

SECTION 9.3

JULY 2004 TO MAY 2005

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Introduction

1. This Section addresses:

- the UK role in the political development of Iraq, including preparation for Iraq's first post-Saddam Hussein elections in January 2005 and subsequent negotiations to form the Iraqi Transitional Government under Prime Minister Ja'afari;
- strategies for tackling the Sunni insurgency, including the UK role in preparation for the second major US offensive in Fallujah; and
- plans for the deployment and withdrawal of UK troops.

2. This Section does not address:

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

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

July 2004

4. On 1 July, Saddam Hussein and 11 other senior Ba'athists appeared in front of an Iraqi court convened at the Camp Victory court martial facility in Baghdad.¹

5. The judge presiding told all 12 what crimes they were accused of having committed. Mr Chris Segar, Head of the British Office Baghdad reported that:

“... under Iraqi law this was a first step in which the accused is informed that there are allegations against him which deserve investigation, which allow for continued detention and that he has a right to legal counsel.”

6. The Annotated Agenda for the Ad Hoc Ministerial Group on Iraq Rehabilitation (AHMGIR) on 1 July informed Ministers that the next seven months in Iraq, leading to elections in early 2005 and the creation of an Iraqi Transitional Government and National Assembly, would be the real test of the success of the transition and the Interim Iraqi Government (IIG) to which the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) had handed power at the end of June.²

7. The Annotated Agenda also said:

“As expected, the pre-handover period was marked by an **increase in attacks** on both coalition and, increasingly, Iraqi forces.”

¹ Telegram 006 Baghdad to FCO London, 1 July 2004, 'Iraq: High Value Detainees: First Court Appearance'.

² Annotated Agenda, 1 July 2004, Ad Hoc Group on Iraq Rehabilitation meeting.

8. When the AHMGIR met, the FCO was commissioned to co-ordinate an integrated UK strategy covering the period up to Iraqi elections.³

9. On 2 July, the Assessments Staff reported “no major attacks over the transition period, and a distinct downturn in lower-level attacks, especially in Baghdad”; probably attributable to bringing forward the handover date and increased security measures as it approached.⁴

10. In the first few days of July, Mr Edward Chaplin arrived in Baghdad to take up post as the first British Ambassador to Iraq for 13 years.⁵

11. Mr Chaplin told the Inquiry that “the overall priority for the Embassy ... was the support of the political process and making sure that elections could take place on time at the end of January 2005”.⁶

12. On 5 July, the Assessments Staff provided Sir Nigel Sheinwald, Mr Blair’s Foreign Policy Adviser, with statistics on the number of attacks against the Multi-National Force – Iraq (MNF-I) and Iraqi targets which showed that there had been a reduction:

“... at some 400/week, however, it is still running well above the rate in January/February.”⁷

13. Sir Nigel commented in manuscript to Mr Blair that there were “some, tentative, positive signs”.

14. Mr Blair spoke to President Bush by video conference on 6 July and commented that although insurgents would continue their activities, overall the security situation was better.⁸ In the South-East, Iraqis were increasingly in the lead on security.

15. Mr Blair was concerned to remind the public about Saddam Hussein’s use of chemical weapons and to expose and document the human rights abuses which had taken place during his regime.

16. A meeting of the Iraq Strategy Group on 9 July noted:

“... the withdrawal of the MNF was likely to be a key [Iraqi] election issue. While we remained committed to help Iraq with security, we needed to start thinking about the possibility that we would be reducing our presence in Iraq during 2005. We would want to avoid the appearance of our assistance being rebuffed.”⁹

³ Minutes, 1 July 2004, Ad Hoc Group on Iraq Rehabilitation meeting.

⁴ Minute Dowse to Sheinwald, 2 July 2004, ‘Iraq Update – 2 July’.

⁵ Public hearing, 7 December 2009, pages 1-2.

⁶ Public hearing, 7 December 2009, page 6.

⁷ Minute Dowse to Sheinwald, 5 July 2004, ‘Iraq Attack Statistics’ including Manuscript comment Sheinwald to Prime Minister.

⁸ Letter Quarrey to Owen, 6 July 2004, ‘Prime Minister’s VTC with Bush, 6 July: Iraq’.

⁹ Minute Cabinet Office [junior official] to Sheinwald, 13 July 2004, ‘Iraq: Strategy Group’.

17. Attendees at the Iraq Strategy Group were also told that increasing the UN's engagement in Iraq, including by the appointment of a new Special Representative, was proving to be difficult.

18. In their conversation on 12 July, Mr Blair told President Bush that he was encouraged by recent reports on Iraq; the key was now to maintain momentum, including by pushing the UN to develop its role and by supporting Prime Minister Allawi.¹⁰

19. On the same day Mr Ashraf Jehangir Qazi was appointed as the new UN Special Representative for Iraq, with responsibility for the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq.¹¹

20. Mr Qazi was a Pakistani diplomat who had been Ambassador of Pakistan to the United States since September 2002.¹²

21. The strategy paper commissioned by the AHMGIR on 1 July was circulated to members of the Defence and Overseas Policy Committee (DOP) on 13 July.¹³

22. The introduction to the paper said that it offered:

“... a strategic look at the position we want Iraq to be in at the end of January 2005; risks to our strategy; and priority areas in which the UK can help ensure success.”

23. The following objectives were proposed in the paper:

- Political
 - an elected Transitional National Government which enjoys broad domestic and international support; and
 - increased international support for the IIG.
- Security
 - real inroads into the insurgency through Iraqi-led security and political measures, including a political process (aimed at drawing in former regime elements and militants such as Muqtada al-Sadr) and improved co-operation with Iraq's neighbours over border security; and
 - significantly increased Iraqi security capacity with Iraqi forces in local control around much of the country and a reduced reliance on international troops, paving the way for foreign troop reductions in 2005.
- Reconstruction and economic development
 - a functioning Iraqi Administration in Baghdad and at governorate level capable of delivering basic services;

¹⁰ Letter Quarrey to Owen, 12 July 2004, 'Prime Minister's VTC with Bush, 12 July: Middle East issues'.

¹¹ *BBC News*, 12 July 2004, *Annan names new UN envoy to Iraq*.

¹² UN Press Release, 14 July 2004, 'Ashraf Jehangir Qazi of Pakistan Appointed Special Representative for Iraq'.

¹³ [Paper FCO, 13 July 2004, 'Iraq: The Next Six Months'](#).

- reconstruction programmes which deliver jobs and improvements to infrastructure and services; and
- reduction of subsidies and an agreed IMF programme leading to a debt settlement by the end of the year.

24. The paper said that security problems posed the greatest risk to achieving the objectives it set out, in particular the risk of “a terrorist spectacular” against either the IIG or the UN. Other significant risks included postponement of the elections, pressure for premature withdrawal of the MNF-I, infrastructure failures during the summer and an increase in sectarian tension.

25. Based on the objectives and risks listed, the UK priorities proposed were:

- redefining the US and UK relationship with the IIG, so that it would be seen to be taking decisions without interference;
- persuading the UN to increase its engagement;
- pushing for an international conference;
- improving electoral communications and getting the UK media to reflect “the improving situation in Iraq”;
- supporting IIG efforts to re-engage members of the former regime and keeping pressure on neighbouring states regarding border security;
- mitigating opposition to the MNF-I, including by countering perceptions of an intention to stay indefinitely;
- supporting Iraqiisation of security forces;
- keeping pressure on the US to spend money in Southern Iraq; and
- pressing the UN and World Bank to send staff back to Iraq.

