mr Asquith reminded Mr Miliband that after the UK had handed back Basra:

“The US will still be fighting a war ... The test of its and others’ action is how much they contribute to that war effort ... The degree to which we continue to contribute to that war effort will determine the influence we can bring to bear on US policy on Iraq. If it concludes we are merely hiding behind its effort and military losses, it will ignore ... our advice ...

“Stepping away I do not see as an option.”

**220.** An update sent to Ms Aldred by Mr Tim Dowse, the Chief of the Assessments Staff, on 16 August said that, overall, the level of violence across Iraq remained unchanged.<sup>97</sup> It was judged that Muqtada al-Sadr had effectively lost control of JAM. The Assessments Staff considered that this was a reminder that “whatever the interests of the Sadrists national political leadership, JAM behaviour (including in Basra) is likely to be determined as much if not more by local factors.”

**221.** Government officials working closely with the military met JAM1 again on 17 August to follow up a letter he had sent.<sup>98</sup> JAM1 complained that he had been

<sup>97</sup> Minute Dowse to Aldred, 16 August 2007, ‘Iraq Intelligence Update – 16 August 2007’.

<sup>98</sup> Email government official working closely with the military, 17 August 2007, ‘[NAME OF OPERATION]: Meeting with JAM1 and Next Steps’.

allowed only 10 minutes to speak to the four detainees immediately prior to their release, rather than the agreed one to two hours. A longer meeting would have allowed him to emphasise that this was an agreement for the benefit of all the detainees.

**222.** JAM1 said that this was a dangerous period, and there was plenty of potential for things to go wrong. He had asked his contacts to monitor those whom he suspected of being active in the Special Groups in order to curtail their attacks.

**223.** The officials reported their meeting with JAM1 to the Steering Group for the operation, now renamed the Mohan Initiative Group (MIG) and chaired by Maj Gen Binns, later that day. In their report back to London, the officials explained:

“We then discussed the substance of further agreement between MND(SE) and [JAM1]. We opined that this would come down to the number of detainees to be released. We would need to release more than four (because [JAM1] would be looking for progress); he would want us to release as many as possible ... GOC was admirably focused on the timelines for securing all-party sign up to Phase II (Phase III?) of the [NAME OF OPERATION] agreement. Working backwards, this looks like this:

- 13 Sep – second (third?) tranche of releases
- 12 Sep – final date for sign-off on agreement to releases/DIRC [Divisional Internment Review Committee]
- 7 Sep – agreement of SOSDEF [the Defence Secretary] secured
- 1 Sep – submission goes to SOSDEF
- 28 Aug – submission goes to PJHQ, with US assent
- 21 Aug – GOC travels to Baghdad to meet Odierno and Petraeus.”

**224.** Maj Gen Binns told the Inquiry that part of his mindset on arriving in post was:

“I thought – and this was before I knew about reconciliation – that only by engaging and seeking to reconcile leaders and organisations that possess some degree of credibility would there be any chance of a solution and that solution would be political and we would find it and we would meet it in Iraq.”<sup>99</sup>

**225.** Having arrived in Iraq, Maj Gen Binns observed that:

“... almost every time we resupplied, the price just to deliver the bread and water there was a death, and that our impact outside the immediate confines of our bases was limited and we had become focused on force protection and trying to break the bones of this amoeba that was called JAM was difficult, if not impossible. I thought that the Iraqi army and police were standing by and watching us get killed, I thought that the rate of casualties was amongst the highest in Iraq and that self-protection and administration was consuming us. I thought the time for the UK was running out.

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<sup>99</sup> Private hearing, 2 June 2010, pages 15-17.

I thought, in any counter-insurgency, patience is key and I thought that the UK in Iraq had lost its patience with Iraq and we were turning to other things like Afghanistan, so I thought I was running out of time.”

**226.** After being briefed on the negotiations that were under way, Maj Gen Binns told the Inquiry that:

“I had no better idea – set against all the background I’ve just explained, I couldn’t think of a better idea. So I stepped into it rather than stepped back from it and I thought it was precisely the right thing to do.”

**227.** On 20 August, Lt Gen Rollo reported that:

“The Presidency Council eventually sat this week amidst huge US frustration at the alliance between the Kurds and Dawa/ISCI, which appears to have given Maliki a reason not to compromise.”<sup>100</sup>

**228.** Lt Gen Rollo reported that security within population centres was clearly improving across Iraq, cutting down Al Qaida’s freedom of movement. However, as bomb attacks in Ninawa against the rural Yazidi population had demonstrated, “it is still all too possible for terrorists to find poorly policed small towns ... which remain intensely vulnerable”.

**229.** Lt Gen Rollo reported that “Shia strategy and reconciliation” remained the subject of “fierce debate” within Baghdad. The Iraqi Government’s committee on reconciliation had begun to generate proposals for tribal outreach, amnesty and the beginnings of ideas for an approach to OMS and JAM. Lt Gen Rollo commented:

“Whether these ideas will come to anything, and whether they will do so before open hostility between Badr and JAM occurs, is wide open to question, but it is nonetheless of note that they are Iraqi ideas ...”

**230.** In Baghdad, Lt Gen Rollo reported that concerns about the situation in Basra had been “less loudly expressed this week” but that Gen Mohan had been visiting to lobby for additional resources to ensure that his forces were fully equipped when UK forces left Basra City. Lt Gen Rollo commented:

“Looking ahead, the British handover of the Palace offers the opportunity to refocus effort both within an evolving coalition concept of operations and a dynamic and constantly shifting Shia political outlook. Our aim should remain to leave Basra in the best possible nick that we can, but there might – and I emphasise might – be more room for manoeuvre than we had previously feared.”

**231.** Mr McDonald gave Mr Brown a verbal update on progress towards transition in Basra on the same day, based on an update note prepared by a Cabinet Office

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<sup>100</sup> Minute Rollo to CDS, 20 August 2007, ‘SBMR-I’s Weekly Report (266) 20 Aug 07’.

official.<sup>101</sup> That note said that Maj Gen Binns was still expecting to be able to hand over responsibility for Basra Palace on 29 August, having written to Gen Petraeus with his assessment of the PPF's readiness. Equipment and fuel remained the key risks to handover.

**232.** On 20 August, at the request of the FCO, a Current Intelligence Group (CIG) examined the influence of the Iraqi Ba'ath Party on the insurgency and Iraqi politics.<sup>102</sup>

**233.** The CIG's Key Judgements included:

"I. The influence of the Iraqi Ba'ath Party on the Sunni Arab insurgency is marginal. The party is fractured with little political relevance or popular support in Iraq; this is highly unlikely to change.

"II. Iraqi Shia politicians' fears of a Ba'athist resurgence, however exaggerated, are genuinely held. They will limit the Shia appetite for reconciliation with the Sunni more broadly."

**234.** The CIG judged that many former leaders of the Iraqi Ba'ath Party had been killed or captured in 2003; others had fled to neighbouring countries:

"Outlawed by the Coalition Provisional Authority, much of the Ba'ath Party's senior Sunni cadre (most of the rank and file were Shia) went underground, while the party's system of patronage collapsed."

**235.** In Syria, two former senior Ba'athists (Muhammad Yunis al-Ahmad and Izzat Ibrahim al-Duri) had established the New Regional Command, loyal to Saddam Hussein. Saddam Hussein's execution in December 2006 had exacerbated rivalry between al-Ahmad and al-Duri, leading to the emergence of two factions competing for primacy. Those in both factions wanted to see the full restoration of the party – and themselves – to power in Iraq.

**236.** The CIG judged that few Ba'athists still identified with their original Arab socialist roots. Although most Ba'athists were fundamentally secular and ideologically opposed to AQ-I, they were willing to co-operate with Sunni Islamists to attack the coalition and what they saw as a Shia-dominated Iranian-backed Iraqi government.

**237.** Although much of the insurgency involved former regime officials and members of the security forces, the CIG judged that most had abandoned Ba'athism.

**238.** Politically, the CIG judged that the Ba'ath Party was "a spent force" which had little political relevance or popular support in Iraq beyond pockets in former regime strongholds such as Tikrit: that was "highly unlikely to change". Nevertheless, many Iraqi

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<sup>101</sup> Manuscript comment [unattributed] on Minute Cabinet Office [junior official] to Prime Minister, 20 August 2007, 'Iraq – Transition in Basra'.

<sup>102</sup> [CIG Assessment, 20 August 2007, 'Iraq: How Important is the Ba'ath Party?'](#)

Shia politicians, including Prime Minister Maliki, typically labelled Sunni oppositionists and insurgents as Ba'athists.

**239.** The CIG judged:

“Shia fears of a Ba'athist resurgence, however exaggerated, are genuinely held (and are shared, to a limited extent, by the Kurds). We judge they will limit the Shia appetite for reconciliation with the Sunni more broadly.”

### **Assassination of the Governor of Muthanna**

On 20 August, Mr Mohammed al-Hasani, Governor of Muthanna province and a Shia, was killed when a roadside bomb exploded next to his car in Samawah.<sup>103</sup>

*BBC News* reported that Mr al-Hasani was a “key figure” in the Badr organisation, which had “clashed frequently with the Mehdi army militia loyal to Shia cleric Muqtada al-Sadr for control of areas in the south of Iraq”.

Maj Gen Binns reported a couple of days after the killing that “all indications are that the Iraqis believe JAM to be responsible, although Muqtada al-Sadr has gone on record condemning both this and the previous assassination of the Governor of Qadisiyah”.<sup>104</sup>

**240.** Mr Browne’s Private Secretary wrote to Mr Brown’s Private Secretary on 21 August about the handover of Basra Palace.<sup>105</sup> The letter said:

“Handover on 29 August is of course not without risk, which predominantly revolves around equipment matters. Mitigating measures are, however, in place, following direction from General Petraeus ... In presentational terms, our communications posture for the handover of Basra Palace will be low key. This is set against the context of the broader process leading towards Provincial Iraqi Control and the run-up to the US reports on Iraq in mid-September. With specific regard to Basra Palace, officials in Baghdad are actively engaged with the Iraqi authorities to develop a media handling plan that matches our intent and portrays the handover as an Iraqi-led process ...

“There will be no ceremony or media event at Basra Palace itself for the handover, but a facility for Iraqi media at the Contingency Operating Base (COB) is planned where our aim will be to emphasise the effective training and support provided by MND(SE) forces to the PPF which has made handover possible.”

**241.** The letter confirmed that the combined handover of the PJCC and Basra Palace would mean “no Multi-National Force presence in Basra City”.

<sup>103</sup> *BBC News*, 20 August 2007, *Roadside bomb kills Iraq governor*.

<sup>104</sup> Minute Binns to CJO, 22 August 2007, ‘GOC HQ MND(SE) – Southern Iraq Update – 22 August 2007’.

<sup>105</sup> Letter Forber to Turner, 21 August 2007, ‘Iraq: Handover of Basra Palace’.

**242.** Mr Brown's Private Secretary added a covering note explaining that Mr McDonald and Ms Aldred had discussed the issue with General Douglas Lute, President Bush's adviser on Iraq, who had confirmed that on balance the US was content with the UK plan.<sup>106</sup>

**243.** Ms Aldred's advice was that it would be important to "keep a careful eye on how things develop between now and handover" and to "establish clear and consistent media messages". Further advice was awaited from the MOD on operational handling between now and PIC, including the part the UK would play in the event of any intra-Shia or sectarian violence.

**244.** Government officials working closely with the military met JAM1 again on 21 August.<sup>107</sup> They suggested that it was important not to be too fixated on detainee releases; the cessation of hostilities was, at least from the UK side, every bit as important. In their report back to London, the officials advised that the "MOD POLAD [Political Adviser] here is preparing a submission that will seek transfer of future authority for releases at the end of each month's period (should the process survive) from SoS Defence to GOC".

**245.** Maj Gen Binns was reported to be "emphatically supportive" of the negotiations: "So far."

**246.** A further long meeting took place on 23 August, described by government officials working closely with the military as "difficult".<sup>108</sup> A large part of the meeting was spent debating further releases. JAM1 insisted that "there must be 15 releases on 30 August; otherwise our agreement was off". Without the releases there would be huge problems; Basra would become "another Fallujah". The slow pace of releases was damaging JAM1's credibility.

**247.** The officials explained that "we had a deal and must stick to it" – the month of cease-fire ended on 13 September. If the violence continued to reduce there "should be substantial releases" then, but nothing could be promised yet.

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<sup>106</sup> Minute Turner to Prime Minister, 22 August 2007, 'Iraq: Handover of Basra Palace'.

<sup>107</sup> Email government official working closely with the military, 22 August 2007, '[NAME OF OPERATION] 21 August Meeting with [JAM1]'.

<sup>108</sup> Email government official working closely with the military, 24 August 2007, '[NAME OF OPERATION]: 23 August Meeting with [JAM1]'.

### General Keane's comments

In August 2007, General Jack Keane, a retired US General who had just returned from Iraq, was quoted in the media saying that UK “disengagement” from southern Iraq was “worsening the security situation and fuelling frustration among American commanders.”<sup>109,110</sup> He commented that the UK had “never had enough troops to truly protect the population” and described Basra as “almost gangland warfare”.

Gen Keane's comments were described by *The Guardian* as “the latest in a series of critical comments made by US officials, many anonymously, about Britain's commitment to Iraq”. They included a warning from academic and columnist Dr Stephen Biddle that the UK would have to fight its way out of Iraq in an “ugly and embarrassing retreat”.

**248.** In his weekly update on 22 August, Maj Gen Binns wrote that he was picking up “a mild suspicion in Baghdad over our CONOPs [concept of operations] post PIC and Basra Palace”.<sup>111</sup> He felt that:

“We have a robust plan engaging in capacity building/SSR with the ISF and engagement with Key Leaders, having an effect on smuggling over the borders ... extending Governance, infrastructure and the economy through the Provincial Reconstruction Teams, Civil Affairs and the development of Basra International Airport ...”

**249.** On 23 August, Mr Day wrote to Ms Aldred to follow up a conversation about “the PM's concern about the capacity and will of the Iraqi Palace Protection Force to secure the Basra Palace compound up to Petraeus/Crocker and then to PIC”.<sup>112</sup>

**250.** Having briefed Maj Gen Binns that Mr Brown “wants to be assured that decisions will be taken on the basis of an honest appraisal of PPF capabilities”, Mr Day reported that the collective view of those in Iraq, PJHQ and the MOD was that the Palace Protection Force would be “as well-trained and equipped as it can make them” and that mentoring would continue after the transfer. Maj Gen Binns would keep the situation under review and would retain the option of delaying transfer.

**251.** On 23 August, the Assessments Staff updated Ms Aldred that the level of daily attacks in Iraq was broadly unchanged.<sup>113</sup> In Basra, rocket and mortar attacks had declined the previous week, though it was not possible to be sure of the cause. The Assessments Staff reported on the likelihood that the agreement between MND(SE) and JAM in Basra would succeed, but that a period of violent score-settling would follow the withdrawal of UK troops from Basra.

<sup>109</sup> *The Guardian*, 24 August 2007, *British troops on verge of long-awaited pullout from Basra*.

<sup>110</sup> *The Guardian*, 22 August 2007, *US general questions British tactics in Iraq*.

<sup>111</sup> Minute Binns to CJO, 22 August, ‘GOC HQ MND(SE) – Southern Iraq Update – 22 August 2007’.

<sup>112</sup> Letter Day to Aldred, 23 August 2007, ‘Iraq: Basra Palace’.

<sup>113</sup> Minute Dowse to Aldred, 23 August 2007, ‘Iraq Intelligence Update – 23 August 2007’.

**252.** On 28 August, MOD officials sought approval from Mr Adam Ingram, the MOD's Duty Minister that day, for Maj Gen Binns "to conclude the next stage of discussions with JAM".<sup>114</sup>

**253.** The submission proposed that, in exchange for a "further one month cease-fire on UK forces", MND(SE) would continue their limitation on strike operations and, provided all the conditions were met, would release a further 11 internees on 13 September.

**254.** The proposal had been approved by Gen Petraeus, Gen Mohan and Dr Rubaie. The advice explained:

"It is intended that the GOC will develop a longer term plan for taking forward these discussions post-September. Given the uncertainty about how long UK forces will remain in the COB, we are naturally keen to ensure that we do not give up our negotiating leverage before we have an enduring agreement in place ...

"This remains a presentationally risky line of activity. The risks that the negotiations will get into the public domain are increasing. This is for a number of reasons:

- It is becoming increasingly obvious that there has been a step change in the security environment at the COB.
- We publish details of the number of internees being held, and it will become apparent that this number is falling;
- Rumours that a cease-fire deal has been reached are apparently circulating on the streets of Basra and these are being picked up by Arabic media outlets, some of whom have posed questions to the MND(SE) press office ...

"All internees released in future will be given a clear instruction by [JAM1] that they are not to publicise the terms of their release. For the moment a fairly neutral defensive line is holding in the face of inquiries from local media outlets."

**255.** Mr Ingram's Military Adviser responded on 28 August that Mr Ingram agreed Maj Gen Binns should now conclude negotiations with JAM1 along the lines proposed, "noting that Ministers will be informed in advance of the precise timing of the release of the internees and if there are any significant changes to the plan".<sup>115</sup>

**256.** In his weekly report on 28 August, Maj Gen Rollo reported Prime Minister Maliki's "evident concern" about security in Basra, which was helping General Mohan to "make progress" with his proposals to reinforce Basra.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> Minute Freer to APS/Minister (AF), 28 August 2007, 'Negotiations with JAM: Next Steps'.

<sup>115</sup> Minute Cameron to Deputy Command Secretary (Ops) PJHQ, 28 August 2007, 'Negotiations with JAM: Next Steps'.

<sup>116</sup> Minute Rollo to CDS, 28 August 2007, 'SBMR-I's Weekly Report (267) 28 Aug 07'.

**257.** Lt Gen Rollo also reported a conversation with Gen Petraeus in the wake of the media stories:

“Unsurprisingly, he remains clear that there are a range of tasks based on a starved HQ to be done, albeit at potentially reduced force levels. These include key leadership engagement, training support to ISF, ISTAR [Intelligence, Surveillance, Target Acquisition and Reconnaissance] and support for ISOF [Iraqi Special Operations Forces], support for the PRTs [Provincial Reconstruction Teams] and in Basra the consulates, in addition to the provision of an intervention capability. At the tactical level General Odierno intends to formulate his position on the UK requirements post PIC ... When it appears this should provide helpful definition on what the US is asking for.”

**258.** When Mr Brown met C (Sir John Scarlett) on 29 August, part of their discussion covered Iraq.<sup>117</sup> As a No.10 record of this meeting cannot be found, the Inquiry has used a record of it made by C.

**259.** Mr Brown was reported to be “currently very focused on Basra Palace and worried about US reactions to withdrawal, which he knows is due in the next few days”. Sir John and Mr Brown discussed the potential importance of the negotiation with JAM1.

**260.** At the end of August, government officials specialising in the Middle East were preparing two separate letters to the FCO on the negotiations and Basra: one updating Whitehall readers not in the MOD chain of command on the latest discussions with JAM1 and focused on the issue of Basra Palace and JAM1’s “guarantee” that JAM would not loot it, and a second “seeking to set the [NAME OF OPERATION] talks in context and to examine the implications of an accommodation with JAM for the future stability of Basra”.<sup>118</sup>

**261.** The second letter was intended to explain that “we may still be able to engineer a tolerable (no better) outcome in Basra if we accept the realities of militia politics”.

**262.** On 29 August, Mr Ahmad al-Shaybani, a senior JAM commander, announced that the activities of JAM would be suspended for six months.<sup>119</sup> The suspension of activity, including against “occupiers”, was to allow some “restructuring” within JAM. The following day, he announced that he had been misquoted and that anti-MNF activities were not suspended. A Cabinet Office official advised Mr Brown that the cease-fire was likely to be an attempt by Muqtada al-Sadr to reassert control over JAM, and there was a “high risk” that some would not respect his call.

**263.** Lt Gen Wall reported to the Iraq Strategy Group on 29 August that there had been some limited militia infiltration and looting of the Warren site following the handover, with

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<sup>117</sup> Minute, C’s meeting with the Prime Minister – 29 August 2007’.

<sup>118</sup> Email government official specialising in the Middle East, 29 August 2007, ‘[NAME OF OPERATION] Update Letter 29 August’.

<sup>119</sup> Minute Cabinet Office [junior official] to Prime Minister, 30 August 2007, ‘Iraq – JAM Ceasefire’.

the possible collusion or acquiescence of the Iraqi Police Service.<sup>120</sup> As a result, General Mohan had deployed his entire reserve battalion to the site. For this reason, and the late arrival of some equipment, the withdrawal from Basra Palace had been delayed.

**264.** Mr McDonald asked whether a delay would be likely to have any negative impact on the JAM cease-fire. The FCO felt that the risk was low and that there were “some indications” though no guarantee that Basra Palace would not be targeted.

**265.** US officials in Baghdad had established a working group to discuss arrangements for the renewal of the UN Security Council resolution which provided the MNF with its mandate in Iraq. Mr Nigel Casey reported to the Iraq Strategy Group that engagement with UK officials “to agree a joint strategy for handling the Iraqis” would begin after Gen Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker had given evidence to Congress.

**266.** Reflecting on the events that occurred after the UK had vacated the PJCC, Maj Gen Binns wrote:

“Whilst the events that unfolded within the PJCC after we vacated were unfortunate, there is much good that can be taken from them. Mohan quickly got to grips with the situation ... regaining control of the building ... The fact that the PJCC shift was back in the next morning ... is testimony to an Iraqi solution to an Iraqi problem and bodes well for the future ... I for one see the positives that came out of these events.”<sup>121</sup>

**267.** On 30 August, a government official working closely with the military reported that he had sent a copy of the letter on Basra Palace to colleagues in Whitehall.<sup>122</sup> He recorded the “excellent news” that Mr Ingram had signed off the MOD’s advice.

**268.** A paper by the Assessments Staff on 30 August stated that an announcement that JAM would be “restructured” was “almost certainly prompted by the growing frustration of Muqtada al-Sadr and other senior Sadrist leaders over their lack of control over the movement”.<sup>123</sup>

**269.** The Assessments Staff also considered that what was meant by “freezing” JAM activity was unclear and recorded that they doubted the ability of the Sadrist leadership to deliver a cease-fire.

**270.** Lt Gen Rollo told the Inquiry that JAM had “overplayed their hand” in August, in the area immediately south of Baghdad, by assassinating several chiefs of police and governors.<sup>124</sup> This led to a “fairly major push against them” by the ISF, which put them under pressure, resulting in the cease-fire.

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<sup>120</sup> Minute Cabinet Office [junior official] to McDonald, 30 August 2007, ‘Iraq Strategy Group, 29 August’.

<sup>121</sup> Minute Binns to CJO, 30 August 2007, ‘GOC HQ MND(SE) – Southern Iraq Update – 30 August 2007’.

<sup>122</sup> Minute official working closely with the military, 30 August 2007, ‘[NAME OF OPERATION] Update to Whitehall’.

<sup>123</sup> Paper Assessments Staff, 30 August 2007, ‘Iraq: JAM Restructuring and Ceasefires’.

<sup>124</sup> Public Hearing, 15 December 2009, pages 71-72.

**271.** SIS3 told the Inquiry that Muqtada al-Sadr was “following events, rather than driving events from his bolthole in Iran”.<sup>125</sup>

**272.** Maj Gen Binns reported on 30 August that UK forces had handed over the PJCC four days previously, ahead of schedule and without incident.<sup>126</sup> He was disappointed by Gen Mohan’s assessment that the PPF was unable to undertake security at Basra Palace yet. He judged this to be “brinksmanship with Baghdad”, that was being used to push for the resources needed for other security aspirations, rather than for Basra Palace.

**273.** Commenting from Baghdad, Major General Gerald Berragan, Deputy Commanding General (Operations) Multi-National Corps – Iraq, reported concerns that some of the additional resources that were being deployed to Basra at Gen Mohan’s request were not yet fully trained or equipped.<sup>127</sup>

**274.** One of the (all Shia) National Police units had a reputation in Baghdad “for its seemingly active role in ethnic cleansing of Sunni districts” and for “turning a blind eye – or worse – to JAM activities”. He cautioned that “reinforcements from Baghdad may bring other complications to the Basra security scene, and these units will clearly require some serious support and mentoring if they are to be successful”.

**275.** Maj Gen Binns, Gen Mohan and Lt Gen Odierno agreed on 30 August that the conditions were set for handover of Basra Palace on the night of 2/3 September.<sup>128</sup>

**276.** On the evening of 31 August, Mr Browne told Mr Brown that the handover would take place on 3 September.<sup>129</sup> He added that transition to PIC looked “likely” for November.

**277.** In a letter to Mr Brown of the same date, Mr Browne wrote:

“... following the handover of Basra Palace and our other Basra City bases, we will de facto be at PIC with the Iraqi Security Forces leading on security in Basra City. While our move out of Basra Palace has never been linked to PIC, it was not envisaged that the gap between the two events would be as large as it is now likely to be. Set against the background of the UK technically retaining responsibility for security in the province until PIC, this will entail a period of greater operational risk and, although UK commanders judge this to be acceptable, we should aim to keep this gap as short as possible.”<sup>130</sup>

<sup>125</sup> Private hearing, 2010, pages 62-63.

<sup>126</sup> Minute Binns to CJO, 30 August 2007, ‘GOC HQ MND(SE) – Southern Iraq Update – 30 August 2007’.

<sup>127</sup> Minute Berragan to CJO, 30 August 2007, ‘MNC-I Update – 30 Aug 07’.

<sup>128</sup> Letter Browne to Brown, 31 August 2007, ‘Iraq: Handover of Basrah Palace and Provincial Iraqi Control in Basra’.

<sup>129</sup> Minute Robbins to McDonald, 31 August 2007, ‘Prime Minister’s Conversation with Defence Secretary’.

<sup>130</sup> Letter Browne to Brown, 31 August 2007, ‘Iraq: Handover of Basrah Palace and Provincial Iraqi Control in Basra’. The papers indicate that Mr Brown did not see this letter as it was superseded by his conversation with Mr Browne.

**278.** On 31 August, Mr Browne's Private Secretary provided No.10 with an update on the security situation in Basra and ongoing discussions with JAM.<sup>131</sup> In the letter, he recapped negotiations with JAM1 and actions to date and explained:

"This arrangement has to date been very successful. Rocket and mortar attacks on Basra Air Station have effectively ceased and those on Basra Palace much reduced. The UK forces withdrawing from the Permanent Joint Co-ordination Centre on 27 August did so almost without incident. And resupply convoys to and from Basra Palace have also proceeded with significantly fewer incidents than would previously have been anticipated. As part of these discussions, we have also secured assurances that the handover of Basra Palace will proceed smoothly.

"The cease-fire period is due to expire on 13 September: the next stage of the discussions is aimed at ensuring a smooth continuance of these arrangements beyond that point. It is due to involve the release of 11 internees and a further month-long cease-fire period. We are also working up plans to try and ensure that a more permanent arrangement is put in place."

**279.** Although the operation had "undoubtedly saved lives", presentational risks remained:

"Some of those involved in the release process are potentially linked, on the basis of intelligence information, to attacks against UK personnel (although in no cases do we have sufficient evidence to initiate legal proceedings through the Iraqi justice system and indeed many would likely have been released in the near future through our standard procedures for managing our internee population). And we face risks of accusations that we have done deals with terrorists, which may reinforce some of the negative comments emerging from the US in recent weeks alleging that we are not in control of events in South-East Iraq and are seeking an early exit."

**280.** The update also recorded media coverage alleging the UK had negotiated a cease-fire with JAM but "these have been inaccurate on the detail and have not yet been more widely followed up":

"But it does seem likely that it is a matter of when, not if, the story will break. We will consider whether there is scope to be more proactive in media handling of this process in the aftermath of the reports to Congress by Petraeus and Crocker. In the meantime we do not intend to comment on any negotiations that we may have held with JAM or other militia groups."

**281.** On 31 August, an article by Mr Miliband and Mr Browne entitled 'Still on Track in Basra' appeared in the *Washington Post*.<sup>132</sup> In it they sought to "set the record straight" following criticism of the UK's role in southern Iraq. Although challenges in Basra

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<sup>131</sup> Letter English to Robbins, 31 August 2007, 'Update on the Security Situation in Basra and On-going Discussions with JAM'.

<sup>132</sup> *Washington Post*, 31 August 2007, *Still on Track in Basra*.

were “real, wide-ranging and deep-seated”, Mr Miliband and Mr Browne described expectations that transition to PIC would be achieved within months, after a judgement “based on the conditions on the ground”.

**282.** The article continued:

“To recognise that such challenges remain is not to accept that our mission in southern Iraq is failing. Our goal was to bring Iraqi forces and institutions to a level where they could take on responsibility for their communities. It could not create in four years in Iraq the democracy, governance and security that it took Great Britain and the United States centuries to establish.”

**283.** Maj Gen Binns told the Inquiry that, in August 2007, the UK considered it had surged – “we believed that SINBAD was a surge of sorts” – and that “we had done what we could in Basra at the time”.<sup>133</sup> This left two alternatives:

“We could have stood and fought. We could have continued to do strike operations at the rate that 19 Brigade were doing them, we could have done that. We would have just had to endure, so we could have endured, we could have hunkered down and we could have just taken it and waited for some form of Iraq-wide impact of the surge that the Americans were conducting.”

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**284.** A few days later two senior former UK military officers, General Sir Mike Jackson and Major General Tim Cross, were also quoted in the media.<sup>134</sup> The roles they held in relation to Iraq in 2003 are described in Section 9.1.

**285.** Gen Jackson characterised US post-invasion policy as “intellectually bankrupt”, Maj Gen Cross considered it “fatally flawed”. Maj Gen Cross alleged that his warnings about the possible descent of Iraq into chaos had been ignored by Mr Donald Rumsfeld, US Secretary of Defense.

**286.** On 3 September, the longer letter on Basra’s future was sent by a senior government official specialising in the Middle East to Mr Mark Lyall Grant, FCO Director General Political.<sup>135</sup> He reported that, at least for the moment, JAM1 appeared to have the backing of the majority of JAM in Basra and its leadership in Najaf. Although the negotiations on detainees were proving hard going, the senior official judged that JAM1 had invested too much of his personal capital in the process to withdraw, though he could lose the trust of his constituents.

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<sup>133</sup> Private hearing, 2 June 2010, page 29.

<sup>134</sup> *AFP*, 2 September 2007, *Second British general bashes US strategy in Iraq*.

<sup>135</sup> Minute senior government official specialising in the Middle East (1) to Lyall Grant, 3 September 2007, ‘[NAME OF OPERATION]: negotiations with JAM – Basrah Palace’.

**287.** The other Basra militia were aware of the negotiations and remained suspicious that the deal would marginalise them. JAM1 had given an undertaking that JAM would respect the Iraqi Government's takeover of Basra Palace and would not loot it, provided that there was an effective guard force in place.

**288.** The senior official concluded:

“This initiative has already delivered significant results but the negotiations remain fragile, uncertain and vulnerable to outside interference. This applies especially to [JAM1's] undertaking on Basra Palace. General Muhan's Palace Protection Force will be the main guarantor of a smooth handover.”

**289.** The national JAM cease-fire was welcomed by the Iraqi Ministerial Committee on National Security meeting at the start of September.<sup>136</sup> Prime Minister Maliki agreed that it provided an opportunity to:

- support moderate Sadrists, isolating the criminal and terrorist elements;
- encourage Sadrists to engage in the political process;
- begin talks with the religious authorities in Sadrist areas;
- outlaw all non-ISF armed groups;
- cease the raids into Sadrist areas as a confidence-building measure, which would also help restore calm;
- release a number of arrested JAM members as a goodwill gesture;
- provide work for the young non-criminal elements of JAM; and to
- invest financially in the JAM areas to help with provision of services.

**290.** Asked on the *Today Programme* on 3 September whether the withdrawal from Basra Palace signalled that the UK was pulling out of Iraq, Mr Brown said that this was a “pre-planned and ... organised move” and that the UK would “discharge all our responsibilities to the Iraqi people”.<sup>137</sup> The UK was moving from a combat role towards overwatch and retained the ability to reintervene if required. Mr Brown denied the accusation that Basra was being left to the mercy of the militias, pointing out that there were 30,000 Iraqi Security Forces (army and police) in Basra who would maintain security there.

**291.** On 3 September, government officials working closely with the military met JAM1, who was “even crosser than we expected” about the treatment of one of his contacts by a member of the British Consulate.<sup>138</sup> The officials commented: “Our despair with the

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<sup>136</sup> eGram 36500/07 Baghdad to FCO London, 5 September 2007, ‘Iraq: Ministerial Committee on National Security, 4 September’.

<sup>137</sup> *BBC Radio 4*, 3 September 2007, *Today Programme*.

<sup>138</sup> Email government official working closely with the military, 5 September 2007, ‘[NAME OF OPERATION]: The Phantom Menace’.

Consulate here grows daily. Apart from this entirely avoidable episode ... there is still no perceptible effort from them on the political track.”

**292.** In a report to Maj Gen Binns and the MIG the following day, a government official working closely with the military explained:

“It was with some difficulty that I focused [JAM1] on the issue of what happens after 13 September (fortuitously more or less the start of Ramadan) following proposed release of eleven more detainees. [JAM1]’s main request was that to delay the next batch of releases until ‘Id al-Fitr would try the patience of his comrades: would it not be possible to release a few each week or so? I replied that I hoped that such flexibility would be feasible, but I could make no promises at this stage ... I said that, in return for these Ramadan releases, we would be looking for [JAM1] to persevere in his efforts to rein in the violence. [JAM1] was almost dismissive, implying that this was a given. He then expounded at length why our agreement had to be about more than just security.”<sup>139</sup>

**293.** The official and JAM1 then discussed “what the end-state of the agreement might be”. JAM1 suggested that it was unlikely that resolution 1723 would be extended and that the UK would have to release all its detainees anyway. If they were released the UK would not appear to be a military occupying force but a social and economic one, so most of the current points of friction between the people of Basra and MND(SE) would fall away. JAM1 also considered it worth seeking to extend the agreement to al-Amara and Nasiriyah. The record of the meeting concluded:

“A difficult meeting in which the importance of the development agenda to [JAM1] became apparent. It seems clear that if we wish to gain the maximum benefit from this agreement we need to accelerate the process for delivering some tangible projects on the ground.”

**294.** In his weekly report on 3 September, Lt Gen Rollo wrote that he had suggested to Gen Petraeus that he would need to focus on three issues when he visited London in mid-September:

- what capabilities were required in Basra post-PIC until around April 2008;
- how this might evolve over summer 2008, including the potential for US troops to reinforce Basra in the event of the Iraqis being overwhelmed; and
- clarification of the long-term intent.<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> Letter government official working closely with the military to GOC, 4 September 2007, ‘Meeting with [JAM1], 3 September’.

<sup>140</sup> Minute Rollo to CDS, 3 September 2007, ‘SBMR-I’s Weekly Report (268) 3 Sep 07’.

**295.** Lt Gen Rollo also wrote that it was important to be clear with the US about UK intentions:

“US slides continue to show a brigade in Basra bedecked with the Union Jack when coalition/US force levels have reduced to only five brigades. If this is not our policy then we should say so, and agree an event or time at which we step out of their plan.”

**296.** Lt Gen Rollo predicted that in his report to Congress Gen Petraeus would “acknowledge the need to drawdown, but will wish to maintain the present policy of securing the population while simultaneously transitioning steadily to the ISF”.

**297.** Neither Mr Browne nor Mr Miliband attended Cabinet on 4 September.<sup>141</sup> Mr Brown said that had they been there, they would have provided an update on the position in Iraq and Afghanistan; he would ask them to report to a future Cabinet.

**298.** On the same day Maj Gen Wall briefed the Chiefs of Staff that the security situation across Iraq “remained positive”, with civilian casualties at their lowest level since the beginning of 2006; “prospects currently appeared positive” for the effectiveness of the six-month JAM cease-fire; but there was a recognised risk of a significant AQ-I attack in the run-up to the Gen Petraeus/Ambassador Crocker statement to Congress.<sup>142</sup>

**299.** The Chiefs of Staff observed that “it was important that a period of stability elapsed before the handover could be considered a complete success. The pressure to achieve PIC needed to be maintained ...” The remaining potential barriers to PIC were the removal of Governor Waili (still legally challenging his dismissal) and the continuance of Gen Mohan and Gen Jalil in post until PIC.

**300.** A CIG assessed Iraq’s relations with its neighbours on 4 September.<sup>143</sup> It judged:

“Iran wants Multi-National Forces (MNF) to leave Iraq and is actively working to make life as difficult as possible for them. Iran will tolerate short-term instability to force a humiliating MNF withdrawal. Iranian support for Shia extremists continues unabated.

“Syria also wants MNF to leave Iraq ... Syria continues to provide safe haven to some Sunni groups supporting insurgent activity in Iraq, particularly those linked to the Iraqi Ba’ath party ...

“As the prospect of MNF drawdown looms larger, Iraq’s Sunni neighbours are increasingly fearful of a descent into civil war, an emerging Al Qaida safe-haven, or an Iranian-dominated Shia state ... So long as Iranian influence is seen to be increasing, regional tensions will continue to rise.”

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<sup>141</sup> Cabinet Conclusions, 4 September 2007.

<sup>142</sup> Minutes, 4 September 2007, Chiefs of Staff meeting.

<sup>143</sup> CIG Assessment, 4 September 2007, ‘Iraq: Relations with the Neighbours’.

**301.** At the request of the MOD and FCO, on 6 September the JIC assessed progress of the Baghdad Security Plan (known in Arabic as Fardh al-Qanoon (FAQ)) which had begun in February, and its future prospects.<sup>144</sup>

**302.** The JIC judged that:

“1. Under the current Baghdad Security Plan, intensified Multi-National Force (MNF) and Iraqi security force (ISF) operations have improved security for Iraqis in general in Baghdad. Civilian, ISF and MNF casualties have reduced. Attacks on the MNF have fallen off since June, and are now at the lowest level since June 2006.”

**303.** The JIC assessed that MNF operations focused on the AQ-I threat and other Sunni Islamist extremists had had an effect. The number of high-profile suicide attacks against Shia targets had fallen.

**304.** Outside Baghdad, overall attack levels had fallen sharply after record highs in June. The JIC assessed it was “too early to say whether this trend will be sustained”.

**305.** The JIC judged that: “The Iraqis have taken no political advantage of the improved security to pursue national reconciliation or reconstruction.”

**306.** The JIC assessed:

“The Iraqi Government committees established to deal with economic regeneration and communal reconciliation have achieved little of substance. Electricity and fuel shortages remain more acute in Baghdad than elsewhere in Iraq and are the cause of widespread disillusionment, undermining the government’s credibility.”

**307.** In relation to performance of the ISF, the JIC judged:

“The initial higher level Iraqi management of and engagement with the complexities of FAQ was encouraging. From the start, Maliki took a ‘hands on’ approach, chairing FAQ’s Executive Steering Committee and co-ordinating security operations ... But in recent months his enthusiasm has worn off. Continuing high profile attacks in Baghdad (together with Shia nervousness over programmes to support armed Sunni tribes) have strained Maliki’s relations with senior MNF commanders. We judge Iraqi confidence, both among Ministers and more generally, has been damaged by the popular perception that security has not significantly improved.”

**308.** The JIC considered that key Iraqi structures established to manage FAQ were still “overwhelmingly Shia”. The government had taken some steps to address human rights abuses, including sacking 23 senior National Police commanders and disbanding an entire battalion accused of complicity in sectarian acts. But other individuals accused of sectarian abuses remained in positions of responsibility.

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<sup>144</sup> [JIC Assessment, 6 September 2007, ‘Baghdad Security Plan: Impact and Prognosis’.](#)

**309.** The JIC Assessment ended with a section entitled ‘Outlook’, which said:

“Iraqi politics are paralysed. Despite upbeat claims following the recent leadership conference, we see no prospect of Maliki’s government making real progress on key legislation ... We continue to judge that any new leader would face similar challenges to Maliki: early significant improvements in government performance would be unlikely.

“We judge the levels of violence in Baghdad and across Iraq may continue to fall, but only as long as the US troop surge can be sustained: the ISF, even with tribal support, are not capable of maintaining the tempo or effect of current MNF operations ... The additional US surge can only be maintained until March 2008 ... When it reduces, we judge that Sunni extremists and Shia militias will try to reassert control on the ground.”

**310.** In his weekly update on 6 September, Maj Gen Binns described the withdrawal of UK troops from Basra Palace on 2 and 3 September as “extremely successful”.<sup>145</sup> Although one of the convoys was hit by an IED, there were no serious injuries and it arrived back in the COB “largely unscathed” – something that would have been “impossible” a month earlier.

**311.** The media coverage in Iraq and in the UK had been “largely positive”, with the only real criticism that the UK was leaving a security gap in the South coming from the US media.

**312.** Maj Gen Binns commented that Dr Rubaie’s decision to speak to the media (“in English, so none of the message was lost in translation”) was “further affirmation that the decision to hand over control of the Palace to the ISF had the full support of the GoI”.

**313.** Less positively, Maj Gen Binns reported:

“Whilst senior US Commanders recognise and understand the reasoning for our departure from the Palace ... it has become apparent that this understanding is not shared by junior and mid-ranking US personnel. My staffs ... detect at least a slight discomfort at the UK position ... at the working level, with a feeling that our return to the COB will leave Southern Iraq open to malign Iranian influence and the flow of EFPs. These feelings are no doubt buoyed by the address by POTUS [President Bush] to military personnel in Anbar; at a tactical level, the rallying call ‘if we let our enemies back us out of Iraq, we will be more likely to face them in America’ at a time when our own Government is announcing a reduction in troop numbers (regardless of how long this has been planned) further demonstrates the perception of a division between UK and US foreign policies towards Iraq.”

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<sup>145</sup> Minute Binns to CJO, 6 September 2007, ‘GOC HQ MND(SE) – Southern Iraq Update – 6 September 2007’.

**314.** Sir John Scarlett told the Inquiry that withdrawing from Basra Palace – “a major exposed operation” – without a single casualty had been a “really important achievement”.<sup>146</sup>

**315.** Colonel Peter Mansoor, executive officer to Gen Petraeus in 2007, wrote in his book *Surge*:

“By withdrawing their forces from Basra and consolidating them on a single base at the city outskirts, British political and military leaders had abdicated responsibility for the city’s security. Shi’a militia leaders had contested control of the city and outlasted the British will to continue the fight.”<sup>147</sup>

**316.** Mr Dowse told the Inquiry that, although there was a policy statement to the effect that even after withdrawal from Basra Palace UK forces retained the ability to re-engage if required, his view and that of the intelligence community more generally had been that that was not true “in any meaningful sense”:

“The idea that we could have gone back into Basra and reoccupied in the event of a crisis ... was extremely optimistic, to say the least. We never actually were in a position where we wrote that in an assessment. I recall going to a couple of meetings where I asked the MOD representatives how confident they were of the assertion of re-engagement and was told ... ‘We recognise we are carrying a risk.’ Actually, it was never really tested.”<sup>148</sup>

**317.** Asked whether the UK had the capacity to re-intervene if the agreement with JAM in Basra had broken down, Maj Gen Binns told the Inquiry that he “didn’t really define what ‘re-intervention’ meant, because it implies that we were intervening in the first place in 2007 and we weren’t”. Maj Gen Binns added:

“Did I have the capacity to go back and reoccupy the Palace? Yes, at a stretch, but it never really crossed my mind because I was so glad to get out of it.”<sup>149</sup>

### The impact of negotiations with JAM1

Maj Gen Shaw told the Inquiry that he thought it likely that without the cease-fire, withdrawing from Basra Palace might have become “the totemic humiliation of the British forces shot out of Basra”.<sup>150</sup>

Maj Gen Shaw subsequently added the following detail: “Indeed, subsequent conversations with [officials working closely with the military] relate JAM affirmation after

<sup>146</sup> Private hearing, 10 June 2010, pages 41-42.

<sup>147</sup> Mansoor PR. *Surge: My Journey with General David Petraeus and the Remaking of the Iraq War*. Yale University Press, 2013.

<sup>148</sup> Private hearing, 14 June 2010, pages 77-78.

<sup>149</sup> Private hearing, 2 June 2010, page 30.

<sup>150</sup> Private hearing, 21 June 2010, page 37.

the reposturing that attacks on it [Basra Palace] had been in the offing but were halted by the 'deal'."

However, references to the process as a "deal" had been unhelpful and Maj Gen Shaw told the Inquiry that:

"I should have packaged it better like the American Anbar uprising, which was broadly the same thing."<sup>151</sup>

Maj Gen Binns told that Inquiry that in his view:

"... the accommodation got us to the stage where the Iraqis took responsibility for the security of Basra and they wouldn't have done that if the violence had still been at an unacceptable level."<sup>152</sup>

He thought that:

"... back here in London there were people who were deeply uncomfortable with this and the further you got away from Basra, the more uncomfortable people got with the nature of the deal."<sup>153</sup>

Although Maj Gen Binns was confident that Mr Browne was aware of and comfortable with the risk associated with negotiations, he told the Inquiry:

"I think, you know, I think there were people in outer offices who wanted – not unreasonably, they wanted to mitigate that risk."<sup>154</sup>

Maj Gen Binns also told the Inquiry:

"...in retrospect, I said, 'Well, look, we've done this before, surely, negotiated with terrorists, surely somebody could give me some advice on negotiations', and I didn't get any, so we were thinking on our feet about this process of negotiation. We were just trying to come up with a policy."

Mr Dowse told the Inquiry that the departure of UK troops from Basra City did affect the quantity, quality and reliability of the information he was receiving.<sup>155</sup>

SIS3 told the Inquiry that the agreement reached had:

"... reserved the right for HMG to respond militarily to any individual or groups planning attacks, that we would interdict any weaponry moving in, and, furthermore, that we would reserve the right to intervene when the Iraqi Government requested us to, if they did. So, in other words, we were circumscribing our military activity to some extent, but I think with no risk to our overall posture."<sup>156</sup>

He also considered that events in Basra had a wider effect across JAM:

"Muqtada al-Sadr, who of course is the rather idiosyncratic, not to say incoherent leader of JAM, sitting in Iran I think then made a virtue out of necessity by

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<sup>151</sup> Private hearing, 21 June 2010, page 22.

<sup>152</sup> Private hearing, 2 June 2010, page 19.

<sup>153</sup> Private hearing, 2 June 2010, page 21.

<sup>154</sup> Private hearing, 2 June 2010, page 22.

<sup>155</sup> Private hearing, 14 June 2010, pages 75-76.

<sup>156</sup> Private hearing, 2010, page 62.

announcing his own six month freeze on activity on 29 August. But I have always rather felt that that was him following events, rather than driving events from his bolthole in Iran.”

SIS6 told the Inquiry that the understanding reached provided a six-month window for the UK to pull out of Basra safely and re-locate to the Air Station.<sup>157</sup>

Asked about the impact on security in Basra City, SIS6 explained that he did not know, because the UK was not on the ground there.<sup>158</sup>

A government official who worked closely with the military told the Inquiry he recalled that the negotiations had been described as “a treatment of the symptoms” which had not “brought about a cure” but was rather intended to “buy time and ... space”.<sup>159</sup>

**318.** On 7 September, Mr McDonald provided Mr Brown with a timeline of actions on Iraq leading up to his statement to Parliament after Recess.<sup>160</sup> The main points were:

- a video conference with President Bush, to understand his reaction to the Petraeus/Crocker report, on 10 September;
- an update to Cabinet by Mr Browne;
- a meeting with Gen Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker on 18 September;
- discussions between US and UK officials and military about future UK role;
- NSID to consider options and reach a view; and
- a visit to Basra by Mr Brown in early October.

**319.** Mr McDonald reported that work was under way in the MOD on options for a UK military contribution “in the next phase” post-PIC. There were two possible models:

- A small group of specialists and a headquarters in Baghdad, plus naval and air support, with a “training component” in the South, totalling 1,800–2,000.
- A large enough force to enable the UK to maintain command of MND(SE), totalling around 3,800.

**320.** After a short visit to Basra and Baghdad from 5 to 7 September, Gen Dannatt reported a “growing, albeit modest, sense of optimism about the strategic opportunities that are now potentially being presented to the coalition and specifically to our own forces in South-East Iraq”.<sup>161</sup>

**321.** That sense of optimism had been generated by a combination of the US surge, Sunni engagement and Muqtada al-Sadr’s cease-fire.

<sup>157</sup> Private hearing, 2010, page 23. Based on redacted material.

<sup>158</sup> Private hearing, 2010, pages 28-29. Based on redacted material.

<sup>159</sup> Private hearing, 2011.

<sup>160</sup> Minute McDonald to Brown, 7 September 2007, ‘Iraq: Timeline Before your H/C statement (and update on Pakistan)’.

<sup>161</sup> [Minute Dannatt to CDS, 10 September 2007, ‘CGS Visit to Iraq 5-7 Sep 07’.](#)

**322.** Gen Dannatt recorded his impression that “at a low level the force levels in Baghdad are beginning to tip the balance”. He reported Lt Gen Odierno’s estimate that 65 percent of Bagdad was “firmly under control”.

**323.** On Basra, Gen Dannatt found that:

“... our own tactical thinking was beginning to reflect that in Baghdad ... we had far more in common than differences despite the best efforts of some of the US staff to confuse the situation.”

**324.** Gen Dannatt described Basra as “tentatively quiet” but observed that security would only be sustainable “if we now begin to deliver some results on the ground in terms of reconstruction and development”. He cautioned:

“We probably now have a very narrow window of opportunity to reinforce the success that has been achieved on the ground, but we must not become the victims of that success by believing that because it is quiet that we have done all we can – the emphasis must now shift away from the military line of operation ... Perhaps it is even time to consider whether we should be pushing the FCO or DFID into a more leading role?”

**325.** In relation to the UK’s ability to re-intervene in Basra, Gen Dannatt wrote:

“I sense that there is the potential for great confusion about what we actually mean by this widely used term. I believe that it is unrealistic to think that we could re-intervene in Basra without considerable cost, indeed to do so would be a massive retrograde step in campaign terms. The focus should be perhaps to enable ISF re-intervention in the city with the coalition enabling this task.”

**326.** If the ISF were unable to re-intervene successfully, the Corps Reserve brigade might be called on. The UK’s “residual focus for a time-limited period” would be on capacity-building with the ISF and in the Basra economy. If that was to be the case, Gen Dannatt saw the UK deployment as between 1,000 and 1,500 troops.

**327.** Gen Dannatt concluded his report:

“In summary, I found a campaign that is at a major crossroads and facing a narrow window of opportunity. The opportunities are time sensitive – we must be seen to be reducing our forces, we must be prepared to engage with all parties and we must follow up military operations with effective political and economic development. We must base our thinking on the fact that we only have a limited amount of time to change tack before ... we out stay our welcome once more ... I am conscious that we have not yet received any political direction, but from an Army viewpoint I can see a definite way forward on the ground in Iraq, consistent with any plans for greater investment in Afghanistan and in a modest return to contingency.”

## The credit crunch

From September 2007, the global financial crisis became a major focus for the UK Government. Key events as the crisis intensified are described below.

On 9 August 2007, French bank BNP Paribas told investors that they would be unable to withdraw money from two of its funds because it could not value the assets in them owing to a “complete evaporation of liquidity” in the market. This triggered a sharp rise in the cost of credit, and alerted the world to the start of the credit crunch.<sup>162</sup>

On 13 September, BBC News reported that Northern Rock had been granted emergency financial support by the Bank of England. The following day, customers of the bank withdrew £1bn, the biggest run on a British bank for more than a century.

On 21 April 2008, the Bank of England announced a £50bn plan to help banks by allowing them to swap high risk mortgage debts for secure government bonds.

At the end of the month, the first annual fall in UK house prices for 12 years was recorded by Nationwide.

On 7 September, US mortgage lenders Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac were taken over by the US Government. Together they had lost approximately US\$14bn over the previous year.<sup>163</sup>

The management of both companies was to be replaced, and they were to be given access to additional funding. Both were to be administered by the Federal Housing Finance Agency until their long-term future was decided.

President Bush said: “Putting these companies on a sound financial footing, and reforming their business practices, is critical to the health of our financial system.”

On 16 September, Lehman Brothers – a major US investment bank – filed for chapter 11 bankruptcy protection, which gives a company time to devise a plan to re-pay its creditors.<sup>164</sup> The BBC reported:

“Unwinding Lehman’s complex deals will take months if not years. During that time the global financial system will be snarled up. Many banks won’t know for sure how much they are exposed to Lehman, and will have difficulty freeing up the money in those deals.

“This in turn is likely to intensify the credit crunch, with potentially dire consequences for businesses and consumers.”<sup>165</sup>

On 3 October, the US House of Representatives passed a US\$700bn plan to rescue the US financial sector.<sup>166</sup>

<sup>162</sup> BBC News, 7 August 2009, *Timeline: Credit crunch to downturn*.

<sup>163</sup> BBC News, 7 September 2008, *US takes over key mortgage firms*.

<sup>164</sup> BBC News, 16 September 2008, *Lehman Bros files for bankruptcy*.

<sup>165</sup> BBC News, 16 September 2008, *Q&A: Lehman Brothers bank collapse*.

<sup>166</sup> BBC News, 7 August 2009, *Timeline: Credit crunch to downturn*.

**328.** Mr Prentice attended his first meeting of the Iraqi Ministerial Committee on National Security (MCNS) on 9 September. It was confirmed that the national JAM cease-fire was intended to include suspension of all attacks on the MNF.<sup>167</sup>

**329.** After visiting Basra for the formal exchange of letters concerning the handover of Basra Palace, Dr Rubaie reported to the MCNS that he had agreed with Gen Mohan that the Iraqi Army would remain in the Palace in the short term, but that longer term it should be renovated and used by the Government.

**330.** Lt Gen Rollo told the MCNS that the MNF had reduced its anti-JAM operations by 50 percent nationally after the cease-fire was announced, but EFP attacks on MNF had risen and indirect fire continued unchanged. Prime Minister Maliki agreed with Dr Rubaie that this should not deflect the efforts of the reconciliation committee: if a political solution could be found, it should be pursued. He would take two steps towards peace for every step the militants took.

**331.** Lt Gen Rollo commented in his weekly report on 10 September that Muqtada al-Sadr's cease-fire announcement had "prompted considerable debate and action geared at capitalising on the situation, regardless of what it might mean in the longer term".<sup>168</sup>

**332.** Lt Gen Rollo reported that the handover of Basra Palace had "generated little interest" in Baghdad, with "nothing but positive noises coming from my US colleagues". He continued:

"The reality of the situation in Basra more generally is also accepted, I believe, and fears of premature withdrawal or less than supportive behaviour from the British appear to be decreasing. CGS's visit provided a useful opportunity to test the acceptability of a transition from current force levels to a significantly smaller force next Spring, focused on assistance and development ..."

**333.** On 10 September, Mr Browne spoke to Secretary Gates shortly before he reported to Congress.<sup>169</sup> Secretary Gates indicated that he expected Gen Petraeus would recommend that while troops should remain in Iraq as long as possible, there were opportunities to draw down where the security situation allowed. Mr Browne observed that the UK strategy for MND(SE) was consistent with this approach; the UK could re-intervene in the South if required.

**334.** Secretary Gates confirmed that the US was content with the UK position. The US concern was whether a significant UK troop reduction would jeopardise the mission and impact on the commitment of other coalition partners. He encouraged Mr Browne to discuss the matter with Gen Petraeus and Ambassador Eric Edelman, Under Secretary of Defense, when they were in London the following week.

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<sup>167</sup> eGram 38263/07 Baghdad to FCO London, 10 September 2007, 'Iraq: Ministerial Committee for National Security (MCNS) – 9 September'.

<sup>168</sup> Minute Rollo to CDS, 10 September 2007, 'SBMR-I's Weekly Report (269) 10 Sep 07'.

<sup>169</sup> Letter Forber to Fletcher, 11 September 2007, 'Iraq: Conversation with US Defence Secretary'.

**335.** Mr Browne shared plans for a Prime Ministerial statement on Iraq in early October, and said that it would be very difficult not to refer to PIC. The two agreed to speak again following Gen Petraeus' visit.

**336.** On 10 and 11 September, Gen Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker testified to Congress on security and political progress in Iraq, and on the impact of the US surge.<sup>170</sup>

**337.** Ambassador Crocker focused on political, economic and diplomatic developments in Iraq. He assessed that a "secure, stable democratic Iraq at peace with its neighbours" was "attainable" but warned that Iraq was, and would remain, "a traumatised society". In terms of progress he said:

"In my judgement, the cumulative trajectory of political, economic, and diplomatic developments in Iraq is upwards, although the line is not steep. The process will not be quick, it will be uneven, punctuated by setbacks as well as achievements, and it will require substantial US resolve and commitment. There will be no single moment at which we can claim victory; any turning point will likely only be recognised in retrospect ...

"2007 has brought improvement. Enormous challenges remain. Iraqis still struggle with fundamental questions about how to share power, accept their differences and overcome their past. The changes to our strategy last January – the surge – have helped change the dynamics in Iraq for the better. Our increased presence made besieged communities feel that they could defeat Al Qaida by working with us ... We have given Iraqis the time and space to reflect on what sort of country they want. Most Iraqis genuinely accept Iraq as a multi-ethnic, multi-sectarian society – it is the balance of power that has yet to be sorted out."

**338.** Gen Petraeus focused on security. He stated that the military objectives of the surge were being met in large measure with coalition and Iraqi forces dealing "significant blows" to Al Qaeda in Iraq and disrupting Shia militia.<sup>171</sup> He highlighted the decline in civilian deaths during the period but recognised that the numbers were still at "troubling levels". Additionally, he described the "tribal rejection of Al Qaida" spreading out from Anbar province as potentially the "most significant development of the past eight months". As a consequence of the progress made, Gen Petraeus suggested that it would be possible to reduce troop numbers to pre-surge levels in summer 2008 although he warned of the dangers of handing over to Iraqi Security Forces too early.

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<sup>170</sup> Testimony to Congress, 10 September 2007, 'Statement of Ambassador Ryan C Crocker, United States Ambassador to the Republic of Iraq, before a Joint Hearing of the Committee on Foreign Affairs and the Committee on Armed Services September 10, 2007'.

<sup>171</sup> Testimony to Congress Petraeus, 10-11 September 2007, 'Report to Congress on the Situation in Iraq'.

**339.** During the two days of testimony, Ambassador Crocker and Gen Petraeus were questioned on the UK's approach in Basra. A briefing paper on key points from those exchanges recorded that:

- Asked whether he agreed with the British drawdown and withdrawal from Basra City, Gen Petraeus said he did.
- Asked whether the British had lost Basra, Gen Petraeus said: "The British did a good hand-off to a force that was trained and equipped and certified to hand off the palace ... There's no question but that there is a competition down there between the Fadhila Party, the Supreme Council, the Badr Corps, and certainly Sadr's party and militia. Interestingly, there have been deals there recently, and the violence level has just flat plummeted. It's included some release of some Jaysh al-Mahdi figures – again accommodations between all of them. Again for the Shia south, that's probably ok."
- Asked why the British had a force protection mission whereas the US had a population protection mission, Gen Petraeus said that this was due to the lack of sectarian violence in Basra.
- Asked whether he could foresee a situation where US troops may have to be committed to Basra, Gen Petraeus said: "I don't think that we need to put US forces in southern provinces, other than, say, some special forces teams or occasionally sending something down to help out."<sup>172</sup>

**340.** A few days after the testimony, Mr Prentice reported that it had "not been the climactic political event here which many were expecting a few weeks ago" but now that it was over "the Iraqi political class know better where the US stand and what is expected of them".<sup>173</sup>

**341.** Mr Brown spoke to President Bush by video conference on 10 September.<sup>174</sup>

**342.** The briefing provided for the conversation suggested he emphasise that no decisions had been taken on a radical drawdown of UK troops and that the UK remained committed both to the coalition and to supporting Iraq's stability and development.<sup>175</sup>

**343.** Officials assessed that President Bush was unlikely to make any fundamental changes to US policy in the medium term; rather, his focus would be on short-term management of the surge. The briefing said:

"Although US commanders in Iraq did sign off on the Palace move [in Basra], Washington report continued anxiety on the part of US officers and policy-makers

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<sup>172</sup> Paper [unattributed], [undated], 'Crocker & Petraeus – Key Quotes & Exchanges'.

<sup>173</sup> [eGram 37677/07 Baghdad to FCO London, 13 September 2007, 'Iraq: Future UK Posture: What is at Stake?'](#)

<sup>174</sup> Letter Fletcher to Hickey, 10 September 2007, 'Prime Minister's VTC with President Bush, 10 September: Middle East'.

<sup>175</sup> Briefing [unattributed], 10 September 2007, 'Bush VTC'.

in both Baghdad and Washington about UK plans in the South. Their concerns are centred on the tension between (what they assume will be) further UK withdrawals in the South, and the US military surge in Baghdad and its surrounding provinces.”

**344.** During the video conference, Mr Brown said that the departure from Basra Palace had been smooth; he told President Bush that “elements of the media had misrepresented our strategy, and our long-term objectives”.<sup>176</sup> The next steps, including transition to PIC in Basra, had to be based on a military assessment. Mr Brown explained that he intended to make a Parliamentary statement on Iraq in early October but there would be no “hasty decisions” in the meantime.

**345.** At Cabinet on 11 September, Mr Browne commented that Gen Petraeus’ evidence had been less dramatic than billed: security in Baghdad had increased, and large scale sectarian violence in Iraq had decreased.<sup>177</sup> The US would wish to sustain its forces at a higher level until 2008, to provide opportunities for political progress, although overall numbers would reduce. By July 2008 the total would be 130,000; the pre-surge level. Mr Browne told Cabinet that the US was essentially adopting the same approach the UK had taken in the South; making reductions where security could be handed over to the Iraqis.

**346.** Mr Browne reported that the transfer of Basra Palace on 3 September had taken place without incident and the city was calm. British forces were now focused on mentoring and training, although they would retain a capability to re-intervene if necessary. Force levels would reduce to around 5,000 in November, with PIC expected at around the same time, conditions permitting. Future plans would, in part, depend on US decisions.

**347.** Mr Miliband observed that the UK’s focus had, inevitably, been on Basra for the last two to three years, but it was important now to think about the nature of the UK’s overall relationship with Iraq, in the context of the wider international community. He believed that there was a chance to persuade the European Union to develop serious economic and social relationships with Iraq.

**348.** Mr Brown concluded the discussion by saying that, over the next few weeks, the Government would need to look at security, reconciliation (where the emphasis was moving from the national to the local level) and the “stake in the future” initiative. Cabinet would have a further opportunity to discuss the issue at an appropriate time as matters became clearer.

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<sup>176</sup> Letter Fletcher to Hickey, 10 September 2007, ‘Prime Minister’s VTC with President Bush, 10 September: Middle East’.

<sup>177</sup> Cabinet Conclusions, 11 September 2007.

**349.** At their meeting on 11 September, the Chiefs of Staff noted that:

“The Gen Petraeus/Amb Crocker statement to Congress had been encouragingly realistic but had not comprehensively articulated the future political intentions and progress of PM Maliki.”<sup>178</sup>

**350.** Uncertainty remained about the direction Shia groups in Basra would take in the coming months. As a result:

“The current nature of the UK mission in Iraq had potential to change, given the security situation in MND(SE). It was important that the current security situation did not cause a premature shift in strategic direction. Potential future UK missions needed to be considered in a coalition context.”

**351.** Major General John Rose, MOD Director General Intelligence Collection, briefed the Chiefs of Staff that the freeze on JAM activity was welcome but its details remained unclear. The lack of Sadrist cohesion meant that “recalcitrant JAM members” were likely to continue to pursue Badr, MNF-I and their opponents within JAM on an opportunist basis, and there therefore remained a “potent threat of further violence”.

**352.** Iranian support to Badr/ISCI and some elements of JAM was believed to be continuing with the goal of influencing the security strategy in southern Iraq. The Chiefs of Staff noted that there would always be an element within JAM which would pursue violent ends. Iranian involvement was an important factor, although the Chiefs of Staff felt that Iran had no interest in promoting an intra-Shia struggle. The important question that remained unanswered was “the route that the Shia groupings in Basra would follow over the coming months: accommodation or confrontation?”

**353.** Government officials working closely with the military had a further meeting with JAM1 on 11 September to discuss detainee releases and development issues.<sup>179</sup> They reported that the release of a further 11 detainees would take place the following day and suggested that JAM1 and MND(SE) should:

“... be using the period of our agreement to demonstrate to both the Iraqi government/Provincial Council and coalition development officials that there were new opportunities ... But we should be looking further than a few individual isolated projects, towards accelerating and unblocking the projects which have already been drawn up and approved ... [JAM1] had brought a list of ideas for development projects ... [that] ranged from the relatively straightforward (street lighting, drinking water) to the much more ambitious (building a new hospital).”

**354.** Following the meeting, a government official working closely with the military reported to colleagues in London that they had been trying to assess the thinking

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<sup>178</sup> Minutes, 11 September 2007, Chiefs of Staff meeting.

<sup>179</sup> Email government official working closely with the military, 12 September 2007, ‘[NAME OF OPERATION]: JAM1 Meeting 11 September’.

of interested parties on “where we are going with [NAME OF OPERATION]”. The responses were summarised as “we do not want merely to be buying JAM quiescence with releases; we do not want to be seen to be appeasing terrorists; we do not want to enter into an open-ended pork-barrel process; we do not want to be seen to be favouring one political trend over another”.

**355.** Mr Day sent Ms Aldred a “first cut” of options for future UK force levels in southern Iraq on 11 September.<sup>180</sup> While emphasising that the analysis remained provisional and needed further work, he outlined four options:

- A minimal contribution of 250-750 personnel, embedded within mainly US units to provide niche training or support to the Iraqis and/or the coalition.
- A 1,500-strong battlegroup or equivalent, plus logistic support, embedded within a US formation, primarily to continue SSR but with a limited combat capability.
- A one- or two-star HQ plus two battlegroups and limited logistic and enabling capabilities, totalling around 2,500 personnel, to form the framework of a multi-national brigade.
- A 500-strong framework brigade with a one- or two-star HQ, two battle groups and full logistic and enabling support capabilities, able to operate without US support.

**356.** The initial MOD view was that the third of these was the minimum contribution necessary to retain the UK’s lead nation and principal ally status in MND(SE), but that would need to be tested with the US. All options except the final one would require significant US logistic and enabling support.

**357.** MOD officials advised Mr Browne’s Private Secretary on 11 September that, as previously agreed, 11 internees would be released the following day and noted that advice on the long-term future of the operation would follow shortly.<sup>181</sup> Referring to a “step reduction” in attacks on coalition forces since the start of the process, the advice said that there was “merit in pursuing this process”.

**358.** The advice included a substantial section on presentation, referring to articles in *The Sunday Times* and *The Guardian*. There had been some follow-up interest and Parliamentary interest was anticipated. As a result:

“We have reflected on whether and how we should adjust our presentational approach to this issue. At some point, some aspects of the overall strategy need to be explained to the public and Parliament and also to the families of service personnel who have been killed in Iraq. The best means of doing so might be as part of a wider piece on Iraq strategy ... rather than a media event focusing solely on [NAME OF OPERATION] issues. If the Secretary of State agrees, we will develop

<sup>180</sup> [Letter Day to Aldred, 11 September 2007, ‘Iraq – Options for UK Military Contribution’](#).

<sup>181</sup> Minute Keay to PS/Secretary of State [MOD], 11 September 2007, ‘Op TELIC: discussions with JAM’.

some text describing our approach to reconciliation in the context of developments in South East Iraq accordingly. In the meantime we will continue to avoid comment on specific cases, confirm that we have been and continue to be, engaged in dialogue with all relevant parties in our area, that this is in line with and supports Iraqi Government initiatives and that individual detainee releases occur only when they are no longer judged to be an imperative threat to security.

“In all this, we need to be particularly mindful of the families of UK personnel killed, either potentially as a result of the activities of those currently interned or in the course of capturing them ...

“Having reviewed the position, we believe that we should now routinely provide parallel notification to the families involved when detainees potentially linked to the death of UK service personnel leave the UK detention facility either being transferred to Iraqi control or being released.”

**359.** Mr Browne’s office replied on 13 September to confirm that he had noted the imminent release and that further advice would be put forward shortly on the long-term sustainability of the operation.<sup>182</sup> Mr Browne was reported to be “particularly keen that any further releases are in the context of a strategy for a more enduring political/security solution for the South.” Presentational advice was also agreed, including the intention to inform bereaved families.

**360.** Senior officials discussed Mr Day’s note of 11 September to Ms Aldred at the Iraq Strategy Group on 13 September, and concluded that further work would be needed before NSID(OD) considered the options in early October.<sup>183</sup> The Group identified a need for “inter-departmental discussion of the political and military objectives for the UK’s continuing engagement in Iraq”. The Group also identified the need for discussion with the US about enabling support and their own plans, and the need for work on the location of a future UK military and civilian presence.

**361.** Mr McDonald also told the Group that Mr Brown would make a short statement the following day, confirming the UK’s commitment to Iraq. He still intended to make a substantive statement when Parliament returned, which would focus on PIC in Basra. By this stage, ideally a date would have been agreed and announced. While he did not favour artificial timetables and remained committed to a conditions-based approach to PIC, Mr Brown wanted to say as much as possible about the tasks and numbers of UK troops that would be required after PIC and give an indication of roughly when each phase of overwatch would be reached.

**362.** Lt Gen Wall noted that there would need to be some engagement with the US on the substance before Mr Brown made his statement: current US military thinking

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<sup>182</sup> Minute McNeil to PJHQ J9 Hd Pol/Ops 1, 13 September 2007, ‘Op. TELIC: discussions with JAM’.

<sup>183</sup> Minute Cabinet Office [junior official] to McDonald, 13 September 2007, ‘Iraq Strategy Group, 13 September’.

envisaged a process for Basra PIC beginning in late October, with an announcement in November. Mr McDonald said that officials would need to lobby the US about the timetable in advance of the statement.

**363.** In advance of Gen Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker’s visit to London, Mr Prentice sent some “thoughts” to the FCO on what the issues at stake were in Iraq, what was expected of the UK by the US and Iraqi governments and what roles the UK could and should continue to perform in order to meet or manage those expectations.<sup>184</sup> The advice had been discussed with Lt Gen Rollo, who was reported to be “in broad agreement”.

**364.** Mr Prentice’s summary assessment was that the best means to win agreement to PIC in Basra in November would be a “UK re-commitment now to a convincing range of longer-term tasks, including in the South”. One of his first impressions was that:

“Uncertainty and therefore anxiety over UK long-term intentions is widespread, among both senior Iraqis and senior US contacts. And public perceptions, fed by the media, continue to misinterpret our strategy for Basra province.”

**365.** Mr Prentice wrote that Iraq was important to UK interests both for reputational reasons and because Iraq’s future was still in the balance; the risk of it descending into chaos and division, rather having a powerful positive influence in the region, was one that needed to be tackled:

“Whether they were at the beginning or not, our global CT [counter-terrorism] interests are certainly now closely engaged in the Iraq theatre.”

**366.** Mr Prentice acknowledged that the UK’s strategy in southern Iraq had been fully discussed and agreed by both the US and the Iraqi Government and that no decisions had yet been taken on medium- and long-term engagement, but also that public interpretation remained that “we are set on full military withdrawal in the shortest order possible”. Although he and Lt Gen Rollo and their predecessors had sought to reassure the US that that was not so, “their confidence in us is becoming more fragile. The reputational risks in this for the UK are clear.”

**367.** Mr Prentice said that US concerns were understood to centre on:

- whether the UK would maintain a Divisional Command in MND(SE);
- continuity for the Basra PRT;
- protection for the US Regional Embassy Office, which had just relocated from Basra Palace to the COB in order to fit in with UK strategy;
- continuing specialist military support for the ISF;
- continued training and mentoring of the ISF;

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<sup>184</sup> [eGram 37677/07 Baghdad to FCO London, 13 September 2007, ‘Iraq: Future UK Posture: What is at Stake’.](#)

- the ability effectively to counter Iranian influence, including handling the borders; and
- protecting the main MNF supply routes through southern Iraq.

**368.** Mr Prentice continued:

“We have invested heavily since 2003 in the South, in treasure, blood and reputation. We should be careful at this late stage not to waste that investment. We are not currently planning further infrastructure development projects but the successful programmes in local government capacity building and police leadership training and mentoring need to continue if they are to achieve sustainable results.”

**369.** Mr Prentice advised that the options for future UK roles and deployments would need to:

- reflect UK regional and strategic interests;
- address US expectations;
- take account of UK domestic political requirements;
- “satisfy UKMOD force generation constraints and the needs of the Afghanistan theatre”; and
- provide a secure platform in the South for non-military tasks.

**370.** On Basra, Mr Prentice wrote that the formal transfer of responsibility for security would “have a more psychological than real effect” given that the UK’s re-posturing to Basra Air Station was, in effect, “de facto PIC”. He understood that US officials suspected that the idea of de facto PIC was:

“... a device to slide past proper analysis of the conditions for PIC. These suspicions about PIC are fuelled by their continued uncertainty about our longer term intentions. The best means to win US support for PIC in Basra on our preferred timing will therefore be to calm their anxieties about our plans for the South and our continued military and non-military contribution to building Iraq’s future.”

**371.** On 13 September, Maj Gen Binns reported that Basra remained quiet.<sup>185</sup> There had been no attacks on the COB in the preceding week and a “decrease in collateral casualties, especially around Basra Palace”. While the situation remained fragile, there were positive indications to suggest that the militias had increased their contacts with the ISF and were moving towards a political accommodation.

**372.** Gen Mohan had attended a meeting of the “Basra Security Forum”, facilitated by OMS, and reported that it had been well attended by all the major parties except Fadilah. Maj Gen Binns observed that this was the first time that there had been

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<sup>185</sup> Minute Binns to CJO, 13 September 2007, ‘GOC HQ MND(SE) – Southern Iraq Update – 13 September 2007’.

major cross-party discussion in Basra, something that would have been inconceivable a month earlier.

**373.** Maj Gen Binns also reported that he had received Lt Gen Odierno's response to his recommendations for PIC. Lt Gen Odierno agreed that Basra continued to make progress and projected that Basra would transition in November, with an announcement the preceding month. Maj Gen Binns reported:

"The sting in the tail is that this is not a recommendation; he considers that more time is needed to further assess the impact of Mohan and Jalil (in particular the effect the deployment of the National Police assets that Jalil has been provided has upon the security situation), cites the uncertainty over the fate of Waili ... and has concerns regarding ... reports of militia influence with the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF)."

**374.** Maj Gen Binns judged:

"None of these really give me cause for concern. The ISF has no more militia influence in Basra than anywhere else in the country ... Mohan and Jalil have already proved themselves: a week on Basra is not burning and both Mohan and Jalil have delivered on their promises of more resources."

**375.** Looking ahead to 2008, Maj Gen Binns warned:

"... we are in danger of being seduced by the current lull in attacks against MNF. The crux is the need to move away from what is seen by the Iraqis as the offensive capability of an occupying force, to one that is focused on Military Assistance and Redevelopment. This progression will increase Iraqi self reliance and develop the economic and political environment necessary to secure external commercial investment. Seeing the political and economic Lines Of Operation undertaken by the FCO and DFID move to the forefront, with the military footprint reducing to provide the force protection and an enhanced BMATT [British Military Advisory and Training Team] role. We are reasonably confident that our engagement with the Shia polity proves this is the way ahead, although, inevitably, as this is Iraq, there will be difficult moments."

**376.** In a Current Assessment Note on Iranian support to JAM Special Groups, issued on 13 September, a CIG assessed that the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps Quds Force (IRGC QF) was continuing to provide "**training, financial support and weaponry to Shia militants attacking Multi-National Forces (MNF) across Iraq**".<sup>186</sup> JAM Special Groups were receiving significant help.

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<sup>186</sup> [CIG Current Assessment Note, 13 September 2007, 'Iranian Support to Jaysh al-Mahdi Special Groups'](#).

**377.** The CIG judged that it was unclear how the Special Groups would respond to the recent “freeze” on JAM activity by Muqtada al-Sadr, but doubted that it would affect Iran’s influence.

**378.** The Assessment Note continued:

“... we judge that **IRGC QF control over these special groups is far from total**. The special groups are using Iranian weaponry to target Shia rivals against Iranian wishes ... And ... there is increasing division between leaders of some of the special groups.

“In many areas the distinction between special groups and more militant elements of mainstream JAM is becoming increasingly blurred as Muqtada al-Sadr’s control of the latter ebbs, leaving them more open to Iranian influence ...”

**379.** On 13 September, President Bush made a speech on Iraq.<sup>187</sup> Describing the challenge there as “formidable”, he nonetheless pointed to the successes of the surge in Baghdad and Anbar. He said:

“Because of this success, General Petraeus believes we have now reached the point where we can maintain our gains with fewer American forces. He has recommended that we not replace about 2,200 Marines scheduled to leave Anbar province later this month. In addition, he says it will be possible to bring home an Army combat brigade, for a total force reduction of 5,700 troops by Christmas. And he expects that by July, we will be able to reduce our troop levels in Iraq from 20 combat brigades to 15.”

**380.** Having consulted with the Joint Chiefs of Staff, other members of his national security team, Iraqi officials and leaders of both parties in Congress, President Bush announced that he had accepted Gen Petraeus’ recommendations. President Bush directed that Gen Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker report again to Congress in March 2008 with “a fresh assessment of the situation in Iraq and of the troop levels and resources we need to meet our national security objectives”.

**381.** Mr Prentice reported to the FCO on 13 September that it looked likely agreement would be reached to renew resolution 1723, on the understanding that it would be the last time and that a new bilateral US/Iraq security arrangement would be put in place by the end of 2008.<sup>188</sup>

**382.** Mr Prentice commented that there was a new US team in Baghdad, which had no corporate experience of the negotiations that led to resolution 1723. Those officials had told him that their interpretation was that a long-term partnership should include coalition partners. Mr Prentice had explained to them why moving to a security relationship

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<sup>187</sup> Speech Bush, 13 September 2007, ‘Speech – President Bush on Iraq’.

<sup>188</sup> eGram 37790/07 Baghdad to FCO London, 13 September 2007, ‘Iraq: UNSCR – US Activity Behind the Scenes’.

without a UN resolution would be problematic for the UK, but suggested that this would be an important point to reinforce with other US interlocutors.

**383.** Mr Prentice told the Inquiry that, despite this concern, he had felt “absolutely joined at the hip” with his US colleagues, who had invited him to sit in on their negotiations with the Iraqis on the text of a new resolution in order to ensure that the UK’s legal requirements were satisfied in the resulting text.<sup>189</sup>

**384.** On 14 September, Mr Brown said publicly that the UK would meet its responsibilities and honour its obligations in Iraq.<sup>190</sup> Decisions on the strength of UK forces would “continue to depend on conditions on the ground” but would be a UK choice.

**385.** Mr Prentice discussed Basra in his introductory meeting with Prime Minister Maliki on 15 September.<sup>191</sup> Prime Minister Maliki agreed that Gen Mohan and Maj Gen Jalil had done an excellent job in Basra. He had authorised extra resources to sustain the momentum. He was optimistic that a solution could be found that would result in the replacement of Governor Waili so that Basra would be ready for PIC within the next two months, and that arrangements would be “well under way” by Mr Brown’s October statement.

**386.** Prime Minister Maliki emphasised that, despite the ISF’s readiness to take on security responsibility, the UK should be certain about its capacity to fulfil its agreed future roles for the next phase. Mr Prentice assured him that was the case.

**387.** Mr Prentice also discussed the likelihood of renewing resolution 1723 during his introductory call with Prime Minister Maliki and also with Dr Rubaie.<sup>192</sup> He reported that Prime Minister Maliki believed some change in the MNF mandate was inevitable, reflecting the changed situation in Iraq.

**388.** Dr Rubaie confirmed that negotiations on the resolution should begin formally in October, at the same time as talks on the content of a future US/Iraqi bilateral security agreement. He wanted that bilateral agreement to be in place by January 2009 and asked whether the UK would be interested in a similar relationship which would encompass political and economic development as well as security.

**389.** Mr Prentice said that the UK would still need a firm legal basis for its continued presence in Iraq and would need to know more about the thinking about a bilateral/trilateral security relationship before committing. Obviously the UK could not be bound by any US/Iraqi negotiations to which it had not been party. Dr Rubaie agreed with

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<sup>189</sup> Public hearing, 6 January 2010, page 40.

<sup>190</sup> *BBC News*, 14 September 2007, *Troop numbers a UK choice – Brown*.

<sup>191</sup> eGram 38048/07 Baghdad to FCO London, 15 September 2007, ‘Iraq: Meeting with PM Maliki’.

<sup>192</sup> eGram 38042/07 Baghdad to FCO London, 15 September 2007, ‘Iraq: UNSCR Call on PM Maliki and Dr Rubaie National Security Adviser’.

his suggestion that the UK should join the US/Iraqi negotiation group (the High Level Working Group).

**390.** On 15 September, the Sadrist withdrew from the UIA grouping in protest at the Iraqi Government's failure to meet their demands for an unbiased investigation into the clashes between JAM and Badr forces during the holy pilgrimage to Karbala in August.<sup>193</sup>

**391.** Their action, together with the withdrawal of Fadhila in March, left the UIA (which had originally held 128 of the 275 seats in the Council of Representatives) with only 81 seats. Attempts to join forces with the Sunni Islamic Party and to encourage Fadhila to rejoin the Alliance had failed, leaving Prime Minister Maliki vulnerable to attempts from others to oust him (former Prime Minister Ja'afari had been making moves to do so), creating a wider destabilising effect on the Baghdad political scene.

**392.** Mr Prentice commented:

“Our interest, and the higher Iraqi interest, remains the emergence of a competent, inclusive administration able to command a majority in the CoR [Council of Representatives] for its programme. Maliki is leaching parliamentary strength but is far from finished ... The better result would still be Hashemi and Tawafuq's return to government and the CoR's endorsement of a Maliki-led Cabinet refreshed with new technocrat recruits.”

**393.** The leader of the Anbar “Awakening”, Sheikh Sittar, was murdered in mid-September. AQ-I claimed responsibility.<sup>194</sup> In his weekly report, Lt Gen Rollo described Sheikh Sittar's death as “most unwelcome news”, commenting that it was “too early to tell how Sittar's death will affect the security environment in Anbar – in the short term the province has remained calm, with tribal leaders vowing to continue his work”.

**394.** Lt Gen Rollo also reported that a feared spike of violence in Iraq around the time of Ambassador Crocker and Gen Petraeus' testimony to Congress, which was also the week before Ramadan, had not materialised. Lt Gen Rollo contrasted the attack rate in the week before Ramadan in 2006 (986 attacks, averaging 140 per day) with the figures for 2007 (569, averaging 81 per day).

**395.** On 16 September, Maj Gen Binns wrote to Lt Gen Houghton in relation to negotiations with JAM1 to recommend that:

“Working to an agreed set of objectives, I seek the authority to negotiate and agree the best deal I can get.”<sup>195</sup>

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<sup>193</sup> eGram 39173/07 Baghdad to FCO London, 24 September 2007, ‘Iraq: Political Manoeuvring’.

<sup>194</sup> Minute Rollo to CDS, 16 September 2007, ‘SBMR-I Weekly Report (270) 16 Sep 07’.

<sup>195</sup> Minute GOC MND(SE) to CJO, 16 September 2007, ‘[NAME OF OPERATION] Strategy’.

**396.** Maj Gen Binns explained that he needed to be able to approve a deal at short notice in order to “keep the process alive”.

**397.** Government officials working closely with the military met JAM1 again on 18 September and said that “If the peace held there would be further releases in 23 days or so.”<sup>196</sup> JAM1 said that “it was time for us, the British, to establish proper plans to exploit this period of reduction in hostilities. There should be three clear headings: Security, Economics, Politics, each to be followed by an agreed plan.”

**398.** Reporting to London following the meeting, the officials explained that hopes of demonstrable development work in Basra attributed to the British had been dashed by the PRT, whose “key themes are empowerment and mentoring – nothing that smacks either of MNF direction or dictation”.

**399.** Mr Browne reported to Cabinet on 18 September that there had been little change in Iraq over the past week: Basra was still calm and the level of attacks on UK forces at Basra Air Station had reduced to “a very low level”.<sup>197</sup> This was primarily “a reflection of political developments within the various factions of Jaysh al-Mahdi, with some wanting to participate in the political process and others ... who were inclined to violence”. Both he and Mr Brown would be meeting Gen Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker that afternoon with a view to establishing US thinking on the medium to longer term, including expectations of the UK.

**400.** Mr Brown said that there would need to be a discussion on Iraq in Cabinet in the next few weeks.

**401.** Mr Brown and Mr Miliband, accompanied by ACM Stirrup and officials, met Gen Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker on 18 September.<sup>198</sup> Mr Brown underlined how successful the handover of Basra Palace had been. Gen Petraeus agreed and said that a decision on PIC could be possible later that year, but there were issues to be resolved, including the status of the Governor. Nevertheless:

“By the time of the Prime Minister’s statement in October, it might be possible to give a sense of the timeframes, with November/December as a possible PIC target.”

**402.** Gen Petraeus added that he considered it would be important to retain a divisional HQ in Basra, given its political and economic significance.

**403.** Mr Brown said that economic development of the South remained a major UK priority (see Section 10.2). Gen Petraeus said there were a number of initiatives on

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<sup>196</sup> Email government official working closely with the military, 19 September 2007, ‘[NAME OF OPERATION]: 18 September meeting with JAM1’.

<sup>197</sup> Cabinet Conclusions, 18 September 2007.

<sup>198</sup> Letter Fletcher to Gould, 18 September 2007, ‘Prime Minister’s Meeting with General Petraeus and Ambassador Ryan Crocker, 18 September’.

which the UK should engage, including clearance of the port, the contract for which was out to tender.

**404.** At the end of the discussion Mr Brown highlighted three areas for follow-up:

- further discussion, including with the Iraqis, of the timeframe for Basra PIC;
- an enhanced UK effort on economic development, including the port; and
- further US/UK discussion of long-term force requirements.

**405.** Mr Brown asked Mr McDonald to take forward work on these three strands of activity during his visit to Washington the following week.

**406.** On 19 September, MOD officials sought Mr Browne's agreement for Maj Gen Binns to release up to 10 further internees in two groups of five, if necessary, "as a bridging measure pending negotiation of a longer-term agreement".<sup>199</sup> The minute explained:

"... GOC MND(SE) is concerned that the discussions have hit an awkward patch and that the already fragile security and political dynamics may unravel, causing a breakdown in the cessation of violence. There are already some initial signs that JAM Secret Cells are stepping up efforts to resume attacks on the COB ... an MND(SE) response to these attacks may trigger a wider escalation of violence.

"... we wish to give the GOC the flexibility to manage these discussions in the short-term, pending agreement to a longer term negotiating strategy. The GOC believes that it may be necessary to release one or possibly even two further batches of five internees in order to prevent a breakdown in the discussions. The GOC judges that a release of up to ten people over Ramadan would be enough to buy sufficient time properly to consider with our interlocutors how to align our other activities to deliver our desired long term objectives. If we do not have this flexibility, and delay any further releases until we have agreed a longer term plan, there is serious risk that the Secret Cells will gain sufficient authority within JAM to resume their attacks against the coalition."

**407.** The advice reported that only one of those proposed for release by JAM1 had previously been judged to be high risk, and MOD officials had informed MND(SE) that he should only be released if "absolutely essential". Advice on long-term strategy would be accompanied by advice on presentation, following a request by Mr Browne in light of comments made by Gen Petraeus in his testimony to Congress.

**408.** On 20 September, Mr Browne marked the advice "agreed".<sup>200</sup>

**409.** Mr Richard Jones, British Consul General in Basra, wrote to Mr Frank Baker, FCO Iraq Group, on 20 September, to provide some background on the "Mohan Initiative" as

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<sup>199</sup> Minute Keay to PS/Secretary of State [MOD], 19 September 2007, 'Op TELIC: Discussions with JAM'.

<sup>200</sup> Minute Keay to PS/Secretary of State [MOD], 19 September 2007, 'Op TELIC: Discussions with JAM' including manuscript comment Browne.

Ministers considered the next phase of the UK presence in Iraq because Mr Jones was not clear to what extent Mr Baker had been kept informed.<sup>201</sup>

**410.** After describing the process of negotiation and detainee releases, and the accompanying reduction in IDF, Mr Jones concluded: “This is the context of optimism within which the military have drawn up their options for a future posture in southeastern Iraq, which are far more forward-leaning than they would have been before the summer break.”

**411.** Mr Jones described maintaining the relationship with JAM1 and keeping “the plates spinning in the complex relationship between JAM/OMS, Badr/ISCI, Fadhila and Mohan/the ISF/the Gol” as “the sine qua non for sustained quiet in the province”.

**412.** Maj Gen Binns reported to Lt Gen Houghton on 20 September that, after returning to Iraq, Gen Petraeus had guided his staff towards a goal of transition to PIC in Basra in mid-December.<sup>202</sup>

**413.** Maj Gen Binns also wrote that information from multiple sources indicated that the security situation in Basra was improving and the Iraqi Police and Army were conducting joint military/police patrols within the city. Basrawis seemed “reassured” by this, though they remained concerned that the militias were using the cease-fire period to reorganise and resupply. Criminality and gangsterism continued to be “endemic”. Maj Gen Binns considered that the security situation was best summed up as “bad, but a lot better now”.

**414.** AM Peach told the Chiefs of Staff on 20 September that the Iraqi Government had “welcomed” the Gen Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker testimony and that:

“PM Maliki was reportedly buoyed by the report and had interpreted the lack of direct personal criticism towards him as a sign of international support.”<sup>203</sup>

**415.** The Chiefs of Staff observed that the next review of progress in Iraq commissioned from Gen Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker in March 2008 “had the potential to create a further strategic pause, which could make longer term UK planning problematic”.

**416.** The MIG met on 22 September.<sup>204</sup> According to an account of the meeting by a government official working closely with the military who had attended it, Maj Gen Binns wanted to use the time bought by the next detainee releases “to turn the [NAME OF OPERATION] cease-fire into a genuine peace process”. The key aim was to bind JAM into the process so that it continued when there were no more detainees to release. A Basra political conference outside Iraq or a development conference in the city itself were possible means for doing so.

<sup>201</sup> Letter Jones to Baker, 20 September 2007, ‘Basra: The Mohan Initiative’.

<sup>202</sup> Minute Binns to CJO, 20 September 2007, ‘GOC HQ MND(SE) – Southern Iraq Update – 20 September 2007’.

<sup>203</sup> Minutes, 20 September 2007, Chiefs of Staff meeting.

<sup>204</sup> Email government official working closely with the military, 24 September 2007, ‘[NAME OF OPERATION]: Implications for [presence at current location]’.

**417.** The official continued:

“Basra City remains a difficult place with JAM carrying arms on the streets with impunity ... But JAM would have been worse if they had unambiguously bombed coalition forces out of the city ...

“The risk is the further weakening of already-weak Iraqi state control in these southern provinces. HMCG [the British Consul General in Basra] is at sea because his instructions to promote and develop the democratic structures of the new Iraqi state are out of touch with what is happening on the ground. The aim of any Basra political conference has to be to bridge the gap between the necessary deals done with the militias and the ineffectual provincial council, to say nothing of the governor. Everyone has a sense that this process should culminate with fresh elections, which would be when the militias such as JAM would theoretically swap their military power for political power, as Muqtada al-Sadr now appears to want. But it remains unclear how we will reach this point. In such circumstances, we view the idea of a political conference as a sensible stopgap.”

**418.** In his weekly report on 23 September, Lt Gen Rollo wrote that after returning to Iraq Gen Petraeus told him that he thought his visit to London had been:

“... a great success: the mood was quite different from February. Everyone was on side; there was a commitment to Iraq, and a common view on tasks over the winter.”<sup>205</sup>

**419.** The MNF-I had formed a working group to look at the conditions for PIC and the tasks for the UK military beyond that. Lt Gen Rollo’s view was that the UK’s planning focus should be on:

- clarifying the mission and tasks anticipated for next summer in Basra;
- producing force packages to carry out these tasks, with and without US support, recognising that the US would have also substantially reduced numbers by next summer;
- thinking through the implications of events going better or worse than anticipated; and
- thinking through the end-game and agreeing it with the US.

**420.** Government officials working closely with the military met JAM1 again on 24 September and again discussed the security situation, prisoner releases and development work.<sup>206</sup> JAM1 reported that his engagement with the UK had received wider endorsement from overall JAM command, who were interested in a wider peace agenda.

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<sup>205</sup> Minute Rollo to CDS, 23 September 2007, ‘SBMR-I Weekly Report (271) 23 Sep 07’.

<sup>206</sup> Email government official working closely with the military, 25 September 2007, ‘[NAME OF OPERATION]: 24 September meeting with [JAM1]’.

**421.** The report included the comment:

“This might be a straw in the wind. Or it might represent a significant opportunity to stretch out for a much larger prize ...”

**422.** Sir John Scarlett and Mr McDonald met on 24 September to discuss Iraq.<sup>207</sup> According to his record of the meeting, during the discussion Sir John observed that decisions about the pace of the UK’s drawdown in Basra needed to be taken “with a clear eye to the current cease-fire”. It was important that the JIC reached a judgement on the robustness of the cease-fire and what was keeping it going.

**423.** Sir John considered that creating a “long-term calm” in Basra would require “energetic” reconstruction and political action.

**424.** The MCNS discussed Basra at length at its 25 September meeting.<sup>208</sup> The Minister of State for National Security, Mr Sherna al-Wa’ili, reported, based on his recent visit to Basra, that it was “not as bad as portrayed”. During the visit he met Gen Mohan and Gen Jalil, who had claimed the problems were due to foreign interference and the many political groups struggling for power. He considered that Gen Mohan was doing a good job, but needed additional support from Baghdad and more forces. Gen Jalil also needed additional forces plus support in retraining 6,000 police officers and more materiel support, including fuel and equipment.