26. When DOP met on 15 July it agreed those priorities and also that the UK should continue to encourage potential contributors to a UN protection force.¹⁴

27. Some positive progress on electricity production was reported, but implementation of the main infrastructure contracts was slow. DOP agreed that DFID should produce a note on infrastructure issues which Mr Blair might use in discussions with President Bush.

28. In a paper for the Chiefs of Staff dated 16 July, Lieutenant General Robert Fry, Deputy Chief of the Defence Staff (Commitments), stated that “although insurgency continues, development of competent Iraqi Security Forces remains on track.”¹⁵

29. Provided the necessary criteria were achieved, the campaign plan envisaged a gradual drawdown of troops during 2005 leading to final withdrawal in 2006, to be followed by a period of “Strategic Overwatch”.

¹⁴ Minutes, 15 July 2004, DOP meeting.

¹⁵ Minute DCDS(C) to COS, 16 July 2004, ‘Strategic Intent’.

30. Lt Gen Fry assumed that “some form of enduring commitment ... will be required”.

31. On the same day Dr Condoleezza Rice, the US National Security Advisor, told Sir Nigel Sheinwald, who was visiting Washington, that President Bush was of the view that the only way to honour those who had died in Iraq was to get the job done.¹⁶ There would be no reduction of US troops unless the security situation permitted it.

32. On 21 July, the Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC) issued an Assessment of the security situation in Iraq.¹⁷

33. The JIC recorded that, across Iraq, there was a brief reduction in violence immediately after the IIG assumed authority on 28 June, but “attacks are still occurring at a steady rate that is impeding progress on the international community’s political and economic objectives for Iraq”.

34. Of those attacks:

“Most ... continue to be against the MNF, using small arms, improvised explosive devices (IEDs), mortars and rockets. But suicide car bomb attacks, principally targeting Iraqis, have also continued. Islamist groups, and others, continue to take (and kill) hostages ... Attacks against infrastructure continue.”

35. Although the situation in Najaf, Karbala and the Shia areas of Baghdad remained “relatively calm”, the Jaysh al-Mahdi (JAM) “in effect retains control of the Imam Ali shrine in Najaf”. Muqtada al-Sadr was maintaining a “low profile” and was assessed to be “seeking a political role, while retaining military options”.

36. The JIC judged that:

“No significant reduction [in the level of violence] is likely in the near term and a number of triggers during the next few months may result in increased violence.”

37. Lieutenant General William Rollo told the Inquiry that, when he arrived to take over as GOC MND(SE) in July 2004, the situation in the South of Iraq was “basically quiet”.¹⁸

38. The Annotated Agenda for the AHMGIR on 22 July said that “there have been a number of high profile incidents in recent days ... reflecting the continued capacity of insurgents to plan and carry out attacks”.¹⁹

39. In a single week in mid-July, the Governor of Mosul, a leading member of the Basra Provincial Council, the Babil Chief of Police and one of the Iraqi MOD’s Directors General were killed in separate incidents, along with several members of the Iraqi Security Forces and civilians. The Iraqi Minister of Justice was also attacked.

¹⁶ Letter Rycroft to Adams, 18 July 2004, ‘Nigel Sheinwald’s visit to Washington’.

¹⁷ [JIC Assessment, 21 July 2004, ‘Iraq Security’](#).

¹⁸ Public hearing, 15 December 2009, page 4.

¹⁹ Annotated Agenda, 22 July 2004, Ad Hoc Group on Iraq Rehabilitation meeting.

40. Mr Blair and President Bush spoke by video conference on 22 July.²⁰ Mr Blair asked about progress on the “Iraq Security Plan” and noted that:

“... showing progress on controlling the violence was the toughest issue – for the UK public a real sense that Iraq was on the way to a peaceful future was essential.”

41. An early draft of a security strategy for the IIG, drawn up by US, UK and Iraqi representatives in Baghdad – but not seen by Prime Minister Allawi – was reviewed by a meeting of senior officials chaired by Mr Bowen on 27 July.²¹

42. At the meeting, Mr Blair’s Private Secretary said:

“... the Prime Minister believed the security strategy should be a key document in communicating the IIG’s plans on security to the Iraqi people. The current draft was not the document the PM was anticipating: it went much broader, and lacked detail on plans to develop the security forces and Iraqi security.”

43. The meeting was told that work on Iraqiisation was being carried out by a separate team, led by Lieutenant General David Petraeus, Commander Multi-National Security Transition Command – Iraq (MNSTC-I). FCO officials were tasked to find out more detail on that work, as well as on the budget to implement the strategy, whether the document had Iraqi support and what US views were.

August 2004

44. On 2 August, an MNF-I patrol passing near Muqtada al-Sadr’s house in Najaf came under attack.²² Fighting within Najaf escalated and spread to other parts of Iraq, particularly Baghdad but with sporadic attacks on the MNF-I and ISF in al-Kut, Nasiriyah, al-Amara and Basra. This upsurge in violence within Shia areas coincided with a wider deterioration in security in Sunni areas, in particular Samarra and Mosul.

45. In a meeting with General George Casey, Commander of the Multi-National Force – Iraq, and Lieutenant General John McColl, his deputy and the Senior British Military Representative – Iraq (SBMR-I), on 4 August, Prime Minister Allawi thought it was essential “to act decisively against the insurgency”.²³ He commissioned an analysis of the areas where the IIG and MNF-I could “match strength against insurgency weakness” to achieve success. That should focus on Fallujah, Ramadi, Samarra, North Babil, Baqubah and Baghdad.

46. On 4 August, Secretary Powell told Mr Straw that he judged the situation in Sunni areas to be:

²⁰ Letter Phillipson to Adams, 22 July 2004, ‘Prime Minister’s VTC with President Bush, 22 July: Iraq and MEPP’.

²¹ [Minute Cabinet Office \[junior official\] to Sheinwald, 28 July 2004, ‘Iraq: Security Strategy’.](#)

²² [JIC Assessment, 11 August 2004, ‘Iraq Security: Shia Violence’.](#)

²³ Telegram 98 Baghdad to FCO London, 5 August 2004, ‘Iraq: Security: Briefing the Prime Minister’.

“... worse than many understood. It was indigenous, self-generating and run by highly sophisticated and intelligent individuals capable of shifting their strategy in response to developments on the ground.”²⁴

47. In a report on 5 August, the British Embassy Baghdad observed that “there is an Iraqi face being put on the operation” and that providing strong Iraqi leaders to take over once the MNF-I had played its part was Gen Casey’s condition for MNF-I involvement.²⁵

48. Also on 5 August Mr Simon Collis, British Consul General in Basra, reported that the detention on 3 August of four members of the Office of the Martyr Sadr had increased tension between the Sadrist militia and the MNF-I in Basra City, Maysan and Nasiriyah.²⁶

49. The tension was such that Mr Collis reported “there is a fair probability of mortar attack attempts on British bases tonight, possibly including our Consulate”.

50. A report from Baghdad on the same day recorded heavy fighting in Najaf between the MNF-I and Sadrist militia plus an insurgent attack on the police in Mosul.²⁷

51. In order to show that the IIG was in charge of the situation, Prime Minister Allawi planned to announce the introduction of the death penalty, and to take steps to manage media coverage.

52. On 6 August, Mr John Sawers, FCO Director General Political, chaired a meeting of senior officials to discuss developments in Iraq.²⁸

53. On security, the meeting was told that:

“There had been a spike in attacks in the last 48 hours. MOD’s initial assessment was that the security situation was not yet unmanageable and that it probably did not represent a single, co-ordinated, plan. It was important that the MNF was measured in its response and did not undermine progress towards the Iraqiisation of security tasks.”

54. Mr Blair’s Private Secretary told the meeting that Mr Blair was concerned that neither an Iraqi security strategy nor an MNF-I internal review of the Iraqiisation process had yet appeared.