**425.** Deputy Prime Minister Barham Saleh said that he had met 12 cross-party Basrawi MPs at their request. Their assessment was that the situation was bad and they expected it to get worse. The numbers of assassinations and attacks were rising and there had been only one arrest. The MPs were critical of both Gen Mohan and Gen Jalil and argued that it was necessary to bring in forces from outside the local area.

**426.** Deputy Prime Minister Saleh said that it would be important to ensure that politicking between the main political parties in the Council of Representatives did not adversely affect the situation in Basra. He concluded that Baghdad-based Basrawi politicians should be encouraged to keep their local representatives in line.

**427.** Mr Prentice commented:

“The discussion on Basra reflects the continued unease in the Iraqi system about the situation there. We are not going to overcome this in the coming weeks as we move towards a decision on PIC. But we will continue to address it with all interlocutors, including the incessantly gloomy (and self-interested) MPs: taking them through all the work we have done to improve Basra’s security and economic situation; underlining that we will continue to provide support post-PIC; but emphasising that the GoI and others in positions of influence must also play their part in working

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<sup>207</sup> Minute C, 25 September 2007, C’s Meeting with Simon McDonald’.

<sup>208</sup> eGram 39796/07 Baghdad to FCO London, 27 September 2007, ‘Iraq: Ministerial Committee on National Security, 25 September’.

constructively towards a better future for Basra. We will also continue to work on the US – whose REO [Regional Embassy Office] persists in sending out downbeat reports, contributing to US disquiet over Basra, most recently predicting a rise in Shia on Shia and other Islamic violence.

“Overall it is welcome that the centre is finally paying attention to Basra and Basra’s needs: their worries reflect a growing sense of ownership, which we have long wished to see.”

**428.** On 26 September, Maj Gen Binns wrote to Lt Gen Houghton, observing that he had not received a formal response to his minute of 16 September, which asked for authority to negotiate the best deal possible without seeking further clearance.<sup>209</sup> The minute had instead resulted in a request from PJHQ for a campaign plan. Having seen an early draft of one, Maj Gen Binns concluded that “the work would be nugatory. The operation is too dynamic.” He believed that enthusiasm for the negotiations was waning in London, and asked Lt Gen Houghton for instructions.

**429.** Maj Gen Binns asked Lt Gen Houghton to agree that “end state” should be “enduring security which facilitates and preserves a political climate suitable for development”. He wrote:

“I am operating with current headroom to release two further tranches of five internees on 28 September and 5 Oct. I need more headroom; another five for release on 12 Oct and then a further 15 to be released between 13 Oct and 3 Nov in order to keep the process alive.”

**430.** In his weekly update on 27 September, Maj Gen Binns commented that the UK should be seeking to:

“... marshal its available and not inconsiderable resources to convince the US hierarchy that PIC is doable so that we can get past PIC and work on the post-PIC mission. The key point is to trust the Iraqis to take responsibility for their own destiny, having given them the tools to do so.”<sup>210</sup>

**431.** The MNF-I had established a working group to review the situation and Maj Gen Binns intended to use the forthcoming visit to Basra by its leader, US Major General Roberson, to “take the initiative and enlist his aid to get Basra to PIC”.

**432.** In the same report, Maj Gen Binns reported that a car bomb attack at a police station in Basra on 25 September had killed three and wounded 17 others. He wrote that car bomb attacks were a “relative rarity” in MND(SE). Locally, the attack was believed to have been carried out by AQ.

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<sup>209</sup> Minute GOC MND(SE) to CJO, 26 September 2007, ‘[NAME OF OPERATION] Strategy’.

<sup>210</sup> Minute Binns to CJO, 27 September 2007, ‘GOC HQ MND(SE) – Southern Iraq Update – 27 September 2007’.

- 433.** A separate explosion at a Sunni mosque near Basra the following day, which killed five people, looked to have been a sectarian retaliation fuelled by this belief. MNF considered that the earlier attack could well have been intra-Shia violence.
- 434.** On 28 September, government officials working closely with the military met JAM1 again. The day before the meeting JAM1 had telephoned to warn that JAM elements had identified British soldiers deployed to the north of Basra, and were preparing an attack.<sup>211</sup> The officials alerted MND(SE) and the troops were extracted immediately.
- 435.** The previous day's incident was not discussed during the meeting which began by focusing on an IDF attack on Basra Air Station that morning. The officials reported that Maj Gen Binns had been talked out of cancelling the release of five detainees due that day as a result, adding "some still have not quite got the concept that we are buying [JAM1's] support and influence to advance peace, not peace itself".
- 436.** The officials then asked JAM1 what JAM members were doing while they were not fighting – was there a risk that redundancy would inspire boredom and restlessness and increase the chances of further violence? JAM1 agreed that people needed work. Possibilities might include the Army, the Police Force, manual work on reconstruction or learning new skills.
- 437.** Mr McDonald discussed future plans for Iraq with Mr Hadley in Washington on 27 September.<sup>212</sup> Reporting on their meeting to the MOD, Mr McDonald said he had explained the UK assumption that PIC would happen in November or December 2007, after which point the UK would retain a similar military presence until March 2008 (5,000 troops, 4,500 of which would be based at Basra Air Station).
- 438.** Beyond March 2008 the UK aspired to reduce troop numbers in stages over the spring and summer, to around 1,500. That would require "significant US support in Basra".
- 439.** Mr Hadley's staff expressed concern about the numbers after March 2008. They indicated that the US had hoped that the UK would retain the lead in Basra throughout 2008; the US had not planned to deploy to Basra in large numbers. Gen Petraeus had already set out the tasks that he wanted the UK to fulfil in MND(SE).
- 440.** In response, Mr McDonald said that the UK was already unable to perform some of those tasks: the UK had therefore "considered the list as a high opening bid". Mr McDonald reported that they had discussed "the bare bones of a compromise": the UK would retain 4,500 troops in Basra until March 2008 (the "tactical overwatch" period); between March and November ("operational overwatch") the UK would reduce its troops to 2,000-2,500, focused on training and mentoring but retaining some intervention capacity. In extremis, they would need to rely on "over-the-horizon US support".

<sup>211</sup> Email government official working closely with the military, 30 September 2007, '[NAME OF OPERATION]: Meeting with [JAM1] on 28 September'.

<sup>212</sup> Letter McDonald to Forber, 28 September 2007, 'Iraq; Meeting with Steve Hadley, 27 September'.

**441.** After November 2008, it might be possible to move to “strategic overwatch”, with re-intervention capacity based elsewhere in Iraq and in Kuwait. Mr McDonald and Mr Hadley agreed that “it was now important for our senior military personnel to discuss the relative merits of the plans”.

**442.** Once Mr McDonald had returned to the UK he briefed Mr Brown on the discussion. When Mr Brown and President Bush spoke by video conference on 28 September, the President said he had also been briefed on the meeting and was comfortable with UK plans.

**443.** Basra “took top billing” again at the 30 September MCNS meeting.<sup>213</sup> With the exception of Dr Safa al-Safi (the Acting Minister of Justice), the Committee agreed that Gen Mohan had performed well in bringing Basra under control and that his tenure should be extended.

**444.** Mr Prentice commented that the “general tone of Iraqi debate on Basra seems to be improving. General Petraeus was especially supportive.”

## October 2007

**445.** Government officials working closely with the military met JAM1 on the morning of 1 October.<sup>214</sup> In order to mitigate his personal risk, JAM1 asked for future negotiations to be conducted through his lawyer. Under pressure from senior Sadrists, JAM1 also stressed the importance of his interlocutors having broader contacts with JAM, to protect the agreement that had been reached if anything should happen to him.

**446.** One of the officials commented:

“Seen from here, these latest developments emphasise the need for a rapid broadening of political engagement with the Sadrists in Basra.”

**447.** On 1 October, at the request of the FCO and the MOD, the JIC examined the prospects for political stability in Basra and the threat to UK forces up to spring 2008.<sup>215</sup>

**448.** The Assessment included graphs showing the recent reduction in attacks on MNF bases in Basra, from a high of 226 attacks in July to nine in September.

**449.** The JIC’s Key Judgements were:

“1. No single political party dominates politics in Basra. Politicians use their positions primarily to pursue personal power and wealth. Most are supported by Shia militias

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<sup>213</sup> eGram 40408/07 Baghdad to FCO London, 2 October 2007, ‘Iraq: Ministerial Committee for National Security, 30 September’.

<sup>214</sup> Email government official working closely with the military, 2 October 2007, ‘[NAME OF OPERATION]: 1 October Meeting with [JAM1]’.

<sup>215</sup> [JIC Assessment, 1 October 2007, ‘Politics and Violence in Basra: Prospects’.](#)

who are in de facto control over many districts of Basra City. Baghdad's ability to determine events is very limited.

"II. The primary reason for the recent reduction in attacks against the Multi-National Forces (MNF) in Basra is the negotiation between MND(SE) and [JAM1]. It is unclear how long this can be sustained when or if all JAM personnel have been released ... in the absence of continuing visible momentum towards full departure of UK forces we judge that the point would eventually be reached when JAM sees the balance of advantage in resuming their campaign against the MNF. Sporadic attacks will continue in any case.

"III. As the MNF presence reduces and provincial elections approach, intra-Shia violence is likely to intensify. We cannot predict the scale. Concern to avoid provoking US intervention, pressure from national Shia political leader, Grand Ayatollah al-Sistani and probably the Iranians, and a desire among at least some of Basra's political leaders and security officials to reach local accommodations will all help restrain the militias. If street fighting did break out, it is likely to be of short duration, but in the worst case could surpass the small-scale skirmishes in other provinces that have transitioned to Iraqi control.

"IV. The Iraqis would only call for MNF re-intervention in Basra as a last resort, in the event of violence over an extended period beyond the capacity of the Iraqi army and police. Locally-raised army units are unlikely to be willing or able to cope in the event of serious and sustained intra-Shia clashes, but new units are being deployed which are loyal to the central government and are likely to be more effective in dealing with low level violence. The largely ineffective local police are heavily infiltrated by militias and would take sides in any fighting.

"V. Iran's aim is to speed the withdrawal of coalition forces while making their life as difficult as possible so long as they remain: the Iranians will continue providing training, weaponry and encouragement for Shia extremists to attack the MNF. Iran's ability to determine political outcomes or ease intra-Shia tensions is limited: it is unlikely to want to take sides in the event of clashes between rival Shia factions."

**450.** The JIC assessed that Muqtada al-Sadr's public call for a cessation of JAM violence might also have been a factor in the reduced number of attacks against the MNF. Other possible factors included a positive reaction by the militias and their political sponsors to the withdrawal of UK forces from Basra City and efforts by Gen Mohan and Gen Jalil to improve the performance of the ISF.

**451.** The JIC judged:

"It is unclear how long the lull can be sustained. Its success to date suggests that ... has the backing of the majority of mainstream JAM in Basra for his tactics, despite initial reporting showing that some local commanders were sceptical ... personal ambitions are unclear ... suggested that JAM's aim following withdrawal of UK

forces from Basra City would be to secure their complete withdrawal by attacking the remaining base at Basra airport.”

**452.** On 2 October Mr Brown visited Iraq.<sup>216</sup> He met Prime Minister Maliki, Vice President Hashemi, Deputy Prime Minister Saleh, Gen Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker in Baghdad, and Maj Gen Binns and Mr Jones in Basra.

**453.** The objectives for the trip were to underline:

- UK commitment to Iraq;
- the importance of building on security progress by making a decision soon to transfer to PIC;
- the need for progress on reconciliation; and
- that economic progress was necessary as a strategic priority.<sup>217</sup>

**454.** Mr Brown was provided with a briefing note on negotiations with JAM1 that had taken place “over the last year”.<sup>218</sup> It said that JAM had been pushed towards an accommodation with the MNF by a combination of:

- resolute British military action in the first half of 2007;
- a growing sense that Iranian tactical support was leading to Iranian infiltration of the Sadrist movement;
- a realisation that the UK really did plan to leave Basra;
- the risk that British forces might be replaced by US troops;
- JAM activists in MND(SE) detention feared that a continued insurgency might leave them marginalised.”

**455.** The briefing note said that the challenge was to broaden the existing cease-fire into a political process with backing from a wider range of Iraqi groups and the central government. Ideally this would transform Iraqi perceptions of UK forces as an army of occupation into acceptance of, and support for, a continuing UK military assistance and development mission, and would expand the process beyond MND(SE).

**456.** JAM1 was reported to want increased and visible UK development assistance for Basra province as well as more detainee releases. Until the process included political and economic elements, the cease-fire would “remain fragile and possibly short-term”.

**457.** A manuscript note on the briefing note by Mr Brown’s Private Secretary recorded that Mr Brown was grateful for the briefing and for the actions it explained. He would be writing to offer his congratulations.<sup>219</sup>

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<sup>216</sup> Letter Fletcher to Forber, 3 October 2007, ‘Prime Minister’s Visit to Iraq, 2 October’.

<sup>217</sup> Minute Cabinet Office [junior official] to Prime Minister, 1 October 2007, ‘Iraq Visit: 2 October 2007’.

<sup>218</sup> Briefing [unattributed], [undated], ‘[NAME OF OPERATION] – moving from ceasefire to peace’.

<sup>219</sup> Briefing [unattributed], [undated], ‘[NAME OF OPERATION] – moving from ceasefire to peace’ including manuscript comment Fletcher.

**458.** In their 45-minute bilateral meeting, Prime Minister Maliki told Mr Brown that 2008 would be the “year of reconstruction”.<sup>220</sup> The Iraqi Government was working towards PIC in Basra on 21 November, and hoped to announce that on 1 November. Mr Brown welcomed this progress and emphasised the importance of following up transition with progress on political reconciliation.

**459.** An account of Mr Brown’s visit to Basra Air Station by government officials working closely with the military reported that Maj Gen Binns said “the situation that he would brief was wholly dependent on ... [NAME OF OPERATION] without which the picture would be utterly different”.<sup>221</sup>

**460.** The officials judged that the FCO briefing attended by Mr Brown had been “thin” and considered it:

“... dispiriting to hear eager questions about the number of policemen trained from McDonald and references to the ‘dividends of Op SINBAD’ [see Section 9.5]. Clearly JIC papers are not going where they should. The impression given of a Basra growing to stability and majority through the wise tutelage of HMG in its various forms was fundamentally mendacious. But less grotesquely so than in the post-SINBAD days.”

**461.** Mr Brown was briefed on the negotiations with JAM1, which made “no secret of the fragility of the process”. Mr McDonald argued that the reduction in hostilities was a result of the UK departure from Basra Palace. The officials believed that their graphics “elegantly disproved this assertion”. The wider JAM cease-fire called by Muqtada al-Sadr had “camouflaged and perhaps subsidised” the Basra agreement.

**462.** Mr Brown told journalists in Baghdad that he believed:

“... within the next two months we can move to Provincial Iraqi Control, and that is the Iraqis taking responsibility for their own security in the whole of Basra ... And I believe that by the end of the year ... a thousand of our troops can be brought back to the United Kingdom ...”<sup>222</sup>

**463.** After returning from Iraq, Mr Brown’s Private Secretary commissioned advice from the Cabinet Office on:

- how best to support a Basra Investment Forum;
- greater UK resources for the effort on reconstruction and economic development;
- whether the UK should do more to support the clear up of Umm Qasr port;

<sup>220</sup> Letter Fletcher to Forber, 3 October 2007, ‘Prime Minister’s Visit to Iraq, 2 October’.

<sup>221</sup> Email government official working closely with the military, 3 October 2007, ‘PM visits Basrah Air Station’.

<sup>222</sup> Note, 2 October 2007, ‘Transcript of doorstep given by the Prime Minister, Mr Gordon Brown, in Baghdad on Tuesday 2 October 2007’.

- how best to maximise pressure on Iraqi political leaders to hold a further meeting of the “1 plus 3” group (the Executive Group); and
- how the UK could offer troops in theatre greater access to the internet.<sup>223</sup>

**464.** Government officials working closely with the military met JAM1’s lawyer on 3 October, who told them that Muqtada al-Sadr had told JAM1 not to advance negotiations with the UK any further.<sup>224</sup>

**465.** The lawyer argued that JAM1 himself should be released so that he could convince al-Sadr in person of the need to continue. This request was not repeated by JAM1 who met the officials later the same day. He indicated that he would send a letter setting out the case for the negotiations to al-Sadr, whose instruction did not yet reflect a final decision.

**466.** Sir John Scarlett discussed Iraq with Mr McDonald on 3 October.<sup>225</sup> Mr McDonald said that he and Mr Brown were aware of the fragility of the situation in Basra. They did not necessarily think this affected PIC: that was a political decision and the timing had been in view for several months, since before negotiations with JAM1 began.

**467.** On 4 October, a government official specialising in the Middle East reported on a meeting chaired by Mr Day originally intended to discuss a negotiating framework but which had been extended to cover immediate threats to the deal.<sup>226</sup> The official’s report of the discussion said:

“... there was a general complacency that the cease-fire was in the bag for as long as we had detainees to release. Emerging British policy in Basra was based on the firm fact of the cease-fire.”

**468.** If the cease-fire were to collapse, the official reported that Mr Day’s concerns were casualties, presentational difficulties for the Prime Minister, and difficulty in getting PIC approved: the “overriding aim of HMG’s policy in MND(SE)”.

**469.** The immediate aim of negotiation therefore “had to be to sustain the cease-fire until we got to PIC”. A submission, a draft of which was already circulating, would be put to Ministers setting out the short-term challenge and the potential risks of linking the UK Government’s success in Basra to JAM. Negotiations would be likely to confer a degree of legitimacy on JAM1, the long-term implications of which were not obvious.

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<sup>223</sup> Letter Fletcher to Forber, 3 October 2007, ‘Prime Minister’s Visit to Iraq, 2 October’.

<sup>224</sup> Email government official working closely with the military, 4 October 2007, ‘[NAME OF OPERATION] Meeting with [JAM1] on 3 October’.

<sup>225</sup> Minute C, 3 October 2007, C’s Meeting with Simon McDonald, 3 October 2007’.

<sup>226</sup> Email government official specialising in the Middle East, 4 October 2007, ‘[NAME OF OPERATION]: Sustaining the Ceasefire’.

**470.** The note continued:

“We pointed out that just because we engaged in talks, we did not necessarily have to come to any sort of agreement with JAM, beyond the exchange of detainees for a lack of IDF. But the aim of such talks was to tie JAM into a political accommodation, before all of our detainee chips were played and before we had to release [JAM1] himself. We also commented that we would have little influence over what happened in Basra after PIC. JAM would be a force whether we liked it or not ...”

**471.** The official who was leading on drafting the submission commented after the meeting that:

“Jon [Day]’s concern (which is shared by SofS) is that we need to be careful we are not seen to be taking sides in the politics of Basra ... he would be much more comfortable therefore to focus discussion on the security and development axes and leave the politics to the FCO ... after his release.”<sup>227</sup>

**472.** Mr Browne wrote to Mr Brown on 5 October setting out his proposals for the UK military commitment to Iraq during 2008.<sup>228</sup> He reported that the MOD had agreed a revised set of tasks with Gen Petraeus which would be achievable within the force levels suggested. Mr Browne proposed:

- retaining current troops levels (4,500 in Basra plus 500 elsewhere) until March 2008; and
- drawing down to around 2,500 troops from March 2008, focused on training and mentoring the ISF with “only a limited *in extremis* re-intervention capability”.

**473.** Mr Browne assessed that this deployment would not require significant US support in southern Iraq. The estimate of costs from May 2008 was £650m per year. Possible options beyond November 2008 had not yet been considered.

**474.** Lt Gen Rollo reported on 7 October that Basra continued to attract the attention of Prime Minister Maliki and the MCNS: “in itself an entirely healthy indication of increasing acceptance that Basra is their responsibility”.<sup>229</sup>

**475.** A recent MOD/MOI delegation to Basra had returned with a list of recommendations, including on the need to “tighten up border and post security and to clear selected areas of the town of militias”.

**476.** Lt Gen Rollo also reported that in the margins of Mr Brown’s visit Gen Petraeus had queried the UK’s long-term intentions in 2009 and had pursued the matter again with Lt Gen Rollo subsequently.

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<sup>227</sup> Email PJHQ-J9 DCOMDSEC to PJHQ-CJO-MA, 5 October 2007, ‘[NAME OF OPERATION]’.

<sup>228</sup> [Letter Browne to Brown, 5 October 2007, ‘Iraq’](#).

<sup>229</sup> Minute Rollo to CDS, 7 October 2007, ‘SBMR-I’s Weekly Report (273) 7 Oct 07’.

**477.** Gen Petraeus had:

“... asserted that our [the UK’s] line had always been ‘in together, out together’ – quoting PM Blair as his authority. My response was that we had defined strategic objectives in Iraq which, when met, would see our departure ... While 2009 seems light years away at present, and retaining flexibility against uncertain future events will always offer advantages, some further definition on the nature of both our long term security relationship with Iraq, and the time/events that would lead to it, would be helpful as bilateral arrangements to succeed the proposed Dec 08 UNSCR start to be discussed.”

**478.** NSID(OD) met for the first time on 8 October.<sup>230</sup> The main aim of the meeting, according to the Cabinet Office steering brief for Mr Brown, was for him to “inform colleagues of the content of your statement on Iraq, focusing on the military plans and economic initiative”.

**479.** Ahead of the meeting, Mr Prentice reported that political progress in Baghdad remained slow.<sup>231</sup> Key legislation remained stalled, with the Kurdish parties refusing to concede ground on revenue sharing and hydrocarbons legislation. Prime Minister Maliki still lacked a majority to complete his Cabinet and drive through legislation. The UK continued to work for the reconvening of the Executive Group but this seemed unlikely until after Eid, which began the following week.

**480.** At the meeting on 8 October, Mr Brown informed his colleagues that he would be making a statement on Iraq in Parliament that afternoon, which would reflect the three key elements he had focused on during his recent visit to Iraq:

- political reconciliation;
- economic reconstruction; and
- the security situation.<sup>232</sup>

**481.** There had been little progress on political reconciliation but economic reconstruction in Basra was making better progress, largely as a result of the improved security environment. The security situation had improved in recent weeks, making possible the handover of Basra Palace to the Iraqis in September and raising the possibility of PIC in December. If the current trend continued, it should be possible to reduce UK forces to around 2,500 by spring 2008.

**482.** In discussion, it was noted that progress on the security situation had been due to a number of factors, not least of which was the JAM cease-fire. That cease-fire

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<sup>230</sup> Minute Cabinet Office [junior official] to Prime Minister, 5 October 2007, ‘NSID(OD) Iraq Meeting – Steering Brief: Monday 8 October 09:30’.

<sup>231</sup> eGram 41205/07 Baghdad to FCO London, 7 October 2007, ‘Iraq: Political Update: Background for NSID, 8 October’.

<sup>232</sup> Minutes, 8 October 2007, NSID(OD) meeting.

was fragile, however, and would need to be sustained in order for the current relative calm to continue.

**483.** According to Sir John Scarlett’s own account of the meeting, Mr Brown:

“... spoke very strongly on the cease-fire in Basra and the dramatic improvement in the security situation. This represented a huge opportunity.”<sup>233</sup>

**484.** Mr Brown expressed thanks and admiration for the work on that initiative.

**485.** Sir John recorded that “CDS [ACM Stirrup] argued that we must take the opportunity to push forward events while the tide was running in our favour”. Mr Brown endorsed the point that the cease-fire was not simply about prisoner releases; the UK had to show progress on the political and economic front, on which JAM1 was also focused.

**486.** In a covering comment, Sir John added that the Prime Minister had:

“... personally ... acknowledged the importance of [NAME OF OPERATION] ... He also understands that the effort has to move into the political and economic sphere and not just the security issue. So there are signs of traction at the top of government; ...”

**487.** Mr Prentice shared key points from an advance copy of Mr Brown’s statement to Parliament with Gen Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker, and shared its full text shortly before Mr Brown began to speak in Parliament.

**488.** Mr Prentice reported that Gen Petraeus had been “complimentary” about the statement, describing it as the culmination of “a good process of consultation altogether” which has worked out “a sensible way ahead” on UK force levels.<sup>234</sup>

**489.** Both Gen Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker repeated the US concern that the UK presence should be centred on Basra, not elsewhere in southern Iraq. Mr Prentice assured both that this was not in doubt: the geographical description “Southern Iraq” was simply used to distinguish UK forces from those elsewhere in Iraq.

**490.** Gen Petraeus also emphasised the need to be cautious about the stability of improved conditions in Basra: the underlying factors behind it were fragile and the UK should be ready to respond if conditions required it.

**491.** On 8 October, Lt Gen Odierno recommended to Gen Petraeus that Basra should move to PIC in December.<sup>235</sup> He had been encouraged by the positive impact that Gen Mohan and Gen Jalil were having but remained concerned by reports of

<sup>233</sup> Email C, 9 October 2007, ‘Iraq NSID 8 Oct 2007’ attaching Note, ‘NSID Iraq – 8 October 2007’.

<sup>234</sup> eGram 41359/07 Baghdad to FCO London, 8 October 2007, ‘Iraq: PM’s Statement: Reactions from Petraeus and Crocker’.

<sup>235</sup> Minute Binns to CJO, 11 October 2007, ‘GOC HQ MND(SE) – Southern Iraq Update – 11 October 2007’.

militia influence within the Basra ISF. Maj Gen Binns commented: “Not a ringing endorsement, but a positive step and an endorsement we’ve been trying to achieve since April this year.”

**492.** On the afternoon of 8 October, Mr Brown told the House of Commons that the UK expected to establish PIC in Basra in the next two months and that:

“As part of the process of putting the Iraqi forces in the lead in Basra, we have just gone through a demanding operation which involved consolidating our forces at Basra airport. That was successfully completed, as planned, last month. The next important stage in delivering our strategy to hand over security to the Iraqis is a move from a combat role in the rest of Basra province to overwatch, which will itself have two distinct stages. In the first, the British forces that remain in Iraq will have the following tasks: training and mentoring the Iraqi army and police force; securing supply routes and policing the Iran-Iraq border; and the ability to come to the assistance of the Iraqi security forces when called upon. Then in the spring of next year – and guided as always by the advice of our military commanders – we plan to move to a second stage of overwatch where the coalition would maintain a more limited re-intervention capacity and where the main focus will be on training and mentoring.

“... after detailed discussions with our military commanders, a meeting of the national security committee, discussions with the Iraqi Government and our allies and, subject, of course, to conditions on the ground – we plan from next spring to reduce force numbers in southern Iraq to a figure of 2,500 ... In both stages of overwatch, around 500 logistics and support personnel will be based outside Iraq but elsewhere in the region. At all times ... we will be honouring our obligations to the Iraqi people and their security, and ensuring the safety of our forces.”<sup>236</sup>

**493.** Mr Brown also announced a new policy on resettlement support for locally employed staff (see Section 15.1) and emphasised the importance of economic reconstruction “to ensure that ordinary Iraqis have a stake in the future”.

**494.** In the Parliamentary debate that followed, Mr Brown was asked whether he was satisfied that the Iraqi Security Forces were capable of maintaining the security of southern Iraq without UK support, whether the numbers of troops being retained was sufficient to ensure that the troops could protect themselves adequately and whether there was continuing value in retaining any military presence in Iraq.<sup>237</sup>

**495.** In response, Mr Brown explained that he was acting on the advice of his military commanders and that troops were remaining because the Iraqi Government wanted

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<sup>236</sup> House of Commons, *Official Report*, 8 October 2007, columns 21-25.

<sup>237</sup> House of Commons, *Official Report*, 8 October 2007, columns 25-37.

their assistance. Asked whether the move from Basra Palace to the air base had shown that the UK presence was part of the problem, Mr Brown commented:

“... it was before our troops withdrew from Basra Palace that the security situation in that area became a great deal calmer. Because we are training up the Iraqi Security Forces, they are in a position to police and provide security to that area. Far from moving quickly out of Iraq ... our presence to train and mentor [the Iraqi Security Forces] is an important element in bringing about a calm, or calmer, security situation. On the basis of that calmer security situation, we can build a better future for the Iraqi people.”

**496.** By 9 October, the JAM suspension of activity had reached its sixth week and mainstream JAM elements remained compliant.<sup>238</sup> Continued attacks had been attributed to the Iranian-backed JAM Special Groups. Mr Tony Pawson, the Deputy Chief of Defence Intelligence, briefed the Chiefs of Staff that the freeze was “unlikely to endure”.

**497.** Lt Gen Wall told the Chiefs of Staff that there would be a need for “careful handling” of the “differing long term US/UK strategic approaches to Iraq”.

**498.** Mr Prentice reported on 10 October that the public reaction to Mr Brown’s statement in Iraq had been low-key.<sup>239</sup> Reductions in troop levels had already been widely reported during Mr Brown’s visit, and many Iraqi politicians had left Baghdad for Eid.

**499.** Mr Brown met Secretary Gates on 11 October and reassured him that the UK “would continue to fulfil its international obligations”.<sup>240</sup> He explained that it would be important to accompany progress on security with political and economic improvements to demonstrate a “peace dividend”. The UK was particularly focused on Basra’s economic regeneration.

**500.** Maj Gen Binns commented in his weekly update on 11 October that the content of Mr Brown’s statement had been welcomed in MND(SE) because:

“We now have a medium term policy, endorsed by Ministers, for our involvement in Iraq.”<sup>241</sup>

**501.** Government officials working closely with the military met JAM1 again on 11 October.<sup>242</sup> JAM1 had not yet received a response from Muqtada al-Sadr to his letter. He said that a delegation from OMS/JAM in Basra might travel to Najaf to speak

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<sup>238</sup> Minutes, 9 October 2007, Chiefs of Staff meeting.

<sup>239</sup> eGram 41700/07 Baghdad to FCO London, 10 October 2007, ‘Iraq: Reaction to the Prime Minister’s 8 October Statement’.

<sup>240</sup> Letter Fletcher to Forber, 11 October 2007, ‘Prime Minister’s Meeting with US Defence Secretary’.

<sup>241</sup> Minute Binns to CJO, 11 October 2007, ‘GOC HQ MND(SE) – Southern Iraq Update – 11 October 2007’.

<sup>242</sup> Email government official working closely with the military, 12 October 2007, ‘[NAME OF OPERATION]: Meeting with [JAM1] 11 October’.

to al-Sadr about the positive effect of the agreement. JAM1 told the officials that “our agreement with him was safe” but broadening and deepening it would be difficult and would need to be dealt with via a third party (his lawyer) for the time being.

**502.** The officials also met JAM1’s lawyer separately on 11 October, who reiterated his request for JAM1 to be released.

**503.** In an email reporting the meeting, officials reported surprise at the extent to which the Secret Cells had acquiesced in the cease-fire and commented:

“But this good news presents us with more thinking to do. Specifically: is it appropriate that we ask [JAM1] to police Basra not just through policing of his own ranks but also those of other organisations? Does this, perhaps, leads [sic] us too quickly down the uncertain road of vigilantism?”

**504.** In the weekly update for Mr Brown on 12 October, a Cabinet Office official reported that his statement had “played well in Baghdad and coalition capitals, especially in Washington where the Administration was pleased at the prior levels of co-ordination which had taken place, as well as the content of the statement itself”.<sup>243</sup>

**505.** Although Gen Petraeus had welcomed the statement, he had been “quick to query the UK’s longer term intentions in Iraq, for 2009 and beyond”, making it likely that US-UK planning discussions would now shift to that timeframe.

**506.** The Cabinet Office official told Mr Brown that the security situation in Basra remained “relatively calm”. Governor Waili’s appeal against his dismissal from post had been successful, and the UK planned to “resume low-key co-operation with him in the interests of moving beyond the political stand-off in Basra” whilst the Iraq Government took other steps towards his dismissal.

**507.** An MOD official provided advice to Mr Browne on 12 October, seeking his agreement to the release of a further four detainees “to underpin the authority of [JAM1] and thus his ability to maintain control over JAM and other elements in Basra”.<sup>244</sup> None of the four individuals was considered to be high risk.

**508.** This was not the submission on aims and negotiation strategy discussed at Mr Day’s meeting on 4 October; further more detailed advice covering those points was promised.

**509.** Under “presentational issues” the advice said:

“We have recently developed a revised strategy for handling this process. This involves being more forward about the need for reconciliation between Iraqi groups as a major part of solving the country’s security problems (this was a major feature

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<sup>243</sup> Minute Cabinet Office [junior official] to Prime Minister, 12 October 2007, ‘Iraq – Weekly Update’.

<sup>244</sup> Minute Freer to APS/Secretary of State [MOD], 12 October 2007, ‘Negotiations with JAM: latest position’ including manuscript comment Browne.

of the Prime Minister's statement on 8 October 2007), whilst being prepared to explain the details of how this is being operationalised somewhat more openly when asked. We will seek proactively to promote the fairly successful MNF efforts to facilitate Iraqi reconciliation in other parts of the country. We will also provide some draft text for the Secretary of State's next operational update to Parliament which will go into greater detail about the efforts of General Mohan, supported by MND(SE), to achieve greater political accommodation in the South."

**510.** The advice also asked for Mr Browne's agreement on proposed lines to take. In answer to the question "are you negotiating with JAM?", the suggested reply was:

"Yes – we talk to JAM and other militia groups in our area of operations as part of the strategy of political engagement and reconciliation we and our coalition partners have long pursued – JAM and similar groups clearly have an interest in and an influence over Basra and the rest of Iraq, and an outright refusal to engage in dialogue with them would not be in Iraq's, or Basra's, best interests. Moreover the Iraqi Government and the US are aware of, and support, these discussions, which form part of the wider reconciliation initiatives being pursued through Iraq. And through the newly-appointed Iraqi Commander of the Basra Operations Centre (BOC), General Mohan, the Iraqis are also engaging with JAM and other groups with a view to reducing the violence perpetrated against MNF and Iraqi civilians. We and the Iraqis will engage with any groups who are interested in joining Iraq's democratic process and reducing violence – it is the right thing to do. We fully support General Mohan in these efforts ..."

**511.** In response to the question "Has the violence decreased in Basra since you began talking to these groups?", the suggested reply was:

"Talking to these groups is nothing new and so we wouldn't expect to see a sudden decrease in violence. The security situation in Basra remains stable with only a very small proportion of attacks in Iraq happening there. Indeed much of the violence in Basra was directed at the MNF and this has decreased recently. Where security incidents have occurred, the Iraqi security forces have demonstrated their ability to deal with them."

**512.** Mr Browne marked the submission "noted and agreed" on 13 October.

**513.** Maj Gen Rose advised the Chiefs of Staff on 16 October that a number of splinter groups, a mixture of Iranian trained/funded Secret Cells and rogue JAM groups opposed to the freeze on violence, had been established in southern Iraq.<sup>245</sup>

**514.** One group, Fayha al-Sadr, focused on Basra and Dhi Qar provinces, was thought to be responsible for recent attacks on the COB, but Gen Mohan and Maj Gen Jalil had made improvements in security that made it likely that it would focus its future efforts

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<sup>245</sup> Minutes, 16 October 2007, Chiefs of Staff meeting.

on other parts of Iraq, where tensions between the Badr-dominated ISF and JAM had created a “more permissive environment”.

**515.** The Chiefs of Staff noted that work to determine the future UK force structure requirements for MND(SE) beyond March 2008 was being conducted, using a figure of 3,000 personnel as the planning baseline. It would be important to bear in mind the size and nature of the UK’s commitment in Baghdad, particularly the senior officers based there, as part of that work.

**516.** Government officials working closely with the military met JAM1 on 16 October.<sup>246</sup> During the meeting, the compound was hit by indirect fire, which JAM1 described as “the work of wreckers”. The officials said that the attack and JAM1’s reaction to it had helped them to get the point across to MND(SE) that not all indirect fire was a contravention of the agreement reached.

**517.** The officials raised the prospect of political engagement, explaining that the UK was working with all the Basra parties to achieve political rapprochement and prepare for next year’s elections – except the Sadrists: “It was difficult for us to defend the Sadrists’ rightful place at the political table if they declined to work with other political entities to prepare the meal.” JAM1 explained that Muqtada al-Sadr was clear that foreign troops were “occupiers” and should not be dealt with:

“But this straight bat stuff out of the way, a more nuanced and positive picture emerged: there might actually be two OMS-affiliated parties standing, one of which was ‘pure’ OMS and the other more prepared to broker with minor parties. And OMS was preparing ... a group of leaders in Basra who would deal with other parties and, under the table, with MNF...”

**518.** The note continued:

“Furthermore, an interlocutor ... would be coming down to Basra from Baghdad ... and would visit [JAM1] in the DIF [Divisional Internment Facility]. This was a senior man, not of the OMS but a Sadrist, who would be seeking to broker a much wider deal which would embrace all the Sadrists on one side and all of MNF on the other ... To that end [JAM1] had already sent us a list of ten Basrawis in American custody whose release would endorse British credentials as the potential deal-makers for all of Iraq ... JAM1 noted that Basrawis still feared that the Americans would, sooner or later, occupy Basra. This would be a disaster, the end of all things. But Sadrists now recognised that the Americans were not beyond negotiation and believed that we offered the most trustworthy point of contact.”

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<sup>246</sup> Email government official working closely with the military, 16 October 2007, ‘[NAME OF OPERATION]: Meeting with [JAM1] 16 October and MND(SE) [NAME OF OPERATION] Discussions’.

**519.** Maj Gen Binns reported on 18 October that Gen Petraeus had agreed Lt Gen Odierno's recommendation of PIC for Basra in December.<sup>247</sup> Although the meeting of the MCNS had been delayed to 21 October, Maj Gen Binns remained confident that it would confirm the recommendation that Basra should transfer to PIC in December.

**520.** Dr Zebari told Mr Prentice on 18 October that the Iraqi Government would be requesting a rollover of the current Security Council mandate, though they would need the new resolution to refer explicitly to parallel negotiations between the Iraqi Government and the coalition on a long-term strategic security partnership.<sup>248</sup>

**521.** The US and Iraqi Governments would issue a joint declaration in the next few weeks that would set out their longer-term vision. Dr Zebari agreed that the UK would be shown the text in advance and that "US/Gol positions on the declaration and on the shape of more detailed negotiations would need to be co-ordinated with us [the UK]".

**522.** On 18 October, MOD officials submitted advice to Mr Browne's Assistant Private Secretary, seeking agreement to the release of another three detainees "as a short term measure to help underpin the authority of [JAM1] and thus his ability to maintain control over JAM and other elements in Basra".<sup>249</sup>

**523.** The advice said that Mr Browne would be informed which individuals from JAM1's list would be released once the Divisional Internment Review Committee had reached a conclusion. It recorded that:

"Six of these individuals are assessed to be high risk and two in particular are closely associated with IDF attacks against UK forces ... It will also be very difficult to release one of the individuals on this list because he is being processed by the Iraqi legal system and his trial is due to commence in December 2007."

**524.** Mr Browne annotated the advice "Noted + agreed" on 18 October.<sup>250</sup>

**525.** Government officials working alongside the military had a "good-humoured meeting" with JAM1 on 19 October.<sup>251</sup>

**526.** JAM1 proposed the creation of a reconciliation committee, to provide a public face for detainee releases. The officials proposed that this should "embrace all parties", which

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<sup>247</sup> Minute Binns to CJO, 18 October 2007, 'GOC HQ MND(SE) – Southern Iraq Update – 18 October 2007'.

<sup>248</sup> eGram 42918/07 Baghdad to FCO London, 19 October 2007, 'Iraq: Meeting with Foreign Minister Zebari, 18 October'.

<sup>249</sup> Minute Freer to APS/Secretary of State [MOD], 18 October 2007, 'Negotiations with JAM: latest position'.

<sup>250</sup> Minute Freer to APS/Secretary of State [MOD], 18 October 2007, 'Negotiations with JAM: latest position' including manuscript comment Browne.

<sup>251</sup> Email official working closely with the military, 19 October 2007, '[NAME OF OPERATION]: Meeting with [JAM1]'.

JAM1 accepted. The officials said that any such meeting would be useful at present, as there was still too much violence in Basra.

**527.** On releases, JAM1 said that his new plan was that five prisoners should be released on 10 November, with a steady stream of releases for the next two months. JAM1 asked that his own release should form part of the 10 November batch.

**528.** The officials concluded:

“... [JAM1]’s assurance that hostilities are not about to resume ... and [JAM1]’s claim that the Secret Cells are signed up (we have some scanty collateral for that) are all positives although all such assurances should be treated with circumspection ...

“But [JAM1]’s request for his own release will be hard to play. He has proved relentless on releases to date and we sense that, however much we seek to draw it into the light, JAM’s feral instincts also remain fixed on the subject. It may be that, at heart, [JAM1] still fears transfer to American custody ... But whilst we might score negotiating points and perhaps even achieve concessions down the road we should be in no doubt that both [JAM1] and his JAM supporters will take this one to the wire. We sense that they, particularly [JAM1] have more to lose than we now. But they might not think so and the next set of negotiations will be hard.”

**529.** On 23 October, Mr Browne told the House of Commons Select Committee on Defence that:

“The security situation in Basra, in our assessment and in the assessment of the Iraqis themselves who are of course important assessors of this, is that it remains stable ... Attacks on Multi-National Forces decreased by 90 percent in September and the overall figure is 19 compared to August when it was 190 ... The other aspect of course of violence is crime against Iraqis themselves ... it has remained at similar levels to those seen in August prior to the handover of Basra Palace.”<sup>252</sup>

**530.** On 23 October, AM Peach briefed the Chiefs of Staff that tension between the Iraqi Government and the MNF-I had increased.<sup>253</sup> Among the contributing factors were an incident on 16 September in which a private military security company had its operating licence revoked after being accused of excessive force in a convoy protection incident, a number of Iraqi civilian deaths in Sadr City on 21 October caused by the MNF-I, increased use of airstrikes and a belief that the MNF-I had been arming the Sunni bloc. In his view, these tensions might lead to changes to the draft resolution, and so delay it.

**531.** The Chiefs of Staff observed that “legal advice would be required to establish the status of UK forces should the current UNSCR lapse without replacement by 31 December 2007”.

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<sup>252</sup> Select Committee on Defence Minutes of Evidence, 23 October 2007, Q4.

<sup>253</sup> Minutes, 23 October 2007, Chiefs of Staff meeting.

**532.** AM Peach also told the Chiefs of Staff: “Contrary to recent US assessments that AQ-I had been defeated, the UK view remained that AQ-I, whilst severely damaged, retained the ability to be resurgent, particularly if the current pressure were to be released.”

**533.** In a message to the FCO on 23 October, Mr Prentice urged that it should “start planning how the UK will meet these commitments [in Mr Brown’s 8 October statement] and best protect our wider strategic interests in the medium term – from the end of 2008 and beyond”.<sup>254</sup> The urgency arose from the ongoing debate between Iraq and the US on the legal basis for a continued coalition presence in 2009 and beyond.

**534.** The Iraqi Government was insisting that there could be no extension of a Chapter VII resolution into 2009. Even renewal of the existing resolution for another year looked set to be “a struggle”. To secure what was needed from that continuing debate, Mr Prentice argued that the UK would need “to clarify now what role we see ourselves playing in Iraq beyond 2008 and what legal authorities we will require to enable us to do that”.

**535.** Mr Prentice continued:

“... to ensure that we do justice to the scale and cost of the UK’s commitment to the Iraq project over the last 4-5 years and secure our national interests for the period ahead, we need to accept now that we are in this for some years to come”.

**536.** Mr Prentice thought the UK role in Iraq in 2009 and beyond ought to include:

- capacity-building in the judiciary and police at the centre;
- training and mentoring of the Basra ISF;
- supporting the Basra development initiatives because: “We will be judged by the progress Basra makes following PIC ... There is also a case for us to be planning a last high profile project as visible proof for Basrawis of our continuing support and as a lasting UK legacy”;
- re-establishing a UK Trade and Industry presence in Basra “to pursue the huge commercial opportunities there will eventually be there”;
- military protection and active defence of the COB at Basra as the southern military HQ and the home for UK/US civilian missions and the PRT;
- defending coalition supply and exit routes to Kuwait, including a Quick Reaction Force capability;
- support, if requested, for ISF efforts against Iranian/militia influence; and
- niche military roles elsewhere in Iraq.

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<sup>254</sup> eGram 43230/07 Baghdad to FCO London, 23 October 2007, ‘Iraq 2009 and Beyond – Unfinished Business’.

**537.** Mr Prentice concluded:

“We need an approach that is ambitious in its vision, but remains flexible in its implementation:

- We must continue to remain engaged on the ground, both militarily and in a civilian capacity in Baghdad, Basra and Erbil.
- Even as that engagement shifts from being primarily military ... the security situation will still require us to provide protection to those engaged in our civilian efforts.
- We must not underestimate the scale of the task of helping to rebuild Iraq, nor the time it will take to achieve conditions when we can revert to a normal relationship with Iraq ...
- Our effort will need to continue to draw on the contributions of a wide range of government departments – including, but not only, FCO, DFID, MOD (civilian and military) ...”

“Given our best assessment of the prospects for security and our operating conditions, it would be a mistake to imagine that, in 12 months time, we might be free to start drawing down UK forces in southern Iraq below the ... figure that we will be at next spring. There remains an enormous amount at stake for the UK in Iraq ...”

**538.** On 24 October, a splinter group – the Iraq National Gathering (ING) – announced that it was breaking away from the main Sadrist movement.<sup>255</sup> Maj Gen Binns reported that the announcement led to a “flurry of speculation that this may be the ‘next big thing’” because its leadership appeared to involve individuals closely associated with the Special Groups. Amidst indications of frustration with the JAM ‘freeze’ among its grassroots support, he judged that the ING had the potential to siphon off disaffected elements.

**539.** Government officials working closely with the military met a Basrawi Judge suggested by JAM1 as a possible interlocutor on 24 October.<sup>256</sup> The officials reported that the Judge said that he was prepared to be an OMS public face in future negotiations but also “made it very clear where his loyalty and instincts lie – he is a Sadrist and he wants [JAM1] out of the DIF now”.

**540.** On 25 October, the Reconciliation Steering Group (RSG), successor body to the MIG, met and agreed a negotiating plan drafted by officials.

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<sup>255</sup> Minute Binns to CJO, 15 November 2007, ‘GOC MND(SE) Weekly Letter – 15 November 2007’.

<sup>256</sup> Email government official working closely with the military, 27 October 2007, ‘[NAME OF OPERATION]: Meeting with [JAM1] 26 October’.

**541.** The negotiating plan said that it should be borne in mind that the ISF were not yet in a fit state to take on JAM. It considered that the UK wished to avoid:

- “• A resumption of the IDF/IED campaign that would send our policy in southern Iraq back to the unhealthy state it was in last May/June.
- Conflict between JAM and the ISF in Basra, particularly if it reaches the level where it demands our re-intervention”.

**542.** The plan went on to suggest that the UK’s position should be that:

- the increased tempo of demands had put “all in doubt”;
- if the negotiation process broke down and attacks resumed, the UK would reinforce a “vigorous ISF campaign” against illegal activity by JAM and releases would cease;
- the release of JAM1 should mark the formal end of “all hostilities” in Basra; and
- the agreements needed to underpin the end of hostilities should be in place by mid-January.

**543.** Those agreements should be:

- a demonstration of intent – a period of 20 days in which there were no kidnaps or crimes or attacks in Basra by JAM;
- a public declaration that JAM would subscribe to the rule of law and cease all military operations against the MNF and the ISF in Basra province and that OMS will look only to the political route;
- a public declaration that JAM would cease all attacks upon, or intimidation of, current and former Iraqi employees and contractors of MNF;
- the delivery of all mortar tubes, rounds and rockets, illegally held in Basra, to MNF or ISF; and
- a public commitment to free and fair provincial elections in Basra province.

**544.** On 26 October, government officials working closely with the military met JAM1 once again and put to him, as agreed by the RSG, that his own release should not take place until the structures were in place to ensure that hostilities could not break out again. The officials told JAM1 that some concrete proposals were being prepared for discussion. JAM1 was reported to have reacted calmly. The officials concluded:

“This went better than we might have expected ... This may simply because [sic] we did not, at this stage, say: ‘you are not being released on 10 November’. Equally he did not react poorly to our lines about agreements and declarations because he had yet to see how draconian and, in their original form, unpalatable, they might be.”

**545.** At a subsequent meeting with JAM1 on 30 October, government officials working closely with the military put forward the list of agreements needed to signal an end to

hostilities, as agreed by the RSG.<sup>257</sup> JAM1 responded that it would take time to find a real solution on handing in heavy weaponry and the protection of the MNF's Iraqi employees, who were widely considered to be British spies.

**546.** JAM1 requested that a translation of the proposals be provided to his lawyer as a representative of the OMS, the ultimate signatory of any agreement. In their report to London, the officials concluded that "even genuinely determined attempts to engage with the OMS ... could take us up to mid-January and beyond. This would definitely not wash."

**547.** ACM Stirrup visited Iraq between 26 and 29 October.<sup>258</sup> Reporting the visit to Mr Browne's Private Secretary, ACM Stirrup's Military Adviser recorded that Maj Gen Binns remained confident of achieving PIC in Basra in December 2007, although he was doubtful that the ISF had the ability to counter JAM if the cease-fire broke.

**548.** ACM Stirrup confirmed that the desired end state was "an enduring security which facilitates a political climate suitable for development". The ongoing JAM reconciliation process and the continued strengthening of the Iraqi Army and the police were all encouraging but: "the biggest lever for JAM to continue reconciliation was the fear of US intervention in Basra, if conditions deteriorated".

**549.** Lt Gen Odierno told ACM Stirrup that he had initially been wary about the UK's proposed withdrawal from Basra Palace but that his fears had been unfounded. He was "more than comfortable" with the prospect of PIC in Basra in December.

**550.** Mr Brown and President Bush spoke by video conference on 29 October. In a short discussion on Iraq, Mr Brown regretted that there had not been further Iraqi progress on reconciliation.<sup>259</sup> He explained that the UK was focused on consolidating the security and economic situation in the south, and emphasised the importance of securing provincial elections to promote a "solid democratic message".

**551.** Sir John Sawers, UK Permanent Representative to the UN in New York, wrote to Sir Peter Ricketts, FCO Permanent Under Secretary, at the end of October to express his concerns about the approach to the new resolution.<sup>260</sup> Sir John understood that the intention was that the new resolution would contain a formal commitment that it would be the last and that the future presence of the MNF would be governed by one or more

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<sup>257</sup> Email official working closely with the military, 31 October 2007, '[NAME OF OPERATION]: Meeting with [JAM1] – 30 October'.

<sup>258</sup> Minute Kyd to PS/SofS [MOD], 29 October 2007, 'CDS Visit to Iraq 26-29 Oct 07'.

<sup>259</sup> Letter Fletcher to Carver, 29 October 2007, 'Prime Minister's VTC with US President, 29 October'.

<sup>260</sup> Letter Sawers to Ricketts, 29 October 2007, 'Iraq: Renewal of MNF-I's UN Mandate'.

Status of Forces Agreements (SOFAs). Sir John outlined four potential risks to UK interests in doing so:

- Building in an implicit acceptance of a long-term US presence in Iraq would complicate the rollover of the UN mandate for 2008.
- UK options for a military presence post-2008 would be limited and dependent on negotiating a SOFA with the Iraqi Government. If that could not be achieved “the absence of such an agreement could prove to be the basis on which our presence in Iraq is terminated ... it would be hard to argue that our decision was based on prevailing security conditions”.
- The nature of the international presence in Iraq would change, narrowing the coalition and setting back the efforts the UK had made to “internationalise” the effort in Iraq.
- UK arguments that a Chapter VII mandate was required for similar operations (for example, in Darfur) would be weakened.

**552.** Sir John concluded his letter by asking that Mr Miliband be made aware of these risks. He wrote:

“I accept fully that there are other factors at play. Purely in terms of UN handling and sustaining the UN’s role in Iraq, I would prefer us to keep open the prospect of further renewals of the UN mandate and to stick as far as we can to last year’s US-Iraq exchange of letters.”

**553.** On 31 October, a government official working closely with the UK military briefed the US military on the negotiations with JAM1 and explored the possibility of Basrawi detainees in US custody being transferred to MND(SE)’s detention facility “to bolster our dwindling numbers in an effort to prolong the detainee release programme”.<sup>261</sup>

**554.** Around 300 detainees in US custody were thought to be of interest to the UK. With the exception of “A Category insurgents” they could be released when needed. The official noted that there were legal issues to be discussed regarding any transfer to UK detention. US and UK military officers would discuss the practicalities.

**555.** Mr Browne visited Iraq between 29 October and 2 November.<sup>262</sup> In a letter reporting his observations to Mr Brown he described it as “markedly the most encouraging of my seven visits to Basra”. He continued:

“So progress there has been, but, as you well know, the space we have achieved is fragile and temporary. We have a window of opportunity in Basra and it is vital that both we and the Iraqis apply political and economic leadership to make the most of it.”

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<sup>261</sup> Email government official working closely with the military, 3 November 2007, ‘Visit to Camp Bucca 31 October 2007’.

<sup>262</sup> Letter Browne to Brown, 2 November 2007, [untitled].

**556.** Mr Browne had impressed upon everyone he met in Iraq the need to announce “a detailed economic plan for Basra” to coincide with PIC in December. He observed that “If we are to deliver, and we must, this will need dedicated and energetic UK resource in London, Basra and Baghdad.”

**557.** During his stay in Baghdad, Mr Browne reported that Gen Petraeus described progress on reconciling the disaffected as “quite extraordinary”. He considered that: “The phenomenon that began amongst the Sunni in the Al Anbar but which is now reaching out to the Shia too, is now of sufficient magnitude that the Government of Iraq has no choice but to embrace it.”

**558.** Mr Browne raised the UK’s concerns about the renewal of resolution 1723 with both Prime Minister Maliki and Gen Petraeus. The latter’s view was that the strategic context had now changed and that in order to secure its passage Prime Minister Maliki would have to be able to tell the Council of Representatives that it would be the final resolution. Mr Browne “left him in little doubt about the legal constraint that the UK would face in the absence of the UNSCR”.

**559.** On 31 October, at the MOD’s request, the JIC examined the sustainability of the recent down-turn in JAM attacks on MNF-I in Basra.<sup>263</sup> It assessed that a range of factors – including the withdrawal from the city centre, a number of development initiatives coming on stream, Gen Mohan and Gen Jalil’s efforts to improve ISF performance in the city – had “created an environment in which the evolving negotiation between MND(SE) and [JAM1] was able to progress to a formal cease-fire agreement in early August, which is still being observed”.

**560.** The JIC judged that:

“The agreement with [JAM1] is fragile. It has hitherto focused on linking a reduction in attacks on MNF to prisoner releases. Pressure for a more broadly-based negotiation including economic and political elements is likely to grow rapidly ...”

**561.** The JIC assessed that the reduction in violence that had been negotiated with JAM1 could be upset “by a number of players with potentially conflicting interests”. The JIC considered that:

“... the fractious nature of the Sadrist movement means we see a high risk that ... [the] initiative could become a pawn of infighting in Najaf.

“The attitude of **Muqtada al-Sadr** is important, in public he had made a point of consistently opposing any contacts with ‘occupation forces’ and the Najaf leadership would be unlikely to challenge an order from him ...”

**562.** The JIC judged that al-Sadr was trying to move his movement towards a more conventional role in Iraqi politics and might therefore see advantage in “an initiative

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<sup>263</sup> [JIC Assessment, 31 October 2007, ‘Iraq: Risks to the Negotiation with JAM in Basra’.](#)

which positions them more strongly is Basra”. However, “al-Sadr is notoriously volatile and it would be unwise to count on his indefinite support for any deal”.

**563.** The JIC judged:

“Prime Minister Maliki is briefed on MND(SE)’s negotiation with [JAM1] and has raised no objection. Maliki places a high premium on stability in Basra. However, he probably has reservations about any deals with JAM and there is a risk that he could miscalculate: an order for ISF to confront JAM directly in Basra could upset the negotiation.”

**564.** Under the heading “Prospects”, the JIC judged:

“The attitude of the Sadrist leadership ... is also likely to be coloured by their perception of the prospects for some lasting political gain, at least until provincial elections take place next year. But we judge that JAM views locally and nationally are also likely to be coloured by their perception of MNF intentions in the longer term ... If JAM conclude that momentum towards complete withdrawal has stalled, we judge they might well resume such attacks. They would almost certainly have Iranian support in doing so.”

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**565.** Mr Browne’s visit to Basra prompted Maj Gen Binns to evaluate progress made since the summer.<sup>264</sup> On 1 November he wrote:

“We are now subject to far fewer attacks, are constructively engaged with the Governor ... and the Provincial Council, we transit through Basra in force ... without opposition (although there is always a quantifiable threat) and are looking to make more of the large amount of reconstruction work we are responsible for (through US resources) in Basra ... We are still subject to attack (and the danger is significant), but these attacks are, we believe, from rogue elements (possibly sponsored by Iran). The mainstream militias are for the most part quiet – unless provoked, as we saw on 23 October.

“Discussions are taking place in Basra, without our involvement, between political parties and JAM. We are also encouraging constructive engagement between the Iraqi Security Forces and the Provincial Council. I am in no doubt that encouraging, cajoling and supporting the various parties in Basra towards a peaceful resolution to their differences will lay the foundations for Basra’s future prosperity and success for the MND(SE) mission ... But we should be in no doubt that this progress is not yet irreversible and, should there be any backsliding by local parties, we must hold our nerve as the groundswell of Iraqi opinion is moving towards reconciliation

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<sup>264</sup> Minute Binns to CJO, 1 November 2007, ‘GOC HQ MND(SE) – Southern Iraq Update – 1 November 2007’.

in order to achieve peace and prosperity. The result will not be pretty, and will no doubt have distasteful people in power ... but to be sustainable the solution must be an Iraqi one.”

**566.** In his weekly report of 4 November, Lt Gen Rollo agreed that “concrete action” would be necessary to make good on the commitments to accelerate economic development in Basra.<sup>265</sup> The work would require “dedicated cells in London and Basra with clear accountability and an aggressive timeline” in order to be able “to clout not dribble”.

**567.** Lt Gen Rollo commented that Mr Browne’s visit had prompted useful US debate about the UK’s requirement for a Security Council resolution because:

“The effect of the lack of UNSCR cover for our operations had not been fully appreciated here, although it had been discussed in Washington.”

**568.** When the Iraq Strategy Group discussed renewal of the resolution on 5 November, the FCO position was described by Mr Baker as “to keep options open for 2009 in case a further resolution were required.”<sup>266</sup> Mr McDonald told the Iraq Strategy Group that:

“... the Prime Minister was content that the next SCR would be the last, and given our stated plan for next year, it would send the wrong message if we appeared to be pushing far more than the US to keep our options open. If the US did not agree to our latest suggested amendments therefore, we should accept that as the last word. We should ensure, however, that all parts of the US system were aware of the consequences for the UK commitment of not having a SCR mandate.”

**569.** Mr McDonald also told the Iraq Strategy Group that there would be a review of the UK’s civilian and military posture in Iraq in spring 2008, when Ministers might take decisions on future plans for 2009 and beyond. He cautioned that it was too early to make assumptions about what the future posture might be, and that it should not be discussed with the US or Iraqis, but the long-term objective was “strategic overwatch in Iraq”. Papers were commissioned from the FCO and MOD for discussion by the Iraq Strategy Group, and eventually for Ministers’ Christmas red boxes.

**570.** On 5 November, in an account of a further meeting with JAM1, a government official working closely with the military recorded that a formal request for releases from US detention was with Lt Gen Odierno for consideration.<sup>267</sup>

**571.** In the meeting itself, JAM1 had not, as expected, pushed for himself to be one of those released on 10 November but officials had been prompted to consider whether it

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<sup>265</sup> Minute Rollo to CDS, 4 November 2007, ‘SBMR-I’s Weekly Report (275) 4 Nov 07’.

<sup>266</sup> Minute Cabinet Office [junior official] to McDonald, 6 November 2007, ‘Iraq Strategy Group, 5 November’.

<sup>267</sup> Email government official working closely with the military, 5 November 2007, ‘[NAME OF OPERATION]: [JAM1] Meeting 4 November’.

was “in our interests” to hold JAM1 until the end of the current phase of the operation. In particular, the official wondered, “how will it look presentationally if we keep him past PIC?”

**572.** Mr Day wrote to Lt Gen Wall on 5 November with an account of discussions between Maj Gen Binns and Mr Browne on JAM1 during Mr Browne’s visit to Basra.<sup>268</sup> Mr Day suggested that the key points were:

- “• the extent to which a long term deal is embedded in – and, indeed, fundamental to – thinking in theatre on political engagement and shifting the gunmen into politics;
- [officials’] caution about the prospects for success;
- the fragility of our hold on [JAM1] after his release – the levers listed in previous draft papers are in my view inadequate to constrain him once out of our hands.”

**573.** Mr Day considered that it was important to recognise that:

“... negotiating a long term relationship with [JAM1] is tantamount to taking a punt at long odds. But the alternatives may well be even less attractive. Having discussed the pros and cons with SofS and Graham Binns, I think the key questions on which we need to provide advice are:

- What are the legal implications/commitment of the kind of political and economic ‘deals’ we are considering – in particular on providing intelligence to [JAM1] and transferring internees from US custody?
- How do we engage the key Iraqi players (presumably Maliki, Mohan and Jalil) and do they have a say or a veto?”

**574.** Mr Day concluded:

“This is essentially a political judgement call so we need to expose all of the factors for SofS. In the shorter term, I have confirmed with SofS’s office that they have no record of SofS agreeing that theatre can release further internees without consulting MOD. That was certainly my understanding, at least as until we have a long term policy in place.”

**575.** Mr Lyall Grant chaired a meeting on 6 November to consider the negotiations with JAM1.<sup>269</sup> It was attended by representatives from the MOD, the FCO, DFID, the Cabinet Office, SIS and GCHQ.

**576.** The Inquiry has seen accounts of that meeting written by attendees from the MOD and other organisations, but the Government has confirmed that no formal minutes of the meeting exist.

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<sup>268</sup> Minute Day to DCDS(C), 5 November 2007, ‘[NAME OF OPERATION]’.

<sup>269</sup> Email junior official specialising in the Middle East, 8 November 2007, ‘[NAME OF OPERATION]: FCO Lead on Strategic Development of the Initiative’.

**577.** One of the accounts reported the purpose of the meeting as looking at the prospects for developing the negotiations from a tactical deal into a process that delivered strategic effect in MND(SE) and perhaps beyond.

**578.** One of the attendees reported internally on broad agreement that:

- The UK should aim to preserve the reduction in violence for as long as possible, because even after PIC a return to violence would make sustaining UK presence in MND(SE) difficult.
- The cease-fire would probably not survive JAM1's release as part of the last tranche of prisoners unless he had first been bound into a broader process.
- It would be necessary to wrap the UK's relationship with JAM1 into a broader process so as to avoid the political risks of directly backing a JAM leader.
- There were potentially strategic gains to be made from such a process, including countering malign Iranian influence and bringing the Sadrists and JAM more fully within Iraqi politics.

**579.** The attendee's account said that the FCO had agreed to take responsibility for developing a strategic plan, while the MOD would take forward the "tactical deal". DFID protested against short-term development projects initiated as part of the agreements reached, which could undermine structural reforms agreed with the Provincial Council. It was agreed unanimously that no reporting on cease-fire violators would be passed to JAM1.

**580.** Mr Day wrote to Mr Browne's Assistant Private Secretary on 7 November with an account of agreements reached at the meeting on the previous day.<sup>270</sup> He said that the discussion had "resolved most of the outstanding issues" on longer-term aims and the negotiating strategy. He reported that it had been agreed that:

- the current process of negotiation should continue with the aim of minimising the IDF threat to the COB and "stringing out the deal for as long as possible" into 2008;
- subject to any legal constraints, the UK should be prepared to act as a conduit for the releases of internees in US hands, if the US agreed; and
- Mr Browne should continue to approve the release of detainees, up to but not including JAM1.

**581.** Mr Day wrote that it had been agreed that the FCO would lead on developing a strategy for wider political engagement in Basra, taking into account US and Iraqi views, into which JAM1 might be embedded. Mr Miliband would take Ministerial ownership. The strategy would "address the timetable for [JAM1]'s release, the relationship with PIC, the prospect of provincial elections and the role of aid funding (probably

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<sup>270</sup> Minute Day to APS/SofS [MOD], 7 November 2007, 'Negotiations with JAM: way ahead'.

CERPS [Commanders' Emergency Response Programme]) in encouraging political engagement”.

**582.** On 8 November, the JIC issued an Assessment of Iranian objectives in Iraq.<sup>271</sup> It judged:

“Supreme Leader Khamenei controls Iranian policy towards Iraq ...

“Khamenei sees violent resistance to the coalition presence in Iraq as a way to deter and deflect US military action against Iran itself ... He is prepared to accept an extended period of disorder in Iraq and continued US military deployment as the price for this. But Iran will not accept a permanent US military presence in Iraq.

“IRGC-QF will continue trying to calibrate violence by its proxies to keep US forces off balance without provoking retaliation against Iran. Should MNF-I appear to be achieving a stable Iraq – with the possibility of secure basing for US forces into the future – Iran would probably seek to respond with increased proxy attacks even at the risk of delaying US military drawdown.

“Iran’s main aim in Basra and its environs is to keep intra-Shia violence under control. Iran will keep pressure on UK forces there through its proxies, while trying to avoid provoking US intervention.”

**583.** Mr Brown met the Chiefs of Staff, Mr Browne and Sir Bill Jeffrey, MOD Permanent Under Secretary, on 8 November.<sup>272</sup> They discussed Iraq briefly, and Mr Brown agreed that there was a need to reach out to potential allies in the South, to maintain the pace of economic redevelopment and to hold Prime Minister Maliki to the target date of 17 December for transition to PIC in Basra.

**584.** Lt Gen Wall told the Chiefs of Staff on 13 November that:

“... the MOU [Memorandum of Understanding] for PIC had still to be finalised and it remained unclear whether Prime Minister Maliki would agree to full PIC or whether an interim solution would be pursued ... on account of his reservations with regard to Gov Waili’s ability to deal effectively with security.”<sup>273</sup>

**585.** Government officials working closely with the military met JAM1 and his lawyer separately on 8 and 7 November respectively.<sup>274</sup> The lawyer pressed for rapid release of JAM1, although JAM1 did not. Maj Gen Binns was considering whether it should be linked to the transfer to PIC and the officials commented that they could “see some merit in this, if we can achieve satisfactory progress on the undertakings for the next stage”.

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<sup>271</sup> JIC Assessment, 8 November 2007, ‘Iranian Objectives in Iraq’.

<sup>272</sup> Letter Fletcher to Forber, 9 November 2007, ‘Prime Minister’s Meeting with Chiefs of Staff, 8 November’.

<sup>273</sup> Minutes, 13 November 2007, Chiefs of Staff meeting.

<sup>274</sup> Email government official working closely with the military, 10 November 2007, ‘[NAME OF OPERATION]: Recent Meetings’.

**586.** The report concluded with a “note of warning” which indicated that they were unclear about the extent to which JAM1 was aware of the activities of JAM death squads, which were believed to be assassinating their enemies.

**587.** On 9 November, a senior official specialising in the Middle East (1) provided Mr Lyall Grant with advice on negotiations with JAM in Basra, intended to provide background for policy makers as they considered “the advantages and risks of moving ahead”.<sup>275</sup> The advice was copied to Mr McDonald, as well as others in the MOD, the Cabinet Office and the FCO.

**588.** The advice opened by stating that negotiations with JAM in Basra had led to “a striking reduction in violence” and that there was an opportunity to “transform a tactical deal based on detainee releases into a process designed to achieve a strategic shift in JAM’s relationship with MND(SE) and possibly with the US and the Government of Iraq”. The senior official anticipated that this would be the subject of an FCO submission. There was “some urgency” to this as by the end of the year MND(SE) would have run out of significant detainees to release, meaning that the current arrangements could collapse, unless “developed into a wider longer term dispensation”.

**589.** The advice explained the background to the “initiative” in Basra and its impact to date. Around 50 detainees had been released already, with 31 still in detention. If releases continued at the same rate, all detainees were likely to have been released by the middle of January 2008.

**590.** The senior official advised that:

“The best date for [JAM1’s] release will depend on exactly how the ... process develops but Provincial Iraqi Control (PIC) and Eid al-Adha on or around 20 December represent symbolic milestones. Fixing a date now for [JAM1’s] release might take the sting out of further demands for immediate release and focus minds on all sides on how to sustain the process.

“[JAM1] has said he does not want all the detainees released immediately to allow time for the transformation of the relationship with the UK. Nonetheless, despite his strong interest in development and politics, his roots in militia violence are never far from the surface and he is very responsive to pressure from JAM in Basra for a quicker pace of releases. Although the atmospherics of the talks are generally good, he remains at times a difficult and unpredictable interlocutor. He wants the cease-fire to work but his instincts are to discipline his own people ... He particularly distrusts Basra security supremo, General Mohan ... Getting him to work with Mohan or a replacement will be difficult but ... [reports suggest] that [JAM1] is beginning to recognise the necessity of security co-ordination with the Iraqi state.”

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<sup>275</sup> Minute senior government official specialising in the Middle East (1) to Lyall Grant, 9 November 2007, ‘[NAME OF OPERATION]: Negotiations with JAM in Basrah’.

**591.** On the attitudes of others to the negotiations, the senior official reported:

“Mohan’s own attitude to JAM remains ambivalent. He talks of tough steps if JAM does not comply with his demands but he has also been keen to associate himself with the [NAME OF OPERATION] detainee releases. Some around PM Maliki seem to fear the UK might empower or even arm JAM, drawing parallels with US actions with Sunnis in al-Anbar ...

“Although there was considerable US suspicion of the [NAME OF OPERATION] process as a means to UK drawdown, there is strong US interest in the progress of the talks and especially the impact on Iran.”

**592.** On 9 November, Mr McDonald sent a minute to Mr Brown on the renewal of the Security Council resolution describing the MNF mandate in Iraq.<sup>276</sup> He reported that Mr Miliband had decided, on advice from the UK Permanent Mission to the UN in New York, that the UK should propose new language for the US draft making clear that a decision on a resolution for 2009 should be conditions-based. It was expected that the US would reject that language. Mr McDonald continued:

“... we should not be seen to be leading the demands for a post-2008 resolution, as this may send the wrong message about the level of our likely commitment in Iraq from 2009 and beyond. I have therefore agreed in Whitehall that if the US does indeed reject our proposal we will accept their position.

“It is a fact, though, that the absence of a UNSCR will have greater implications for the level and scope of the UK commitment than it will for the US, given our obligation to comply with the European Convention on Human Rights. The US are aware of this ... Petraeus recognised that the absence of a UNSCR ... would significantly constrain our freedoms and may prejudice the tasks he wants us to perform ... Nevertheless, his view was that the strategic context had changed and that, to secure the passage of the next resolution, Maliki would need to present it internally as the last.”

**593.** Mr McDonald recommended that the UK should accept that the next resolution would be the last and should start to look at what would be necessary to replace it in 2009, which was likely to be some form of Status of Forces Agreement.

**594.** In his 11 November weekly report, Lt Gen Rollo reported that a group of mid- to senior-level Sadrists – the Mid Euphrates Awakening – had made contact with the MNF-I engagement cell and there were also signs of Sadrist engagement with MNF-I in western Baghdad.<sup>277</sup>

**595.** Lt Gen Rollo commented that these “and last but not least our – and the GOI’s – engagement with JAM in Basra” illustrated a “remarkable” increase in MNF-I

<sup>276</sup> Minute McDonald to Prime Minister, 9 November 2007, ‘Iraq: UNSCR Renewal’.

<sup>277</sup> Minute Rollo to CDS, 11 November 2007, ‘SBMR-I’s Weekly Report (276) 11 Nov 07’.

engagement with the Sadrist movement in recent weeks. He observed that, together, these initiatives represented an opportunity for the Iraqi Government (if not directly for the MNF).

**596.** The impact on the UK was likely to be “increased Iraqi and coalition interest in our engagement with JAM in Basra, which will need a degree of careful management”. In particular, the US and Iraqi desire to regain control of the port from JAM would “need to be thought through in the context of wider political and security relationships” there.

**597.** On 13 November, Lt Gen Houghton briefed the Chiefs of Staff that the JAM cease-fire in Basra continued, “largely as a result of engagement, political accommodation and self-limiting violence”.<sup>278</sup> Nonetheless, five variables had been identified that could put it at risk:

- Prime Minister Maliki’s continued pressure for General Mohan to act against militants in Basra;
- Iranian sponsorship of militant activity;
- JAM special groups intent on breaking the Sadrist freeze on military activity;
- the formation of JAM splinter groups undermining mainstream JAM elements; and
- the “exhaustion of current security accommodations in Basra”.

**598.** It was reported on 14 November that Mr Alexander had suggested that Ministers should be briefed orally on the negotiations with JAM1 and that Mr Brown had agreed.<sup>279</sup>

**599.** MOD officials submitted an update on negotiations with JAM to Mr Browne’s Assistant Private Secretary on 15 November.<sup>280</sup> The advice asked Mr Browne to approve (subject to the agreement of the DIRC), by the following day, the release of five detainees, to take place on 17 November.

**600.** A revised handling strategy for the process had been developed and was “more forward leaning about the need for reconciliation between Iraqi groups as a major part of solving the country’s security problem ... whilst being prepared to explain the details of how this is being operationalised somewhat more openly”.

**601.** Mr Browne annotated the advice “Agreed” on 16 November.

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<sup>278</sup> Minutes, 13 November 2007, Chiefs of Staff meeting.

<sup>279</sup> Email PS/C, 14 November 2007, ‘[...] – Briefing for Ministers’.

<sup>280</sup> Minute Powell to APS/Secretary of State [MOD], 15 November 2007, ‘Negotiations with JAM: latest position’ including manuscript comment Browne.

**602.** On 17 November, *The Guardian* reported a press conference by Maj Gen Binns in Baghdad in which he:

“... confirmed ... that UK officials have been holding talks with supporters of the Shia cleric Muqtada al-Sadr’s Mahdi Army in the hope they would be drawn into the political process.”<sup>281</sup>

**603.** Maj Gen Binns was reported to have said that not everyone in the Mahdi Army supported the talks, and that its main rival, the Badr brigade, was too weak to mount a challenge. *The Guardian* reported that:

“British officials last night were keen to emphasise that the talks with the militia were being held with the full support and, at times, participation of Major General Abdul Jalil Khalaff and General Mohan ... The talks have been accompanied by the release, by British forces, of Mahdi Army fighters detained in connection with attacks on British troops.”

**604.** On 18 November, Lt Gen Rollo reported that if Governor Waili remained in post, then the UK might be faced with “a difficult decision on whether to accept an unsatisfactory solution on 17 December or to hold out for one which will really set the conditions for next year”.<sup>282</sup> The Iraqi Government’s solution was “for the Prime Minister to accept the security file and delegate it to General Mohan”. The coalition view was that this was “bad in law, bad politically at home, and bad in practice in Basra, where we want a solid triumvirate, including the Governor, alongside the BOC Commander and the Chief of Police.”

**605.** Mr Prentice reported on 19 November that Dr Rubaie said that he had submitted a “favourable” memo to Prime Minister Maliki on UK recommendations for the handling of Basra PIC, but had yet to receive a response.<sup>283</sup>

**606.** On 19 November, a junior official from the FCO Iraq Group provided advice to Dr Kim Howells, FCO Minister of State, and Mr Miliband on “Broadening the basis of negotiations with [JAM1]” which reflected discussion at Mr Lyall Grant’s meeting of 6 November.<sup>284</sup>

**607.** The issue discussed in the submission was described as “To maintain a dialogue with ... [JAM1] once all detainees have been released, to ensure the recent political and security gains in Basra are expanded.” The preferred option was that Mr Miliband agreed to broaden the scope of negotiations with JAM1 to include “the integration of the Sadr-ists into Basra’s formal political process, including Sadrist participation in provincial elections”.

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<sup>281</sup> *The Guardian*, 17 November 2007, *British officials hold talks with Mahdi army*.

<sup>282</sup> Minute Rollo to CDS, 18 November 2007, ‘SBMR-I’s Weekly Report (277) 18 Nov 07’.

<sup>283</sup> eGram 47120/07, Baghdad to FCO London, 19 November 2007, ‘Iraq; Political Round-Up’.

<sup>284</sup> Minute FCO Iraq Group [junior official] to Private Secretary [FCO], 19 November 2007, ‘[NAME OF OPERATION]: Broadening the basis of negotiations with [JAM1]’.

**608.** The junior FCO official also described an alternative option, which was “to continue to limit the basis of our accommodation with JAM to detainee release”. If this option was to be selected, it was unlikely that “calm” in Basra would be sustained beyond the release of the last detainee.

**609.** In contrast to advice provided to Mr Browne a few days earlier, the junior FCO official proposed that discussions with JAM1 should be kept as low key as possible because “media attention would likely portray these as a tacit acknowledgement of defeat for the UK in southern Iraq”.

**610.** The junior FCO official wrote that negotiations with JAM1 had always included a political element, but that the “continuation and formalisation” of these talks was intended to bind JAM1 and the Sadrists into political reconciliation before JAM1’s release. The specific objectives of talks would be to secure commitments from JAM1 on:

- free and fair elections in Basra;
- support for the Iraqi authorities to limit crime and violence in Basra;
- ending hostilities;
- ending attacks on MNF current or former employees; and
- disarmament.

**611.** The junior FCO official recorded that Maj Gen Binns was recommending to Mr Browne that JAM1 was released earlier than planned if “significant progress” was made against these objectives.

**612.** The greatest risk was a described as “a failure of an accommodation with [JAM1]”, which was likely to mean a return to a high level of attacks against the MNF. The main threats to the dialogue were:

- JAM1 concluding that he could better advance his political interests through violence;
- JAM1 being killed after release;
- JAM1 losing control of JAM in Basra; and
- JAM being drawn into large-scale fighting with the MNF.

**613.** The junior FCO official also described the risk of negative reactions from the US and from the Iraqi Government, and of losing traction with other parties in Basra by expanding the scope of engagement with JAM.

**614.** Baroness Scotland visited Iraq between 19 and 21 November.<sup>285</sup> In a report of her visit sent to Mr Miliband, Baroness Scotland observed that, while a lot had been achieved, “there is a long way to go to establish the rule of law in Iraq”. She had discussed the implications of a lack of a further resolution for the UK’s continued

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<sup>285</sup> Letter Scotland to Miliband, 3 December 2007, ‘Iraq’.

operation in Iraq with Gen Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker. Although the general message appeared to have been taken on board, the detailed implications (for example, that the UK would have no power to intern) did not seem to have been appreciated.

**615.** NSID(OD) met on 20 November to take stock of the situation in Basra.<sup>286</sup>

Cabinet Office officials briefed Mr Brown, the Chair, that the main aim of the meeting was “to ensure that the transfer to Iraqi control in Basra, scheduled for 17 December is not delayed” and that the meeting would need to assess the security situation in Basra and look at how to sustain the present reduction in violence, including through possible political or economic measures.

**616.** At the meeting, Mr Miliband reported that the security situation was “encouraging”, putting the UK “on track” for the transfer to Iraqi control to take place, on schedule, on 17 December.<sup>287</sup> Risk came from the uncertainty over Governor Waili’s position. Mr Miliband reported that the inter-departmental work on contacts with local militias had been good, but it would be important in future to ensure that negotiations with local militia leaders did not favour any one person but were inclusive – the UK should support the process, not an individual.

**617.** Mr Alexander reported that Mr Michael Wareing, the International CEO of KPMG, had agreed to help drive forward the work of the Basra Development Commission (BDC). Several of the projects included within the BDC’s 2007 plan had been requested by local militia leaders, which would help “lock them into the economic and political process”.

**618.** Mr Browne observed that, from a force protection perspective, it would be important to keep local militia leaders engaged and bring them into the wider political and economic process as much as possible. Sir John Scarlett agreed that it would be important to find ways of broadening the dialogue to address a wider range of political and economic issues.

**619.** Summing up the meeting, Mr Brown said that:

- the UK should “press ahead” for the transfer of security responsibility to Iraqi control on 17 December;
- economic projects should be agreed through proper discussion with local representatives, rather than favouring any faction or individual, though that “did not preclude using a coincidence of interest to draw local militia leaders into the wider political process”;
- Mr Alexander should write with plans for the launch of the BDC; and
- the UK should continue to encourage the Iraqi Government to hold provincial elections as soon as possible.

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<sup>286</sup> Minute Cabinet Office [junior official] to Prime Minister, 19 November 2007, ‘NSID(OD) Iraq Meeting – Steering Brief: Tuesday 20 November 16:45-17:30’.

<sup>287</sup> Minutes, 20 November 2007, NSID(OD) meeting.

**620.** After the meeting (at which Mr Alexander's request for a briefing on discussions with JAM1 was to be answered), Sir John Scarlett's Private Secretary produced a summary of his account of the meeting.<sup>288</sup>

**621.** According to the summary, Mr Miliband said that:

“... there was a need to send clear political instructions about the parameters within which negotiations could be conducted, but he offered nothing concrete on FCO action in relation to broadening the process”.

**622.** Mr Alexander had expressed concerns about development projects agreed with JAM1 drawing resources and expertise away from existing projects. There was general support for resource decisions to be taken in theatre where conflicts arose between priorities.

**623.** The account recorded Sir John's sense that:

“... there was a general consensus that [Mr Miliband] should approve the [NAME OF OPERATION] submission and that MOD should press ahead with a mid-December release date for [JAM1]. But the shortening of the meeting meant that there was not time to agree a detailed plan of action.”

However, there had been “clear interest and support from the PM” which would help in agreeing a detailed plan.

**624.** Mr Brown “touched very briefly” on Iraq during a telephone conversation with President Bush on 20 November.<sup>289</sup> He reported that the UK was making progress on its political and economic priorities in the South and still hoped to move to PIC in Basra on 17 December.

**625.** Government officials working closely with the military met JAM1 again on 21 November.<sup>290</sup> As agreed by the Reconciliation Steering Group, their objectives for the meeting were to brief JAM1 on the forthcoming release of eight detainees; to discuss the draft agreement that must precede his own release; to explain the previous weekend's media coverage of the GOC's press conference in Baghdad; and to discuss post-release contact.

**626.** The officials reminded JAM1 that he would not be released until an agreement that marked an end to hostilities in Basra province had been completed. JAM1 agreed in principle but “asked, a little pointedly, what forum could bring together all significant leaders in Basra to sign such an agreement”. They explained that the UK was continuing to discuss the options with local politicians and security officials.

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<sup>288</sup> Minute PS/C, 21 November 2007, ‘NSID (IRAQ) 20 Nov 2007’.

<sup>289</sup> Letter Fletcher to Gould, 20 November 2007, ‘Prime Minister's telephone call with US President, 20 November’.

<sup>290</sup> Email government official working closely with the military, 22 November 2007, ‘[NAME OF OPERATION]: Meeting with [JAM1] – 21 November’.

**627.** JAM1 reported that contact with the Iraqi Government in Baghdad had resulted in agreement to three “reconciliation” committees in Basra as part of a wider national initiative: one dealing with security, one with social affairs and one with politics/conflict resolution.

**628.** The officials observed that “our sense was, as well that we, [NAME OF OPERATION], the British, are starting to matter less” and concluded that they would “need to drive home the importance of continuing contact with [government officials working closely with the military]” after his release.

**629.** MOD officials wrote to Mr Browne’s Assistant Private Secretary with the latest position regarding negotiations with JAM on 22 November.<sup>291</sup> This explained that the arrangements remained “fragile”. Mr Browne was asked to agree that a further 10 detainees could be released by MND(SE) in three tranches over the following three weeks, subject to agreement that they no longer posed a serious threat. Approval was required by the next day.

**630.** Lt Gen Rollo reported that Gen Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker held their quarterly review of the campaign in Iraq on 24 November.<sup>292</sup> Lt Gen Rollo wrote that, while no-one discounted the hard work still required on the security line of operations, the main debate focused on how to make more progress on politics and economics in a way that would contain and gradually reduce the inter-communal tensions that continued to dominate Iraq.

**631.** There was a significant debate about anti-corruption and terrorist financing, including the problems of militia infiltration and intimidation of the MOI and MOD. This mattered not only because of the need to starve AQ and the Special Groups of funds but because any dysfunctionality in those ministries undermined the Iraqi Government more generally. Lt Gen Rollo reported that there had been unanimity that economic development and employment were critical to the success of the next stage of the campaign.

**632.** Lt Gen Rollo also reported that the Supreme Court had found in favour of Governor Waili. He wrote:

“Whatever the merits of the legal case it is to be hoped that this now provides the basis for Maliki to accept that he will have to live with Waili as Governor, and therefore for work to be taken forward on the MOU for PIC on a relatively conventional basis on 16 or 17 December.”

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<sup>291</sup> Minute Powell to APS/Secretary of State [MOD], 22 November 2007, ‘Negotiations with JAM: Latest Position’.

<sup>292</sup> Minute Rollo to CDS, 25 November 2007, ‘SBMR-I’s Weekly Report (278) 25 Nov 07’.

**633.** Mr Baker told the Iraq Strategy Group that it appeared the ruling would be accepted by the Iraqi Government, and that 17 December was therefore still the target for PIC.<sup>293</sup> The MCNS would take the final decision on 9 December.

**634.** In relation to the renewal of resolution 1732, Mr Baker confirmed to the Iraq Strategy Group that “the US were aware of the implications for us of this being the last resolution”.

**635.** Mr Browne’s Assistant Private Secretary replied to MOD officials on 26 November to record his agreement to the releases requested on 22 November, subject to it being assessed that they no longer posed an “imperative threat” to security.<sup>294</sup>

**636.** A senior government official specialising in the Middle East (2), accompanied by colleagues, met JAM1 again on 27 November.<sup>295</sup> The purpose of the meeting was:

- to show JAM1 a draft of a possible Basra Agreement/Declaration that would precede his release;
- to discuss the progress of other OMS reconciliation talks, particularly with Gen Mohan;
- to resolve difficulties over specific releases; and
- to discuss post-release contact with JAM1.

**637.** JAM1’s reaction to the draft agreement was “neutral” and he agreed to reflect on it. His immediate concern remained one of process: who would organise the agreement and who would sign up as the leaders of Basra?

**638.** The officials visited JAM1 again two days later on 29 November in order to hear his reaction to the draft Declaration, which was positive. The RSG had also directed that the officials should secure endorsement for MND(SE)’s training/development role and draw on that to reach a fuller agreement to future contact. JAM1 considered that 70-80 percent of the Najaf leadership would sign up to the sort of MNF deployment envisaged.

**639.** The record of the meeting concluded:

“[JAM1]’s position is, of course, inconsistent, even schizophrenic. He has supported our development and training agenda by deed as well as word; he says the right things about development and governance; he draws a distinction between the view of the ‘old men’ in Najaf: reactionary, anti-development, anti-MNF in any form, and

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<sup>293</sup> Letter Cabinet Office [junior official] to McDonald, 26 November 2007, ‘Iraq Strategy Group, 5 November’. Note: the Inquiry believes that the title of this letter refers incorrectly to a previous meeting of the ISG.

<sup>294</sup> Letter APS/Secretary of State [MOD] to AD1 Pol Ops PJHQ, 26 November 2007, ‘Negotiations with JAM: latest position’.

<sup>295</sup> Email senior government official specialising in the Middle East (2), 30 November 2007, ‘[NAME OF OPERATION]: Meetings with [JAM1] - 27 November and 29 November’.

his own far more positive and constructive views. Some of this, particularly the last bit, is clearly heartfelt. But much of it may also be linked to the issue of releases, which is the subject that, until the threat to JAM in Basra, was the one that inspired most heat and emotion in our meetings. On the other hand he still talks bitterly about the ‘occupation’ and did not yet seem completely free of the dread inspired by the prospect of Najaf’s disfavour.”

**640.** On 29 November, Mr Prentice reported that a US/Iraqi bilateral Statement of Intent about a long-term military, security and economic relationship had been signed by President Bush and Prime Minister Maliki on 26 November.<sup>296</sup> This included a firm US commitment to the Iraqi Government that the next resolution would be the final one under Chapter VII of the UN Charter.

**641.** Mr Prentice advised that the next step would be negotiation of the resolution and the accompanying letter from the Iraqi Government formally requesting the extension of the MNF-I mandate. Mr Zebari had already said publicly that the letter would be submitted to the Iraqi Council of Representatives for approval. On the basis of the length of time it had taken to negotiate the US/Iraqi Statement of Intent, Mr Prentice considered it likely that negotiations would go “to the wire”.

**642.** The timeframe for negotiating long-term security agreements was a longer one and Mr Prentice thought it unlikely that talks would begin before the New Year. He commented that the UK would soon need to decide how best to frame the “new legal base for UK forces’ presence and activity in Iraq post-2008” and also whether the UK preferred its interests to be covered in relevant parts of the US-Iraq agreement or to negotiate its own agreement.

**643.** Several senior Iraqi politicians had already expressed the hope that the UK would want to build on the “positive and much appreciated” role it had played in founding the new Iraq, and that it would be natural for the new relationship to be expressed in a UK-Iraq bilateral agreement.

## December 2007

**644.** In early December, Ambassador John Negroponte, Deputy Secretary of State, and Ambassador David Satterfield, State Department Co-ordinator for Iraq, travelled to Iraq to lead negotiations on the new resolution.<sup>297</sup> Mr Prentice stressed the need for transparency and consultation on both the resolution and the accompanying letters.

**645.** Mr Prentice reported that although Prime Minister Maliki had agreed that there should be no change in the operative paragraphs of the resolution, he wished to

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<sup>296</sup> eGram 48777/07 Baghdad to FCO London, 29 November 2007, ‘Iraq: the US/GOI Partnership Declaration and the UNSCR’.

<sup>297</sup> eGram 49070/07 Baghdad to FCO London, 3 December 2007, ‘Iraq: UNSCR Renewal Negotiations’.

add a number of principles “unacceptable to both the US and ourselves” to the Iraqi Government’s letter to the Security Council. They included:

- the right of the Iraqi Government to assume full command and control of the ISF;
- that the recruitment, training and equipping of the ISF should be the responsibility of the Iraqi Government; and
- that all coalition detentions should be governed by Iraqi law.

**646.** In discussions with the US, Mr Prentice emphasised that the UK was keen for a smooth roll-over, but had concerns that the language in the letter could undermine the effect of the Chapter VII resolution. He wanted to ensure that UK legal advisers had an opportunity to clear the language and that any differences between the US and UK interpretations could be ironed out before the US responded formally to the Iraqi Government and before the texts were sent to New York.

**647.** Ambassador Satterfield agreed to share the text of the Iraqi Government’s letter as soon as he received it.

**648.** Lt Gen Rollo reported on 3 December that the US was focused on the new resolution.<sup>298</sup> Although there remained “the possibility of political ambush on the subject of US military freedom of action”, US attention was beginning to turn to the Long Term Security Arrangement (LTSA) that would succeed it.

**649.** Gen Petraeus had directed his staff to help lay the groundwork for a UK equivalent of the LTSA or a Chapter VI resolution that would provide adequate protection for UK (and EU) involvement in Iraq. Lt Gen Rollo wrote that the UK would need to take an early view on the level of protection it required and whether it was obtainable without a Chapter VII resolution.

**650.** Lt Gen Rollo commented that, despite being “relatively innocuous” in itself, the US/Iraqi bilateral Statement of Intent had “acted as a lightning rod for Iraqi frustration over a number of sovereignty issues”, an indication of the friction that the debate on the successor resolution was likely to prompt.

**651.** On 3 December, the House of Commons Defence Committee published a report entitled *UK land operations in Iraq 2007*, based in part on its visit to Iraq in July.<sup>299</sup>

**652.** The Defence Committee said:

“In South-Eastern Iraq, there has been a dramatic decrease in the number of attacks against UK and coalition forces since the decision was taken to withdraw from Basra Palace, but there has been no corresponding reduction in the number of attacks against the civilian population of Basra.”

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<sup>298</sup> Minute Rollo to CDS, 3 December 2007, ‘SBMR-I’s Weekly Report (279) 3 Dec 07’.

<sup>299</sup> First report from the Defence Committee, Session 2007-08, *UK land operations in Iraq 2007*, HC 110.

**653.** The Defence Committee considered that there had been significant progress in the training, equipping and mentoring of the Iraqi Army in the past year but:

“There remain murderous, corrupt and militia-infiltrated elements within the Police which must be rooted out as a matter of priority. The UK continues to play an important role in training and mentoring the Iraqi Army and Police. It is unclear how its trainers will be supported once UK forces levels are reduced further in the spring.”

**654.** In relation to plans to reduce UK forces levels to 2,500 in spring 2008, the Committee wrote:

“Important questions remain about the sustainability of a force of this size. If there is still a role for UK Forces in Iraq, those Forces must be capable of doing more than just protecting themselves at Basra Air Station. If the reduction in numbers means they cannot do more than this, the entire UK presence in South-Eastern Iraq will be open to question.”

**655.** In a Current Assessment Note issued on 4 December, a CIG considered the significance to JAM and the Sadrists of the Iraqi National Gathering (ING) splinter group.<sup>300</sup>

**656.** The CIG assessed that those close to Muqtada al-Sadr were concerned that the ING’s establishment might lead to a significant number of defections from the mainstream Sadrist movement, but judged that those who might consider defecting were likely to wait to see the impact of the ING before joining the new movement.

**657.** The note continued:

“Sadr probably views the ING as a direct attack on his authority. He does not appear willing to make any concessions ...

“As former JAM special group commanders, the ING members have links to the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps Quds Force and Lebanese Hizballah. However, we have no intelligence to suggest that either is supporting the ING.”

**658.** On 4 December, a video was released of one of the five British hostages kidnapped from the Ministry of Finance in Baghdad on 29 May by men dressed in Iraqi Police uniforms.<sup>301</sup> In it, the kidnappers threatened to kill a hostage if the UK did not leave Iraq by 13 December.

**659.** Prime Minister Maliki and Governor Waili met on 5 December and “cleared the air between them”, paving the way for PIC. Prime Minister Maliki communicated his immediate priorities for Basra, including reconciliation encompassing all political parties and measures to curb corruption.

<sup>300</sup> CIG Current Assessment Note, 4 December 2007, ‘Iraq: How Important is the Iraqi National Gathering?’