55. The security strategy was particularly important for demonstrating publicly that the IIG had a plan to tackle the security situation. The FCO was instructed to press Prime Minister Allawi on the importance of issuing a public statement soon.

²⁴ Letter Owen to Quarrey, 4 August 2004, ‘Foreign Secretary’s Conversation with US Secretary of State, 4 August’.

²⁵ Telegram 98 Baghdad to FCO London, 5 August 2004, ‘Iraq: Security: Briefing the Prime Minister’.

²⁶ Telegram 86 Basra to FCO London, 5 August 2004, ‘Iraq: OMS Activity in Basra’.

²⁷ Telegram 103, Baghdad to FCO London, 5 August 2004, ‘Iraq: Security: Ministerial Committee on National [Security]’.

²⁸ Minute Cabinet Office [junior official] to Sawers, 6 August 2004, ‘Iraq’.

56. Mr Asquith, FCO Director Iraq, reported on 9 August that Prime Minister Allawi understood the need to explain the IIG’s strategy on security, “but does not think the National Security Strategy document fits the bill”.²⁹

57. Prime Minister Allawi had however agreed the need to sort out the details quickly with the MNF-I. He envisaged “a statement setting out the security strategy in detail – including with numbers, timelines and objectives for what the government planned to achieve”, to be issued shortly before the National Conference planned for mid-August.

58. The JIC assessed the recent upsurge of violence in Shia areas on 11 August and judged that:

“The scale of the violence has not matched the intensity or breadth of the attacks in April, nor have there been indications of wider public support for al-Sadr and his militia.”³⁰

59. In Najaf and elsewhere the Mahdi Army was:

“... resisting strongly ... and continues to pose a significant threat to Iraqi Interim Government political and security objectives ... [It] has proven, again, to be capable of generating widespread attacks across central and southern Iraq and reinforcing vulnerable points when needed.”

60. Although the JIC assessed that violence in Sunni areas presented “the more enduring challenge”, Shia violence was “providing a serious test of strength” to Prime Minister Allawi’s Government.

61. The JIC assessed that:

“The position of Grand Ayatollah al-Sistani, receiving medical treatment in the UK, is not clear and his absence may have weakened a potential moderating influence on all sides.”

62. The JIC judged that the exact degree of Iranian involvement in recent events was unclear, but Iran was providing “encouragement, funding and possibly arms to the Mahdi Army”.

63. A message from Mr Asquith in Baghdad on 11 August suggested that, although its instinct was to take decisive military action in Najaf, the IIG had been persuaded to delay, at least until after the National Conference on 15 August.³¹ Planning was under way for military action at a later point.

²⁹ Telegram 107 Baghdad to FCO London, 9 August 2004, ‘Iraq: Security: Prime Minister’s Views’.

³⁰ [JIC Assessment, 11 August 2004, ‘Iraq Security: Shia Violence’](#).

³¹ Telegram 118 Baghdad to FCO London, 11 August 2004, ‘Iraq: Security and Najaf’.

64. A subsequent telegram from Mr Collis highlighted that “any attack on the holy sites is liable to have a major and lasting impact across the South”.³² That risk could be mitigated by:

- making the operation an ISF, rather than MNF-I, one with Prime Minister Allawi fronting political and media operations;
- explaining the purpose of such action to Grand Ayatollah al-Sistani and Mr Kofi Annan, UN Secretary General;
- launching a major humanitarian operation in Najaf; and
- re-launching economic reconstruction across the South.

65. Maj Gen Rollo supported all of those points.

66. Mr Collis advised that “high level contact from London to take Allawi and the Americans through our concerns” would make sense.

67. A discussion between Cabinet Office and No.10 officials on 11 August concluded:

“The **security situation** was bad, both in the Sunni and Shia areas. While the fighting in Shia areas currently had greater profile, the problems in the Sunni areas were more strategically significant ... The policy question was how we suggested Allawi should deal with the problems, particularly in Najaf. Generally, the view of the meeting was that action did need to be taken against Muqtada al-Sadr (MAS), but that there were significant risks, military and political, which would need to be managed ... If they [the ISF] were not ready, any operation risked either failing or drawing in coalition forces.”³³

68. Officials also observed that “while **Allawi** was performing relatively well, the Iraqi Interim Government (IIG) remained highly dependent on him for drive and direction”.

69. On 11 August, a briefing paper for Mr Blair in advance of a telephone call with President Bush stated that, while the main strategic challenge remained the violence in the Sunni areas, the immediate issue was addressing the situation in Najaf and its spread across southern Iraq.³⁴

70. Muqtada al-Sadr remained a threat that would need to be “dealt with ... probably sooner rather than later” although he was not considered to pose a strategic threat as he had earlier in the year.

71. The brief said that any decision to deal with Muqtada al-Sadr was for Prime Minister Allawi to take, and the MNF-I would need to support that decision. It seemed likely that no action would be taken before the National Conference. The brief suggested that

³² Telegram 103 Basra to FCO London, 11 August 2004, ‘Iraq: Security and Najaf’.

³³ Minute Cabinet Office [junior official] to Fergusson, 11 August 2004, ‘Iraq’.

³⁴ Minute Quarrey to Prime Minister, 11 August 2004, ‘Iraq: Phone Call with President Bush’.

Mr Blair should voice UK concern that Iran was encouraging, financing and possibly arming the Sadrists.

72. Mr Blair spoke to President Bush by telephone later that day and said that the UK considered that the Iranians were at least encouraging and funding Muqtada al-Sadr, and might be sending him arms.³⁵ He was aware that the US did not entirely share that assessment.

73. In Mr Blair's view, the Iranians were concerned that they would be the next target for US military action and were therefore concluding that they should make life more difficult for the US in Iraq. He intended to send a personal message to Iran via Mr Richard Dalton, British Ambassador to Iran, making clear that no-one was talking about invading Iran, but that if they "misbehaved" on Iraq then "things would only get more difficult for them".

74. From 15 to 18 August a National Conference was held to select an Iraqi Interim National Council (IINC) of 100 members to oversee the IIG until the election of the Transitional National Assembly in January 2005.³⁶ The Conference included a wide range of Iraqis: representatives of political parties, the religious hierarchy, tribes, the regions and civil society.

75. The British Embassy Baghdad reported that three methods were put forward at the Conference for selecting the members of the IINC:

"... a slate system of complete lists of 81 names, the UN's proportional representation based on the make up of the conference (which would favour the established political parties) and a caucus system requiring delegates to form ad hoc groupings receiving one Council seat for every 13 delegates in the group."³⁷

76. Delegates opted for the slate system, by a "clear majority".

77. The IPU assessed the conference as:

"... a qualified success. That it took place, despite the security situation, was an achievement. It generated a great deal of interest ... and included some vigorous debates. And it succeeded in selecting a broadly representative 100 member National Council, 26 percent of whom are women. It did not, however, succeed in drawing in any elements on the fringes of the insurgency."³⁸

78. On 18 August, a Current Intelligence Group (CIG) assessed security in Iraq.³⁹

³⁵ Letter Quarrey to Sinclair, 11 August 2004, 'Prime Minister's telephone conversation with President Bush, 11 August: Iraq and Iran'.

³⁶ JIC Assessment, 2 September 2004, 'Iraq: Political Prospects'.

³⁷ Telegram 136 Baghdad to FCO London, 18 August 2004, 'Iraq: National Conference'.

³⁸ Submission Crompton to Private Secretary [FCO], 27 August 2004, 'Iraq: Next Steps' attaching Paper Iraq Policy Unit, 27 August 2004 'Iraq: Next Steps' and Letter Charlton to Phillipson, 24 August 2004, 'Iraq'.