<sup>301</sup> Minute Cabinet Office [junior official] to Brown, [undated], ‘Prime Minister’s Visit to Basra: 9 December 2007’.

**660.** When Mr Brown and President Bush spoke on the telephone on 6 December, Mr Brown reported that he was looking forward to the move to PIC in Basra on 16 December and the UK was planning to launch the Basra Investment Forum.<sup>302</sup> He reported “continued good progress” on security and economic reconstruction in the South.

**661.** On 7 December, government officials working closely with the military reported to London on a “difficult meeting” with JAM1 the previous day.<sup>303</sup>

**662.** The officials also reported that detainee releases were now in the gift of Maj Gen Binns rather than requiring sign-off in Whitehall. The release of JAM1 was an exception to this rule, and was to be delegated to Mr Prentice.

**663.** FCO officials advised Mr Miliband on 7 December that representatives of all the parties in Basra signed “a statement ... in which they agreed to support the security services in their efforts to maintain security and work for stability and growth in Basra”.<sup>304</sup> Although there had been similar declarations in the past, the FCO considered this statement to be more significant because of the broad political support it had attracted, in particular from OMS. FCO officials described the statement as the work of Sayyid Abdul Ali al-Musawi, a prominent Shia cleric, and Sheikh Amr al-Faiz, a tribal leader.

**664.** Also on 7 December, officials in the FCO submitted advice to Mr Miliband on the strategy for negotiations leading to the release of JAM1.<sup>305</sup> MOD officials sent a copy of that advice to Mr Browne, under separate cover, on the same day.

**665.** A junior official from the FCO Iraq Group advised Mr Miliband that the key issue was ensuring that the UK obtained “maximum benefit from the timing of the release of [JAM1]”.<sup>306</sup> The advice explained that negotiations had always been based on the understanding that JAM1 would be released eventually, and recommended that Mr Miliband should delegate the decision on the precise timing of JAM1’s release to Mr Prentice, who would consult Maj Gen Binns, Mr Jones and “other interested parties on the ground”.

**666.** The junior official advised that JAM1’s release could attract media attention, in response to which the FCO’s message would be that “the process was part of the coalition’s and GOI’s wider strategy of reconciliation with armed groups in Iraq”.

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<sup>302</sup> Letter Fletcher to Gould, 6 December 2007, ‘Prime Minister’s Call with US President, 6 December: Foreign Policy’.

<sup>303</sup> Email government official working closely with the military, 7 December 2007, ‘[NAME OF OPERATION]: Meeting with [JAM1] on 6 December’.

<sup>304</sup> Minute FCO Iraq Group [junior official] to PS/Foreign Secretary, 7 December 2007, ‘Iraq – Basra Developments’.

<sup>305</sup> Minute FCO Iraq Group [junior official] to Jenkins etc, 7 December 2007, ‘[NAME OF OPERATION] – negotiating strategy’; and Minute Day to APS/SofS [MOD], 7 December 2007, ‘[NAME OF OPERATION]’.

<sup>306</sup> Minute FCO Iraq Group [junior official] to Jenkins etc, 7 December 2007, ‘[NAME OF OPERATION] – negotiating strategy’.

**667.** The junior official repeated the risks set out in his 19 November submission, concluding that “It is impossible to predict before the event how these risks will play in detail” and that choosing the best timing for JAM1’s release would mitigate them to some extent. On timing, the official explained that the final detainee releases were expected in early to mid-January, and “depending on developments on the ground, it might be tactically wise to release [JAM1] somewhat earlier, although we would not expect to do so before Basra has achieved Provincial Iraqi Control.”

**668.** The following day, the junior FCO official sent Mr Miliband’s office some additional text supplied by Mr Prentice “as further clarification” of his submission. It said:

“Whilst delegating the decision to us is fine, this is not just a sovereign issue. As GOC MND(SE) comes under MNF-I and Petraeus’ command, they would have to be consulted. And we would have to inform the GoI (Maliki) of our plans as such a decision would play into the broader Shia reconciliation strategy.”<sup>307</sup>

**669.** Mr Day’s parallel submission to Mr Browne explained that the FCO was taking responsibility for JAM1’s release. The submission reflected advice from theatre that delegated authority was needed because of the speed with which the position on the ground was developing.<sup>308</sup>

**670.** The Private Secretary to Mr Bob Ainsworth, Minister for the Armed Forces, to whom the submission was copied, wrote on the advice on 11 December that although Mr Browne had already “noted the submission” she had concerns about whether the decision should be delegated because:

“The implications of his release are strategic and I think the decision ought to be taken here, away from tactical considerations.”<sup>309</sup>

**671.** Mr Ainsworth replied in relation to the submission: “I think this is wrong and should not be delegated.”<sup>310</sup>

**672.** On 9 December, Mr Brown visited Basra, primarily for the purpose of “a Christmas visit to the troops”.<sup>311</sup>

**673.** In a briefing for the visit, a Cabinet Office official told Mr Brown that the UK had reached agreement with the US and Iraqi Governments on the text of the draft resolution and supporting exchange of letters. The resolution would be tabled at the UN in New

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<sup>307</sup> Email FCO Iraq Group [junior official] to various, 8 December 2007, ‘Submission: [NAME OF OPERATION].’

<sup>308</sup> Minute Day to APS/SofS [MOD], 7 December 2007, ‘[NAME OF OPERATION].’

<sup>309</sup> Manuscript comment Pusey on Minute Day to APS/SofS [MOD], 7 December 2007, ‘[NAME OF OPERATION].’

<sup>310</sup> Manuscript comment Ainsworth on Minute Day to APS/SofS [MOD], 7 December 2007, ‘[NAME OF OPERATION].’

<sup>311</sup> Minute Cabinet Office [junior official] to Brown, [undated], ‘Prime Minister’s visit to Basra: 9 December 2007.’

York during the following week. It extended the MNF-I's mandate for a further year, but the letters also acknowledged the Government of Iraq's wish that this should be the last resolution of its kind. The letters committed the US and Iraqis to negotiating a long-term agreement to cover the presence of US forces in Iraq in 2009 and beyond. The UK had yet to decide whether to pursue something similar.

**674.** During the visit, Mr Brown spoke by telephone to Prime Minister Maliki and congratulated him on the decision to move to PIC in Basra.<sup>312</sup> Mr Brown promised that the UK "would continue to act sensitively in Basra" and that Mr Alexander and Mr Miliband would both visit soon, the former for the launch of the Basra Development Forum.

**675.** Lt Gen Rollo reported on 10 December that it had been a "further steady week" in security terms, with no major incidents in Anbar, Baghdad or the South.<sup>313</sup> There were some "interesting dynamics" in the South, with "Maliki's Iraqi led operations" in Karbala and Diwaniyah, together with "rumours of a major offensive in Basra". They were "having an effect on JAM" but the freeze was holding. In Basra, "despite much talk of defensive preparation, JAM, backed up by OMS from Najaf, have come to the table and appear to be willing to sign up to some if not all of Mohan's demands".

**676.** At the local political level, Lt Gen Rollo reported that Governor Waili was "reconciled to Maliki". Lt Gen Rollo considered that this cleared the way for the Basra Development Forum meeting on 12 December and for transition to PIC on 16 December. It also meant that the way was clear to:

"... focus hard on how the promises to be made at the Forum will be kept ... General Petraeus's challenge, reiterated to each UK visitor, to fulfil our Prime Minister's intent has been very clear. Barham Saleh underlined this point when he spoke to the MOD and FCO Permanent Secretaries who visited this week along with the DFID Director covering the Middle East. He said that while long term capacity building remained essential, 'jump starting' was now necessary ... That should give us our lead. The way that money has been poured into Anbar, by both the US and the GOI, to reinforce success is also setting the standard; recognising that in counter-insurgency operations, all the lines of operation must be properly supported."

**677.** Mr Brown reported on his visit to Iraq at Cabinet on 11 December.<sup>314</sup> He said that British troops would be transferring responsibility for the security of Basra to PIC on 16 December as planned. The number of violent incidents targeted at British forces had reduced by 90 percent since September, and they were already operating in an overwatch capacity in support of the Iraqi Security Forces: "Their main role would be

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<sup>312</sup> Letter Fletcher to Gooding, 9 December 2007, 'Prime Minister's Telephone Call with Prime Minister of Iraq, 9 December'.

<sup>313</sup> Minute Rollo to CDS, 10 December 2007, 'SBMR-I's Weekly Report (280) 9 Dec 07'.

<sup>314</sup> Cabinet Conclusions, 11 December 2007.

training the Iraqi Security Forces, although they would re-engage if necessary.” The transition would enable force levels to reduce from 4,500 to 2,500 by March 2008, at which point the future position would be reviewed.

**678.** Sir Nigel Sheinwald, Foreign Policy Adviser to Mr Blair until June 2007 and subsequently British Ambassador to the US, told the Inquiry that “we deliberately chose as a government to accept that as we left Basra it wouldn’t be perfect; it was going to be rough and ready and difficult. We developed deliberately this doctrine of sufficiency.”<sup>315</sup>

**679.** On 12 December, a junior official from the FCO Iraq Group sent further advice to Mr Miliband, apparently in response to his request for “more detail on the criteria which we would use to inform a decision to release the detained JAM leader [JAM1]”.<sup>316</sup>

**680.** The junior official advised that “it is not possible to provide a comprehensive checklist of things which would have to happen (or not happen) before we decided to release [JAM1]”. Since the negotiations had always been based on the understanding that JAM1 would be released at some stage, the question was when to release, not whether to release.

**681.** The junior official went on to explain that:

“... our main aim is to sustain the JAM cease-fire against us, and to secure ... a clear commitment to certain principles. These would centre on undertakings to end violence and intimidation against MNF, the ISF, other political parties, our LE [locally engaged] staff and others, and to respect the democratic process ...

“We will, as far as possible, seek to secure such a commitment from [JAM1] before he is released. But the time to do so is limited. In addition, it may be tactically preferable to release [JAM1] even if he has not given all of the commitments which we are seeking, either as a mark of our good faith or to increase his ability to deliver his JAM colleagues.”

**682.** At the MOD’s request, on 12 December the JIC examined the strength, cohesion and prospects for the Sunni insurgency in Iraq.<sup>317</sup>

**683.** The JIC judged that the decreasing levels of violence in Iraq were due in significant part to a “shift in the priorities of some Sunni insurgents who had reduced attacks on the MNF in favour of working with it to resist AQ-I as part of the US-sponsored ‘Concerned Local Citizens’ groups (CLCs)” (see Section 12.1).

**684.** The JIC assessed:

“II. Though Sunni Arab insurgent groups remain divided by ideology, regional demographics and local concerns, factions of several groups are trying to work

<sup>315</sup> Public hearing, 16 December 2009, page 99.

<sup>316</sup> Minute FCO Iraq Group [junior official] to Jenkins, 10 December 2007, ‘Iraq: [NAME OF OPERATION]’.

<sup>317</sup> JIC Assessment, 12 December 2007, ‘Iraq’s Sunni Insurgency: Nationalists and Jihadists’.

together in some areas as recognition of the political benefits of unity is slowly emerging. The formation of new alliances and willingness of some groups to negotiate at a tactical level with the MNF shows that engagement is possible – albeit locally.

“III. The combination of Sunni resistance and pressure from MNF and Iraqi security forces is limiting AQ-I’s freedom to operate. It is struggling and no longer driving sectarian violence. But AQ-I remains capable of undermining stability in Iraq: it can still hit strategic targets. Without sustained military pressure and less sectarian politics, it could regenerate and reinvigorate sectarian violence.”

**685.** Looking ahead, the JIC concluded:

“We see no sign that the Sunni insurgency will recover its momentum at least as long as the US ‘surge’ and coalition support for CLCs lasts ...

“If the anti-AQ-I movement continues throughout 2008, we would expect Iraq to become a less attractive destination for those wishing to join AQ-I and fight the global jihad. Some Iraqis might abandon AQ-I for other insurgent groups of CLCs. However, we judge the Sunni community’s continued rejection of AQ-I and tolerance of the MNF will be fragile so long as Sunni grievances are not being addressed quickly enough. CLC members expect financial and political rewards ... Recently announced Iraqi and US plans to release about 15,000 (mainly Sunni) detainees by the end of 2008 might temporarily appease some more Sunnis, if implemented. But we judge there is still a high risk that the current security gains will fade after the US ‘surge’ ends in April unless Maliki’s government visibly improves public services in Sunni areas, provides lasting employment, allows for early provincial elections and reverses its policy on de-Ba’athification.”

**686.** On 12 December, Prime Minister Maliki and Governor Waili jointly hosted a meeting of the Basra Development Forum at Basra International Airport.<sup>318</sup> Mr Alexander attended to represent the UK and was joined by a number of Iraqi ministers, including Deputy Prime Minister Saleh. The work of the Basra Development Forum is addressed in Section 10.2.

**687.** Mr Prentice described it as a “hugely successful event” which struck “an optimistic note on the governance and economic agenda to complement the security handover” which was due to take place four days later. He reported to the FCO that the event had helped to bridge the divide between Basra and Baghdad, through the first visit by Prime Minister Maliki since July 2006 and his joint public appearance with Governor Waili.

**688.** Mr Jones told the Inquiry that it was “no coincidence that the third Basra development forum took place about four days before the PIC ceremony”.<sup>319</sup> He and his

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<sup>318</sup> eGram 50733/07 Baghdad to FCO London, 13 December 2007, ‘Iraq: Basra Development Forum’.

<sup>319</sup> Private hearing, 24 June 2010, page 58.

colleagues had “many hours of amusement” discussing with their military colleagues in the preceding months how developments relating to the economy, which had been identified as “the crucial thing” in helping to keep Basra stable to allow for PIC, could support progress on security.

**689.** Lt Gen Rollo recorded that Prime Minister Maliki had made a strong speech in response to which Governor Waili promised that Basra would be disarmed and corruption rooted out.<sup>320</sup>

**690.** Maj Gen Binns observed that relations between Prime Minister Maliki and Governor Waili were clearly much improved as they sat together.<sup>321</sup> He reported that Prime Minister Maliki described 2008 as “the year of redevelopment and reconstruction”.

**691.** Maj Gen Binns wrote that, despite the operations MND(SE) had been conducting on the border in Maysan and Basra, the US chain of command appeared still to have concerns. They were proposing to build forward operating bases at border crossings in Basra and Maysan, and to deploy a US artillery battalion there from March 2008. Maj Gen Binns explained:

“I have made the point that I believe that militarily this is not necessary, but have also conceded that if MNC-I want to do this then we should be seen to support them. Not surprisingly Gen Mohan and Gen Abbas are supportive of the proposal. My chief concern has been the potential impact on reconciliation and Basra dynamics and the level of support expected from MND(SE).”

**692.** On 13 December, Mr McDonald updated the Iraq Strategy Group on Mr Brown’s visit to Iraq.<sup>322</sup> He said that:

“Despite some views expressed in theatre, the Prime Minister was clear that we should continue on our path of Iraqisation set out in his October statement, which should entail a significant reduction in our force levels from November 2008.”

**693.** SIS6 told the Iraq Strategy Group that “influence with local leaders was likely to reduce in the near future, and that might lead to a deterioration in the security situation”.

**694.** The Iraq Strategy Group also discussed a draft FCO strategy paper for 2008-2009 and concluded that it would not be ready for Ministers to read over Christmas as had been intended.

**695.** Mr McDonald commissioned the MOD to produce a paper setting out two options for force levels from November 2008: a reduction by half (to around 1,500) or to almost zero (a removal of UK combat forces from the South). The paper was to include what tasks could be carried out, what ability there would be to protect civilian

<sup>320</sup> Minute Rollo to CDS, 17 December 2007, ‘SBMR-I’s Weekly Report (281) 16 Dec 07’.

<sup>321</sup> Minute Binns to CJO, 13 December 2007, ‘GOC MND(SE) Weekly Letter – 13 December 2007’.

<sup>322</sup> Letter Cabinet Office [junior official] to McDonald, 14 December 2007, ‘Iraq Strategy Group, 13 December’.

staff and how quickly the reductions could happen. This and an updated version of the FCO paper would be discussed by the ISG in mid-January, then put to a meeting of NSID(OD) chaired by the Foreign Secretary in early February and finally to a meeting of NSID(OD) chaired by the Prime Minister in early March.

**696.** On 14 December, a Private Secretary confirmed that Mr Miliband was content to delegate authority to Mr Prentice to take the decision about when to release JAM1.<sup>323</sup> He said that Mr Miliband believed that the negotiations had “proven their worth” and had “confidence in the team working on this”. The Private Secretary explained that Mr Miliband would be available should the team want further consultation.

**697.** Security responsibility for Basra province transferred to Provincial Iraqi Control on 16 December.<sup>324</sup> Mr Miliband attended the handover ceremony for the UK, and Dr Rubaie for the Iraqi Government.<sup>325</sup>

**698.** After the transition in Basra, all of the four provinces within MND(SE) were under Iraqi control, with “overwatch” support from UK and other coalition forces.

**699.** In total, nine Iraqi provinces had made the transition to PIC, half of the total.<sup>326</sup>

**700.** After the ceremony, Mr Miliband remained in Iraq to visit Baghdad and Erbil.<sup>327</sup> Mr Prentice reported that Mr Miliband told “Zebari and Maliki that PIC in Basra would not mean any diminution of our effort or commitment but did mark a new stage in our relationship”. Mr Miliband also “urged on all ... the need for political leadership to unblock vital legislation and make progress on political reconciliation”.

**701.** In his visit report to Mr Brown, Mr Miliband said that “Iraqi press coverage [of the handover] was on the whole favourable, characterising the event as a restoration of national authority.”<sup>328</sup>

**702.** Mr Miliband wrote:

“In spite of some of the recent press reporting, security has undoubtedly improved, not just in Basra but in Iraq as a whole. Attacks of all sorts have remained for 10 straight weeks now at levels last seen consistently in the middle of 2005.”

**703.** Mr Miliband attributed the improvement to political factors including the Anbar Awakening, the physical separation of Sunni and Shia communities in Baghdad, the

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<sup>323</sup> Email Hickey to FCO Iraq Group [junior official], 14 December 2007, ‘Iraq: [NAME OF OPERATION]: further advice’.

<sup>324</sup> *BBC News*, 23 March 2009, *Timeline: UK Troops in Basra*.

<sup>325</sup> Minute Rollo to CDS, 17 December 2007, ‘SBMR-I’s Weekly Report (281) 16 Dec 07’.

<sup>326</sup> Letter Cabinet Office [junior official] to McDonald, 14 December 2007, ‘Iraq Strategy Group, 13 December’.

<sup>327</sup> eGram 51785/07 Baghdad to FCO London, 20 December 2007, ‘Iraq: SofS Visit to Baghdad 16-17 December’.

<sup>328</sup> Minute Miliband to Brown, 27 December 2007, ‘My Visit to Iraq: 16-18 December’.

JAM freeze and “the emergence of a fragile but real inter-factional political process”. But he warned that the improvement would not be sustained without political progress:

“There is a general lack of political drive and leadership. No one in government is willing to accept responsibility for delivery of legislation through the Council of Representatives.”

**704.** The UK’s challenge, in Mr Miliband’s view, was “to decide what more it is that we can realistically do to help the country maintain forward momentum”. The work under way across Whitehall to review UK strategy would assist, but:

“My own initial view is that we should neither start with a numbers game in terms of troops, nor an open ended security commitment driven by commitment on economic development. Instead we need to build on the points of consensus: that Iraq depends on local political leadership supported by the international community, that we have distinctive sunk costs in Iraq but also distinctive assets to deploy ...; that there are real foreign policy arguments for continued engagement; but these need to be justified by a clear, coherent and agreed plan for Iraq supported by the international community.”

**705.** Mr Prentice recorded that during his visit Mr Miliband had been briefed on negotiations with JAM1 by Maj Gen Binns, who had explained his emerging conclusion that JAM1’s release “should come sooner rather than later in the remaining scheduled releases”.<sup>329</sup>

**706.** The Inquiry asked Mr Browne whether there was a sense that the UK had rushed the pace of transfer to Iraqi control.<sup>330</sup> Mr Browne considered that, in fact, the reverse had often been true: the Iraqis were keen to speed up the process of transfer but the UK needed, at times, to slow the pace down a bit.

**707.** In his book *Surge*, Colonel Peter Mansoor (Gen Petraeus’ executive officer in 2007), wrote that after transition to PIC:

“The Jaysh al-Mahdi assumed control of large sections of Basra, inflicting on its residents a severe brand of Shari’a law that forced women to wear the *hijab* [sic] on pain of death, closed barber shops and music stores, and generally made life miserable for city residents. The situation proved yet again that without control or protection of the population, counter-insurgency efforts would fail and the Iraqi people would suffer. For his part, Muqtada al-Sadr took credit for forcing the British out of Iraq.”<sup>331</sup>

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<sup>329</sup> Email Prentice to Hickey, 20 December 2007, ‘Iraq: [NAME OF OPERATION]: Imminent Release’.

<sup>330</sup> Public hearing, 25 January 2010, pages 37-39.

<sup>331</sup> Mansoor PR. *Surge: My Journey with General David Petraeus and the Remaking of the Iraq War*. Yale University Press, 2013.

**708.** Mr Tinline told the Inquiry:

“... once we got to PIC and we could hand over control, at that point you could sort of take a deep breath and say; then what? Until we had got to that point and had got out of the city, I think we were very focused on: okay, how do we get to that point?”<sup>332</sup>

**709.** Resolution 1790 (2007) was adopted by the United Nations Security Council on 18 December 2007.<sup>333</sup> It extended arrangements for the presence of the MNF-I in Iraq until 31 December 2008. Thereafter, the Security Council took note of the objectives stated in the Iraqi Government’s letter in relation to the resolution, “including the statement that the Government of Iraq considers this to be its final request to the Security Council for the extension of the mandate of the Multi-National Force”.

**710.** On 19 December, Mr Brown discussed Iraq briefly with President Bush.<sup>334</sup> Mr Brown welcomed PIC in Basra and stressed the importance of full support from the international community for provincial elections. Gen Petraeus was reported to be positive about progress in the South and about US/UK consultation.

**711.** On 20 December, Mr Prentice sent an email to Mr Miliband’s Private Secretary to tell him that JAM1’s release was planned for the following evening.<sup>335</sup> This followed a recommendation by Maj Gen Binns which had been agreed by MNF(I). Prime Minister Maliki had welcomed the proposal.

**712.** On the same day, Mr Miliband’s Private Secretary confirmed that he was content with the approach.<sup>336</sup>

**713.** Government officials working closely with the military told JAM1 the news that evening and they agreed he would leave detention late the following evening.<sup>337</sup>

**714.** On 20 December, the JIC circulated an Assessment of Iraqi security strategy and the proficiency of Iraqi Security Forces.<sup>338</sup> The JIC’s detailed conclusions about the ISF are addressed in Section 12.1, but its Key Judgements included:

“I. Greater centralisation of Iraqi national security decision making has resulted in more effective implementation. The Ministry of Defence is steadily building capacity, but is unlikely to achieve complete self-reliance by the end of 2008. The Ministry of Interior is still largely ineffective, with endemic sectarianism and corruption.

“II. For the foreseeable future the army will depend heavily on the coalition for air support, logistics, heavy fire support and specialist enablers such as real time

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<sup>332</sup> Private hearing, 24 June 2010, page 17.

<sup>333</sup> United Nations Security Council resolution 1790 (2007).

<sup>334</sup> Letter Fletcher to Gould, 19 December 2007, ‘Prime Minister’s VTC with US President, 19 December’.

<sup>335</sup> Email Prentice to Hickey, 20 December 2007, ‘Iraq: [NAME OF OPERATION]: Imminent Release’.

<sup>336</sup> Email Hickey to Prentice, 20 December 2007, ‘Iraq: [NAME OF OPERATION]: Imminent Release’.

<sup>337</sup> Email government official working closely with the military, 23 December 2007, ‘[NAME OF OPERATION]: End of Act 1, curtain up on Act 2’.

<sup>338</sup> [JIC Assessment, 20 December 2007, ‘Iraqi Security Forces: Two Steps Forward’.](#)

intelligence and surveillance. But overall capability continues to develop and far exceeds that of the police. Where violence has flared, combat units have been reinforced from elsewhere without recourse to MNF re-intervention.

“III. The large majority of local Iraqi Police remains wholly ineffective in tackling crime and turns a blind eye to sectarian, criminal and violent anti-MNF activity by colleagues who are also members of Shia militias. National Police (NP) and provincial special police units are more tactically capable, but the NP follows a sectarian Shia agenda. The judiciary is also overstretched and underperforming.”

**715.** On 21 December, MOD officials advised Mr Browne of the “probable imminent release” of JAM1.<sup>339</sup> The advice said:

“The DIRC met yesterday and concluded that [JAM1] can no longer be held as an imperative threat to the security of Iraq ... Every effort has been made ... to ensure that we retain a link to [JAM1] after his release. Some procedures have been agreed in principle – but we judge that one way to help ensure that contact is maintained is for [JAM1] not to be the final internee released so that he needs to remain in contact to ensure that the release process smoothly continues to completion ...”

“It will be for ... /FCO to manage our relationship with [JAM1] post release, although MND(SE) will retain a strong interest and involvement, both because of [JAM1]’s importance to managing security in Basra and also because of continuing dialogue with [JAM1] regarding possible future releases of those of his supporters who are currently being detained by the US ...”

**716.** Mr Browne marked the advice “Noted” on 22 December.

**717.** Maj Gen Binns met JAM1 on the morning of 21 December.<sup>340</sup> A government official working closely with the military reported that during the meeting JAM1 said that he had not wanted to go to war with the British, but they had “occupied his country and attacked his groups”. Now it was time for a fresh page and for reconstruction and reconciliation. He wished that the process of negotiation had begun in 2004 or 2005 but it had been impossible to find British interlocutors to take it on. He hoped that the process would now be a model for the rest of Iraq to follow. There should be no further animosity against the British Military and he hoped that British soldiers would get home safely. It was agreed that JAM1’s release should be brought forward by a few hours, because of security concerns.

**718.** On the evening of 21 December, JAM1 left the Divisional Internment Facility in Basra. The following day, officials made contact with JAM1 by email, and received a response a day later.

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<sup>339</sup> Manuscript comment Browne on Minute Powell to PS/Secretary of State [MOD], 21 December 2007, ‘Iraq Op TELIC: future detainee releases’.

<sup>340</sup> Email government official working closely with the military, 23 December 2007, ‘[NAME OF OPERATION]: End of Act 1, curtain up on Act 2’.

**719.** A senior government official specialising in the Middle East (2) wrote to Dr John Jenkins, FCO Director Middle East and North Africa, on 21 December to take stock following JAM1's release and to offer views on next steps for JAM and Shia engagement.<sup>341</sup> He wrote that "The key task for HMG is to preserve the relative peace in Basra" in order to protect what had been achieved already and "to try to bring the Sadrist movement nationally to the kind of strategic tipping point achieved with the Sunnis in Anbar". The objective was a "fractured, but not atomised, JAM". He wrote that Shia engagement would remain a "strategic priority in Iraq" with the aim of deepening dialogue with a range of Sadrist interlocutors. But only the US would have the "breadth and depth" for Shia engagement across Iraq, so the challenge was "to support and influence this effort not to go it alone".

**720.** Mr Browne wrote to Mr Brown on 22 December with an update on force levels from spring 2008, reflecting "further work" since Mr Brown's statement to Parliament on 8 October.<sup>342</sup>

**721.** Mr Browne wrote that the latest military advice, endorsed by the Chiefs of Staff and incorporating direction from Gen Petraeus, was that the UK should deploy 2,750 personnel in southern Iraq, supported by 800 in Kuwait. That was 550 higher than Mr Brown had announced on 8 October. The reason for the increase was a decision by the Czech government to withdraw its Basra contingent in 2008 and the need to have a slightly larger headquarters to provide for effective understanding of the situation on the ground and to ensure effective engagement with key Iraqi leaders.

**722.** Mr Browne advised:

"... I believe we can present these figures as broadly consistent with the aspirations you outlined to Parliament in October, and further that we can make a positive case for a small potential increase in our planning figures, as a demonstration of how decisions on force levels will be guided by advice from military commanders and an assessment of conditions on the ground – a point you and I have always emphasised."

**723.** On 24 December, Lt Gen Rollo reported a "startling sequel" to the handover ceremony in Basra.<sup>343</sup> Gen Mohan and Governor Waili held a press conference alongside an OMS delegation from Najaf, live on Al Iraqiya television. The OMS spokesman had welcomed PIC and supported the Iraqi security organisations. Lt Gen Rollo observed that this was "All very welcome – both for Basra and for handling US perceptions of the situation in the South."

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<sup>341</sup> Minute senior government official specialising in the Middle East (2) to Jenkins, 21 December 2007, 'Shia engagement: [NAME OF OPERATION] after [JAM1]'s release'.

<sup>342</sup> Letter Browne to Brown, 22 December 2007, 'Iraq: Proposed Force Levels from Spring 2008'.

<sup>343</sup> Minute Rollo to CDS, 24 December 2007, 'SBMR-I's Weekly Report (282) 23 Dec 07'.

**724.** Lt Gen Rollo also reported that Mr Kevin Rudd, newly elected Prime Minister of Australia, had visited Basra and announced the withdrawal of the Australian battlegroup and training contingent from Dhi Qar and Muthanna in June 2008, leaving only embedded staff.

**725.** On 31 December, Lt Gen Rollo sent ACM Stirrup a paper considering the main areas of coalition effort for 2008, and issues for the UK to address.<sup>344</sup>

**726.** In his introduction, Lt Gen Rollo wrote that Iraq was “in a much better condition than it was a year ago”. The “viciously destabilising sectarian conflict” was now largely absent; AQ-I had been driven out of most of Anbar and Baghdad and was gradually being driven into the North; the Sadrists were maintaining their freeze and were riven with internal conflict; and the ISF were rapidly increasing in number and capability. But significant sections of the country remained insecure and violence remained at an unacceptably high level, meaning that “we do not yet have ‘irreversible momentum’”.

**727.** Given the dynamic nature of the campaign, Lt Gen Rollo reported that Gen Petraeus would not make recommendations beyond the end of 2008 when he reported to Congress in March. The main themes of the coalition effort for 2008 would be:

- The pursuit of AQ-I, which was already badly damaged, and now able to operate effectively only in areas where there are inadequate security forces and where the population felt threatened, for example by local militias.
- The “reshaping of JAM/OMS”. The movement was splitting, its future direction unclear; the coalition and the Iraqi Government would continue to support the freeze, and would not go after any JAM members who respected it, but would pursue others (including the Special Groups) who continue to conduct criminal actions, seeking to separate the reconcilables from the irreconcilables and bind them into the political process.
- Working with neighbouring countries to reduce the flow of foreign fighters into Iraq.
- Opening up the economy and increasing employment. The immediate concern for the MNF was the need to help the tens of thousands of Sunni Arabs who had participated in the Anbar Awakening to find jobs, reducing their “economic motivation to take up arms against the Iraqi Government or MNF”.
- Building governance capacity at all levels.
- Developing future bilateral security relationships, to form the basis for coalition engagement in Iraq when resolution 1790 expired in December 2008.

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<sup>344</sup> [Minute Rollo to CDS, 31 December 2007, ‘Iraq in 2008 – An Opportunity To Be Taken’.](#)

**728.** As a consequence, Lt Gen Rollo considered that there were four main issues for the UK to engage with in 2008:

- Working out where the UK military contribution in Iraq sat within the wider strategic relationship with the US: “I fully appreciate that there are wider factors at play, but it may nevertheless be helpful to make the obvious point that the US military main effort (with 15 brigades deployed here, even in July 2008, against two in Afghanistan) unquestionably remains Iraq, that this will still be the case in 2009, and that General Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker consistently express their wish for us to remain.”
- Determining the role, size and duration of the UK’s national effort in Basra: “Our military effort ... should be focused on support to the ISF. Our national effort should be focused on political and economic development in the area. But of course the two are inextricably related ... This will need national effort and needs to be properly resourced ... In the long run Basra should be a success, but without coalition support (which Petraeus and Crocker clearly believe should be British led) we risk it going backwards in the short to medium term.”
- Working out the extent to which the UK wished to support the ISF more broadly in the future.
- Engaging with the US on the restructuring of MNF-I, MNC-I and MNSTC-I, both in terms of headquarters and basing.

**729.** Lt Gen Rollo concluded:

“To say that the next six months in Iraq will be critical is a truism. What is clear is that the Iraqis, and their allies, have been given a chance to move decisively in the right direction, which if squandered is [not] likely to be reproduced.”

## January 2008

**730.** On 3 January, Mr Brown met Prime Minister Maliki in the UK and urged him to make progress on the Hydrocarbons Law and on local elections as well as to appoint Iraqi staff to support the Basra Development Forum.<sup>345</sup> He also encouraged Prime Minister Maliki to convene a further meeting of the “3 plus 1” Executive Group and to re-appoint Gen Mohan and Gen Jalil for another term. Prime Minister Maliki agreed to the re-appointments, and said he would increase Basra’s budget.

**731.** One of Maj Gen Binns’ senior officers met Gen Mohan on 4 January to discuss MND(SE) proposals for future support to the ISF (a “scalable support package”).<sup>346</sup> Gen Mohan suggested that an MOU would be required to formalise the arrangement and guarantee the support. Maj Gen Binns commented that an MOU “would not be

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<sup>345</sup> Letter Fletcher to Carver, 3 January 2008, ‘Prime Minister’s Bilateral with Prime Minister of Iraq, 3 January’.

<sup>346</sup> Minute Binns to CJO, 10 January 2008, ‘GOC MND(SE) Weekly Letter – 10 January 2008’.

helpful as it would require us to make some significant commitments and, potentially, make it difficult for us to meet expectations” so he suggested that they should look at “alternative confidence building measures” instead.

**732.** In a letter to Mr Browne’s Private Secretary on 7 January, Mr Brown’s Private Secretary said that the Prime Minister preferred to defer decisions and announcements on force levels in Iraq until after the final review had taken place at the end of February.<sup>347</sup> The decision would need to be taken “in the light of advice from military commanders, a full assessment of conditions on the ground, a further effort to internationalise Iraq-handling ... and a review of the progress of the Kuwait Support Facility”.

**733.** The same Private Secretary also wrote to Mr Miliband’s Private Secretary, with Mr Brown’s response to the report of Mr Miliband’s visit.<sup>348</sup>

**734.** Mr Brown agreed with Mr Miliband’s conclusions on the 2008 Iraq strategy and was content for him to proceed as outlined. In particular, he was “keen to work hard to persuade the US of the need to support early provincial elections” and agreed strongly on the importance of “further internationalising the effort”.

**735.** On 7 January, Mr McDonald and Ms Aldred met members of the US Administration and explored US thinking on future force levels in Iraq.<sup>349</sup> Mr McDonald explained that the UK was continuing to plan on the basis of a reduction in UK troops in March or April, but that the latest military advice was that the reduction should be to around 2,700 to 2,800; not 2,500 as previously envisaged. Options for beyond November 2008 were under consideration but the UK would be constrained once the resolution expired.

**736.** Mr McDonald and Ms Aldred were told that the US had not ruled out a further resolution completely, only that there would not be another under Chapter VII.

**737.** Lt Gen Houghton told the Chiefs of Staff at their 8 January meeting that HQ MND(SE) had assessed that the impact of the Australian withdrawal on UK forces would be “minimal”.<sup>350</sup> Around 105 embedded personnel would remain. Danish troops had already withdrawn, and Czech forces were due to do so in June, leaving Romanian forces alongside those of the UK.

**738.** Gen Dannatt visited Basra and Baghdad between 13 and 15 January and had an “extremely useful” meeting with Gen Petraeus, who outlined options to use US forces to backfill into Muthanna and Dhi Qar provinces once the Australian forces withdrew.<sup>351</sup>

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<sup>347</sup> Letter Fletcher to Forber, 7 January 2008, ‘Iraq: Force Levels’.

<sup>348</sup> Letter Fletcher to Hickey, 7 January 2008, ‘Iraq’.

<sup>349</sup> Minute Aldred to McDonald, 7 January 2008, ‘Meeting with Eliot Cohen and Eric Edelman’.

<sup>350</sup> Minutes, 8 January 2008, Chiefs of Staff meeting.

<sup>351</sup> Minute CGS to Various, 21 January 2008, ‘CGS Visit to Iraq 13-15 Jan 08’.

**739.** Two options were being considered; either extending the boundary of a combined MND (Centre South) and MND (Centre) to encompass Muthanna and Dhi Qar or placing US troops under UK command in MND(SE). Gen Dannatt wrote to the Chiefs of Staff and senior officials in the MOD:

“It may be that we wish to volunteer early to take the US forces under command, in order to shape the direction of our future engagement in Iraq rather than reduce to a two-star controlling a single province.”

**740.** Gen Dannatt also described experiencing in Baghdad and Basra a “palpable sense of optimism ... that has to be balanced against the growing realisation that unless we will build on the successes of 2007, we will miss the opportunities that 2008 presents”.

**741.** In his weekly report on 14 January, Lt Gen Rollo commented that although the final days of 2007 had “very much the feel of a boat without wind”, there was “a very different feel” to Baghdad at the start of 2008.<sup>352</sup> He wrote: “The emphasis is on politics, and there are clear signs of movement.”

**742.** Efforts to counter AQ continued, with a series of MNF operations against AQ strongholds in Baghdad and Diyala. Discussions continued in Baghdad on the commercial plans for the development of Umm Qasr port in Basra. Lt Gen Rollo commented:

“This offers a real opportunity for Basra and the South-East and we need to ensure that contracts are let as quickly as possible ... This will require co-ordination in Baghdad, and with the Ministries and the Japan Bank of International Co-operation. My team will continue to track this, but I remain of the view that the real answer is a Basra Development Office in Baghdad.”

**743.** Lt Gen Rollo recorded that US work on the long term US-Iraqi bilateral Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) had begun in earnest, with a negotiating team due to arrive in Iraq in February.

**744.** Lt Gen Rollo reported that there was provision in the US thinking for coalition partners either to be covered by their agreement, or to adopt its language, or to negotiate their own agreement. He believed that the US was aware that the European Convention on Human Rights imposed particular demands on UK forces and was keen to know what the UK would need in such an agreement. Maj Gen Rollo wrote that the SOFA would cover all aspects of the MNF presence in Iraq and one would be necessary regardless of the size of the UK’s commitment. He felt that: “A clear view on how we plan to engage is overdue.”

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<sup>352</sup> Minute Rollo to CDS, 14 January 2008, ‘SBMR-I’s Weekly Report (283) 14 Jan 08’.

**745.** Mr Prentice reported that the “3+1” group had a “positive and productive meeting” on 14 January, and formally agreed to rename themselves the Executive Council.<sup>353</sup> In his view the atmosphere had clearly been different. Mr Prentice also reported that “re-energising the 3+1 has coincided with the first step forward on key legislation we have seen for some time”.

**746.** On 14 January, in response to a Parliamentary Question from Lady Hermon, Mr Browne said that the number of established military posts in Iraq had reduced by 100 in October 2007 and 600 in November.<sup>354</sup> Mr Browne added that by the end of January he aimed to have reduced the number of posts by a further 350, and that work continued to plan for future reductions to around 2,500 in southern Iraq from spring 2008.

**747.** Maj Gen Binns’ weekly report of 17 January recorded that the Iraqi Department of Border Enforcement had arrested eight individuals on the al-Faw Peninsula, in “an area notorious for smuggling”, on 11 January.<sup>355</sup>

**748.** Initial investigation revealed that four of the men were Iranian consular officials from Basra, and the other four were Iraqis working as their personal security. Maj Gen Binns commented that it was possible that the individuals were engaged in smuggling lethal aid<sup>356</sup> or in the reconnaissance of potential routes for doing so. The four Iranians were released two days later.

**749.** The day after the Iranians were arrested, the ISF in Nasiriyah detained a mainstream JAM figure who was believed to be the sponsor or leader of a splinter group operating in contravention of the freeze on activity.

**750.** On 18 January, a CIG considered foreign fighters entering Iraq via Syria.<sup>357</sup> The CIG assessed that the majority of foreign fighters joined AQ-I to become suicide bombers. The main route for entry into Iraq was through Syria, using well-established extremist facilitation networks and professional smugglers.

**751.** The CIG judged that, although foreign fighters would undoubtedly find alternative routes into Iraq, tougher action by the Syrians against facilitation networks would restrict – at least temporarily – the supply of foreign suicide bombers and funds and help maintain pressure on AQ-I.

**752.** On 18 and 19 January, there was unrest in Basra and Nasiriyah during the Shia festival of Ashura.<sup>358</sup>

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<sup>353</sup> eGram 1592/08 Baghdad to FCO London, 16 January 2008, ‘Iraq: Rice Visit and a New Political Mood in Baghdad’.

<sup>354</sup> House of Commons, *Official Report*, 14 January 2008, column 884W.

<sup>355</sup> Minute Binns to CJO, 17 January 2008, ‘GOC MND(SE) Weekly Letter – 17 January 2008’.

<sup>356</sup> There is no simple definition of “lethal aid”. It is generally used to mean military equipment which can be used directly to inflict serious injury or death.

<sup>357</sup> CIG Assessment, 18 January 2008, ‘Iraq: Foreign Fighters Entering via Syria’.

<sup>358</sup> Minute Binns to CJO, 24 January 2008, ‘GOC MND(SE) Weekly Letter – 24 January 2008’; Minute Rollo to CDS, 20 January 2008, ‘SBMR-I’s Weekly Report (284) 20 Jan 08’.

**753.** Clashes between the ISF and a Shia group called the Soldiers of Heaven resulted in “dozens” of deaths.<sup>359</sup>

**754.** Maj Gen Binns observed that the ISF had handled both situations effectively, demonstrating evidence of enhanced capability and strength of resolve. MNF support to the ISF in both cities was “measured, successful and appreciated by the ISF”.<sup>360</sup> JAM distanced themselves from the uprising and, Maj Gen Binns reported, “in some cases moved actively to assist the IPS restoring order in Basra”.

**755.** On 20 January, Lt Gen Rollo included “two initial observations ... to help frame the debate” about the future of the UK’s role in MND(SE) in his weekly report:

“First, before we go too far down the road of developing bilateral relations, we should not forget that we still have to help the Iraqi Government establish law and order in their country (in the face of a significant continuing threat from, amongst others, AQ-I, insurgent Sunni terrorist groups and various Shia militias. Second, as the campaign develops the route to success will increasingly be along the non-military lines of operation – especially the economic one. If we choose we could let the US take most of that burden, but in the South at least, they will be looking to us to drive it. And therefore, our reputation with the US (as well as the Iraqis) will be informed as much by our non-military contribution as our force numbers. And our contribution in 2008 will set the conditions for what we can achieve there in future years. As the Iraq Strategy work moves forward we would do well to keep this in the forefront of our minds.”<sup>361</sup>

**756.** On 24 January, Mr Prentice reported a further meeting of the Executive Council which had taken place on the previous day.<sup>362</sup> The Council agreed a set of principles for moving the political process forward, including:

- proposals for a “slimmer” government – abolishing at least 14 Ministries, leaving between 17 and 22 Cabinet positions;
- further discussions between Prime Minister Maliki and Vice-President Tariq al-Hashemi with a view to a Tawafuq return to government;
- the establishment of separate political and technical committees to discuss the long-term security agreement, chaired respectively by Foreign Minister Zebari and Deputy Foreign Minister Mohammed Hamoud;
- the establishment of a standing secretariat for the Political Council for National Security; and

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<sup>359</sup> *BBC News*, 19 January 2008, *Iraqi Shia pilgrims mark holy day*.

<sup>360</sup> Minute Binns to CJO, 24 January 2008, ‘GOC MND(SE) Weekly Letter – 24 January 2008’.

<sup>361</sup> Minute Rollo to CDS, 20 January 2008, ‘SBMR-I’s Weekly Report (284) 20 Jan 08’.

<sup>362</sup> eGram 2673/08 Baghdad to FCO London, 24 January 2008, ‘Iraq: Internal Political Progress?’

- a “decision to sign” the Accountability and Justice Law (formerly the de-Ba’athification Law), which had been passed by the Council of Representatives (see Section 11.1).

**757.** Mr Prentice observed: “The simultaneous intent to cut posts and broaden the coalition creates obvious difficulty in satisfying all demands.”

**758.** On 24 January, Maj Gen Binns reported that he had briefed Lt Gen Odierno on “the key elements of the mission for the first half on 2008” in MND(SE).<sup>363</sup> They agreed that it was right for MND(SE) to be a command in support of the Iraqi Government, ISF, FCO and PRT. Lt Gen Odierno confirmed that Maysan remained an ongoing concern. Maj Gen Binns judged that:

“... the US command in Iraq are seriously concerned about the lack of MNF presence/control in Dhi Qar and Maysan. We may employ the argument that the provinces have been PIC’d and that we MND(SE) are in strategic overwatch, but this doesn’t convince US Commanders.”

**759.** Maj Gen Binns told Lt Gen Houghton:

“I should therefore be grateful for your direction on what the UK position is regarding the potential transfer of Dhi Qar, Maysan and Muthanna provinces to another MND’s area of responsibility and the line I should take in discussions ...”

**760.** Mr Brown and President Bush discussed Iraq briefly during a video conference on 24 January.<sup>364</sup> Mr Brown considered that Iraq appeared to have turned a corner; progress on key legislation and a change in mindset were encouraging.

### The Aitken Report

On 25 January, the MOD published a report of the army’s investigation into cases of “deliberate abuse and unlawful killings of civilians in Iraq in 2003 and early 2004” by UK Service Personnel.<sup>365</sup> It included the case of Mr Baha Mousa.

*The Aitken Report* summarised what had happened in Iraq, and steps taken since 2003 to prevent similar events recurring. It concluded:

“The fact that these measures were not introduced in advance of the invasion of Iraq may suggest a lack of awareness of the operational context by those responsible for preparing our people for that operation, and thus a failing. At one level, the paucity of planning for nation-rebuilding after the invasion (a consequence, in part, of the need to give last-minute diplomacy a chance of success) was certainly a factor. Uncertainty over the reaction of the Iraqi people to being invaded was probably another; in some

<sup>363</sup> Minute Binns to CJO, 24 January 2008, ‘GOC MND(SE) Weekly Letter – 24 January 2008’.

<sup>364</sup> Letter Fletcher to Gould, 24 January 2008, ‘Prime Minister’s VTC with Bush, 24 January’.

<sup>365</sup> *The Aitken Report: An Investigation into Cases of Deliberate Abuse and Unlawful Killing in Iraq in 2003 and 2004*, 25 January 2008.

areas we were probably surprised at how quickly the initial euphoria of liberation changed to insurgency.”

*The Aitken Report* recommended that:

“We need to ensure that lessons learned from the disciplinary and administrative processes (police investigations, legal advice and trials) are better collated as part of the Army’s formal Lessons Learned process, so that trends in criminal behaviour or professional shortcomings can be quickly identified and remedied. We need to ensure that a better understanding of the Army’s Core Values, and their application, is inculcated into all ranks, and especially commanders ...”