³⁹ [CIG Assessment 18 August 2004, 'Iraq Security'](#).

79. Its Key Judgements included:

I. The number of attacks against the Multinational Force and Iraqi targets has now matched the previous highest level in April. There is no sign of an early improvement.

II. The confrontation in Najaf has become a test of credibility for Allawi and the IIG. Allawi will have to tread a fine line between acting before the conditions for success are right and delaying too long and appearing weak, unless al-Sadr backs down. Iraqi forces will be heavily reliant on broader US military support.”

80. The CIG judged that even if a negotiated settlement was agreed, a residual Shia insurgency would probably persist, and that:

“The Shia violence has tended to obscure the fact that attacks in Sunni areas have also continued unabated. Large areas in a number of Sunni cities remain under insurgent control. This will continue to be the most serious long-term security problem for the IIG.”

81. The CIG recorded that a British journalist, Mr James Brandon, had been kidnapped by JAM in Basra. Mr Brandon was released shortly afterwards, but kidnappings continued.

82. The CIG assessed that the “mixed performance” of the ISF had been highlighted in Shia areas. In Basra the police chief was reported to be “in league with the militants and elements of the Iraqi police were involved in the kidnapping of the British journalist”. In al-Amara the police chief had agreed not to interfere in JAM activities because of “police concern about their own vulnerability rather than support for al-Sadr”.

83. On 19 August, Maj Gen Rollo reported:

“There has been a significant mood change over the past week and a marked deterioration in the security situation in the South East ... In the week up to August 15, the number of hostile incidents aimed specifically against multi-national forces in this area showed an increase of 300 percent over the previous peak in April 2004. These attacks have become more sophisticated and more lethal.”⁴⁰

84. Maj Gen Rollo attributed the rise in attacks to “tensions and confrontation” in Najaf, and commented that:

“A pause or reduced tension in Najaf will have immediate and positive effects in the South. However, it will not solve the problem here. There will remain an irreducible number of militant sympathisers who will wish to attack and intimidate. I intend to tighten the screw on the militants and exploit every opportunity to re-occupy ground in Basra and elsewhere by resuming the visible patrolling that we had reduced in number and intensity on transfer of authority at the end of June ... There is no

⁴⁰ Minute GOC MND(SE) to CJO, 19 August 2004, ‘GOC MND(SE) – Iraq update – 19 August 2004’.

evidence of widespread or deep support for Muqtada, in the police or the population at large. Their loyalties have come under pressure as they watch the events unfold in Najaf ...”

85. On 20 August, Mr Blair’s Private Secretary wrote to the Overseas and Defence Secretariat of the Cabinet Office to commission a:

“... full picture of the situation in Iraq after the National Conference, how we are going to get from here to successful elections in January, and the challenges we will face.”⁴¹

86. Mr Phillipson’s letter followed a “long discussion” the previous day with Mr Blair, who had observed that the security situation and the slow rate at which the ISF were being trained and equipped presented a real risk to the achievement of the UK’s objectives in Iraq. Mr Blair had indicated that he wanted to discuss Iraq strategy with President Bush “soon”.

87. The British Embassy Office Basra remained “in lock-down, with a twice daily helicopter service to the airport”.⁴²

88. Mr Ali A Allawi recorded in his book on the Occupation of Iraq that Grand Ayatollah al-Sistani brokered a solution to the violence in Najaf and Kufa.⁴³ The five point agreement he negotiated with Muqtada al-Sadr on 26 August called for:

- demilitarisation of Najaf and the nearby city of Kufa and the withdrawal of all armed groups;
- responsibility for maintaining law and order in the two cities to be handed to the Iraqi police;
- withdrawal of all foreign forces from the two cities;
- compensation by the Iraqi Government for all victims of the violence; and
- completion of a census as the basis of general elections to restore complete Iraqi sovereignty.

89. According to Mr Allawi:

“Muqtada couched his climbdown in terms of submission to the demands of the highest religious authority. The Interim Government had no choice but to accept the terms of the agreement ...”

90. Mr Allawi judged that, although all the key players claimed some part in the success in reaching agreement, Grand Ayatollah al-Sistani, by demonstrating his control over the Shia, emerged the “only clear winner”.

⁴¹ [Letter Phillipson to Fergusson, 20 August 2004, ‘Iraq: Next Steps’.](#)

⁴² Letter Cabinet Office [junior official] to Jack, 23 August 2004, ‘Iraq: Ad Hoc Group’.

⁴³ Allawi AA. *The Occupation of Iraq: winning the war, losing the peace*. Yale University Press, 2007.

91. The Iraq Senior Officials Group on 27 August was told that:

“... we should not assume the problems with Muqtada Al Sadr (MAS) and his militias had been solved. In particular, there was no way of enforcing their agreement to disarm.”⁴⁴

92. In response to the 20 August commission from Mr Blair’s Private Secretary, the IPU provided a paper on 27 August which contained “little new in policy terms”.⁴⁵

93. The paper concluded that the strategy agreed by DOP in July remained the right one but would need regular fine tuning.

94. Drawing on a letter from Mr Alan Charlton, British Chargé d’Affaires Washington, the IPU also advised that President Bush was “letting US officials in Baghdad make the running” and that the UK should focus its effort with the President on a few issues where Washington could make a difference, specifically:

- keeping the elections on course;
- IIG outreach to the regions;
- ensuring that the US did not take reconstruction in the South for granted; and
- Security Sector Reform.

95. The IPU paper also included a description of the key risks, including:

- continued security problems;
- preparations for elections falling further behind schedule and pressure from the IIG to postpone them; and
- lack of communications support for the IIG.

96. The Private Secretary’s covering minute to Mr Blair suggested that the IPU’s paper was “too vague”, did not reflect the deteriorating security situation in Basra and elsewhere and did not offer a clear way forward.⁴⁶ He recalled that Mr Blair had asked for the “unvarnished truth so that we can engage in a frank discussion about how we can help the IIG restore control”.

97. After discussing the paper with Sir Nigel Sheinwald, Mr Antony Phillipson (Mr Blair’s Private Secretary for Foreign Affairs) recommended that a new paper should be commissioned, broken into three sections:

- how to ensure that the elections took place, on time, in January 2005;
- how the Sunni triangle could be brought “back under control”; and
- how order could be restored in Basra.

⁴⁴ Letter Cabinet Office [junior official] to Jack, 27 August 2004, ‘Iraq: Senior Officials Group’.

⁴⁵ Submission Crompton to Private Secretary [FCO], 27 August 2004, ‘Iraq: Next Steps’ attaching Paper Iraq Policy Unit, 27 August 2004, ‘Iraq: Next Steps’ and Letter Charlton to Phillipson, 24 August 2004, ‘Iraq’.

⁴⁶ [Minute Phillipson to Prime Minister, 27 August 2004, ‘Iraq: Next Steps’](#).

98. Within each section, the issues of Iraqisation and governance should be “mainstreamed” and answers provided on:

- whether Iraqisation really was on track and, if not, what could be done; and
- how to build up capacity within the IIG to govern.

99. Mr Phillipson noted that although the UK had an enormous stake in getting these issues right, it did not have direct control over the levers. Prime Minister Allawi therefore remained “the key”.

100. On 29 August Mr Blair set out his analysis of the issues in a minute to Sir Nigel, Mr Jonathan Powell, his Private Secretary and a junior member of his No.10 staff.⁴⁷ He wrote:

“The situation is self-evidently serious. But two basic elements remain valid:

“We are trying to help Iraq become what most Iraqis want it to be; and the FRE and extremists are trying to stop us ...