Announcing the report’s publication in Parliament, Mr Browne said he was “proud to acknowledge that the vast majority ... who have served in Iraq have conducted themselves to the highest standards of behaviour” and that he was “satisfied that the Army is doing everything possible to ensure that its personnel do not repeat the appalling acts that were perpetrated in these cases”.<sup>366</sup>

In May 2008 Mr Browne announced a Public Inquiry into the death of Mr Baha Mousa.<sup>367</sup> Its report was published on 8 September 2011.<sup>368</sup>

**761.** On 27 January, Lt Gen Rollo reported “a very large explosion” in Mosul the previous week, which killed 34 people and injured a further 135.<sup>369</sup> When the Provincial Chief of Police visited the site the next morning, he was killed by a suicide bomber.

**762.** As a consequence, Prime Minister Maliki had announced the “final battle” in the struggle against AQ-I, following this up with what Lt Gen Rollo judged to be a “purposeful performance” at the MCNS, arguing for the reinforcement of Ninawa.

**763.** Lt Gen Rollo commented: “This is not a question of changing strategic priorities – reinforcements, predominantly Iraqi, have already been despatched to Mosul as part of the overall operation, with more on the way – but it is a reflection of the political requirement to be seen to be responding to a part of the country in need.”

**764.** Gen Mohan and Gen Jalil conducted a review of the Ashura disturbances and were reported by Maj Gen Binns on 31 January to be “pleased with the outcome of the incidents in so much as they demonstrated ISF capability and gave confidence both to ISF and the people of Basra”.<sup>370</sup> Maj Gen Binns also reported: “Ominously, both generals mentioned their preparation for the ‘next battle’.”

**765.** Towards the end of January there was an increase in the volume and sophistication of IDF attacks on the COB in Basra. Maj Gen Binns assessed that these were the work of Iranian-backed Secret Cells. Although many of the individuals

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<sup>366</sup> House of Commons, *Official Report*, 25 January 2008, column 65WS.

<sup>367</sup> House of Commons, *Official Report*, 14 May 2008, columns 60-61WS.

<sup>368</sup> *The Baha Mousa Public Inquiry Report*, 8 September 2011, HC 1452-I.

<sup>369</sup> Minute Rollo to CDS, 27 January 2008, ‘SBMR-I’s Weekly Report (285) 27 Jan 08’.

<sup>370</sup> Minute Binns to CJO, 31 January 2008, ‘GOC MND(SE) Weekly Letter – 31 January 2008’.

involved were known to MND(SE), there were problems in targeting them directly as it would require UK forces to re-commence strike operations in Basra, “action that would prejudice the accommodation process with the mainstream of JAM”.

**766.** Maj Gen Binns discussed the attacks with Governor Waili and said that while UK forces could deal with the attacks, the people they would harm most were the people of Basra because of the direct impact on economic development and investment. Governor Waili undertook to develop a plan to deal with the problem as a priority.

**767.** Government officials working closely with the military in Basra also reported rising levels of IDF, including an attack on 31 January that was the heaviest ever experienced by Basra Air Station.<sup>371</sup> JAM1 claimed that the attacks were the work of a splinter group and not of his supporters, a claim which the officials considered to be justified.

## February 2008

**768.** On 1 February, bombs exploded at two popular Baghdad markets in what appeared to have been co-ordinated attacks.<sup>372</sup> Mr Prentice reported that the local media believed there to be at least 70 dead and more than 120 injured, though MNF estimates were lower. Mr Prentice commented that these were the deadliest attacks in Baghdad since the surge began the previous summer. He wrote:

“Initial reporting was that these attacks had been carried out by female suicide bombers, with Al Qaida (AQ-I) being the prime suspect. However, eyewitness reports state that the two women wearing the bombs were mentally ill ... [and] regularly frequented the markets.”

That led to speculation that the bombs had been detonated by remote control.

**769.** Mr Prentice reported that there had been an increase in the use of female suicide bombers; they were actively recruited by AQ-I as they were unlikely to be searched by men at checkpoints. He commented:

“It may never be known for sure who was behind these attacks. But, if it is confirmed that two mentally ill women were used as ‘mules’, a new low in bestial criminal activity in Iraq will have been set.”

**770.** In early February, Lt Gen Rollo reported that the solution to replacing the Australian troops appeared to be focused on “the nearest wolf to the sled”, with backfill to be achieved by “double tasking a battalion already at Tallil”.<sup>373</sup>

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<sup>371</sup> Email government official working closely with the military, 4 February 2008, ‘[NAME OF OPERATION]: Act 2’ attaching ‘Discussion Paper: Maintaining the Accommodation, Reducing IDF’.

<sup>372</sup> eGram 3913/08 Baghdad to FCO London, 2 February 2008, ‘Iraq: Double Bombing in Baghdad Street Markets’.

<sup>373</sup> Minute Rollo to CDS, 3 February 2003, ‘Weekly Report 3 Feb 08’.

**771.** Ahead of the arrival of the US SOFA negotiating team in Baghdad in mid-February, Lt Gen Rollo reported that MNF-I was focused on retaining four key authorities within Iraq:

- the ability to train and equip the ISF;
- contractor immunities and privileges;
- the power to detain; and
- “full spectrum operations”.

**772.** All four of these were seen as “essential to mission success”. Lt Gen Rollo reported acceptance that the SOFA might need to be wrapped into a wider political and economic agreement.

**773.** On 3 February, officials produced a discussion paper for MND(SE) entitled ‘Maintaining the Accommodation, Reducing IDF’.<sup>374</sup> They explained that, compared with early 2007, the attack figures remained “very modest” but that the upward trend required attention, and possibly a “tuning” of strategy and tactics.

**774.** A number of “carrots and sticks” were proposed in the paper, including releases from US detention, supplying intelligence on attackers to the ISF, political engagement, interdiction, a show of force, persuading Muqtada al-Sadr to extend his cease-fire, reducing Iranian influence and visible development activity.

**775.** The paper concluded: “It may well be that ... a confrontation between JAM and the ISF is inevitable. But our sense is that the longer the majority of JAM fighters can be persuaded to go without the stimulus and status of regular combat, the weaker the force will be.”

**776.** On 4 February, Sir John Scarlett wrote to Mr Miliband with an “update from the ground” following a recent visit to Iraq.<sup>375</sup> It included the situation in the South. Although there had been some interest in re-creating the effect elsewhere in Iraq, the US was:

“... suspicious of our Shia engagement in the South, which, despite its parallels to the CLC programme, they see as allowing Iranian influence to expand.”

**777.** Sir John wrote:

“Although Basra province is relatively quiet, the political and military situation is still fragile and the risk of significant further conflict remains ... [JAM1] appears to be exerting a positive influence in Basra. But some Sadrist hardline militants, probably no more than 2-300 strong, continue to defy the accommodation and attack UK Forces. IDF into the COB is showing a spike. If it ramps up significantly HMG has few levers of influence. Development and economic projects might improve the

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<sup>374</sup> Email government official working closely with the military, 4 February 2008, ‘[NAME OF OPERATION]: Act 2’ attaching ‘Discussion Paper: Maintaining the Accommodation, Reducing IDF’.

<sup>375</sup> Letter C to Secretary of State [FCO], 4 February 2008, ‘Iraq: An Update From The Ground’.

wider situation but few are labelled as British and are unlikely, anyway, to dissuade committed hardliners from attacks ...”

**778.** Sir John observed that, as UK forces were concentrated in Basra Air Station:

“... HMG now has less situational awareness and ground truth on what is going on in Basra on a day to day basis ...”

**779.** Asked by the Inquiry whether the relocation had reduced the ability of UK forces to intervene in support of the ISF, Mr Day said: “No, I don’t think it did ... We retained the ability to re-engage, if asked to do so by the Iraqis, or if the threat to the airport required it.”<sup>376</sup>

**780.** On 6 February, a senior government official specialising in the Middle East (2) wrote to Mr Jenkins with an update on the Shia engagement strategy, in advance of a planned discussion of Shia engagement at the Cabinet Office on 8 February.<sup>377</sup> He outlined a proposal “to continue to work towards the broad strategy indicated in my letter of 21 December”.

**781.** On Iranian influence, the senior official explained:

“As illustrated by the changes in the Secret Cells, for the time being Iran’s main focus seems to be on building political influence. Just as [HMG] is seeking to pull Iran’s proxies out of an Iranian orbit, the Iranians are reaching out to the new Sadrist groups such as Adnan Al-Shahmani’s Iraqi National Gathering (ING) and Fadilah, to ensure continuing lines of Iranian influence across Shia politics in Iraq. Meanwhile, Muqtada al-Sadr remains marginalised.”

**782.** On 7 February, at the request of the MOD and the FCO, the JIC assessed changes in the Sadrist Trend, led by Muqtada al-Sadr, and their implications for violence and political reconciliation.<sup>378</sup>

**783.** It judged:

“I. The Office of the Martyr Sadr (OMS) is marginalised, in disarray and much weaker politically than at any time since 2003. Muqtada al-Sadr’s goals are largely unchanged. How he intends to achieve them and his own future role are less clear, including to him.

“II. Sadr’s lineage means he will almost certainly remain a key ideological influence for the Sadrist Trend. But his ability to exert political authority over the senior cadre of OMS officials is now weak. He may relinquish his position altogether ...

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<sup>376</sup> Public hearing, 6 January 2010, page 37.

<sup>377</sup> Minute senior government official specialising in the Middle East (2) to Jenkins, 6 February 2008, ‘Shia engagement: [NAME OF OPERATION] update’.

<sup>378</sup> [JIC Assessment, 7 February 2008, ‘Iraq: Whither the Sadrist Trend?’](#)

“III. Whether Sadr’s political rivals, including those in the JAM Special Groups and the new Iraqi National Gathering, gain traction with the grassroots Sadrist movement will probably depend more on Sadr’s next moves than on what they can deliver for the Shia ...

“IV. The Iranians for now probably place more weight on overt political support to their traditional allies in ISCI/Badr than on military support for JAM. In areas of the South where the coalition’s footprint has diminished, ‘Iranian Intelligence’ may have started to replace the coalition as the focus of JAM’s campaign to get rid of foreign influence.

...

“VII. Sadr will almost certainly extend the ‘freeze’ on JAM activities beyond this month. But it will remain fragile and could give way in some areas at any time ... A large proportion of JAM will remain engaged in often violent criminality.”

**784.** The JIC assessed that fierce competition for the Shia vote between ISCI/Badr and OMS/JAM was likely to result in further clashes as the provincial elections approached (not expected until late 2008 at the earliest). However, under pressure from the Shia religious authorities, both sides had established joint committees to avert clashes, but the JIC judged that “some local Badr commanders are using the cover of ISF to exploit the JAM freeze and irreversibly weaken their chief rival”.

### Kidnap of Mr Richard Butler

On 9 February 2008, Mr Richard Butler, a British journalist working with CBS, was kidnapped along with his Iraqi interpreter in Basra.<sup>379</sup> The interpreter was freed three days later. Mr Butler was eventually freed on 14 April during a raid by members of the Iraqi Army, who were believed to have been looking for a weapons cache.

**785.** On 11 February, Lt Gen Rollo reported having discussed the MND(SE) boundary with Gen Petraeus, who was keen that the UK two-star commander had a proper role, and did not regard the tactical command and control advantages of a single nation covering an area of operations as decisive.<sup>380</sup> Gen Petraeus also thought that the MNF divisional boundaries should mirror those of the Iraqi Army, which was likely to have a headquarters responsible for both 10th Division (Muthanna, Dhi Qar and Maysan) and 14th Division (Basra).

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<sup>379</sup> *BBC News*, 30 April 2008, *Journalist tells of Iraq kidnap*.

<sup>380</sup> Minute Rollo to CDS, 11 February 2008, ‘SBMR-I’s Weekly Report (287) 10 Feb 08’.

**786.** In addition, Lt Gen Rollo reported that Gen Petraeus had suggested:

“... political sensitivities over ground-holding responsibilities worked both ways, and that Washington might also be sensitive to an apparent extension of US responsibilities as allies departed ... The debate therefore remains open.”

**787.** Maj Gen Binns left MND(SE) on 12 February and was succeeded by Major General Barney White-Spunner.<sup>381</sup>

**788.** Reflecting on the progress made during the previous six months in his last weekly report, Maj Gen Binns commented:

“It has taken me six months to develop an understanding of the Economic and Political Lines of Operation. I have learned to measure economic redevelopment in decades, to be patient, to listen to, and take the advice of, specialists in the PRT, some of whom have been in Iraq for more than three years. We should stop beating up on DFID; those, like me initially, who talk of ‘windows of opportunity’ and ‘economic surges’ are misguided. Iraq is awash with money. The Iraqis need help in spending it and overcoming corruption through good governance, which is exactly the approach taken by our PRT. Of course we will continue to use CERPs money to buy consent for military operations, but let us not pretend that this is sustainable development, because on some occasions it is the reverse. In 10 years time Basrawis will remember that the US Army Corps of Engineers built their Children’s Cancer Hospital; they will probably have forgotten Operation SINBAD.”

**789.** In his formal end of tour report, Maj Gen Binns wrote:

“The Consul General was hugely agile in getting politics moving and the PRT used the headroom created by improvements to the security situation to re-engage ... Inter Departmental co-operation in theatre is superb ...”<sup>382</sup>

**790.** Maj Gen Binns wrote that negotiations with JAM were “more successful than we dared imagine”. Although JAM remained capable of renewing hostilities, there was now “clear daylight” between the mainstream and the Iranian-backed cells. As a result of the negotiations “we now talk of how to stay, not when to leave”. He judged that:

“The reconciliation process was dynamic, and our key interlocutor was prone to inconsistency. The situation was complicated by the failure of some wholly to appreciate that we were negotiating with a potentially unstable force. So trying to apply reason to his argument and, in particular, to his negotiating position imposed an unrealistic constraint on our freedom of negotiation. I found it hugely frustrating that I was not trusted with delegated authority. By the time we worked up a submission the situation had changed. Decisions were taken in London by those least able to keep track of events. Only agile negotiation by [government officials

<sup>381</sup> Minute Binns to CJO, 7 February 2008, ‘GOC MND(SE) Weekly Letter – 07 February 2008’.

<sup>382</sup> Minute Binns to CJO, 12 February 2008, ‘Op TELIC – GOC 1 (UK) Armd Div Post Operation Report’.

working closely with the military] and some judicious risk taking kept us in the game. As a formation commander in Kosovo I could claim that I had significantly more freedom of action than my US counterparts – not so now.”

**791.** Maj Gen Binns concluded: “I did not think I would depart feeling so optimistic about Iraq and its future.”

**792.** Maj Gen Binns told the Inquiry:

“I’m wiser now and I think in that report I was just expressing the natural frustrations of somebody who is really trying to make the process work, living with the consequences of failure, and just being frustrated by what I thought was a risk averse culture back here. But I’m wiser and I’m probably now grateful that there was oversight and that somebody back here had taken responsibility and had been properly briefed. But at the time, as a field commander, I was frustrated by what I perceived to be a lack of delegated authority.”<sup>383</sup>

**793.** In advance of the 14 February meeting of the Iraq Strategy Group, Mr Day wrote to Ms Aldred setting out five options for future force levels from November 2008, not yet considered by MOD Ministers.<sup>384</sup> All options assumed that legal cover for the UK presence would be found and that the threat in Basra would not deteriorate significantly.

**794.** The “illustrative” options ranged from maintaining the status quo (around 2,800 troops at Basra Air Station including a two- or one-star headquarters, two battlegroup equivalents and integral force protection, enabling and logistic support) to complete withdrawal.

**795.** Retaining 2,800 troops would require no increase to the US presence in Basra and would meet what the UK understood to be the US aspirations for a UK contribution. Mr Day judged that “in the absence of an entirely benign security environment, 1,000-1,500 is likely to be the minimum force level to support a national presence in the COB”. Although it was assumed that at some stage the COB would be handed over to the US, doing so would be “potentially destabilising”.

**796.** On 13 February, the Iraqi Council of Representatives passed three major pieces of legislation: the 2008 Budget Law, the Provincial Powers Law and the Amnesty Law.<sup>385</sup> An official in the FCO Iraq Group judged that:

“Passage of these long awaited laws is welcomed, not least because it should help to reduce the tension that has been building between the Kurds and Arabs in the Council of Representatives. We have long been calling for early elections and action

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<sup>383</sup> Private hearing, 2 June 2010, pages 26-27.

<sup>384</sup> Letter Day to Aldred, 13 February 2008, ‘Potential Options for the UK Military Commitment in Southern Iraq in 2009’.

<sup>385</sup> Email Iraq Group [junior official] to Hickey, 15 February 2008, ‘Iraq: Passage of Budget, Amnesty and Provincial Powers Laws: Statement and Personal Message’.

on detainees, while passage of these laws still leaves much to be done before these issues are resolved it does represent a significant step which might boost reconciliation efforts ...”

**797.** Mr Prentice commented that the political atmosphere in the run up to the votes was “poisonous but gave way to relief and pride when all three Bills were passed and the CoR went back on holiday”.<sup>386</sup>

**798.** The passing of the 2008 Budget (60 trillion Iraqi Dinars, then equivalent to US\$50bn) followed a protracted battle between a Dawa-led Arab nationalist faction and the Kurdish alliance, in which the two main sticking points were the funding of the Peshmerga and the Kurdish Regional Government’s (KRG) share of revenues. A further postponement of a decision on funding the Peshmerga and agreement that the KRG should retain its existing 17 percent revenue share, with a census conducted later in the year, allowed the Budget to pass.

**799.** Mr Miliband issued a statement welcoming the approval of the legislation, as “three important and positive steps for Iraq” which would release “record resources for services and reconstruction”, lay “the foundation for greater Sunni reintegration” and move Iraq closer towards a new round of provincial elections.<sup>387</sup> The statement continued:

“There is now a clear desire on the part of Iraq’s political leaders to reach out to each other in a spirit of compromise, and use the space created by the improved security environment to make real progress on reconciliation. I hope this positive atmosphere continues. Political reconciliation is key to Iraq’s development as a secure and stable country.”

**800.** The Iraq Strategy Group discussed “the strategy paper” again on 14 February.<sup>388</sup> Mr McDonald underlined that the paper was “too ambitious, not UK-centric enough, and too long” and that it should not presume engagement beyond spring 2009. More work was needed before it could be put to Ministers. It was agreed to split the paper into two: one which dealt with the medium term (to spring 2009) and another dealing with the longer term, including future legal arrangements.

**801.** Those papers would be discussed again at the ISG and then by a Ministerial trilateral meeting on 4 March and NSID(OD) in early April, which would also consider force level options.

**802.** Mr McDonald asked that three clear options should be presented to Ministers:

- maintain the status quo at around 2,800;

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<sup>386</sup> eGram 6531/08 Baghdad to FCO London, 20 February 2008, ‘Iraq: 2008 Budget Passed’.

<sup>387</sup> Email Hickey to Iraq Group [junior official], 15 February 2008, ‘Iraq: Passage of Budget, Amnesty and Provincial Powers Laws: Statement and Personal Message’.

<sup>388</sup> Minute Cabinet Office [junior official], 15 February 2008, ‘Iraq Strategy Group, 14 February’.

- a mid-level option (between about 1,800 and 2,200); and
- zero forces in southern Iraq.

**803.** Lt Gen Wall told the ISG that any drawdown below a critical mass of 2,800 should only be a short-term interim measure on the way to zero in order to reduce the period of high vulnerability for personnel. From a military perspective, he observed that a decision on post-November 2008 force levels did not need to be taken until the summer. Mr McDonald acknowledged this, but also noted that the way ahead would need to be clear by late March in order to inform Ministerial decisions on Afghanistan.

**804.** On 18 February, Lt Gen Rollo reported that the Provincial Powers Law set out the balance between the central and provincial authorities that would apply following the next provincial election.<sup>389</sup> He wrote:

“The key differences to the current arrangement are the strengthening of Governors’ control over provincial security forces and the arrangements for dismissing a Governor (making it easier for a Provincial Council to do so, but also giving the Prime Minister and the Council of Representatives a potential role in the process). Whether this will be sufficient to see off a push for greater federalism when the Regions law takes effect in April remains to be seen.”

**805.** The Provincial Powers Law directed that an Elections Law be passed within 90 days and provincial elections be held not later than 1 October. Lt Gen Rollo observed that this would be “challenging” but that the UN’s view was that “the date should be technically possible”.

**806.** Lt Gen Rollo recorded that the Amnesty Law was likely to allow a significant number of those convicted of less serious offences, or who had never been charged, to be released from detention. Those convicted of serious crimes were excluded. Lt Gen Rollo observed that the law was a “positive move”, though much would depend on how it was administered, and in particular on the reintegration of former detainees.

**807.** Lt Gen Rollo commented it was:

“... difficult to overestimate the importance of this week’s political events. It commits Iraq to provincial elections in the autumn, offering the prospect of bringing in both Sunni and Shia groups who failed to vote in 2005, and decisively turning Iraq’s struggle for power onto a political path. Conversely, it also offers the prospect of increased instability if the armed wings of political parties compete to influence results ... These events are also, of course, the context for decisions on the timing and pace of future troop drawdown.”

**808.** Mr Miliband sent a personal message of congratulations to Speaker Mahmoud Mashhadani of the Iraqi Council of Representatives, which was delivered in person by

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<sup>389</sup> Minute Rollo to CDS, 18 February 2008, ‘SBMR-I’s Weekly Report (288) 17 Feb 08’.

Mr Prentice.<sup>390</sup> Mr Prentice reported that the Speaker had been grateful for the message, as he had been for President Bush's personal telephone call: it was encouraging that friends of Iraq and the major powers paid close attention to developments in the Council of Representatives and showed support for their achievements.

**809.** Speaker Mashhadani told Mr Prentice that once the Council had returned from its break there were three more key subjects to be addressed: oil, elections and Kirkuk. Mr Prentice observed that "the next three political challenges are even more politically charged than the last". Implementing the three new laws was also "key" in the Speaker's eyes. For the Amnesty Law in particular there was "a real danger of heightened expectations, particularly among the Sunni community, being let down by the limited scope of the legislation".

**810.** On 15 February, the *Financial Times* published an article reporting the details of a witness statement made by Mr Hilal al-Jedda.<sup>391</sup> Mr al-Jedda, a former British detainee, was reported to have said that "British military officers agreed on a schedule to release all detainees in return for a pledge by the militia to cease attacks on British forces". The article reported that the negotiations had involved Maj Gen Shaw and "members of a Shia militia associated with the radical cleric Muqtada al-Sadr's Mahdi Army". He also reported that a Defence Advisory Notice (often referred to as a D-Notice) had been issued, requesting that the identities of Iraqi negotiators and the reason why Mr al-Jedda might have been privy to details of the talks should be withheld.

**811.** On 17 February, Mr Adnan al-Asadi, the Iraqi Deputy Interior Minister, briefed the MCNS that the Ministry of the Interior had formed a committee to look at issues surrounding election security.<sup>392</sup> Protection of election materials, officials and offices would be paramount, and MNF and MOD help would be required. He considered that clashes were likely in the South.

**812.** In his 21 February weekly report to Lt Gen Houghton, Maj Gen White-Spunner concluded that "everyone, for the time being, is doing the right tasks and doing them well" but that "we now need to think about the spring and summer very carefully ... we could, depending on whether or not Sadr continues his freeze, be in a more difficult period here".<sup>393</sup>

**813.** Maj Gen White-Spunner reported that the increases in indirect fire reported by Maj Gen Binns at the end of January had continued into February. In the week leading up to 22 February, when the JAM freeze was to expire, there had been six confirmed attacks including the first 240mm rocket since August 2007. He shared his predecessor's

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<sup>390</sup> eGram 6041/08 Baghdad to FCO London, 18 February 2008, 'Iraq: Message Delivered to Speaker Mashhadani'.

<sup>391</sup> *Financial Times*, 15 February 2008, *Iraq prison release deal alleged*.

<sup>392</sup> eGram 6052/08 Baghdad to FCO London, 18 February 2008, 'Iraq Ministerial Committee on National Security 17 February'.

<sup>393</sup> Minute White-Spunner to CJO, 21 February 2008, 'GOC MND(SE) Weekly Letter – 21 February 2008'.

view that these were the work of JAM Special Groups and that there were limits on what MND(SE) could do to respond. He commented:

“Our position is somewhat constrained by the desire to maintain the accommodation with mainstream JAM and the number of troops at my disposal ... I shall redouble my efforts, but I hope that this may prove to be a momentary aberration through which we will have to stick it out.”

**814.** Mr Browne’s Private Secretary commented in the margins of Mr Browne’s copy of the report: “All this will push CJO towards conservatism in his force level recommendations.”<sup>394</sup>

**815.** On 21 February, the Turkish authorities crossed the border into Northern Iraq as part of a military operation to deal with a terrorist threat to Turkey.<sup>395</sup> The incident raised tension between Turkey and Iraq and also placed a strain on the relationship between the Kurdish Regional Government and the central Iraqi Government in Baghdad.

**816.** On 23 February, Mr Prentice discussed the security situation in Basra with Dr Rubaie, who confirmed that an order replacing Gen Mohan had already been signed by Prime Minister Maliki based on a report that a “non-interference pact” had been signed with JAM.<sup>396</sup> Mr Prentice commented that the UK had some understanding of the balance that Gen Mohan and Gen Jalil had to strike in handling the militias and that “It was probably wise not to seek a confrontation with JAM, while the army and police were still building their strength.” Dr Rubaie observed that there was a difference between calming the situation and fearing to confront it.

**817.** The day before the 26 February deadline for ratification of the three new laws by the Presidency Council expired, Mr Prentice reported the intention of Vice President Mehdi to veto the Provincial Powers Law on the grounds that central government should have no role in dismissing Provincial Governors.<sup>397</sup> Mr Prentice wrote that if the veto was exercised:

“... the Law passes back to the CoR, which is in recess until c.18 March but unlikely to do much until after the Kurdish New Year later in March. The CoR can then reconfirm or amend the Law by a majority of its members. If rejected a second time, the CoR can override the second veto by a 60 percent majority of its members.”

**818.** Senior officials from the MOD, the FCO, DFID and the Cabinet Office discussed the draft strategy paper once again on 26 February, and made amendments to it; the

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<sup>394</sup> Manuscript comment Ferguson to Browne on Minute White-Spinner to CJO, 21 February 2008, ‘GOC MND(SE) Weekly Letter – 21 February 2008’.

<sup>395</sup> Minute Rollo to CDS, 25 February 2008, ‘SBMR-I’s Weekly Report (289) 24 Feb 08’.

<sup>396</sup> Email Prentice to Betts, 24 February 2008, ‘Meeting with National Security Adviser Rubaie, 23 February’.

<sup>397</sup> eGram 7171/08 Baghdad to FCO London, 25 February 2008, ‘Iraq: VP Mehdi About to Veto Provincial Powers Law’.

paper needed to say more about Iraqi views on whether the UK should remain and to include a more nuanced section on US views.<sup>398</sup>

**819.** On the same day, the Chiefs of Staff were told by Lt Gen Houghton that:

“The increase in attacks in MND(SE), together with the uncertain future intelligence picture meant that it might not be possible to make bold decisions with reference to operational transition in Iraq. It was felt that some troop reductions would be justifiable in terms of risk in order to demonstrate further progress and to ensure the ISF continued to take increasing responsibility for security in MND(SE). Any future troop reductions would have complex presentational aspects for UK ... The recommendations for future UK troop numbers in Iraq would be forwarded to COS by 28 Feb 08.”<sup>399</sup>

**820.** Lt Gen Houghton told the Chiefs of Staff that Prime Minister Maliki had become increasingly concerned about General Mohan’s “accommodations” with JAM elements in Basra. From a UK perspective, Lt Gen Houghton hoped that Gen Mohan would not be transferred from Basra, where he was “a known quantity” and was understood to be making use of the extended JAM freeze to isolate and eliminate the JAM Special Groups and splinter groups.

**821.** At PJHQ’s request, on 27 February the JIC examined the prospects for security, political, and economic stability across southern Iraq during 2008.<sup>400</sup> Its Key Judgements were:

“I. Mutually reinforcing factors are helping to keep attacks against the Multi-National Forces (MNF) in MND(SE) at a low level [JAM1] remains active in preserving a cease-fire – though his influence may be reducing. Work by Basra’s Security Co-ordinator and Provincial Director of Police, and the continuation of Muqtada al-Sadr’s ‘freeze’ on JAM activity are also key. The situation is fragile and could quickly deteriorate.

“II. Iran’s attitude to anti-MNF-violence in Iraq is linked to its wider national agenda, particularly its relationship with the US. A more aggressive US posture in the South might prompt the IRGC QF to sponsor more anti-MNF attacks in response. Iran will continue its efforts to build political and economic influence and defuse intra-Shia rivalries in southern Iraq, driven by a desire to ensure that its influence pervades Shia politics more widely.

“III. Intra-Shia clashes will intensify as provincial elections approach. Assassinations of politicians and violent intimidation of the electorate are likely. In the worst case,

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<sup>398</sup> Minute Cabinet Office [junior official] to McDonald, 27 February 2008, ‘Iraq Strategy Paper Meeting, 26 February’.

<sup>399</sup> Minutes, 26 February 2008, Chiefs of Staff meeting.

<sup>400</sup> [JIC Assessment, 27 February 2008, ‘Iraq: Security Prospects in the South’](#).

there could be outbreaks of street fighting on a large scale ... Delays to the elections might also provoke violence and civil unrest.

“IV. Economic initiatives such as job creation schemes and reconstruction projects have the potential to reinforce Iraq’s security gains and promote reconciliation. But there is little prospect of change in the South in 2008. Perceptions that conditions are not improving fast enough could erode popular consent for local and national authority.

“V. The Iraqi security forces’ (ISF) ability and willingness to maintain security in the south remains patchy and dependent on MNF training, logistic and specialist air support. Radical improvements in police effectiveness are unlikely. The army will remain at the forefront in providing security ... The Iraqis would only call for MNF troop re-intervention as a last resort.

“VI. Violent criminality, murders, kidnappings, score-settling and intimidation will remain part of life in southern Iraq. Pressure from national Shia political and religious leaders ... may limit the scope of unrest. But local ISF action, accommodations between the ISF and elements of JAM, and the perception of MNF willingness to intervene will also remain crucial tools for managing instability.”

**822.** The JIC reported that although reliable data for attacks against non-MNF targets was lacking, in Basra City alone there had been about 80 murders and 40 kidnappings. Accounts in the media suggested that Shia milita were increasingly punishing and sometimes killing women for “contravening strict interpretations of Islamic mores”. Around 10 women were reportedly murdered each month in Basra City.

**823.** Mr Brown discussed Iraq with President Bush on 28 February and observed that the situation in Basra had been more difficult in recent weeks, despite an extension of the JAM cease-fire.<sup>401</sup> They discussed the strategies that had worked in the north of Iraq, in particular mobilising grassroots tribal support.

**824.** Mr Brown indicated that he had pressed the Iraqi Government on ratification of the budget and election laws.

**825.** Mr Brown explained that the UK would “in time” be reviewing troop numbers, but would await the next report by Gen Petraeus in April before taking decisions.

**826.** In his weekly report on 29 February, Maj Gen White-Spunner considered that the impact of an extension to the freeze on JAM operations was likely to be a further splintering of JAM.<sup>402</sup> There were reports of a new hardline commander of JAM in Basra, who was expected to take an aggressive stance towards confronting the ISF, though he seemed likely to maintain the freeze by not attacking the MNF.

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<sup>401</sup> Letter Fletcher to Gould, 28 February 2008, ‘Prime Minister’s VTC with Bush, 28 February’.

<sup>402</sup> Minute White-Spunner to CJO, 29 February 2008, ‘GOC MND(SE) Weekly Letter – 21 [sic] February 2008’.

**827.** Mr Browne’s Private Secretary commented that this “presumably shows that JAM want the South for themselves and see us as yesterday’s news and the ISF as the real threat to their hegemony”.<sup>403</sup>

**828.** Maj Gen White-Spunner reported that at the MNF-I Commanders Conference on 23 February, Gen Petraeus had been upbeat about progress across Iraq.<sup>404</sup> While Mosul and the North remained the focus, combating Shia militias and Iranian influence were the long-term challenges. For MND(SE), this would mean an increase in US attention on the South, particularly the borders with Iran in Maysan.

**829.** Maj Gen White-Spunner reported that US planning for drawdown was progressing at great speed, and the redrawing of command boundaries would form part of this work. While he believed that the US and UK were “thinking the same on Dhi Qar and Muthanna” it would be important to engage the US soon in relation to Maysan if the UK considered that the right approach view was to focus its effort on Basra alone.

## March 2008

**830.** In his 3 March weekly report, Lt Gen Rollo wrote that he sensed MNF and Iraqi eyes were increasingly turning to the South and Basra.<sup>405</sup> It was important for the UK to understand the implications for future UK responsibilities there and to “force the pace so that we can more accurately gauge our own contribution to it”. The size of the area for which the UK would be militarily responsible remained a key issue.

**831.** A second key issue was “what we do while we are there”. Lt Gen Rollo saw two aspects: the scale of the contribution and the relationship with the UK’s Iraqi partners. On the scale of contribution he wrote:

“From a Baghdad perspective I have only three points. The first is that the force structure should be able to carry out the tasks agreed between CJO and General Petraeus. The second is that the continued use of force level reductions as the principal metric of success seems increasingly at odds with the reality of Iraq today. The third is that our willingness and ability to deliver genuine non-military effect will also be a factor in US thinking ...

“For most of the last four years, Basra has been, understandably, an economy of force operation. However, with the Iraq Strategy nearing completion, I hope that it will look at our plans for 2008/09 in the context of the wider campaign. I have no doubt that our longer term military focus ought to be on a BMATT [British Military Advisory and Training Team] ... but in the short term we need to get Basra right. If there is unfinished business in Basra, and there is, it is clearly Iraqi business to do

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<sup>403</sup> Manuscript comment Ferguson to Browne on Minute White-Spunner to CJO, 29 February 2008, ‘GOC MND(SE) Weekly Letter – 21 [sic] February 2008’.

<sup>404</sup> Minute White-Spunner to CJO, 29 February 2008, ‘GOC MND(SE) Weekly Letter – 21 [sic] February 2008’.

<sup>405</sup> Minute Rollo to CDS, 3 March 2008, ‘SBMR-I’s Weekly Report (290) 2 Mar 08’.

it. However, it is equally clearly in our interests to see that they do do it, and that our joint efforts are integrated properly within the overall coalition and Iraqi plan. And properly resourcing that plan for the relatively short time that the Basrawis will continue to require and want our help seems the only sensible course of action.”

**832.** Maj Gen Rollo also reported that Gen Mohan had visited Baghdad in early March to present his security strategy for Basra to Ministers and to Gen Petraeus. Gen Petraeus had established a committee, chaired by the commander of MNSTC-I, to look at how this plan might best be supported by MNF. Lt Gen Rollo commented that it would continue to be in the UK’s interests to support Gen Mohan or his successor.

**833.** President Ahmadinejad of Iran visited Baghdad in early March, the first time an Iranian President had done so.<sup>406</sup>

**834.** Lt Gen Rollo commented that, in the short term, the visit had presented another handling challenge for Prime Minister Maliki as Iranian training and funding of terrorist groups was widely known and resented, particularly by the Sunni community.<sup>407</sup> The visit resulted in seven co-operation agreements between Iran and Iraq on trade, transport, insurance and industry.

**835.** On 4 March, JAM1 was arrested by US forces in Baghdad.<sup>408</sup> Officials reported the following day that Maj Gen White-Spunner had raised the issue with Gen Petraeus, explaining that the UK had difficulty with JAM1’s detention, to which Gen Petraeus replied “Release him now.”

**836.** Lt Gen Houghton briefed the Chiefs of Staff on 4 March that an Iraqi Vice President had vetoed the Provincial Powers Law “on constitutional grounds” and that “the possibility of a delay to the Provincial Elections timetable now existed”.<sup>409</sup>

**837.** Reporting on the detail of General Mohan’s security strategy on 6 March, Maj Gen White-Spunner commented that although MND(SE) supported the bid for extra resources for Basra in order to “over face” JAM:

“We would not support Mohan developing this strategy into the prosecution of a major urban battle for which he would need more IA troops than are likely to be forthcoming given other coalition/ISF priorities ...”<sup>410</sup>

**838.** Mr Brown and Mr Browne had breakfast with the Chiefs of Staff on 6 March.<sup>411</sup> On Iraq, the Chiefs told them that “there was quality in the ISF but it was not broadening as rapidly as hoped, so training and mentoring of 14 Div remained a vital job”. The

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<sup>406</sup> *BBC News*, 2 March 2008, *Iran leader in landmark Iraq trip*.

<sup>407</sup> Minute Rollo to CDS, 3 March 2008, ‘SBMR-I’s Weekly Report (290) 2 Mar 08’.

<sup>408</sup> Email government official working closely with the military, 5 March 2008, ‘Detention of [JAM1] [...] by US [...]’.

<sup>409</sup> Minutes, 4 March 2008, Chiefs of Staff meeting.

<sup>410</sup> Minute White-Spunner to CJO, 6 March 2008, ‘GOC MND(SE) Weekly Letter – 6 March 2008’.

<sup>411</sup> Letter Fletcher to Rimmer, 6 March 2008, ‘Prime Minister’s Breakfast with Chiefs of Staff, 6 March’.

extension of the JAM cease-fire was positive while it lasted, but provincial elections were essential. Training of the Iraqi Navy would take at least until 2010.

**839.** On 7 March, Mr Day provided advice to Mr Browne's Assistant Private Secretary on media handling of the "accommodation" with JAM, specifically whether the MOD should brief the media proactively.<sup>412</sup> He explained that the advice had been requested by Mr Browne following a *Financial Times* article in February.

**840.** Mr Day recommended that Mr Browne should agree that the concerns of PJHQ and others were "sufficiently compelling" to justify maintaining "our present defensive posture on this issue".

**841.** Mr Day wrote that there was a risk that further details of the story would emerge and suggested that the advantage of a proactive briefing would be to allow the UK:

"... to explain the rationale and benefits to the UK of the accommodation and set out the facts of the case accurately rather than allowing stories based on between-cell whispers to stand unchallenged. Most journalists regard the basic principle of reconciliation as nothing new and any 'deal' that has been struck as a sensible step."

**842.** On the other hand, there was a concern about the risk to JAM1 personally, and "that disclosure would pose a risk to the accommodation itself, including the political process in Basra, and could lead to increased IDF attacks". They were therefore opposed to "proactive briefing of any kind in current circumstances":

"Presentationally, there is a risk that the recent rise in IDF attacks on the COB, and last weekend's fatality, would call into question the long-term benefit to the UK of the accommodation, and generate unhelpful debate over the partial truce at a time when the political situation in Basra remains finely balanced ... It is also possible, given that we invoked DA [Defence Advisory] Notice procedures with the FT, that we could be accused of publicising those details that suit us while suppressing those that do not."

**843.** Mr Day concluded:

"It will come out in more detail eventually, and we will need at that stage to put our case quickly and strongly. I have asked PJHQ and DJC [Directorate of Joint Commitments] to review our lines accordingly. SofS may also wish to consider briefing the Opposition on Privy Council terms."

**844.** Lieutenant General Lloyd Austin, who had succeeded Lt Gen Odierno as Commanding General MNC-I, visited Basra on 8 March and shared his concerns about Gen Mohan's plan.<sup>413</sup>

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<sup>412</sup> Minute Day to APS/Secretary of State [MOD], 7 March 2008, 'Accommodation with Jaish Al Mahdi – Media Handling'.

<sup>413</sup> Minute White-Spinner to CJO, 13 March 2008, 'GOC MND(SE) Weekly Letter – 13 March 2008'.

**845.** Maj Gen White-Spunner observed that Gen Mohan had “laid it on thick when he presented his plan in Baghdad, so I had to explain to Lt Gen Austin that Mohan was feeding an Iraqi political demand when he talked about the forthcoming ‘battle for Basra’.”

**846.** Maj Gen White-Spunner explained that MND(SE)’s objective was to assist in building up the Iraqi Army so that they could win a psychological and political battle without the need for violence. Lt Gen Austin was reported to be reassured and said that he did not have the troops to open up a second front in the South while still dealing with the North.

**847.** Lt Gen Rollo discussed the US SOFA plans with Ambassador Satterfield on 9 March.<sup>414</sup> He reported that the US had shared drafts of the Strategic Framework Agreement/Status of Forces Agreement with the Iraqi Government and, as a result, recognised that compromises would be needed. Drafts would be shown to the UK the following week, and the UK would be consulted on emerging US thinking on possible compromises, although Ambassador Satterfield recognised that the UK had not yet settled its legal position “and he observed that that would be driven by our political position”.

**848.** On 11 March, Lt Gen Houghton briefed the Chiefs of Staff that Gen Mohan’s plan:

“... included three phases, with the first (preparation) involving the building of further ISF capability in terms of personnel numbers and equipment in Basra. Phase 2 (disarmament) would require PM to declare Basra as a ‘weapons free zone’ with incentives being provided for a voluntary handover of weapons: this phase would have a specific end date (possibly 1 June 08) after which Phase 3 (confrontation) would be entered. Phase 3 would consist of search and strike missions aimed at confronting those who were not reconciled.”<sup>415</sup>

**849.** ACM Stirrup visited Iraq from 14 to 17 March, travelling to both Baghdad and Basra.<sup>416</sup> ACM Stirrup underlined to Maj Gen Binns, that “both a fully functioning airport and a capable and credible 14 (IA) Div [14th Division of the Iraqi Army] were pre-requisites for a UK withdrawal”. They agreed that both were achievable by the end of 2008.

**850.** ACM Stirrup and Mr Jones agreed that “the continuing military presence in the COB would hinder local economic development and perpetuate attacks”. In discussion with senior members of the US military, ACM Stirrup “noted with disquiet the current US plan earmarks the UK remaining in Tactical Overwatch in perpetuity”. This expectation would need to be “realigned and managed as potentially divergent UK plans unfold”.

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<sup>414</sup> Minute Rollo to CDS, 10 March 2008, ‘SBMR-I’s Weekly Report (291) 10 Mar 08’.

<sup>415</sup> Minutes, 11 March 2008, Chiefs of Staff meeting.

<sup>416</sup> Minute Kyd to PS/SofS [MOD], 17 March 2008, ‘CDS visit to Iraq 14-17 Mar 07 [sic]’.

**851.** Reporting on the visit, Lt Gen Rollo recorded that Gen Petraeus confirmed that he had given direction that the MND boundaries should remain as they were, and made clear that he had no difficulty with a US brigade coming under the command of MND(SE).<sup>417</sup>

**852.** In Basra, ACM Stirrup and Gen Petraeus had agreed that once Gen Mohan had committed to his plan “he must not be allowed to fail”.

**853.** Lt Gen Rollo observed that, “2009 was barely discussed in any of the discussions over the last week”. He continued:

“... it is becoming increasingly apparent to me that there are risks in not taking decisions ... on our posture in Basra. Quite apart from the potential to confuse our allies, getting things done in Iraq requires commitment, which is harder to deliver in an atmosphere of unsettling uncertainty. There remains plenty to do. So while I accept that it might be necessary to defer decisions for a while, the opportunity cost of that approach needs to be clearly understood.”

**854.** In mid-March, Mr Browne visited Iraq with Mr Wareing.<sup>418</sup> After returning to the UK, Mr Browne wrote that:

“The overall mood in Iraq is optimistic, reflecting the improved security situation, political progress and the new focus on economic regeneration to which Michael [Wareing] is contributing. Inevitably in Iraq, the pace of change is lower than we would wish and no-one believes it is irreversible, but we have an opportunity over the next year or so to contribute to a step-change in the country’s economy and to put our bilateral relationship onto a sustainable long-term footing. That does, however, mean we need to redouble our efforts now ... to exploit the progress we have already made.”

**855.** Mr Browne reported that Gen Mohan’s plans to “confront and face down Basra’s militia later in the year” were supported by the Iraqi Government and Gen Petraeus. The visit had also confirmed Mr Browne’s view that “the rate of reduction [of troop numbers] should be slower than we envisaged last autumn, to deal with current threats and to support this [sic] Iraqis through until after the elections”.

**856.** In Baghdad, Mr Browne judged the main focus of activity to be negotiation of the Long Term Security Agreement. He observed:

“Given our different legal systems, the LTSA may not be sufficient for our requirements and, despite our best efforts, the US chose to table their draft with the Iraqis before discussing it with us ... I intend to send a team of our own to Baghdad shortly to start formal discussions, in concert with the US if possible, on a Status

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<sup>417</sup> Minute Rollo to CDS, 17 March 2008, ‘SBMR-I’s Weekly Report (292) 17 Mar 08’.

<sup>418</sup> Letter Browne to Brown, 18 March 2008, ‘Visit to Iraq and Kuwait’.

of Forces Agreement to meet our military and legal requirements from the end of this year.”

**857.** Maj Gen White-Spunner reported on 20 March that Basra had been “quite tense” that week, with “spasmodic violence between the ISF and JAM, including the assassination of senior police officers”.<sup>419</sup> He considered that JAM knew that Gen Mohan’s plan was gaining acceptance, and might be starting to act while they felt they still had the initiative. MND(SE) was focusing its efforts on developing Gen Mohan’s plans with him and “ensuring they are workable, not unduly kinetic”.

**858.** Brigadier Julian Free, Commander of the 4th Mechanised Brigade and Deputy Commander Operations, attended the first meeting of the joint MNF/Iraqi Government committee in Baghdad that was considering how best to support Gen Mohan’s security plan for Basra. Maj Gen White-Spunner described it as “a useful first meeting that has set the parameters and identified who was responsible for informing the key decisions that would determine how fast General Mohan’s plan can be enacted”.

**859.** Maj Gen White-Spunner reported that he had briefed Gen Keane in similar terms as Lt Gen Austin when he visited on 17 March, “emphasising that we believe General Mohan does not want to open up a major kinetic front in Basra”.

**860.** Mr Prentice told the Inquiry that Prime Minister Maliki had been:

“... hearing exaggerated reports in early 2008 about the deterioration in local security. There were some assassinations of people of consequence to him ... if he had a long-term vision it was that his political pitch in any national elections would have to be based on him having asserted the strong hand of government.”<sup>420</sup>

**861.** As a result, Mr Prentice told the Inquiry that when Prime Minister Maliki was briefed on Gen Mohan’s plan “he said ‘it’s too slow, too late’” as he “clearly wanted to have asserted his authority across the South in time for the provincial elections”.<sup>421</sup>

**862.** Lieutenant General John Cooper, who had succeeded Lt Gen Rollo as SBMR-I on 23 March, reported two days into his tour that:

“The week’s most notable development ... has been Prime Minister Maliki’s trip down to Basra and his apparent replacement of Mohan as the commander of Basra Operations Command. Exactly what prompted this remains subject to speculation. I am told Maliki has for some time had concerns about ... [the Basra ISF’s] alleged deal-making and (arguably prudent) unwillingness to take action early against the militias ...

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<sup>419</sup> Minute White-Spunner to CJO, 20 March 2008, ‘GOC MND(SE) Weekly Letter – 20 March 2008’.

<sup>420</sup> Private hearing, 15 June 2010, pages 33-34.

<sup>421</sup> Private hearing, 15 June 2010, page 34.