“Iraq has therefore become the battleground for the future of the region: does it go benign, showing Muslim and Arab nations can embrace the modern world; or descend into a mixture of religious fanaticism and brutality that only brutal dictators or even less than brutal dictators can manage? ...

“Our strategy is fine in one sense: Iraqisation of security and support for the democratic political process. The problem is that the urgency of the situation may overwhelm us and make our timelines for Iraqisation naïve.

“The fact is Allawi needs help now; and there has to be a clear sense of our gripping the situation now.”

101. Mr Blair listed things that should be done, including:

- providing “first-class political, media and strategic capability ... now” to support Prime Minister Allawi, drawing on “the best home-grown Iraqi talent” supported by “our own people” who should be “hand-picked” immediately;
- examining DFID’s assistance to key Iraqi ministries, in particular defence, “to ensure real robustness and ... if necessary, our people put in”;
- ensuring Prime Minister Allawi had immediate access to “strong, well-armed brigades who can move into any trouble-spot and clean up”, with “commanders in the field whose loyalty and that of their troops is clear”;
- unblocking funding for reconstruction, which was “key to winning hearts and minds”;

⁴⁷ [Minute Prime Minister to Sheinwald, 29 August 2004, ‘Iraq’.](#)

- getting a renewed strong message from UK military and civilians in MND(SE) on what was urgently required and then delivering against those requirements; and
- tackling Iranian interference.

102. Mr Blair also wrote that the UK should make clear that “we aren’t going anywhere until the job is done, i.e. we aren’t going to be defeated. Period.” He concluded his minute:

“When I meet Allawi in September, it should be with a coherent plan to change the situation.”

103. In a telephone call with President Bush on 31 August, Mr Blair said he was concerned that Prime Minister Allawi “was not getting exactly what he needed in terms of help to strengthen his political and communications strategies”.⁴⁸ He suggested that the US and UK “needed to ensure that Allawi had some visible successes in the coming weeks”.

September 2004

104. At its meeting on 1 September the JIC discussed the prospects for the IIG up to the election in January 2005, at the request of the FCO.⁴⁹

105. The JIC assessed that the IIG’s agenda had so far been dominated by security, particularly the uprising in Najaf. Now that the situation there appeared to have been resolved, the way seemed clear for Prime Minister Allawi to focus on the Sunni insurgency which remained “the main longer-term problem”.

106. Prime Minister Allawi had already passed emergency legislation, including a limited amnesty, and re-introduced the death penalty but his attempts to engage the Sunni insurgents directly had only limited success. The security situation was continuing to hamper reconstruction, which in turn was undermining public confidence in the IIG.

107. The JIC’s view was that the political timetable for the January 2005 elections was ambitious given the prevailing security environment, with extremists on all sides “certain to attempt to disrupt proceedings”. Although postponement was likely to suit the IIG, the JIC judged that “any significant delay would provoke confrontation with Sistani and risk unrest”.

108. The JIC’s analysis of the composition of the Iraqi Interim National Council is set out in the table below. The JIC made clear the figures were simplistic and should be treated with caution. There was considerable overlap between the groups; in particular, most members also had some tribal or provincial affiliation in addition to their association with a political party.

⁴⁸ Letter Phillipson to Adams, 31 August 2004, ‘Prime Minister’s phonecall with President Bush, 31 August’.

⁴⁹ JIC Assessment, 2 September 2004, ‘Iraq: Political Prospects’.

Table 1: Composition of Iraqi Interim National Council

Former IGC Members	19%
SCIRI/Badr	6%
Dawa Party	3%
Other Islamist Parties	7%
Kurds	17%
Tribes	7%
Independents	8%
Provincial Caucuses	8%
Female	25%
Regional Personalities	10%
Preparatory Committee Members	8%

109. The JIC observed that:

“Although the process of selecting the Council was far from democratic, it nevertheless produced a body which found favour with the majority of conference delegates.”

110. Established Shia and Kurdish parties got most of the seats reserved for political groups, while Sunni Arabs were less well represented.

111. In early September, Maj Gen Rollo reported that he was:

“... encouraged by the fact that anti-Muqtada forces and moderates (the majority) have been strengthened by what they consider to be the submission of Muqtada al-Sadr to the rightful religious authority. Should his militia return arbitrarily to confrontation, I am confident that there will be greater resistance from the Iraqis themselves, and greater support to us in acting firmly against threats to stability.”⁵⁰

112. On 2 September, an assessment of resistance to the coalition in Iraq was provided to Mr Stuart Jack, Head of the FCO Iraq Operations Unit, and Mr David Richmond, FCO Director General Defence and Intelligence.⁵¹ It said:

“... the Sunni resistance remains the greatest threat to the political process ... Their movement is facilitated by US military disengagement from the centres of key Sunni cities (Fallujah, Samarra, Ramadi, Ba’qubah) ... Attacks in the Sunni triangle and Baghdad remain at a high level. Fatalities amongst the ISF, who have assumed sole responsibility for policing Sunni city centres, have increased significantly since handover.”

⁵⁰ Minute Rollo to CJO, 2 September 2004, ‘GOC MND (SE) – Iraq Update – 02 September 2004’.

⁵¹ Minute senior government official specialising in the Middle East to Jack and Richmond, 2 September 2004, ‘Resistance to the Coalition in Iraq’.

113. On the threat posed by Muqtada al-Sadr and the Shia militia:

“In the wake of the Najaf crisis ... the Sadrists are down but not out ... Since the Najaf agreement ... the JAM leadership has indicated their intention to retain heavy weapons for future use. Our conclusion is that despite the recently brokered truce with the Sadrists in Basra and al-Sadr’s proclaimed determination to follow a political path, the threat to British forces remains high. Post-handover, our ability to disrupt it unilaterally is curtailed but ... there may be opportunities to work with the Iraqis to neutralise elements of the Sadrist militia leadership.”

114. Maj Gen Rollo reported to Air Chief Marshal Glenn Torpy, the Chief of Joint Operations, on 8 September that the situation in MND(SE) had improved.⁵² There had been:

“... no hostile incidents of note over the past week in MND(SE), and on some days there have been no hostile incidents at all. Just as the confrontation in Najaf ramped up the tension down here, so its apparent resolution has seen an abrupt end to the militia attacks against us.”

115. On 9 September, Sir Nigel Sheinwald and Mr David Quarrey (a Private Secretary to Mr Blair) sent Mr Blair a minute reporting their recent visit to Iraq, for use in Mr Blair’s planned video conference with President Bush.⁵³

116. Sir Nigel and Mr Quarrey reported that they had:

“... heard a range of views on the key issues (Americans mostly more optimistic, Brits and Allawi less so.) We have heard some impressive numbers ... but we have heard such numbers before, and delivery is far from certain. The only safe prediction is that the going will continue to be very tough.”

117. Sir Nigel and Mr Quarrey explained that a “joined up programme was needed” and highlighted:

- The ongoing development of an effective counter-insurgency strategy to “regain control of cities in the Sunni triangle”. The ISF would lead the exercises, but would require significant MNF-I support.
- Continued Iraqiisation of security forces which could take until well into 2006; further progress would require “the NSC [National Security Council] and Number Ten ... to be all over these issues” to keep the pressure up.
- The lack of a worked-out IIG strategy for Sunni outreach.
- The logistical challenge of elections, and the likelihood that candidates would “pronounce on the timing of the departure of the MNF”.

⁵² Minute Rollo to CJO, 8 September 2004, ‘GOC MIND (SE) – Iraq Update – 08 September 2004’.

⁵³ Minute Sheinwald and Quarrey to Blair, 9 September 2004, ‘Iraq’.