“Even on Friday evening when I listened to Mohan brief his Basra plan to Petraeus and Iraqi Ministers and senior officers, it was assumed that he would be the one to implement it ... By Saturday, however, Maliki was suggesting that the situation in Basra had degenerated to such an extent that he would need to go there with additional forces; by MCNS on Sunday he was talking of taking two IA battalions ... and a brigade of National Police ... with him. In the margins of the meeting it was being suggested that Major General Aziz (Deputy Commander of 11th IA Div) would replace Mohan ...”<sup>422</sup>

**863.** Lt Gen Cooper also reported that Vice President Mehdi lifted his veto of the Provincial Powers Law following “considerable US pressure, including from Vice President Cheney”.

**864.** Government officials working closely with the military reported on 24 March that the OMS was considering breaking off the truce in Basra in 24 hours’ time as a reaction to Prime Minister Maliki’s presence in Basra.<sup>423</sup>

**865.** On Tuesday 25 March, Prime Minister Maliki began his operation in Basra.<sup>424</sup>

**866.** It triggered heavy fighting between the ISF and militias in Basra and outbreaks of violence elsewhere in Iraq.<sup>425</sup>

**867.** On Wednesday 26 March, Prime Minister Maliki offered the militias a 72-hour period in which to hand over their weapons and sign a pledge to renounce violence. By the following day, the UK assessed that there had been almost no take-up.

**868.** Mr Prentice reported to the FCO in London on 27 March that Ambassador Crocker was surprised by Prime Minister Maliki’s decision and had “expected a Basra operation to come later on the agenda”.<sup>426</sup>

**869.** Lt Gen Cooper told the Inquiry that, in his testimony to Congress, Gen Petraeus “made it very clear that the coalition was taken by surprise by Prime Minister Maliki’s decision to go south”.<sup>427</sup> Once announced, Lt Gen Cooper reported Gen Petraeus’ view as: “this is an Iraqi operation. It clearly can’t be allowed to fail.”

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<sup>422</sup> Minute Cooper to CDS, 25 March 2008, ‘SBMR-I’s weekly report (293) 25 Mar 08’.

<sup>423</sup> Email government official working closely with the military, 24 March 2008, ‘[...] Threat to Truce between MND(SE) and JAM in Basrah’.

<sup>424</sup> *BBC News*, 25 March 2008, *Basra’s gun rule risks Iraq future*.

<sup>425</sup> Briefing [unattributed], 27 March 2008, ‘The Current Security Situation in Basra’.

<sup>426</sup> eGram11590/08 Baghdad to FCO London, 27 March 2008, ‘Iraq: Meetings with US Ambassador and UNSRSG, 27 March’.

<sup>427</sup> Public hearing, 15 December 2009, page 75.

**870.** In a speech at the National Museum of the US Air Force in Ohio on 27 March, President Bush said:

“Prime Minister Maliki’s bold decision – and it was a bold decision – to go after the illegal groups in Basra shows his leadership, and his commitment to enforce the law in an even-handed manner.”<sup>428</sup>

**871.** On 27 March, Brig Free reported to Lt Gen Houghton on an “unexpectedly busy week” in Basra.<sup>429</sup> Gen Mohan had returned to Baghdad to present his three-phase security plan for Basra to the Basra Planning Conference, chaired by Dr Rubaie and Gen Petraeus, on 22 March. The following day, the plan was presented to Prime Minister Maliki at the MCNS, and he decided, “based on a separate assessment of the security situation, that pre-emptive action was necessary and directed that additional troops should deploy to Basra immediately”.

**872.** Lt Gen Cooper told the Inquiry that Prime Minister Maliki “got up and flew to Basra the next day, and then Charge of the Knights emerged”.<sup>430</sup>

**873.** Mr Prentice reported that Prime Minister Maliki was taking a “tough line” with the Sadrists, refusing to speak directly to Muqtada al-Sadr and delegating contact to his advisers.<sup>431</sup> The Iraqi Government’s message to the Sadrists was:

- Surrender weapons (within 72 hours).
- Step aside and allow the ISF to take out/arrest the ‘outlaws’/Special Groups.
- Respect the law and stick to politics.”

**874.** Mr Prentice reported that “so far, the Sadrist response has been uncompromising”. Muqtada al-Sadr had demanded that:

- the ISF stop all operations against JAM in Basra;
- those detained so far should be released;
- Prime Minister Maliki leave Basra to meet him; and
- an apology be issued for the Basra operation.

**875.** Mr Prentice advised:

“There is increasing need for a formal UK public response to the Basra operation in order to manage US perceptions as well as Iraqi public and GoI attitudes. There has been contact with MODUK about this and we are in touch with Iraq Group. So far,

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<sup>428</sup> George W Bush, 27 March 2008, ‘More on Iraq: Address at the National Museum of the United States Air Force’.

<sup>429</sup> Minute Free to CJO, 27 March 2008, ‘MND(SE) Weekly Letter – 27 March 2008’.

<sup>430</sup> Public hearing, 15 December 2009, page 76.

<sup>431</sup> eGram 11590/08 Baghdad to FCO London, 27 March 2008, ‘Iraq: Meetings with US Ambassador and UNSRSG, 27 March’.

I have only spoken briefly on local Arabic TV on the first day of the operation and confirmed our confidence in the GoI's efforts to sustain the rule of law in Basra."

**876.** A briefing note of the same date, seen by Mr Brown, reported that poor intelligence and bad planning led to changes in the objectives of the operation immediately before it began.<sup>432</sup>

**877.** By 27 March, the Iraqi Special Forces had failed to take any of their targets and suffered a number of casualties before retreating. UK forces were on standby to provide "emergency support" but were not deployed. The militias remained "in control of the majority of the city" and attacks on the Basra Operational Command, where Gen Mohan and Gen Jalil were based, were described as "intense". There were rumours that the Iraqi authorities had entered into discussions with the militia groups but Prime Minister Maliki was reportedly "determined not to do a deal".

**878.** Reports suggested that the majority of the local population supported the efforts by the Iraqi Government to assert its authority over the city, although "it remains to be seen how long this will endure if the fighting continues". The two particular areas of concern for MND(SE) were the announcement by the UN Refugee Agency that it was suspending activities in southern Iraq; and secondly, the fact that the number of locally employed civilian staff turning up to work at Basra Air Station had, understandably, been reduced dramatically.

**879.** The briefing note reported that the UK had "given considerable support to the Iraqis" including air support, food, medical and logistical support. But "kinetic" support had "necessarily been limited on occasion as requests have fallen beyond what our rules of engagement allow". The Iraqis were reported to be frustrated at this "lukewarm" support, and the US was concerned:

"General Petraeus is reportedly of the view that the UK has not been sufficiently positive in supporting the Iraqi operation in the media. Moreover, it has also been reported that Washington has been briefed that the UK has refused to provide ground support of the Iraqis (when as far as we can judge the only two requests for such support were rejected by General Austin). We believe this perception has largely been corrected, but the fact that it seems to have got to a very high level in the US system very quickly perhaps reflects the degree of concern in the US system at the way events are unfolding."

**880.** Brig Free visited the Basra Operational Command on 27 March to discuss UK support for the Iraqi operation with the Minister for Defence and Gen Mohan, and later visited Prime Minister Maliki with Lt Gen Austin at Basra Palace.<sup>433</sup>

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<sup>432</sup> Briefing [unattributed], 27 March 2008, 'The Current Security Situation in Basra'.

<sup>433</sup> Minute Free to CJO, 27 March 2008, 'MND(SE) Weekly Letter – 27 March 2008'.

**881.** Lt Gen Austin asked him to sit out of the meeting “as things were a little sensitive between the PM [Maliki] and the UK”. Brig Free was clear that that was the right call: Prime Minister Maliki had made it “abundantly clear that he will not meet with a British officer ... he sees us as responsible for releasing the very criminals responsible for destabilising Basra, the ones he is now having to deal with”.

**882.** Mr Brown’s Private Secretary gave him an update on developments on 28 March, reporting that neither side had yet achieved a decisive advantage and it was looking increasingly likely that a stalemate would develop.<sup>434</sup> The deadline for Prime Minister Maliki’s disarmament ultimatum had been extended to 8 April, but the best outcome was likely to be “some form of fudge through which both sides can claim victory”. Publicly, Prime Minister Maliki remained committed to defeating JAM.

**883.** The Private Secretary told Mr Brown that the next step was for him to speak to Prime Minister Maliki “to register our concern at lack of consultation in advance of the operation; and to offer further UK assistance”. Mr Browne would update Parliament following the outcome of NSID’s discussion of troop levels.

**884.** A report from the British Embassy Office Basra on 28 March suggested that “the current assessment is that the fighting is likely to be protracted”.<sup>435</sup> The perception remained that the operation was targeted against JAM in general and not the criminal elements, which was “causing militia groups and Basra JAM to unite”.

**885.** Maj Gen White-Spunner returned to Basra on Friday 28 March and spoke by telephone to Governor Waili who reported that he had been present at a meeting that included Prime Minister Maliki and OMS representatives.<sup>436</sup> Prime Minister Maliki had been persuaded to attend only on the basis that “he would not negotiate but only listen to what OMS had to say”. OMS agreed to consider the Iraqi Government’s suggestions that militia should hand over medium/heavy weapons and that senior leaders should hand themselves in.

**886.** Prime Minister Maliki made a statement on Iraqi television on 29 March. He said that he was trying to build a state governed by law and order and accused ex-Ba’athists and people with “influences from across the border” of not wishing stability for Iraq. He said that he had come to Basra to remove “gangs and thugs” – as long as such people were around there could be no future – and reiterated his intention to stay in Basra “until all had subjected themselves to the rule of law”.

**887.** There were reports in the Iraqi media that more than 100 police officers had been sacked in Basra, apparently for losing their weapons and/or abandoning their posts during the recent clashes.

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<sup>434</sup> Minute Turner to Prime Minister, 28 March 2008, ‘Basra’.

<sup>435</sup> eGram 11870/08 Basra to FCO London, 28 March 2008, ‘Basra – Update 27/28 March 2008’.

<sup>436</sup> eGram 11975/08 Basra to FCO London, 29 March 2008, ‘Basra – Update – 29 March’.

**888.** By 1300 on 29 March, the Director of Joint Commitments (DJC) reported to Mr Browne’s Assistant Private Secretary that he considered “little tangible success has been achieved by either side, and sustained conflict looks set to continue”.<sup>437</sup> There had been a 24-hour relative lull in activity, possibly due to Friday prayers and a pause in ISF operations.

**889.** The DJC’s report said that a Deputy Commanding General of MNC-I, plus a Command and Control cell, planners, analytical support and intelligence capability had arrived at the COB, from which seven US Apache helicopters were also operating. More US forces, including a tactical HQ and an infantry company were on their way and US Central Command had “instructed planning to examine the feasibility of diverting additional US troops to MND(SE) should there be a requirement”.

**890.** MND(SE)’s planning “focused on the requirement for UK military effort to enhance the capacity of the ISF, whilst attempting to provide a ‘Bridging Concept’ for Basra from the current confrontation to the Mohan’s [sic] original, more-considered Basra Security Plan.”

**891.** On 29 March, Mr Prentice reported that, in an emergency meeting of the Executive Steering Committee (ESC) (usually focused on supporting Fardh al-Qanoon), Gen Petraeus described the situation in Basra as “confused and quite difficult”.<sup>438</sup> The military objectives that the Iraqi Government had set itself were more expansive than the MNF had expected and Gen Petraeus warned that they “would not be able to achieve their wider publicly stated objectives of gaining total control of Basra”.

**892.** Mr Prentice reported that Ambassador Crocker had described Basra to the ESC as critical for the Iraqi Government and for the future of Iraq: it was important that all Iraqis came together. He also raised the idea of an “economic initiative for Basra”. The proposal, as Mr Prentice understood it, was less of an economic initiative and more a disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration exercise. Mr Prentice reported that DFID had some concerns about the proposals and he could not see how it would be feasible in the absence of a political settlement in Basra. He commented:

“If the idea becomes unstoppable, some obvious challenges to implementing it successfully will be:

- ensuring Basra has the capacity to manage this level of resources ...
- managing the fiduciary risk, and trying to ensure the scheme achieves long term impact and sustainability;
- ensuring that the initiative adheres to the ‘do no harm’ principle, safeguarding the advances made in provincial authority planning and delivery capacity.”

<sup>437</sup> Minute DJC to SofS/APS4 [MOD], 29 March 2008, ‘Basra: MOD update’.

<sup>438</sup> eGram 11998/08 Baghdad to FCO London, 30 March 2008, ‘Iraq: Emergency Meeting of Executive Steering Committee (ESC), 29 March’.

**893.** In the margins of the ESC, Mr Prentice spoke to Dr Rubaie who told him that Prime Minister Maliki “had been led by others around him into an exaggerated sense of the urgency and a radical underestimation of the challenges” in Basra.<sup>439</sup>

**894.** In response to an email providing an account of discussions in the margins of the ESC, Mr Brown commented early on the morning of 30 March:

“Need to be clear of

(a) build up of local military and police strength – how big is it and how will it grow?

(b) conditions in which we would intervene.”<sup>440</sup>

**895.** Mr Brown’s Private Secretary replied that “a kinetic action would be triggered by a request from the Iraqis or Petraeus. Commanders on the ground have delegated authority to take realtime decisions”.<sup>441</sup> The most likely scenario would be for UK forces to support Iraqi units with a Quick Reaction Force, which ACM Stirrup had authorised for use if needed. The Private Secretary undertook to pass on to Mr Browne the message that there should be no specific announcements about UK troop numbers, given the current situation in Basra.

**896.** The same Private Secretary provided a further update on the situation in Basra to Mr Brown later that morning.<sup>442</sup>

**897.** In response, Mr Brown asked the Private Secretary to “summarise options now available to us”.<sup>443</sup>

**898.** The Private Secretary replied, “the short version is that our options are limited” and commented that Mr Miliband and Mr Browne were likely to conclude:

“... that it makes it more important that we accelerate drawdown of UK troops once we are through the current crisis. The challenge for the next month is to judge how to pitch this to Bush, how to create the conditions to show that it is from a position of strength, and how to manage the presentation in a way that does not make the wider US effort more difficult.”<sup>444</sup>

**899.** On Sunday 30 March, the British Embassy Office Basra reported that the overall situation in Basra was unchanged.<sup>445</sup> Neither the militia nor the ISF had made gains but “ISF continue to show no sign of coherent planning, and troop morale remains low”.

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<sup>439</sup> eGram 11977/08 Baghdad to FCO London, 29 March 2008, ‘Baghdad: Update on Security Events and Political Implications’.

<sup>440</sup> Email Brown to Fletcher, 30 March 2008, [untitled].

<sup>441</sup> Email Fletcher to Brown, 30 March 2008, [untitled].

<sup>442</sup> Email Fletcher to Brown, 30 March 2008, ‘Re: Basra Latest’.

<sup>443</sup> Email Brown to Fletcher, 30 March 2008, ‘Re: Basra Latest’.

<sup>444</sup> Email Fletcher to Brown, 30 March 2008, ‘Re: Basra Latest’.

<sup>445</sup> eGram 12015/08 Basra to FCO London, 30 March 2008, ‘Basra – Update 30 March’.

**900.** The following day, the British Embassy Baghdad reported that Muqtada al-Sadr had issued a statement calling for a cease-fire, which:

- called for an end to armed demonstrations and to “illegal arrests” and for the return of those who were displaced because of the violence;
- appealed to the Iraqi Government to give a general pardon to and to release all those held in detention, particularly those from the Sadrist Trend;
- disowned all who owned weapons and used them to target government buildings and institutions;
- confirmed that the Sadrist Trend did not possess heavy weapons; and
- made a commitment to co-operation with the Iraqi Government and institutions in establishing law and order and working to restore public services.<sup>446</sup>

**901.** The Embassy reported that the Iraqi Government had welcomed al-Sadr’s statement and reiterated that it was not attacking any specific group or party, but only those who were breaking the law. Prime Minister Maliki had told Dr Rubaie that he intended to remain in Basra for a further two or three days to complete “cleansing operations” there. There would be two further unspecified security operations: one in a port area and the other in a district in Basra.

**902.** Questions were asked at the MCNS meeting that evening about the reports of police desertions in Baghdad and allegations of poor co-operation between the police and army. The representative of the Ministry of Interior told the Council that “only 10 percent of the national Police had proven ineffective” and that more than 400 police had been dismissed in Basra in recent days for “disloyalty”.

**903.** Mr Prentice commented to the FCO:

“If the JAM cease-fire proves to be real, the Gol will need to move quickly in lifting the curfew and returning life ... [in] Baghdad ... to normal asap ... The response of the Special Groups to both MaS’ [Muqtada al-Sadr’s] public cease-fire and Iran’s encouragement for some kind of truce, will be important in allowing normality to return quickly ... There is still a long way to go in Basra, both in shaping a workable military plan and framing the political settlement.”

**904.** In a telegram to London issued late on 30 March, Mr Prentice considered the possible outcomes to the situation in Basra, their likely result and options for the UK’s response.<sup>447</sup> In his view, the worst case scenario would involve the ISF collapsing in Basra and the MNF being forced to come to their assistance. JAM would see this as a victory and Prime Minister Maliki’s credibility would be damaged.

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<sup>446</sup> eGram 12023/08 Baghdad to FCO London, 31 March 2008, ‘Iraq: Baghdad: Security and Political Update, Sunday 30 March’.

<sup>447</sup> eGram 12020/08 Baghdad to FCO London, 30 March 2008, ‘Iraq: Whither?’

**905.** In the best case scenario, the ISF would be able to achieve its military and security objectives in Basra (possibly with MNF help), allowing Prime Minister Maliki to return to Baghdad with a “success” and able to act in a way that was seen by others (particularly the Sunni) as inclusive.

**906.** Mr Prentice thought that neither of these extreme scenarios was likely – and the most likely outcome would be something in between. He continued:

“The new Iraq has survived since 2003 through expediency. Their politicians and criminals are all capable of moving from violence to dialogue and back again with little pause. In this case, despite Maliki’s ... rhetoric about fighting JAM to the bitter end, there will be a limit to Shia tolerance for such internecine strife. Already ... a compromise seems to be emerging.

“Other politicians have had a major scare and, including even the Sadrist mainstream, will have had an object lesson in why all factions need to put aside their criminal wings. The tectonic plates of central Iraqi politics have shifted and all factions are assessing the opportunities they may have after the immediate security crisis passes. Until now, Maliki has not been aware of the weakness of his position. The rude awakening ... which he will receive on return to Baghdad may prompt him to be more inclusive (and therefore more successful) as PM. There is also a real possibility that the UIA will splinter as a result of the pressure his operation has produced and as elections approach across the South. It is too early to draw up the order of winners and losers but the prospect is of complex politicking and a range of pragmatic compromises.

“We should hope that Sadrist and other politicians will see opportunity in exploiting the aftermath to return to government. In the case of the Sadrists, this will require them getting the message convincingly from other factions that they recognise Sadrist as an essential constituent of Iraqi politics. To achieve this, the compromise yet to be worked out over Basra will have to have some plausible element of discipline by the Sadrists on their violent fringe. The compromise cannot be a thinly disguised climb-down in the face of JAM violence.”

**907.** Considering how the UK could best support the outcome, Mr Prentice suggested that the main areas for UK activity should be:

- encouraging Prime Minister Maliki to “draw the right lessons”, seeking to persuade him that (contrary to his historic suspicions about the UK) the UK had always supported him and wanted to “put this chapter behind us”; helping him realise that he had been the victim of “catastrophic advice and false intelligence” which nearly led to his humiliation; and persuading him that the success of his government required dismissal of those responsible;
- encouraging the Iraqi Government to act against all militias, not just JAM;

- emphasising to the Sadrists that a choice finally had to be made between building state institutions and pursuing factional influence through criminality;
- continuing to underline with political contacts the importance of supporting Prime Minister Maliki; and
- persuading the US to temper their public message to avoid giving fuel to the Sadrists' public accusations that Prime Minister Maliki was a US lackey.

**908.** Mr Prentice concluded:

“Despite the fevered talk ... that the State is in peril, state institutions are not about to disappear, even in the worst case. We are not about to see JAM in the palace ...

“The political deal in Basra will be a precedent for the rest of the South. Whatever the scale of concessions to JAM inherent in the eventual political compromise reached in Basra with the Sadrists, it will set the standard for handling the JAM challenge in other provinces. The wider public will also draw lessons about the risk of standing out locally against the militia ... Our aim must be to settle the country back into the recent slow grind of normal Iraqi politics. Some of the new dynamics released by events in Basra may in the end prove positive and help to build on recent political progress. But, immediately, there are still serious challenges in Basra.”

**909.** On the evening of 31 March, Mr Brown's Private Secretary told him that:

“The US agree that the most likely outcome in Basra is stalemate. The Iraqi Security Forces can't muster what is needed for a clear and hold operation. Maliki will be weakened.”<sup>448</sup>

**910.** The same Private Secretary also reported that Muqtada al-Sadr had made a further statement calling for an end to arrests, detainee releases, a pardon for JAM members, the punishment of those responsible for the death of Sadrists and for Prime Minister Maliki to leave Basra province. He added:

“Given the improvement on the ground, it may make most sense to focus tomorrow's meeting on the longer term strategy, while drawing lessons from the last few days ...”

**911.** In his second weekly report as SBMR-I, Lt Gen Cooper reflected on the impact that the recent events in Basra had had on key relationships within Iraq.<sup>449</sup>

“The US's relationship with Maliki has been damaged ... because of the surprise nature of the expedition ...

“US-UK relationships are polite but bruised. Suspicions about the Accommodation with JAM in Basra are not far below the surface. Those that were part of the

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<sup>448</sup> Email Fletcher to Brown, 31 March 2008, 'Iraq Update'.

<sup>449</sup> Minute Cooper to CDS, 31 March 2008, 'SBMR-I's Weekly Report (294) 31 Mar 08'.

process understand the history, but the others who have been dragged in are less understanding. The existing UK military posture and lack of situational awareness due to having no ground troops in the city gave the perception that JAM had been allowed free rein. That said ... Lt Gen Austin told me that he was impressed by all he saw of MND(SE) when he visited ...

“The UK-Iraqi relationship is damaged. Various ... reports have highlighted Maliki’s ... outburst against the UK. Maliki blames us for the situation in Basra and perceived failure to support his forces. The fault lay largely with Iraqi lack of planning and a poor command performance, but what is clear is that post this event, UK-Iraqi relations will need some repair if we are to continue to make a contribution whilst in Basra. We do not know how this will turn out in the next days and weeks, but we should focus on shaping the future as best as possible.”

**912.** In preparation for a meeting of NSID(OD) on 1 April, to consider the UK’s “continuing role in Basra in 2008/2009, and the timelines and considerations for taking decisions on force level options”, attendees were supplied with three papers.<sup>450</sup> They were a short-term strategy paper, a draft of a planned statement to Parliament by Mr Browne and a letter from Mr Alexander on economic progress.

**913.** A Cabinet Office ‘Chair’s Brief’ for Mr Brown identified five objectives for the meeting:

- agreeing the terms of Mr Browne’s statement to Parliament that afternoon;
- beginning discussions – to be continued once the situation in Basra was clearer – on future force levels in Iraq;
- considering “how best to sensitise US interlocutors to the possibility of a more rapid UK military withdrawal than they would wish for, while recognising the need to maintain our long term close relationship with the US”;
- securing agreement to officials engaging more actively in the US negotiations with the Iraqis on legal cover for MNF in Iraq once resolution 1790 expired; and
- reviewing progress on political and economic initiatives in Iraq, ahead of a more substantive discussion in NSID(OD) in May.<sup>451</sup>

**914.** In a separate paper sent to all attendees, Cabinet Office officials recommended that Ministers agree that:

- Mr Browne should announce to Parliament that UK troop levels would remain at current levels (4,100 in southern Iraq) until the situation became clearer;
- no decision on the longer-term posture should be taken in the immediate future, but consideration should be given to “how best to sensitise US interlocutors

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<sup>450</sup> [Paper Cabinet Office, 31 March 2008, ‘Iraq’.](#)

<sup>451</sup> Minute Cabinet Office [junior officials] to Prime Minister, 31 March 2008, ‘NSID(OD) Meeting on Iraq and Afghanistan: 1 April 13:30 – Chair’s Brief’.

to the possibility of a more rapid UK military withdrawal than they would wish for, while recognising the need to maintain our long term close relationship with the US”;

- if the UK was likely to have a military presence in Iraq in 2009, officials should insert themselves into US negotiations with the Iraqis to secure adequate legal cover post-resolution; and
- notwithstanding the plans for a military drawdown, the UK should maintain areas of political and economic engagement “where we could continue to add value in order to maintain our reputation and relations with the Government of Iraq, as well as with the US”.<sup>452</sup>

**915.** The FCO short-term strategy paper looked at the options for drawing down UK troops in Iraq; the civilian and military tasks that the UK could continue to undertake; and assessed the impact of a diminishing UK contribution on the UK’s reputation.<sup>453</sup>

The FCO identified options for military withdrawal as:

- Withdraw by May 2009: “do the benefits of leaving early (less risk to life, cutting our losses in an environment where it is proving difficult to achieve objectives) balance the risk of serious damage to our global reputation (including accusations that after five years in Iraq the UK mission had failed) and to our relationship with the new US President?”
- Withdraw in late 2009, but no announcement of a decision until the new US Administration was in office: “should we maintain the costs of staying (financially/in asset resource terms, risk to life, political risk (including over legal basis), risks posed by increasing insecurity in Basra) into 2009 in order to protect the UK’s reputation and relationship with the new US Administration?”
- Withdraw in late 2009, but release Basra Air Station for economic development by the Iraqis earlier and move a “smaller transitional force” to the Iraqi Army base at Shaibah: “does reconfiguring our forces in this way enable us to withdraw forces from Iraq by the end of 09 in a more effective way? Can civilian effect, including delivery on the Prime Minister’s Economic Initiatives, be delivered during 09 if UK forces reconfigure in this way? Would the extra costs of developing Shaibah [Logistics Base] be justified?”
- Stay on indefinitely, with around 3,000 troops at Basra Air Station, in order to provide continued support for the ISF, a secure platform for political and economic work and “to protect the UK’s relationship with the new US President”: “do the costs of remaining (financially/in asset resource terms, risk to life, political risk) without a timeframe for withdrawal balance the benefits we would gain from a continued presence (possible political, security, economic progress; reputational (staying the course); better relations with the new President)?”

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<sup>452</sup> [Paper Cabinet Office, 31 March 2008, ‘Iraq’.](#)

<sup>453</sup> [Paper FCO, March 2008, ‘Iraq: The Short Term’.](#)

**916.** Beyond comments about how to evaluate each option – as set out above – the paper made no recommendation on troop withdrawals. It set out a number of areas in which the UK could continue to contribute in the absence of a significant military presence in Basra, evaluating the importance and the likely impact of UK involvement. They were:

- Progressing politics, top down: continuing the intensive diplomatic efforts in Baghdad and with the Kurds in Erbil, focusing particularly on resolving the Hydrocarbons Law and securing provincial elections and progress on Kirkuk and the constitutional review. This was assessed as high importance (“This process is slow and iterative, but without it the spectre of civil war looms large”) but only medium impact.
- Progressing politics, bottom up: continuing the reconciliation and outreach efforts led by the UK military in Baghdad and building on the links with JAM established in Basra. This was assessed as high importance and high potential UK impact.
- Economics: continuing to make an important contribution to Iraqi-led growth and economic reform, both in Baghdad and in Basra, where Mr Wareing’s leadership as co-chair of the Basra Development Commission was “making real progress” (see Section 10.2). This was assessed as of high importance, but low to medium UK impact, because of the contrast with the “massive US effort”.
- Security: primarily military SSR and support for ISF on operations. No assessment of importance or potential UK impact was given.
- Governance and security/justice sectors: continuing capacity-building projects in Baghdad (not Basra), focused on security and justice sector reform. This was assessed as of medium importance and medium impact.
- Pressing for more substantive multilateral and regional engagement by the UN, International Monetary Fund and World Bank, assessed as high importance and high UK impact (“We have more leverage with the EU, UN and World Bank than the US”).

**917.** FCO officials concluded the paper with a consideration on the reputational risk to the UK of withdrawing from Iraq:

“Reducing UK effort in Iraq risks accusations that we are drawing down or leaving prematurely and before the job is done, whenever we do it. The risk is more acute if we make significant further reductions this year, leaving the ISF to deal with any spikes in violence around the provincial/Presidential elections, and if the US backfill. Next year the risk will be (somewhat) mitigated by reductions in the US’s own force levels, if the security situation continues to improve, and if the US can be persuaded not to backfill.

“Either way, we will need to work up a strong public script, setting out the positive aspects of the work we have done in Basra since 2003, and why the situation on the ground justifies Ministers’ decisions on UK drawdown/withdrawal.”

**918.** Sir Nigel Sheinwald, British Ambassador to the US, wrote to Mr McDonald on 31 March to express concern that the analysis of the options did not fully take into account the risk to the UK’s relationship with the US, particularly in the run-up to a Presidential election.<sup>454</sup> He argued that it was essential to allow recent events in Basra to:

“... shake down before we can sensibly take firm decisions on the right presence and approach over the coming 12-18 months, decisions which are going to have a major impact, not just on our Iraq policy but also our relations with the US and our international reputation.

“Over the past five years we have repeatedly said that we will draw down our troops as fast as conditions and Iraqi capabilities allow. It would be difficult, in the US and elsewhere, to justify a draw down under present conditions in these terms. If anything, the recent deterioration would suggest that we consider the reverse ...”

**919.** Sir Nigel commented that the Washington media were already picking up “mutterings of dissatisfaction” about the UK’s contribution in Basra from some lower level US military sources. Any suggestion that the UK was considering earlier withdrawal was likely to stir up much greater criticism:

“... our reputation in the US will be significantly damaged if we are seen to leave Basra in chaos or if UK forces have to be backfilled by US troops.”

**920.** Sir Nigel thought that the US continued to believe that the UK military had a valid continuing role in MND(SE): training and mentoring the ISF, protecting supply routes and providing a re-intervention capacity. But he cautioned that, once the situation in Basra had settled down, it would be necessary to reconsider the UK’s military posture there, because the “major gaps” in UK situational awareness in Basra City “directly affects our credibility here [in Washington]”. He therefore hoped that serious consideration would be given to embedding UK troops with ISF units “as the US already do and as we ourselves do in Afghanistan”.

## April 2008

**921.** Mr Browne reported to Cabinet on 1 April about recent events in Basra.<sup>455</sup> He said that the decision to launch the Charge of the Knights had come as a surprise to everybody.

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<sup>454</sup> [Letter Sheinwald to McDonald, 31 March 2008, ‘Iraq: NSID, 1 April’.](#)

<sup>455</sup> Cabinet Conclusions, 1 April 2008.

**922.** The role of UK forces had developed during the operation, initially providing reconnaissance, medical and logistic support but expanding to include a Quick Reaction Force deployed to the outskirts of Basra to help extract the ISF. This was “wholly consistent” with overwatch. Mr Browne would tell the House of Commons that afternoon that there would be a pause in troop reductions until the position clarified.

**923.** Mr Browne observed that it would be some time before the full implications of the operation were clear. It could have positive effects, including the direct engagement of Muqtada al-Sadr in politics.

**924.** Mr Brown said that Ministers would have a further discussion of the implications of recent events at NSID(OD), but the events in Basra had demonstrated the perennial difficulties in Iraq. By acting early and without adequate planning, the Charge of the Knights had exposed weaknesses in the ISF.

**925.** When NSID(OD) met later that day, Mr Brown recognised that it was difficult to take firm decisions on longer term options until there was a clearer assessment of events in Basra.<sup>456</sup> It was good that the Iraqi Army had sought to take control, but the way in which it had done so threatened to have a negative impact on political and economic progress, as well as the security gains achieved by UK forces. The UK “could not afford to be perceived to be irrelevant to the situation in Basra”.

**926.** Mr Browne observed that there were now US forces involved in Basra, and they were unlikely to leave. It was becoming clear that JAM1 was “a spent force”. The UK’s relations with Prime Minister Maliki had deteriorated severely and would need to be repaired.

**927.** ACM Stirrup reported that present events in Basra did not affect the expectation that the UK could complete its residual military mission in Basra by the end of the year.

**928.** Ministers agreed that troop levels should remain at 4,100 until the situation became clearer and that no decision on longer-term military commitment should be taken at present. Departments were commissioned to produce an assessment of current events in Basra before Mr Brown’s visit to Washington.

**929.** Concluding the discussion, Mr Brown said that hopes for political and economic stability to take hold in Basra had been “set back”. The UK needed to wait and assess the implications of events “but work to bring our political and economic objectives back on line”.

**930.** Lt Gen Houghton briefed the Chiefs of Staff on 1 April that the violence across Iraq that had erupted in the wake of the Charge of the Knights had been the worst seen since June 2007.<sup>457</sup> More than half of the attacks had occurred in Baghdad. However, less

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<sup>456</sup> Minutes, 1 April 2008, NSID(OD) meeting.

<sup>457</sup> Minutes, 1 April 2008, Chiefs of Staff meeting.

than 15 percent of the strength of the ISF had been deployed to Basra. Mosul, and the campaign to defeat AQ-I, remained the main focus for MNF-I attention.

**931.** On the afternoon of 1 April, Mr Browne made a statement to Parliament about the security situation in Basra.<sup>458</sup> He told MPs that UK forces continued to have a role supporting ISF but:

“As the Iraqi Government have made clear, the main problems in Basra are criminality and militia elements that act outside the law ... While UK and coalition forces have done much to deliver broad levels of security, over the longer term only the Iraqis can tackle successfully criminal activity and political violence, which are often linked to social and economic factors. The events of the last week should be seen in that context.”

**932.** Mr Browne went on to describe the sequence of events leading to the Charge of the Knights:

“When I visited Iraq three weeks ago, I was briefed in detail about the Iraqi plan for improving security in Basra by General Mohan ... General Mohan then visited Baghdad the following week to present the same plan to the Government of Iraq for endorsement. Prime Minister Maliki formally announced his intention to accelerate the implementation of the plan at a meeting on Sunday 23 March, where both the US and the UK were represented at a very senior level.

“Let me be clear: what we have seen over the last week is action being taken by the Government of Iraq to fulfil their responsibilities for security in a province that has transferred to Iraqi control ...”

**933.** Mr Browne continued:

“It is too early to give a definitive or detailed assessment of how the operation has gone overall ... The situation remains fluid, although levels of fighting in Basra have reduced since the weekend ...

“We and our coalition partners are providing support to the Iraqis in line with our commitments under overwatch and in accordance with our usual rules of engagement. Requests for support are being made through the coalition, and I can confirm that UK forces have continued to meet all their obligations as part of the multi-national corps.”

**934.** On UK force levels, Mr Browne told Parliament:

“In October, we announced our plan for drawing down UK troops from southern Iraq, from 5,000 at the time of the announcement to around 2,500 by the spring, dependent on conditions on the ground and military advice. At the end of the year,

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<sup>458</sup> House of Commons, *Official Report*, 1 April 2008, columns 628-629.

when UK forces moved into overwatch in the last province of Basra, we reduced force numbers to around 4,500. Since then, numbers have been reduced further, to their current level of around 4,000.

“Before the events of the last week, the emerging military advice ... was that the further reductions might not be possible at the rate envisaged in the October announcement, although it remains our clear direction of travel and our plan. In the light of the last week’s events, however, it is prudent that we pause further reductions while the current situation is unfolding.”<sup>459</sup>

**935.** In the debate that followed his statement, Mr Browne was asked by Mr Adam Price whether ISF action was disproportionately targeting JAM over other militia and whether UK forces were therefore being drawn into taking sides in a civil war. Mr Browne said that the available information suggested that the Iraqi Security Forces were taking on a “complex mixture of criminal elements and gangs”, including JAM.<sup>460</sup> JAM had attracted particular attention because Muqtada al-Sadr was a “significant player” in the Iraqi political process. However, to “suggest that the Iraqi security forces had been taking on only one element of the militia and criminal gang elements in Basra would be to misrepresent what they have been doing”.

**936.** Mr Browne also told MPs that it was well known that Iranian elements had been “interfering substantially” in southern Iraq in a number of ways.<sup>461</sup> He had no evidence to suggest malign involvement by Iran over the past week but there was “no question but that some of those people have been trained and equipped by Iran”.<sup>462</sup>

**937.** On 1 April, Prime Minister Maliki announced that he was going to supplement the ISF with 10,000 Basra citizens in a “Sons of Iraq” programme that he had developed with the local tribes.<sup>463</sup>

**938.** Maj Gen White-Spunner commented that a sufficiently robust governance structure would be required to prevent this group turning into another armed militia and a considered approach would be needed to prevent them becoming a new target set for JAM. Whilst the establishment of such a programme in MND(SE) was something that the UK had sought to avoid and continued to oppose, he observed that “our voice carries little weight and there is little that we can and ought to do other than support the MNC-I in developing recommendations”.

**939.** Mr Brown spoke to President Bush on the afternoon of 1 April.<sup>464</sup> His Private Secretary’s record of the conversation indicates that they did not discuss Iraq but looked forward to a “full discussion” in the future.

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<sup>459</sup> House of Commons, *Official Report*, 1 April 2008, column 630.

<sup>460</sup> House of Commons, *Official Report*, 1 April 2008, column 637.

<sup>461</sup> House of Commons, *Official Report*, 1 April 2008, columns 635-636.

<sup>462</sup> House of Commons, *Official Report*, 1 April 2008, column 643.

<sup>463</sup> Minute White-Spunner to CJO, 3 April 2008, ‘GOC MND(SE) Weekly Letter – 3 April 2008’.

<sup>464</sup> Letter Fletcher to Gould, 1 April 2008, ‘NATO: Prime Minister’s telephone call with Bush, 1 April’.

**940.** On the same day, Mr Prentice met Vice President Hashemi in Baghdad, who attributed the cease-fire in Basra “entirely to the ‘role of Iran’”.<sup>465</sup> Mr Prentice and Vice President Hashemi agreed that action in Basra was correctly targeting JAM first since they were “the most active group”.

**941.** Vice President Hashemi told Mr Prentice that he was urging Prime Minister Maliki to return to Bagdad and call for a Political Committee for National Security. He believed there was wide support for such a committee focused on Basra.

**942.** On 2 April, the British Embassy Office Basra reported that Prime Minister Maliki had left Basra for Baghdad on the previous day.<sup>466</sup>

**943.** On 3 April, Maj Gen White-Spunner briefed Lt Gen Houghton that the situation on the ground in Basra City had changed dramatically.<sup>467</sup> JAM appeared to be abiding by Muqtada al-Sadr’s call to stay off the streets; the curfew had been lifted during the day and the streets seemed mostly calm and quiet. The resulting impact on MND(SE) freedom of manoeuvre in the city and on the threat against the COB had been significant.

**944.** Maj Gen White-Spunner reported that MNC-I had re-ordered its priorities so that Basra now sat above Mosul and was second only to Baghdad. Significant US forces had been deployed to Basra to support the ISF operation:

“With this influx, the US have recognised that MND(SE)’s current size and structure is insufficient to deliver a result in Basra at the pace they require and have asked [for] it to be reviewed. We should expect nothing less from a MNC-I Main Effort. The PM’s initiative, whilst not what we had planned for, does now pose a real opportunity that we must enable the Iraqis to capitalise on. A coalition-led, but Iraqi-faced surge over the coming month would build on the Basrawi consent and optimism and has the potential to dramatically reshape the security environment.”

**945.** US troops were expected to remain in MND(SE) for at least a month. The Deputy Commanding General MNC-I and Maj Gen White-Spunner had decided to integrate their staff into a joint headquarters in order to maximise the coherence of their efforts. Maj Gen White-Spunner wrote that:

“For the next month we are jointly focused on delivering the very best for Basra that we can and our approach is very much that the Iraqi operation offers an opportunity. We could, possibly, end up with a more peaceful and secure city in the coming weeks ... Whilst we are getting on with this, I suspect that the UK needs to answer some fairly fundamental questions. To preserve the level of effort the US feels is required in Basra will require substantial resources, certainly beyond what is currently available to MND(SE). If we are to provide these then we should expect to

<sup>465</sup> Email Oppenheim to Prentice, 2 April 2008, ‘Meeting with VP Hashemi, 1 April’.

<sup>466</sup> eGram 12405/08 Basra to Baghdad, 2 April 2008, ‘Basra – Update 1 April’.

<sup>467</sup> Minute White-Spunner to CJO, 3 March 2008 [sic], ‘GOC MND(SE) Weekly Letter – 3 April 2008’.

do so for a sustained period. Alternatively, the demonstrable lead that the ISF have taken could be argued to have opened a window of opportunity for us to reassess the mission. MNC-I think that the events of the last two weeks have advanced the campaign in Iraq by eight months and we have to accept, albeit painfully, that we have become somewhat irrelevant to the Iraqis now that they have access to US resources. We suggested to you last month the need to change the mission here to a training and economic mission ... and we would argue that the time has come to decide to do so and to fit that mission into a broader US structure in southern Iraq ... Whatever, we're beyond a 'patch up' to preserve a Union Jack in Basra just to look good. We will most definitely not look good if we can't preserve whatever may have been achieved in Basra and it slips back. We must only take on those tasks that we have the resources to deliver."

**946.** Mr Prentice told the Inquiry that, through the Charge of the Knights, Prime Minister Maliki had asserted central government authority over Basra and turned around the perception of Iraq drifting into renewed sectarian conflict.<sup>468</sup> It had also served to reprioritise Basra within the MNF campaign. Until Prime Minister Maliki launched his initiative, Basra had never been the main effort for either the Iraqi Government or the Americans. The impact of that shift in priorities was, in Mr Prentice's view, a key turning point.

**947.** In an update on 3 April, the British Embassy Office Basra commented that it was "clear that the US ... feels that we moved to PIC in Basra too early".<sup>469</sup>

**948.** A Cabinet Office minute containing briefing for a telephone call between Mr Brown and Prime Minister Maliki on 3 April described one deliverable for the call as "our relationship with Maliki starts to rebuild, and he feels he still has the UK's support".<sup>470</sup>

**949.** Cabinet Office officials explained that Prime Minister Maliki had given the UK and US "minimal notice of his intention to travel to Basra, and did not consult at all on his plan to launch a major Iraqi-led offensive". He had then blamed the UK for lack of support when the ISF got into difficulties and excluded UK officers from planning meetings at his headquarters in Basra Palace. The brief suggested that Mr Brown should point out that "if UK planning staff had been involved from an earlier stage, we could have done more – and more effectively".

**950.** The minute said that the coalition had turned down a number of "ill-thought-through Iraqi requests for combat support" but "with the full knowledge and support of General Austin (Commander, Multi-National Corps)". As the operation continued, MND(SE) had expanded its involvement, providing air, surveillance, medical and logistical support to the ISF, as well as limited direct and indirect fire support.

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<sup>468</sup> Private hearing, 15 June 2010, pages 40-41 and 48.

<sup>469</sup> eGram 12617/08 Basra to FCO London, 3 April 2008, 'Basra – Update 2 April: Changes on the Way'.

<sup>470</sup> Minute Cabinet Office [junior official] to Prime Minister, 3 April 2008, 'Iraq: Phone Call with Prime Minister Maliki, 3 April'.

**951.** Mr Brown and Prime Minister Maliki spoke by telephone on 3 April.<sup>471</sup> The latter explained that events in Basra had been difficult but they had been a good opportunity to test the readiness of Iraqi Security Forces, which had undertaken their tasks with only limited logistic support from the MNF.

**952.** Mr Brown explained that all the UK's actions had been intended to support the restoration of law and order in Basra and the authority of the Iraqi Government; 4,000 UK troops continued to risk their lives to ensure that Iraq was stable and peaceful. Prime Minister Maliki expressed his gratitude, but observed that the Iraqis had not been informed about the agreement between the UK and JAM, which JAM had exploited. Commanders in Basra had told Prime Minister Maliki that there had been insufficient support for the Charge of the Knights from UK troops. In order to preserve the close working relationship between Iraq and the UK, better co-ordination and communication needed to be agreed.

**953.** Mr Brown "regretted that a misunderstanding had arisen over the UK role" and said that the UK "had offered full logistical support to the operations". He expressed concern that the UK had not been consulted in advance about Prime Minister Maliki's operations in Basra. Given the role and exposure of UK forces, it was important to ensure that this did not happen again. Mr Prentice would be instructed to meet Prime Minister Maliki and Dr Rubaie to go over the issues in more detail.

**954.** Mr Prentice told the Inquiry that:

"We were not doing what Maliki ... accused us of doing, which is taking ourselves out of the fight and essentially giving free rein to the militias in Basra, which is what he came to see as the role."<sup>472</sup>

**955.** The day after Mr Brown's telephone call, a senior government official specialising in the Middle East (2) wrote to Mr Jenkins to say that Prime Minister Maliki's complaint was unfounded.<sup>473</sup> His advisers – Dr Rubaie, and Mr Tariq Abdullah – had been briefed on the negotiations "at the outset and at various stages". Although the Iraqi Government had been "instinctively suspicious", it did not oppose negotiations because they made an early British withdrawal from the centre of Basra more likely.

**956.** The senior official told Mr Jenkins that he was unaware of any former detainees having returned to violence before the start of the Charge of the Knights. Attacks on the COB had been largely the work of "splinter groups". Information suggested that the releases had in fact "encouraged JAM towards pragmatism rather than radicalism".

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<sup>471</sup> Letter Fletcher to Hickey, 4 April 2008, 'Prime Minister's Telephone Call with Iraqi Prime Minister, 3 April'.

<sup>472</sup> Private hearing, 15 June 2010, page 31.

<sup>473</sup> Minute senior government official specialising in the Middle East (2) to Jenkins, 4 April 2008, '[NAME OF OPERATION]: GOI complaints'.

**957.** Maj Gen Shaw told the Inquiry that the job of discussing the accommodation with the Iraqi Government fell to Maj Gen Rollo, who “took it to the Government of Iraq through Rubaie, the security adviser, and got the clearance”. The reaction was “positive”. Maj Gen Shaw had also been told that “Maliki had been appraised of the situation and agreed”.<sup>474</sup>

**958.** On 4 April, a Cabinet Office official updated Mr Brown that the situation in Basra had “calmed considerably” but remained “fragile”.<sup>475</sup> Operations continued, with both US and UK “Military Training Teams” now in support of Iraqi forces. Both Prime Minister Maliki and the Sadrists were claiming victory and relations between them were at a low point, both nationally and in Basra, which would be “a set back for reconciliation and the legislative programme”. Rebuilding UK-Iraq relations was likely to be “an uphill struggle”.

**959.** As a result of the Charge of the Knights the US now had troops on the ground in Basra (around 700 at the COB and more than 400 embedded with the ISF) and was proposing a joint UK-US headquarters since “a return to the status quo ante” was not an option. The UK’s “supposed red line for Basra’s militias has therefore already been crossed, with US troops already on the streets”. Indications were that the US intended to maintain an enhanced presence in Basra for the longer term, and there could be some additional short-term increases.

**960.** The Cabinet Office official also updated Mr Brown on Gen Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker’s forthcoming appearance before Congress. They were “likely to present the Basra operation as a sharp spike in violence with repercussions still to play out, but highlighting some positives in the operation.” It was possible they would “major on the role of Iran” and the overall assessment was likely to prompt President Bush to “agree the case for a cautious approach to future troop reductions”.