- Practical support for Prime Minister Allawi. Two No.10 staff were to be seconded to provide support with government co-ordination and logistics (Mr Nicholas Cannon, a former Assistant Private Secretary to Mr Blair) and communications (Mr Charles Heatly).

118. Sir Nigel and Mr Quarrey recommended that the key message for Mr Blair’s conversation with President Bush should be “this is a decisive period for our joint mission in Iraq” and that the UK and US must:

- hold firm on January elections;
- keep up pressure for delivery on Iraqisation and reconstruction; and
- “give Allawi the sort of political advice ... he needs to help him win the election”.

119. During his visit, Sir Nigel met Prime Minister Allawi, who expressed concern about the capacity of Iraqi Security Forces, which “needed more help from the UK”.⁵⁴

120. Mr Hilary Benn, International Development Secretary, told Cabinet on 9 September that on a recent visit to Baghdad and Basra he had been able to “feel the difference” since the transfer of sovereignty.⁵⁵ Sunni outreach was needed in the South, where the mood was one of “persistent victimisation”. Reconstruction activity was continuing, but had been adversely affected by the security situation.

121. Summing up the Cabinet discussion, Mr Blair said that the coalition must send strong signals that it would stay in Iraq until the job was done, so that the Iraqi people would not fear abandonment. Those opposing the coalition through terrorism had “a clear strategy to plunge the country into chaos” but:

“It was a fallacy to see the only alternatives for political control as brutal dictatorship or religious fundamentalism and we needed to be as clear-headed in our strategic aims as were the terrorists in theirs.”

122. During a video conference with President Bush on 9 September, Mr Blair raised both the need to accelerate Iraqisation and for enhanced capacity within the IIG, without which “too much fell on Allawi himself”.⁵⁶ The existing timelines for improved security and services were “too long” and risked delaying the election.

123. On 13 September, Sir Nigel Sheinwald sent Mr Blair a second report covering “broader impressions” from his visit to Iraq.⁵⁷ Sir Nigel wrote:

“... I don’t think there’s anything we have, as it were, forgotten. The basic policy elements are right. But this remains a race against time ...”

⁵⁴ Letter Quarrey to Owen, 9 September 2004, ‘Iraq: Nigel Sheinwald’s meeting with Allawi, 8 September’.

⁵⁵ Cabinet Conclusions, 9 September 2004.

⁵⁶ Letter Phillipson to Adams, 9 September 2004, ‘Prime Minister’s VTC with President Bush, 9 September’.

⁵⁷ Minute Sheinwald to Prime Minister, 13 September 2004, ‘Visit to Iraq: Some Impressions’.

124. Sir Nigel highlighted the need to focus on the timing of the MNF-I's eventual withdrawal, which would become an increasingly important issue in the run up to the Iraqi election. He recommended that the UK should look at options and feed views into Gen Casey and Lt Gen McColl, who intended to discuss the issue with Prime Minister Allawi in the autumn.

125. Sir Nigel praised the skill and commitment of the UN team he met in Iraq, but observed that the electoral timetable remained "incredibly tight" and that the Iraqi public did not yet have any information about the election. In his view, "a broad electoral coalition containing secular Shia, moderate Sunnis and Kurds is the best guarantee, if it wins, of Iraq holding together in the years ahead, and of reducing Iranian influence".

126. Reflecting on the level and reliability of information available about Iraq, Sir Nigel wrote "there is still a tendency ... to talk things up or ... take the sage position that things take time and we have to be realistic". Sir Nigel concluded the report by saying:

"Compared with my visit last November, the security situation has got much worse and there is a greater sense of disconnect between the Green Zone and the rest of Iraq. It is difficult to be sure of one's judgements; and Iraq in any case continues to be the land of lies. The interim period is inherently unstable, as we always knew. But if we can get through it and hold respectable elections on time, that would be an incredible achievement; and the prognosis then should lighten."

127. Sir Nigel Sheinwald closed his visit report of 13 September by saying to Mr Blair:

"To achieve the level of engagement we need, we will need your help in keeping Whitehall up to the mark – there are definite signs of Iraq fatigue. Ditto the Americans."

128. On 14 September, Maj Gen Rollo wrote "MND (SE) continues to experience a period of calm. Incidents are running at about four or five a week, the lowest figure since January and February."⁵⁸

129. On 15 September, Mr Blair spoke by video conference to Mr Chaplin and Lt Gen McColl in Baghdad.⁵⁹ Lt Gen McColl reported that he "expected to see continuing high levels of activity in the coming months" and that the insurgency was becoming better co-ordinated with "no shortage of finance or volunteers".

130. Lt Gen McColl told Mr Blair that Iraq Security Forces would not be able to take full responsibility for security before 2006. Mr Chaplin emphasised the need for economic and political progress, to create a "less benign environment for the insurgents". Mr Blair agreed, and observed:

"We would not be able to deliver on the political and economic tracks without getting on top of the security situation."

⁵⁸ Minute Rollo to CJO, 14 September 2004, 'GOC MND (SE) – Iraq Update – 14 September 2004'.

⁵⁹ Letter Quarrey to Owen, 15 September 2004, 'Iraq: Prime Minister's VTC with Baghdad'.

131. At the request of the FCO, two JIC Assessments in September considered the degree to which Iran was interfering in Iraq and supporting Al Qaida or Sunni extremist groups.⁶⁰ The JIC assessed that:

“Iran has many legitimate interests in the future of Iraq, which it regards as vital to its security ... It wants the multinational forces to depart, so long as chaos does not result ... While it does not expect, and is not pushing for, a government in Iraq on the Iranian model, it does want a regime in which the Iraqi Shia – especially those amenable to Iranian influence – have significant representation and real power. We judge that Iran wants to maximise its influence in Iraq, but also to hedge against an outcome which marginalises it or its main Iraqi allies. Consequently, it continues its efforts to build links with a wide range of Iraqi individuals, groups and political parties, including some outside the mainstream ... Hardliners may also fear the implications for Iran of having a successful democracy in Iraq.”

132. The JIC assessed that there had been a “shift for the worse in Iranian posture and tactics”, specifically that there was some support from within Iran for Shia insurgents in southern Iraq, including the provision of finance and weapons for al-Sadr’s recent uprising in Najaf, although there was “no sign of a wide-scale Shia insurgency”. The JIC judged that “any direct Iranian support to the Sunni insurgency ... is likely to be relatively narrow in scope” and that:

“The Sunni extremist presence in Iran is substantial, and comprises members of several groups in addition to Al Qaida. Some of these jihadists ... are allowed by the Iranian authorities to operate in comparative freedom.”

133. Sir John Scarlett, Chairman of the JIC between 2001 and 2004, told the Inquiry that there was a marked contrast in the degree to which Iran appeared to be involved in Iraq between April 2004 and September 2004.⁶¹ In April, the JIC was confident that Iran was not behind the Sadrist attacks on coalition forces in Najaf; but by September the assessment was “very significantly tougher”.

134. Mr Tim Dowse, Chief of the Assessments Staff from 2003 to 2009, told the Inquiry that the JIC had spent a lot of time trying to work out what the Iranians were doing in Iraq, but had “started this whole period with a reluctance to see an Iranian hand”.⁶²

135. The JIC felt that “the Iranians had at least a twin track policy, and probably more than that, more than two tracks”.⁶³

⁶⁰ JIC Assessment, 15 September 2004, ‘Iran: Interference in Iraq’; JIC Assessment, 23 September 2004, ‘International Terrorism: Iran’s Stance Towards Al Qaida and Other Sunni Extremist Groups’.

⁶¹ Private hearing, 10 June 2010, page 45.

⁶² Private hearing, 14 June 2010, page 60.