**961.** Attached to the update was a letter from Mr Day to Ms Aldred containing advice on “how US and UK military planning was proceeding in Basra”.<sup>476</sup> Mr Day wrote that short-term increases in US troop numbers were possible, to help the ISF “establish the security conditions on the ground that will allow consent-winning economic effect to be delivered”. Their activity might include “targeted strike operations, an information campaign, ground patrols and the establishment of ISF strong-points in the city”, but since Gen Petraeus had said there were no plans to send significant numbers of US troops to MND(SE) then “the responsibility for any reinforcement in Basra itself could fall to UK forces”.

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<sup>474</sup> Private hearing, 21 June 2010, page 30.

<sup>475</sup> Minute Cabinet Office [junior official] to Prime Minister, 4 April 2008, ‘Basra: Update for the Prime Minister’.

<sup>476</sup> Letter Day to Aldred, 4 April 2008, ‘Military Plans for Basra’.

**962.** Mr Day considered it too early to say how the UK ought to respond politically and strategically to new circumstances in Basra:

“At best, we could find the city stabilises and improves, which could ease a decision on our longer term commitment. At worst, we could find ourselves confronted with very difficult choices about how to respond to renewed violence, and a much more complicated background to our long term strategic direction. Initial analysis suggests that options might include our retaining control of MND(SE), with the expectation that this would require us to deploy extra resources to meet the new US plans; negotiating with the US to define a role in their plan that we could meet within existing resources, either retaining command of MND(SE) or operating under a US 2\*; and using the changed circumstances as the catalyst for ending our mission in Basra.”

**963.** Lt Gen Cooper reported to ACM Stirrup on 6 April that Basra had been “relatively calm” in the week following the cease-fire.<sup>477</sup> From Baghdad to Basra an “awkward faceoff seems to have developed, with the Government having to balance its (legitimate) determination to continue operations in support of the Rule of Law with the threat of the Sadrists to break their Freeze again”. Lt Gen Cooper described Prime Minister Maliki as “in control and emboldened” and outlined positive moves by the Iraqi Government to kick-start the economy in Basra “driven by a welcome recognition of the economic basis of criminality and militia-membership”.

**964.** Lt Gen Cooper reported having discussed Basra with Gen Petraeus and concluded: “I am confident that the driver behind the current reinforcement of MND(SE) is a theatre-specific desire to exploit an opportunity. He also confirmed that he had no intention of asking the UK to reinforce in Basra”. But Lt Gen Cooper believed that Gen Petraeus’ rejection of proposals to change the boundaries of MND(SE) was calculated to “tie in a UK two star officer to Southern Iraq for the foreseeable future”.

**965.** Lt Gen Cooper continued:

“We have to be honest about US perceptions. They see Basra as they found it as ungoverned space. They are determined that it will not revert. While Petraeus has told me that he sees no requirement for the UK to reinforce MND(SE), he also believes the MNF-I build up was the right thing to do. He was pleased with the results of action against JAM there ... as he has made clear, he believes economic progress is fundamental to underpinning the security line of operation. If the UK will not leverage Iraqi money to deliver rapid progress, the US will use their own expertise, links to Baghdad and manpower.

“The US view Southern Iraq through the prism of Iran. Events of the past week in Basra and Baghdad have reinforced perceptions ... It also explains why, sooner or later, MNF-I will move into Maysan in order to control better the Iranian border. Any

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<sup>477</sup> Minute Cooper to CDS, 6 April 2008, ‘SBMR-I’s Weekly Report (295) 6 Apr 08’.

UK future posture that can be perceived as leaving Iran in a stronger position will not be welcomed.”

**966.** On 6 April, Mr Prentice attended the MCNS, which was told that in Basra the situation was “stable with the ISF fully able to control the situation”.<sup>478</sup> The main priority now was finding civilian employment for 25,000 unemployed. Acting Justice Minister Dr Safa al-Safi had been appointed to co-ordinate the Iraqi Government’s economic efforts in Basra.

**967.** The main concern on the horizon was the protest in Baghdad planned by Muqtada al-Sadr for later in the week.

**968.** Dr Rubaie believed that agreement had been reached to confine the demonstration to Sadr City and to ensure that it would have no “inappropriate slogans/banners”. The ISF would work hard to protect the crowds from attack but also to control any violence from within the crowds. In the event, Muqtada al-Sadr called off the protest.<sup>479</sup>

**969.** On 7 April, a government official working closely with the military in Basra sent a “snapshot” of the area to London. The official reported that the “Basra landscape has, in the space of two weeks, changed dramatically.”<sup>480</sup> Prime Minister Maliki was reported to have “loudly blamed the British for treating with the JAM ‘criminals’ and, hence, handing Basra over to them”.

**970.** The official argued that the “unsatisfactory” performance of the ISF in the initial offensive of the Charge of the Knights was a “vindication” of the objective to negotiate reduced levels of violence:

“Within four days the Al-Maliki offensive had brutally exposed the inadequacies of the ISF, united the Sadrist militias that we strove for so long to divide, and restored JAM military prowess and morale ... to excellent health.”

**971.** A meeting attended only by UK staff had discussed the future of the accommodation negotiated with JAM1. The official reported that they told the meeting it had “been a child of its time”:

“It was not dead (indeed JAM seemed keen to keep it alive and had sent warm greetings ... that morning) but its influence over British operational policy should be proportional to its fundamental usefulness. [JAM1] was on the run and the ISF, backed by MNF, were back at war with JAM. But – it was still both a potential weapon and an insurance policy. Essentially we should exploit it but not be restricted by it.”

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<sup>478</sup> eGram 13078/08 Baghdad to FCO London, 7 April 2008, ‘Iraq: Ministerial Committee on National Security, 06 April 2008’.

<sup>479</sup> Email FCO [junior official] to Prentice, 9 April 2008, ‘Call on NSA Rubaie, 8 April’.

<sup>480</sup> Email government official working closely with the military, 7 April 2008, ‘Basrah: A Snapshot’.

**972.** Mr Day told the Inquiry that the understanding reached with JAM1 did not in any way limit the ability of UK forces to assist with the Charge of the Knights, and that by the time it happened “that aspect of our dialogue with the Sadrists in Basra had come to an end”.<sup>481</sup>

**973.** Mr Prentice met Mr Abdullah, Prime Minister Maliki’s Chief of Staff, on 7 April to discuss the phone call between Mr Brown and Prime Minister Maliki on 3 April and to “correct the prevailing misconceptions about a lack of UK military assistance in Basra and nefarious deals between the UK and JAM”.<sup>482</sup>

**974.** Mr Prentice expressed his surprise that the tone of the phone call had not been positive as he had discussed the issues with Mr Abdullah shortly beforehand. During the course of the conversation “a number of points had arisen that PM Brown had found difficult to accept”.

**975.** Mr Prentice added that allegations of a conspiracy between the UK and JAM were “very damaging, unfounded and not understood in London”. The UK had been open with Gen Petraeus and Dr Rubaie about its interaction with JAM. UK military commanders also recalled that, two years previously, when they had proposed operations against targeted JAM leaders in Basra (Operation SALAMANCA – see Section 9.5), Prime Minister Maliki’s office had blocked them. In light of that, it was difficult to accept accusations of malign intention and blame for JAM’s residual capacity. The fundamental problem was Iranian assistance.

**976.** Mr Abdullah agreed and acknowledged that the Prime Minister’s Office had been kept in the picture about the UK’s dealings with JAM.

**977.** Comments about lack of UK assistance during the Charge of the Knights were also surprising; Mr Prentice provided Mr Abdullah with a list of “non-kinetic support provided to ISF while Maliki had been present in Basra” and assured him that the UK “remained fully committed to helping in its post-PIC role in Basra”.

**978.** Mr Prentice asked Mr Abdullah to clarify the UK position with Prime Minister Maliki before he and Mr Brown spoke again, in order “to move the relationship forward” in advance of a planned visit to Washington by Mr Brown on 16 April.

**979.** Mr Prentice also called on Dr Rubaie the following day, and explored “how best to correct PM Maliki’s misapprehensions about the UK’s relations with JAM in Basra and the support that MND(SE) had given during the recent operations”.<sup>483</sup> He emphasised the “delicate political atmosphere in the UK over Iraq” and that important decisions over Iraq policy were pending. Perceptions that the UK contribution and role were not appreciated at the top levels of the Iraqi Government were damaging and could “undermine political will to maintain UK engagement”.

<sup>481</sup> Public hearing, 6 January 2010, pages 37-38.

<sup>482</sup> Email FCO [junior official] to Prentice, 9 April 2008, ‘Meeting with Tariq ‘Abdullah (7 April)’.

<sup>483</sup> Email FCO [junior official] to Prentice, 9 April 2008, ‘Call on NSA Rubaie, 9 April’.

**980.** Dr Rubaie expressed his personal regard for the UK and the UK role in Iraq over the previous five years. But Prime Minister Maliki had received information about the relationship between the UK and JAM which had undermined his confidence in UK forces in Basra, leading him to tell Gen Petraeus that he did not want UK forces involved in the operation.

**981.** The Chiefs of Staff were told on 8 April that it had “now become clear that the US had always considered Basra to be ‘ungoverned space’ which MNC-I had planned to address towards the end of 2008”.<sup>484</sup>

**982.** The Charge of the Knights had simply accelerated US intervention in Basra, which had now been designated by MNC-I as the second priority after Baghdad, “resulting (significantly) in the provision of continuous ISTAR coverage over the city which, combined with the deployment of US and UK Military Transition Teams (MiTTs), had dramatically improved situational awareness”.

**983.** The Chiefs of Staff noted that the current situation in Basra:

“... placed the UK in an uncomfortable position though it was important not to miss the current potential window of opportunity, alongside the US, to deliver tangible progress on development. The UK’s longer term strategic objectives in Iraq would need consideration alongside both national and military reputation. The Iraqi and US position with regard to JAM needed clarity in the light of the recent ISF operations in Basra; it was possible that the US might be forced to adopt a more robust position against JAM if it continued to support Prime Minister Maliki. This would have consequences for the current operational design in MND(SE).”

**984.** A message from the British Embassy Office Basra on 9 April said that, at Prime Minister Maliki’s request, a tribal committee had been established whose “broad plan is to establish dialogue with OMS; support ISF and police in the search for weapons, and support the process of handing in weapons”.<sup>485</sup> The committee had divided the city into areas, within which a sub-committee would work to persuade militia members to hand over their weapons.

**985.** On 8 and 9 April, Gen Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker testified in Congress on security and political progress in Iraq for a second time.<sup>486</sup>

**986.** Ambassador Crocker said:

“Immense challenges remain and progress is uneven and often frustratingly slow; but there is progress. Sustaining that progress will require continuing US resolve and commitment. What has been achieved is substantial, but it is also reversible.”

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<sup>484</sup> Minutes, 8 April 2008, Chiefs of Staff meeting.

<sup>485</sup> eGram 13473/08 Basra to FCO London, 9 April 2008, ‘Basra Update – 9 April 2008’.

<sup>486</sup> Testimony to Congress, 8 April 2008, ‘Testimony of Ambassador Ryan C. Crocker before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee’.

**987.** Ambassador Crocker described newly passed laws as “not perfect and much depends on their implementation, but they are important steps”. He pointed to the importance of the Council of Representatives as a functioning institution and also highlighted the “intangibles” – the attitudes among the population and the conversations occurring among Iraqi leaders – stating: “The security improvements of the past months have diminished the atmosphere of suspicion and allowed for acts of humanity that transcend sectarian identities.”

**988.** Ambassador Crocker concluded:

“... almost everything about Iraq is difficult. It will continue to be difficult as Iraqis struggle with the damage and trauma inflicted by 35 years of totalitarian Ba’athist rule. But hard does not mean hopeless, and the political and economic process of the past few months is significant. I must underscore, however, that these gains are fragile, and they are reversible. Americans have invested a great deal in Iraq, in blood as well as treasure, and they have the right to ask whether this is worth it, whether it is now time to walk away and let the Iraqis fend for themselves. Iraq has the potential to develop into a stable, secure multi-ethnic, multi-sectarian democracy under the rule of law. Whether it realizes that potential is ultimately up to the Iraqi people. Our support, however, will continue to be critical. I said in September that I cannot guarantee success in Iraq. That is still the case, although I think we are now closer. I remain convinced that a major departure from our current engagement would bring failure, and we have to be clear with ourselves about what failure would mean.”

**989.** Gen Petraeus described “significant but uneven security progress” since the previous Congressional hearing in September 2007. He highlighted that levels of violence and civilian deaths had been reduced substantially, that extremist elements had been “dealt serious blows” and that the capability of Iraqi Security Forces had grown. Like Ambassador Crocker, he warned:

“Nonetheless, the situation in certain areas is still unsatisfactory and innumerable challenges remain. Moreover, as events in the past two weeks [the Charge of the Knights] have reminded us and I have repeatedly cautioned, the progress made since last spring is fragile and reversible.”

**990.** Both Ambassador Crocker and Gen Petraeus referred to the situation in Basra. Ambassador Crocker stated:

“News from Iraq in recent weeks has been dominated by the situation in Basra. Taken as a snapshot, with scenes of increasing violence, and masked gunmen in the streets, it is hard to see how this situation supports a narrative of progress in Iraq. There is still very much to be done to bring full government control to the streets of Basra and eliminate entrenched extremist, criminal, and militia groups.

“When viewed with a broader lens, the Iraqi decision to combat these groups in Basra has major significance. First, a Shia majority government, led by Prime Minister Maliki, has demonstrated its commitment to taking on criminals and extremists regardless of sectarian identity. Second, Iraqi Security Forces led these operations, in Basra, and in towns and cities throughout the South. British and US elements played important roles, but these were supporting roles, as they should be.”

**991.** Reporting on 10 April, Maj Gen White-Spunner said that the ISF had reasonable freedom of movement on Basra’s main routes and in the centre and east but less so in the north and west where effective IED attacks against their patrols continued and small arms fire incidents were commonplace.<sup>487</sup> The militia strongholds of Qibla, Hayaniyah and Five Mile Market remained under JAM control. The city was increasingly tense, with people anticipating the second phase of ISF operations.

**992.** The weapons amnesty had ended on 8 April, but a lack of publicity meant that it had had limited success. The ISF planned to launch a series of clearance operations to find and confiscate medium to heavy weapons in key areas, although this phase of operations had been delayed twice.

**993.** Maj Gen White-Spunner concluded:

“We continue to believe that the events of the past two weeks, although unexpected and open to misinterpretation, are a real opportunity for Basra and hence our involvement here. The time for any recrimination over lack of Iraqi consultation and rumours of possible complicity by others in Baghdad is behind us; we now have a better chance than we have arguably had for two years to achieve better security and some initial development goals in the city. We will not have long to do so, given that the run up to the October elections will inevitably lead to polarisation and a possible recurrence of factional violence. The next two-three months are therefore critical and if the next phase of the ISF security operation is successful then we must be prepared to exploit that success more quickly.”

**994.** On 11 April, Dr Christian Turner, Deputy Director Middle East, North Africa and North America in the Cabinet Office Overseas and Defence Secretariat, advised Mr Brown that he should use his forthcoming visit to Washington to press President Bush for UK involvement in planning for Basra.<sup>488</sup> He explained:

“At present we have little insight into their [US] thinking, and its effect on us. A key deliverable for your meeting with [President] Bush is to secure our involvement in planning: if we are to stay in the South, we need agreed plans ...

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<sup>487</sup> Minute White-Spunner to CJO, 10 April 2008, ‘GOC MND(SE) weekly letter – 10 April 2008’.

<sup>488</sup> [Minute Turner to Prime Minister, 11 April 2008, ‘Iraq: Implications of Basra Operation and US Visit’.](#)

“The main ... question is what are US plans for the MNF Mission in the South? At a high level they want to help the Iraqis counter the militias, disrupt Iranian influence and extend Iraqi Government control. But we will need to be clear what we are getting in to, and guard against two strategic risks:

- (a) That MNF gets dragged into intra-Shia rivalries ...
- (b) That we become embroiled in an escalating Iranian confrontation. Events in Basra have greatly increased Iraqi perceptions of the threat posed by Iran’s sponsorship of JAM ... We are less convinced ... that the Iranians can control JAM, and ... judge that Iran’s role in the crisis was primarily one of observer and mediator. We judge that Iran is trying to limit intra-Shia violence ...

“Whatever the plan, we will see a more active US role, and renegotiation of UK tasks in MND(SE). We have three broad military options:

- (i) Step-up: seek to take full responsibility for delivering emerging plans for MND(SE), reversing our troop drawdown.
- (ii) Steady state: remain with existing force levels and negotiate a new set of tasks with the US ...
- (iii) Withdrawal: take the opportunity provided by the changed circumstance to accelerate our withdrawal from Basra before November.

“Much depends on US attitudes, which are conditional on whether the situation in Basra stabilises ...

“A US team will arrive in Basra in the next few days to step up reconstruction efforts. Presentationally, the US effort risks overshadowing UK economic initiatives ...

“We will need to ensure our projects are co-ordinated and complementary. Experience over the past five years in such projects is that they provide short term benefits, but are often not sustainable ... Our message to the US will need to be that such work takes time.”

**995.** Dr Turner provided Mr Brown with “a narrative stressing what we have achieved – and still hope to achieve – on military training, political reconciliation and economic reconstruction”. He advised:

“Publicly we will need to reinforce the principles of your 8 October statement: we will fulfil our obligations in Iraq as long as we are there at the invitation of the Government of Iraq and the international community ...

“In private, we will also need to keep reminding the US of our legal constraints, once the UNSCR lapses ...”

**996.** Mr Brown's Private Secretary sent him Dr Turner's advice on 11 April.<sup>489</sup> In his covering email he reported having spoken to both Sir Nigel Sheinwald and to the White House and commented:

"They know we are irritated, but 'a lot of people here think the UK has failed in Basra'. I told Bush's people that ... your priorities were Iraq ... [and] you would have positive public messages on the three part plan for Iraq ..."

**997.** On 11 April, Mr Browne's Private Secretary wrote to No.10 with "a note on the implications if we were to decide to reduce our military presence in Iraq and Kuwait to c[irca] 1,750 later this year", provided at Mr Brown's request.<sup>490</sup>

**998.** The letter explained that current planning was conditions-based but rested on the assumption that the UK would not leave Basra until the training of the Iraqi Army's 14th Division had been completed and Basra Airport had been transferred to Iraqi control. Both were expected during the latter part of 2008, though the Charge of the Knights had set back progress.

**999.** Although there was no cross-Whitehall "template" for the UK's relationship with Iraq, and no detailed planning had been done "on whether a 1,750 figure made sense militarily", the main military contribution could include:

- training the Iraqi Navy;
- helping to run the military staff college and junior officer training;
- continued MiTTing activity; and
- some niche capabilities – including ships in the northern Gulf and fast jets – provided an appropriate legal basis could be agreed once resolution 1790 expired at the end of the year.

**1000.** The Private Secretary wrote, "early planning suggests that it should be possible to meet all of these tasks with rather fewer than 1,750 people in Iraq and Kuwait".

**1001.** The letter continued:

"Moving from our current presence in Basra (c[irca].4,100 personnel) to this new model would be a complex and demanding operation ... Our provisional assumption ... is that we would need around six months to plan and implement withdrawal from the Basra COB ... Our preparations would become apparent very quickly to the Americans but a shorter timescale would carry major operational, morale and presentational consequences.

"The broader implications would need to be worked through. Our initial sense is that even with a significant residual commitment it would have an inevitable impact on UK-US relations ... We would need to work hard not only to minimise damage

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<sup>489</sup> Email Fletcher to Brown, 11 April 2008, 'Iraq – Handling Bush'.

<sup>490</sup> Letter Ferguson to Fletcher, 11 April 2008, [untitled].

to UK-US co-operation ... and to mitigate damage to the domestic reputation of the Armed Forces.”

**1002.** Attached to the letter was a draft speaking note for use in explaining the policy to the US. It said: “it will only be possible for us to gain domestic support for an enduring commitment ... if we can at the same time announce that the task of our ground troops in Basra is coming to an end.”

**1003.** Phase II of the Charge of the Knights began on 12 April.<sup>491</sup> The British Embassy Office Basra reported that the ISF conducted successful house-to-house operations in two districts of Basra which “met little resistance and netted two significant weapons caches, an IED factory and at least 15 militiamen arrested”. However, it was “still not clear whether the failure of JAM to confront the army is a tactical move or indicates a significant breakdown of leadership and morale in mainstream JAM”.

**1004.** Mr Prentice met Prime Minister Maliki for half an hour on 12 April and for an hour and a half on the following day to discuss the UK military’s role in Basra and the alleged deals with JAM.<sup>492</sup> A record of the discussions by a member of the Embassy’s Chancery section said that they were “frank and open discussions without a hint of animosity”. During the first meeting, Prime Minister Maliki explained that his concerns were:

- information alluding to deals between JAM and UK forces in Basra, in particular allegations that UK forces had provided assurances that they would not intervene and that JAM detainees had been released without informing the Iraqi Government;
- lack of UK support to the ISF in Basra – Gen Mohan believed that UK forces had provided “no training and no equipment”;
- a lack of intelligence support on JAM’s capabilities from the UK;
- UK negligence in allowing JAM to re-arm and regroup during the “freeze”;
- the error of withdrawing from Basra Palace without proper consultation which had allowed JAM to take control; and
- that the UK had prevented US helicopters flying from Basra in support of the Charge of the Knights.

**1005.** Mr Prentice explained the support that UK forces had provided in Basra while Prime Minister Maliki had been there.<sup>493</sup> The allegations that the UK had not provided support were untrue. Nor was there any agreement between JAM and the UK of the sort described. The OMS might have attempted to drive a wedge between the UK and the

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<sup>491</sup> eGram 14079/08 Basra to FCO London, 14 April 2008, ‘Iraq: Basra Update 14 April’.

<sup>492</sup> Email FCO [junior official] to Prentice, 14 April 2008, ‘Meetings with PM Maliki: UK military’s role in Basrah and alleged deals with JAM’; Email FCO [junior official] to Prentice, 14 April 2008, ‘Maliki Meetings 12-13 April’.

<sup>493</sup> Email FCO [junior official] to Prentice, 14 April 2008, ‘Meetings with PM Maliki: UK military’s role in Basrah and alleged deals with JAM’.

Iraqi Government but they had failed. UK forces had continued to confront those who used violence and to interdict, where possible, operations to smuggle weapons.

**1006.** Prime Minister Maliki expressed surprise at the amount and variety of weapons in JAM's possession. Mr Prentice explained that "Iran alone" was responsible for the weapons in JAM's hands. It was not possible to stem the flow of smuggled weapons either to Basra or to Sadr City completely.

**1007.** On the issue of helicopter support, Mr Prentice explained that both US and UK Rules of Engagement had prevented flights initially but that the US had altered theirs and so were able to conduct selected operations.

**1008.** Prime Minister Maliki concluded by thanking the UK for the support offered. He would be meeting the Minister of Defence on 18 April and would communicate the true picture of UK co-operation.

**1009.** Mr Prentice told the Inquiry that he had gone over the history of the UK's negotiations with JAM and the arrangements for releasing detainees with Prime Minister Maliki, who acknowledged that his Office had been informed.<sup>494</sup>

**1010.** A CIG assessed the performance of the Iraqi Security Forces during the Charge of the Knights in a note issued on 14 April.<sup>495</sup> The CIG judged that:

"... on their own, the ISF underperformed against JAM in Basra, Maysan and Dhi Qar ... In Basra they relied heavily on MNF supplies (i.e. ammunition and rations), air strikes and eventually MNF mentoring ... Military reporting suggested little sign of a detailed operational plan or evidence of precision targeting of JAM Special Groups ... until the arrival of MNF training teams from 1 April ...

"Basra's Chief of Police reportedly believes that hundreds of local police melted away within the first 24 hours of fighting – others joined JAM's ranks ... Many of the National Police units drafted in from Baghdad, with superior arms and armour, fared much better. The affiliation of many to ISCI/Badr probably strengthened their resolve to try and weaken their chief rival (JAM).

"... even with reinforcements ... the Iraqi Army lost most tactical engagements against JAM ... prior to JAM's stand down on 31st March. However, neither did they cede ground, and specific successes ... [have] emboldened them. Iraqi Special Forces were ineffective until their US mentors were re-inserted."

**1011.** In his weekly report on 14 April, Lt Gen Cooper wrote that the theme from Gen Petraeus' and Ambassador Crocker's testimony likely to have the biggest impact on the campaign in the short to medium term was their renewed focus on addressing

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<sup>494</sup> Private hearing, 15 June 2010, page 32.

<sup>495</sup> [CIG Current Assessment Note, 14 April 2008, 'Iraqi Security Forces Performance in MND\(SE\)'](#).

Iranian influence.<sup>496</sup> More than ever, he added, senior Iraqi officials were beginning to ask the same questions.

**1012.** Lt Gen Cooper considered that the fact that Gen Petraeus saw the South as the front line in the battle against Iranian influence in Iraq meant that he was likely to focus on Basra as soon as he returned from Washington after his testimony. US forces were expected to remain in MND(SE) for some time. Lt Gen Cooper commented:

“... there seems little doubt that MND(SE) has changed for good. I think there is also an increasing consensus around the UK’s options to respond to this – probably best described as ‘lead’, ‘follow’ or ‘get out of the way’ ...

“It is clear from my discussions here that the US view of the current HQ MND(SE) is that it is not a proper two star HQ. That is why they reinforced ... in order to achieve greater situational awareness and an enhanced planning and fires capability. They will wish to ensure that these capabilities remain in the future in order to have the desired effect in Basra. The question will be whether the US or UK supplies those capabilities and in what balance. This may demand a re-enlargement of HQ MND(SE) in terms of UK staff and capability, but it should not require additional units ...

“I think we should be looking at the current position as an opportunity rather than a threat. It is hard to escape the view that the current situation in Basra is not that which we would wish. If we want to depart leaving a sound and robust legacy, with our reputation intact, Basra will need an improved Iraqi Army, a reformed IPS and a sound expectation for long term economic regeneration. We are now better placed to move more quickly to our desired endstate than we have been for some time, but this will require close and vigorous [effort] ... Taking this opportunity for the UK to lead this will be important for our collective self-esteem. As Ambassador Crocker said in his testimony this week ‘We will be judged on how we depart not on how we arrived’.”

**1013.** On 14 April, Mr Prentice reported to the FCO his view that Iranian influence had been central to Muqtada al-Sadr’s decision to call a cease-fire at the end of March.<sup>497</sup> Prime Minister Maliki’s Charge of the Knights had unsettled the Iranians and caused them to reassess their 100 percent support for him. Mr Prentice commented:

“These events have once again shown the extent of Iranian influence in Iraq: having been a major contributor to the problem, Iran then became central to delivering the cease-fire. But many in the Gol ... have been shocked and angered by Iran’s behaviour and their continued brazen support for JAM Special Groups in particular ...

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<sup>496</sup> Minute Cooper to CDS, 14 April 2008, ‘SBMR-I’s Weekly Report (296) 14 Apr 08’.

<sup>497</sup> eGram 14136/08 Baghdad to FCO London, 14 April 2008, ‘Iraq: Iranian Influence – Lessons From Basra’.

“Iran’s malign influence in Iraq is deep-rooted and extends across the political and sectarian spectrum. Their influence is supported by bribery, supply of lethal aid and an active and direct IRGC presence in Iraq. But it is only as effective as the Gol and the Iraqi people allow it to be. And in the end, only the Gol and the Iraqi people will be able to contain Iran’s malign influence in their country ... Our best strategy for helping the Gol contain malign Iranian influence remains:

- to continue exposing nefarious Iranian activity when we have evidence of it;
- to support the US in thumping Iran’s proxies when they are involved in violence; and in parallel
- to encourage US-Iranian-Iraqi dialogue over security in Iraq.

“We should also continue to acknowledge the legitimacy of benign Iranian activity – particularly in the South. Senior Iraqis often (rightly) remind us that they cannot change the map. Strong, mutually beneficial Iran-Iraq relations are in everyone’s interest.”

**1014.** Mr Prentice anticipated that, having being drawn into Basra by Prime Minister Maliki, the US was likely to want to take the opportunity to address negative Iranian activity in southern Iraq. Ambassador Crocker and Gen Petraeus had set up a cross-departmental team to draw up a strategy on how to combat Iranian influence.

**1015.** On 16 April, the JIC looked again at the extent and nature of Iranian influence in Iraq.<sup>498</sup> It judged:

“In pursuit of its aims for Iraq, Iran backs all of the main Iraqi Shia groups – both those in Nuri Al-Maliki’s government and those in opposition. In relation to the West, Iraqi Shia militias offer Iran a means to exert pressure – albeit with adverse consequences for Shia political unity.

“Iran sees Al-Maliki as the best available Prime Minister ... But Iranian support for Al-Maliki is not a given ...

“Al-Maliki’s decision to take on the JAM in Basra in March was primarily to address internal Iraqi issues, including local crime and suppressing a rival political group ...”

**1016.** Maj Gen White-Spunner reported on 17 April that Gen Mohan and his successor, General Mohammed, were starting to look north of Basra towards al-Qurnah as a means of addressing the flow of lethal aid.<sup>499</sup> If successful, any operation was likely to drive the remaining JAM elements further north into Maysan, specifically al-Amara, which was both a haven for those fleeing south from Sadr City and also the major hub for the distribution of lethal aid from Iran.

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<sup>498</sup> JIC Assessment, 16 April 2008, ‘Iraq: the Nature and Extent of Iranian Influence’.

<sup>499</sup> Minute White-Spunner to CJO, 17 April 2008, ‘GOC MND(SE) Weekly Letter – 17 April 2008’.

**1017.** MND(SE) continued to focus on drawing as much US and Iraqi resource into Basra as possible in order to take advantage of the “unexpected but very welcome changes” that the Charge of the Knights had brought. Maj Gen White-Spunner’s main concerns were ensuring that the Iraqi Police were “functioning again before the Iraqi army re-deploys” (probably in six months’ time) and preventing the return of JAM hardliners and Special Groups who had left the city.

**1018.** Mr Brown visited Washington from 16 to 17 April for a series of meetings, including with both President Bush and Senator Obama.

**1019.** The day before travelling he was interviewed by Mr Jon Snow from *Channel 4*, who pressed him on what continued purpose the UK forces in Iraq were serving.<sup>500</sup> Mr Brown responded that “the idea we are not doing a useful job there is wrong because we are actually training the Iraqi forces” and declined to give a timescale for the withdrawal of UK troops:

“I am not going to give a time-scale, but what I do say [is] that the job we are doing is an important one and the very thing that we have moved from combat to over watch will mean that in future you will see Iraqi troops and the Iraqi police taking a bigger role. That is the right thing to do, it shows the progress that has been made that Iraqis themselves will gradually take responsibility for their own affairs and at some point they will take full control of their own country again.”

**1020.** President Bush and Mr Brown met on 17 April.<sup>501</sup> On Iraq, ACM Stirrup and Gen Petraeus would report to both Mr Brown and President Bush on troop numbers in Iraq before the President visited Europe in June. Mr Brown suggested that close US and UK consultation was needed on Basra and repeated his commitment to the troop deployments he had previously described to the President.

**1021.** Mr McDonald reported to the FCO that at dinner with Secretary Rice and Mr Hadley on 17 April they had reached a common understanding that President Bush and Mr Brown had commissioned Gen Petraeus and ACM Stirrup to “come up with proposals for how to work together in Basra”.<sup>502</sup> It was a shared assumption that the US would remain in MND(SE).

**1022.** Mr Brown met Senator Obama on the same day and discussed Iraq briefly.<sup>503</sup> The Senator was reported to have been “mainly in listening mode” and interested in the concept of overwatch but “underlined that his policy remained to draw down US troops”.

**1023.** Before leaving the US, on 18 April Mr Brown delivered a Kennedy Memorial Lecture on international relations, from the John F Kennedy Presidential Library and

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<sup>500</sup> Transcript of an interview given by the Prime Minister, 15 April 2008.

<sup>501</sup> Letter Fletcher to Gould, 17 April 2008, ‘Prime Minister’s Bilateral with US President, 17 April 2008’.

<sup>502</sup> Letter McDonald to Gould, 21 April 2008, ‘Rice/Hadley: MEPP, Iran, Iraq’.

<sup>503</sup> Letter Fletcher to Gould, 17 April 2008, ‘Prime Minister’s bilateral with Barack Obama, 17 April 2008’.

Museum in Boston.<sup>504</sup> In it he said that “global problems required global solutions” and called for new international rules and institutions to assist. One force of globalisation, he said, was:

“... the sobering reality ... that we are exposed – unpredictably but directly – to the risk of violence originating in failed and rogue states around the world. Once we feared rival nations becoming too strong; now the worst threats come from states that are too weak.”

**1024.** Phase III of the Charge of the Knights – an operation in the JAM stronghold in the Hayaniyah district of Basra – was launched on 19 April.<sup>505</sup> Although MND(SE) had expected the operation to be problematic, it went “remarkably smoothly, largely due to some very thorough joint planning and an insistence on unity of command and fire control measures which were welcomed by the Iraqi Army”.

**1025.** During the course of the operation, over 35 large weapons caches were found, containing 1,000 mortar rounds (some marked IRAN 2008), over 500 rockets, 450 rocket-propelled grenades and a large number of IEDs, EFPs and small arms. The most notable finds were four man-portable air defence missile systems.

**1026.** Lt Gen Cooper reported that on the same day that Phase III launched, Muqtada al-Sadr issued a threat “to declare war” if the Iraqi Government did not back off continued targeted operations such as those in Basra.<sup>506</sup> The threat was being taken seriously but the Iraqi Government was not going to be forced into negotiation, “OMS/JAM will need to be de-escalatory in advance of any further talks”.

**1027.** Lt Gen Cooper also reported to ACM Stirrup that the “US view of the Bush/Brown discussion on Iraq is that it confirmed the move towards a shared venture in MND(SE)”.

**1028.** Gen Dannatt visited Basra during Phase III and “found everyone in the Division in an extremely positive, but cautious mood about the potential for delivering success on the ground”.<sup>507</sup> At the end of his visit, Gen Dannatt reported that he:

“... came away from Iraq confident that we have *another* opportunity to be successful in Basra – we must not let this one go. In order to do that we must ensure that we are giving GOC MND(SE) the resources that he requires, not just in terms of numbers but in the capabilities. Most crucially, however, we must ensure that our message is proactive, aggressive and co-ordinated.”

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<sup>504</sup> *Maxims News Network*, 19 April 2008, *UK Prime Minister Gordon Brown's Kennedy Memorial Lecture on Foreign Affairs*.

<sup>505</sup> Minute White-Spinner to CJO, 24 April 2008, ‘GOC MND(SE) Weekly Letter – 24 April 2008’.

<sup>506</sup> Minute Cooper to CDS, 21 April 2008, ‘SBMR-I's Weekly Report (297) 21 Apr 08’.

<sup>507</sup> Minute CGS to CDS, 22 April 2008, ‘GCS Visit to Basra – 19 Apr 08’.

**1029.** Mr Prentice reported that at the 20 April meeting of MCNS, Gen Petraeus praised the significant progress that the ISF had made in Basra in recent weeks.<sup>508</sup> The challenge, Gen Petraeus said, would be to sustain it. He advised that the sustained campaign needed to secure lasting success meant that the ISF had to start planning future troop rotations so that they could stay on the offensive.

**1030.** ACM Stirrup spoke to Gen Petraeus by telephone on 21 April.<sup>509</sup> They agreed that given the recent events in Basra the enterprise in South-East Iraq “now represented a ‘joint endeavour’”. Whilst the UK was content to retain the lead in the South-East for the moment, this would need to be addressed in the longer term.

**1031.** ACM Stirrup made clear that the UK had to remain within current force levels, accepting that there would need to be some restructuring to meet the new circumstances and that, “for political reasons”, the UK would need to deliver some further force reductions by the end of the year. They agreed that Lt Gen Houghton should discuss proposals in more detail with Gen Petraeus so that ACM Stirrup could give “some early thoughts” to Mr Brown.

**1032.** On the same day, Lt Gen Cooper reported his own discussion with Gen Petraeus, who said that he could accept a drop in UK combat force elements in return for an increase in HQ staff capability. This reflected expected resource pressure that the MNF would face when the Polish HQ in Multi-National Division (Centre-South) withdrew in October.<sup>510</sup>

**1033.** Lt Gen Cooper reported that “the overall picture shows a return to pre-22 March attack levels (which were in turn similar to 2005 levels)”. A trio of AQ-I attacks in Mosul, Baquabah and Ramadi were a significant cause, along with “the continued constant dribble” of fatalities and injuries from JAM or Special Group attacks. Prime Minister Maliki’s attention was turning to “a new expedition” in Mosul.

**1034.** Lt Gen Cooper awaited the outcome of Phase III in Basra, but indications were that the JAM leadership had moved out of Hayaniyah. The key was to ensure they could not return.

**1035.** Phase IV of the Charge of the Knights was launched on 24 April, in the Five Mile Market area of Basra, focused on “isolation and clearance, providing the security required to conduct a detailed search”.<sup>511</sup>

**1036.** Maj Gen White-Spunner reported indications that Maysan province was becoming a refuge for JAM militants – both Special Groups and mainstream – driven out of Basra

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<sup>508</sup> eGram 15509/08 Baghdad to FCO London, 21 April 2008, ‘Iraq: Ministerial Council on National Security (MCNS) 20 April 2008’.

<sup>509</sup> Email Poffley to DG Op Pol, 22 April 2008, ‘Petraeus Telecom with CDS: 21 Apr 08’.

<sup>510</sup> Minute Cooper to CDS, 21 April 2008, ‘SBMR-I’s Weekly Report (297) 21 Apr 08’.

<sup>511</sup> Minute White-Spunner to CJO, 24 April 2008, ‘GOC MND(SE) Weekly Letter – 24 April 2008’.

by the Charge of the Knights. In the short term, he did not think that the increased JAM presence would destabilise Maysan:

“... as it is already under de facto ‘Sadr’ control from Governor Maliki downwards and the local ISF are unlikely to take any action against them. Of more concern is the likelihood they are using this period to discuss their future strategy for JAM co-operation in Iraq. In the event of an ISF-MNF operation to secure al-Amara, it is likely that the majority of key leaders will attempt to cross the border into Iran. In due course they will try to return to Basra, an eventuality we must take care to guard against.”

**1037.** In Basra, there was a continuing “anti-British sentiment” in Basra Palace, where the presence of UK personnel was still not welcomed.

**1038.** Maj Gen White-Spunner reported that, at the MNF-I Conference in Baghdad, Ambassador Crocker had described the action in Basra as “a defining moment in the Iraqi mission showing an assertion of Iraqi sovereignty by the Gol previously not seen”.

**1039.** Lt Gen Houghton visited Iraq on 25 April, to “talk through the options for the UK’s operational commitment to southern Iraq during the remainder of 2008” with Gen Petraeus, as ACM Stirrup had agreed he would.<sup>512</sup> Reporting the meeting to ACM Stirrup, he explained that he had set out the UK position as:

- a. That the UK should retain two-star Command of the four southern provinces for the immediate future.
- b. That the UK could only commit to tasks within a force level ceiling of 4,100 troops.
- c. That this force level ceiling only allowed the UK to effectively meet the following tasks:
  - (1) Provision of an integrated Division/Brigade composite Headquarters;
  - (2) MiTTing the BOC [Basra Operational Command].
  - (3) MiTTing of 14 IA Div with supporting QRFs [Quick Reaction Forces]
  - (4) Security of Umm Qasr;
  - (5) NaTT [Navy Training Team];
  - (6) BIA [Basra International Airport] Commercialisation.
  - (7) Force Protection.
  - (8) Force Support.”

**1040.** Lt Gen Houghton went on to explain that if the coalition was going to be able to exploit the opportunities now offered in Basra and not allow the situation to be reversed,

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<sup>512</sup> [Minute Houghton to PSO/CDS, 26 April 2008, ‘CJO – Gen Petraeus Meeting 25 Apr 08’.](#)

“the US would have to take on certain additional tasks and resource commitments”, specifically:

- a commitment of around 50 staff to the composite headquarters;
- MiTTing of 10 Division;
- border security;
- reform and retraining of the Iraqi Police Service; and
- a package of enablers amounting to around 750 US personnel.

**1041.** Lt Gen Houghton reported that Gen Petraeus “readily understood the UK policy context and was content with the scale of the continued UK commitment and the potential division of tasks”. More detailed work was needed but “in principle we had an agreement”.

**1042.** Gen Petraeus visited Basra and gave an upbeat account of his visit at the meeting of the MCNS on 27 April.<sup>513</sup> He congratulated the Iraqi Government on a job well done. The situation was transformed, but the ISF would need to stay focused and not relapse into static routine. Operations in the Five Mile Market area had been successful and the ISF were now moving on al-Qurnah.

**1043.** In his weekly report, Lt Gen Cooper recorded that Gen Petraeus had commented twice during the meeting “I can live with this”, but also observed that the situation was “not optimal”.<sup>514</sup> Lt Gen Cooper commented:

“The bill of manpower that the UK equity leaves the US (and specifically MND-C [Multi-National Division (Centre)]) to find will be possible, but will create some local pain and include a degree of reprioritising. We should not underestimate the pain that will fall to Lt Gen Lloyd Austin’s MNC-I, but I am confident that he will learn to live with it.”

**1044.** Mr Prentice told the Inquiry that Gen Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker:

“... definitively wished to preserve our participation in the coalition. They sensed ... a wish in London to draw a line under Iraq and to get our forces out as soon as possible, and they suspected somewhat a rush to draw down ... [They] understood the political realities for us, and also they had their understanding of the rising demands from Afghanistan and other theatres.”<sup>515</sup>

**1045.** Mr McDonald updated the Iraq Strategy Group on Mr Brown’s visit to Washington on 28 April.<sup>516</sup> He reported that on troop numbers “the Prime Minister had stated his

<sup>513</sup> eGram 16416/08 Baghdad to FCO London, 28 April 2008, ‘Iraq: Ministerial Committee on National Security 27 April 2008’.

<sup>514</sup> Minute Cooper to CDS, 28 April 2008, ‘SBMR-I’s Weekly Report (298) 28 Apr 08’.

<sup>515</sup> Private hearing, 15 June 2010, pages 71-72.

<sup>516</sup> Letter Cabinet Office [junior official] to McDonald, 28 April 2008, ‘Iraq Strategy Group, 28 April’.

intention to resume a downward trajectory” after pausing at current levels and “would therefore need a clear script on this for his meeting with Petraeus on 1 May”.

**1046.** President Bush had “understood our sensitivities regarding the conduct of the recent ISF operation in Basra” but added that “the US had been operating under the same constraints, and believed the security situation in Basra had improved as a result”.

**1047.** Mr McDonald told the Iraq Strategy Group:

“It was now clear that there was a shared UK/US operation in the South, and that we would need to decide on their tasks and the division of labour. We needed to focus on our remaining political, economic and military tasks. The first two required provincial elections to take place, and tangible outcomes from the work of Michael Wareing and the Basra Development Commission. The third would require a focus on training and mentoring 14 Div, and might involve an accelerated push to achieve effect earlier, so that we could draw down combat forces more quickly in 2009. Our residual tasks should require no more than a few hundred troops.”

**1048.** Lt Gen Wall reported to the Group that attack levels – including IEDs and IDF – were lower in Basra since the Charge of the Knights, and JAM resistance to ISF operations was waning. The challenge would be to prevent JAM’s re-infiltration, but it was likely that the ISF would stay in the South in large numbers and therefore act as a deterrent. He reported also a “risk” that 14th Division might be moved into Maysan, “which would have implications for our MiTTs”.

**1049.** Lt Gen Houghton’s visit to Baghdad had “gone as planned” and although Gen Petraeus would prefer a “gentle glide path rather than rapid drawdown” once 14th Division was fully trained, he had “reluctantly agreed” to the UK’s proposals.

**1050.** The next likely focus for ISF operations would be Mosul, which would have implications for US resources in Basra, as would any uplift in Sadr City. Gen Petraeus remained concerned about the lack of capacity on the border and had urged the UK to consider greater use of private military companies (for example to provide airport security, which might free up 200-300 troops). Lt Gen Wall observed that the UK was “doing very little with the police, now that Jalil had departed”.

**1051.** Mr Miliband visited Baghdad and Erbil in mid-April.<sup>517</sup> On 29 April, he wrote to Mr Brown:

“However unfortunate its genesis, Maliki’s operation in Basra has created an opportunity to reshape our approach there and set a new direction towards transition. 2009 is the year we will need to move from a Basra military strategy to an Iraq political and economic strategy. If we get the strategy right I believe we can

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<sup>517</sup> [Letter Miliband to Prime Minister, 29 April 2008, ‘Iraq’](#).

emerge from Iraq with our military and political reputation intact and our relationship with the US protected.”

**1052.** Mr Miliband commented that the Iraqi Government was “for the first time since 2003” giving full attention to Basra. In support of that, the US had committed, “again for the first time since 2003, serious assets from the Multi-National Corps to bolster MND(SE)”. He believed that combined US, UK and Iraqi resources “will be able to accelerate the rate of positive change in Basra”, paving the way for a “proper and respectable end to our role as lead partner in the coalition” in the course of 2009 and the start of “a broad-based and natural relationship with the new Iraq, the ‘whole Iraq policy’ which we have long wanted”.

**1053.** To make the transition “in good order”, Mr Miliband advised that it should be clear to the US that the UK had properly completed the remaining military tasks to which it was committed. That had implications for the ongoing negotiations with the US over the “rebalancing” of US and UK efforts in MND(SE). Mr Miliband expressed concern that the UK should “not be locked into tasks or roles which either cannot be easily justified or presented domestically in the UK; or which have no discernable end and so risk locking us into an open-ended commitment”. He also proposed that agreement should be reached “sooner rather than later” on handing over the two-star Command of MND(SE) to the US.

**1054.** Concluding his letter, Mr Miliband wrote that:

“The opportunity in Iraq also cuts both ways. Iraq is discernibly shaping to be an important and assertive regional power. We have a strong interest in establishing a productive and full-scope bilateral relationship with that renascent Iraq. We will best do so on the basis of a positive conclusion to our military engagement within the coalition in MND(SE).”

**1055.** During his visit, Mr Miliband met Prime Minister Maliki.<sup>518</sup> Mr Baker reported to the Iraq Strategy Group that this conversation “had been held in a bad atmosphere, with Maliki blaming us for all of Basra’s shortcomings, and criticising our dealings with JAM.”

**1056.** Charge of the Knights Phase V took place in the Jumariyah district of Basra on 28 April.<sup>519</sup> On 1 May, Maj Gen White-Spunner reported that:

“What is becoming increasingly evident, as our situational awareness improves, is just what a poor state the city is in, with basic services non-existent in some areas and a serious problem with raw sewage and mounds of rubbish on the streets.”

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<sup>518</sup> Letter Cabinet Office [junior official] to McDonald, 28 April 2008, ‘Iraq Strategy Group, 28 April’.

<sup>519</sup> Minute White-Spunner to CJO, 2 May 2008, ‘GOC MND(SE) Weekly Letter – 1 May 2008’.