⁶³ Private hearing, 14 June 2010, pages 61-62.

136. In SIS1's view, Iran did not have a strong interest in a stable Middle East and had been willing to provide support to the insurgents, both Shia and Sunni, because "if they could cause trouble for the coalition, they would".⁶⁴

137. On 16 September, Mr Blair chaired a meeting of the Ad Hoc Ministerial Group on Iraq, called "to ensure the UK government approach to Iraq was fully co-ordinated in the period up to Iraqi elections in January 2005".⁶⁵ He intended that the Group should meet regularly.

138. Mr Blair's Chairman's Brief stated that one purpose of the meeting was to:

"... **galvanise the key departments** and ensure they give Iraq their full attention in the next five months, in order to **achieve the necessary results on the ground in the run-up to elections**."⁶⁶

139. Given an insurgency that appeared to be increasingly co-ordinated, Mr Blair told the Group that he was "concerned that the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) did not have sufficient capability to take on the insurgents".⁶⁷

140. General Sir Michael Walker, Chief of the Defence Staff, reported that plans were in place for the ISF to be fully equipped and trained by mid-2005, but that their capabilities would remain limited, especially compared to the MNF-I. There was little scope for accelerating the plans.

141. In discussion, members of the Group observed that the insurgency in the Sunni triangle was the most serious security threat facing Iraq and that the UK needed a better understanding of the US/Iraqi campaign plan to tackle it.

142. The Group agreed that the MOD, DFID and the FCO would produce specific suggestions for how progress could be made in Iraq which Mr Blair could put to President Bush when they next spoke:

- MOD to make recommendations on how ISF capacity will develop and what more we can do to accelerate or refine the delivery to allow the ISF to tackle the current insurgency campaign.
- DFID to advise on where blockages can be removed [sic] to speed up the impact of reconstruction funding.
- FCO to advise on what political strategy Allawi should be pursuing and his capacity to deliver it."

⁶⁴ Private hearing, 2010, pages 87-89.

⁶⁵ Minutes, 16 September 2004, Ad Hoc Ministerial Group on Iraq meeting.

⁶⁶ Briefing Cabinet Office, 16 September 2004, 'Ad Hoc Ministerial Group on Iraq meeting to be held in the Cabinet Room on Thursday 16 September 2004 at 0830: Chairman's Brief'.

⁶⁷ Minutes, 16 September 2004, Ad Hoc Ministerial Group on Iraq meeting.

143. Mr Blair and Prime Minister Allawi met in London on 19 September.⁶⁸

144. Prime Minister Allawi said that tackling the security situation was his top priority, but he lacked effective resources to do it: he needed two mechanised divisions, a rapid deployment force, an effective anti-terrorist capability in the police and a more rapid build up of intelligence capability.

145. Security was Prime Minister Allawi's personal focus, but was part of wider work on an overall strategy addressing national reconciliation and Sunni outreach, building the economy and building up the institutions of government and the state.

146. Mr Blair confirmed the offer of staff from No.10 to provide practical support to Prime Minister Allawi in setting up his office. The two men agreed that they needed to develop a channel that would enable them to ensure the reform programme was implemented. Mr Blair would need to know Prime Minister Allawi's priorities week by week, for discussion in the UK system and with the Americans. Mr Blair observed that "contact with President Bush was essential in order to get pressure from the top in Washington".

147. Following the meeting, Sir Nigel Sheinwald commissioned advice from Lt Gen McColl on how best to meet Prime Minister Allawi's urgent requirement for mechanised forces, a rapid deployment capability, counter-terrorist police and intelligence.

148. In response to the Ad Hoc Ministerial Group's 16 September commissions, Mr Hoon's Private Secretary provided two papers on 20 September: one on the current status of the ISF (including the Petraeus Plan and recommendations for further work) and a speaking note for the conversation with President Bush.⁶⁹ These are described in detail in Section 12.1.

149. Mr Straw wrote to Mr Blair to answer the third commission.⁷⁰ He advised that:

"To succeed in the elections Allawi needs to decide on his coalition; agree a vision and sell it in all parts of the country; and form a campaign apparatus straight away."

150. Mr Jim Drummond, DFID Director, Iraq, wrote to Mr Blair's Private Secretary on 23 September enclosing "a few points to make on reconstruction" for the video conference.⁷¹ That advice is described in Section 10.2.

151. On 23 September, Lt Gen McColl sent Lt Gen Fry a paper on the UK's options for withdrawing or reducing the number of troops in Iraq "up to and beyond January 2006".⁷²

⁶⁸ Letter Sheinwald to Adams, 19 September 2004, 'Iraq: Prime Minister's meeting with Prime Minister Allawi, Sunday 19 September'.

⁶⁹ Letter Naworynsky to Quarrey, 20 September 2004, 'Advice for the Prime Minister's next VTC with President Bush'.

⁷⁰ Minute Straw to Prime Minister, 20 September 2004, 'Allawi's Political Strategy'.

⁷¹ Letter Drummond to Quarrey, 23 September 2004, 'VTC with President Bush'.

⁷² [Minute McColl to DCDS\(C\), 23 September 2004, Iraq up to and beyond January 2006 – defining a UK position](#)'.

He explained that Gen Casey had been briefed on the ideas in the paper, but the text had not been shared with the US.

152. Lt Gen McColl advised that planning in Baghdad within the MNF-I had highlighted the need for “coalition members to be clear about their desired national end-states” and there were “indications that January 2006 could be the point at which the desired national end-states of US and UK diverge”. He understood that the US was considering a significant draw down over the next 15 months, from 17 brigades to between three and seven, which was likely to result in a request for the UK to take control of areas beyond MND(SE) in early 2005.

153. The US planning team considering the options for MNF-I distribution had been unaware of the UK’s national commitments in 2006, which Lt Gen McColl described as “the possible deployment of the ARRC [Allied Rapid Reaction Corps] and the shift of the UK’s medium-scale commitment to Afghanistan”. That illustrated the need to be clear about the UK’s strategic intentions.

154. Lt Gen McColl observed:

“Should the UK decide that its national interests are best served by remaining close to US policy on Iraq beyond January 2006, UK policy makers must be under no illusion as to the nature of the growing insurgency, and the risks and challenges that any long-term deployment of UK forces would present ... The Iraqi insurgency has reached the point where it is now capable of sustaining itself ... for several years ... Put simply, the enemy is getting better ... Evidence is increasingly emerging ... that the coalition’s presence is the single most important catalyst for this ... After the elections in January 2005 ... the value of MNF-I’s continued presence is likely to come under ever closer scrutiny. It will be important for the international community ... to form a judgement on this. However successful the elections ... there will be a significant insurgency for the foreseeable future.”

155. A key factor in assessing the need for extended MNF-I presence in Iraq was the degree to which the ISF could operate without MNF-I support. Lt Gen McColl commented that although there had been significant progress in developing the ISF there were capability gaps and a “serious rift” between the Iraqi Ministries of Defence and Interior. That would need to be addressed if the ISF was to assume full responsibility for Iraq’s security without putting the country at serious risk.

156. Lt Gen McColl argued that it was important for the UK:

“... to develop a national exit strategy. This is in no way inconsistent with PM Blair’s determination to stay the course in Iraq. On the contrary, it places the onus on the UK defining precisely what is meant by ‘the job is done’.

“Provided the electoral process remains on schedule in 2005, there is much to commend a withdrawal in early 2006. This is the natural political, legal and (if we do

our job well) security culminating point. But a failure to build adequate capacity in the interim would leave the first constitutionally-elected Iraqi government at severe risk from an entrenched insurgency, and without the structures and security forces to combat that insurgency effectively.”

157. Lt Gen McColl advised that there were two broad options available to the UK:

- investing “maximum effort” in the 15 months before the end of 2005 to “put in place the structures, forces and economic benefits that can ensure a successful outcome” (effectively trained Iraqi security forces, including the police) and then aiming to withdraw in early 2006; or
- deciding that the UK would need to make a longer-term commitment to Iraq, “whether from a desire to ‘see the job through’, to stay alongside the US at all costs, or for its [the UK’s] own regional policy reasons”, recognising that this would be against a backdrop of continuing insurgency and attacks on the MNF-I.

158. Lt Gen McColl did not make a recommendation in favour of either option, but stressed the need for the UK to come to a decision “in a timely fashion”. In particular, if the UK was to opt to make a longer-term commitment, it must:

“... go into this with its eyes open and, specifically, must put in place now the force protection measures required to minimise this risk as far as possible.”

159. Lt Gen McColl drew his paper to the attention of Gen Walker the next day, suggesting that “the time is right for the consideration of the substantive issues”.⁷³

160. In a telephone conversation with President Bush on 24 September, Mr Blair set out three priority issues, as discussed with Prime Minister Allawi: the need to strengthen his (Allawi’s) office; accelerating work to show the ISF had capacity to act; and increasing the pace of development activity.⁷⁴

161. On 24 September Mr Blair sent a note to Mr Jonathan Powell, Mr David Hill (Mr Blair’s Director of Communications and Strategy), Mr Godric Smith (Mr Blair’s Official Spokesperson) and Baroness Sally Morgan (Director of Political and Government Relations) on what messages they should be feeding into the public debate on Iraq.⁷⁵

162. Mr Blair characterised the debate as:

“... have we got the country into a mess and therefore any bad news is our fault; or is Iraq the battleground whose outcome will determine our own security and therefore the bad news is worth it in the end?”

⁷³ Minute McColl to CDS and CJO, 26 September 2004, ‘Report 130 of 26 Sep 04’.

⁷⁴ Letter Quarrey to Owen, 24 September 2004, ‘Prime Minister’s Phone Conversation with President Bush, 24 September’.

⁷⁵ [Minute TB to Powell, 24 September 2004, \[untitled\]](#).

163. Mr Blair listed nine points to be injected into the debate and told his staff “we need a concerted effort, organised and disciplined, to get this across”.

164. The points listed emphasised the presence of “foreign jihadists”, in Iraq since before March 2003 but increasingly without the support of the Iraqi people. Mr Blair described Iraq as part of a global counter-terrorism approach to protect the UK’s security, although this was not the original intention behind the invasion. He rejected the argument that Iraq increased the terrorist threat, highlighting that 9/11 and other incidents took place before the war began.

165. On 28 September, Mr Blair addressed the Labour Party conference in Brighton.⁷⁶ On Iraq, he said:

“The evidence about Saddam having actual biological and chemical weapons, as opposed to the capability to develop them, has turned out to be wrong.

“I acknowledge that and accept it.

“I simply point out, such evidence was agreed by the whole international community, not least because Saddam had used such weapons against his own people and neighbouring countries.

“And the problem is, I can apologise for the information that turned out to be wrong, but I can’t, sincerely at least, apologise for removing Saddam.”

166. Mr Blair told the conference: “The world is a better place with Saddam in prison not in power.”

167. In a video conference in early October, Mr Blair told President Bush that there had been a debate at the Party Conference, which had been won by 4:1.⁷⁷ He observed that: “There had been a number of powerful Iraqi speakers.”

168. Sir Nigel Sheinwald spoke to Dr Rice on 29 September.⁷⁸ Sir Nigel set out his impression that the tempo of planning and preparation was being increased ready for an operation in Fallujah.

169. Dr Rice confirmed that the ground was being prepared, but that no decisions had been taken. Sir Nigel “accepted that pressure for action in Fallujah was growing” and “made clear that we would need to return to this once plans had advanced”.

170. On 30 September, the JIC circulated an Assessment of the Sunni Arab Opposition.⁷⁹ The Assessment gave an overview of the nature of the insurgency in the

⁷⁶ *BBC News*, 28 September 2004, *Full text of Blair’s speech*.

⁷⁷ Letter Phillipson to Adams, 5 October 2004, ‘Prime Minister’s VTC with President Bush, 5 October: US elections, Iraq, Iran, MEPP’.

⁷⁸ Letter Sheinwald to Adams, 29 September 2004, ‘Conversation with US National Security Adviser, 29 September’.

⁷⁹ [JIC Assessment, 30 September 2004, ‘Iraq: Sunni Arab Opposition’](#).

Sunni Arab areas of Iraq, and had been written by the Assessments Staff drawing on the conclusions of a cross-Whitehall discussion led by the JIC Chair.

171. The Assessment stated that:

“Iraqi Sunni Arabs believe they have little to gain from the political process. A minority (but numbered in many thousands) are involved in armed insurgency. The majority of Sunni Arabs are likely to sympathise with the insurgents.”

172. The Assessments Staff judged that Sunni Arab Iraqis had the same basic interests as all other Iraqi citizens: security, the provision of services and employment. In addition, however, they had some specific concerns, in particular loss of status and a real fear of Shia domination and Iranian influence.

173. The paper stated that all the insurgents were united in their resentment of the presence of foreign forces, and that “their hatred of the US in particular has been developing since 1990”. Despite these similarities, the underlying motivating factors were likely to vary between groups:

“**Nationalists** want to see significant Sunni Arab representation in Iraq’s political structures. They want a strong Iraq that can resist Iranian threats and Western oppression. They want to see rulers who represent all Iraq and are not exiles. They might engage in a political process if they could see it delivering – but they do not at present have any organised political representation.

“**Ba’athists** are most resistant to the current political process. They do not all want Saddam’s return (although some do), but want to regain their position of power. They want an Iraq dominated by Sunni Arabs loyal to their leadership and able to check Kurdish and Shia aspirations.

“**Islamists** view fighting the Occupation as jihad and have a vision of Iraq as a Sunni Islamic state – they recall Baghdad as the central power during Islam’s ‘Golden Age’ (749-1258). There are a number of organised Sunni Islamist parties. Neither these nor most Sunni Islamists are engaging with the political process – but some may be persuaded to do so.

“**Disaffected Iraqis** and **opportunists** are motivated more by personal circumstances than by a strategy for Iraq. They are most likely to be swayed by visible improvements to their daily lives and political and economic progress. But their association with more committed insurgents may over time result in them adopting their agenda.”

174. The Assessments Staff judged that:

“... insurgent groups rather than the political process appear to many Sunni Arabs to be more likely to deliver what they want ... If the election has virtually no Sunni Arab participation and results in little Sunni Arab representation, the

problem will be exacerbated. We judge that at that stage, there could be a risk of sectarian violence.”

Kidnap in Iraq

In late September and early October, there was extensive media coverage in Iraq and the UK of the kidnapping and murder of two UK citizens: Mr Kenneth Bigley, a civil engineer working under contract on a reconstruction project, and Mrs Margaret Hassan, Iraq Director of Care International.

A JIC Assessment on 11 November recorded that more than 230 foreigners, and many more Iraqis, had been kidnapped since March 2003.⁸⁰ The JIC judged that Islamist terrorists had been responsible for the majority of the high profile incidents and their attacks were forcing many organisations to stop working in Iraq.

Mr Bigley was kidnapped in Baghdad on 16 September 2004, along with two of his US colleagues, Mr Jack Hensley and Mr Eugene Armstrong, both of whom were beheaded shortly afterwards.⁸¹

Mr Bigley’s kidnapping prompted the FCO to update its travel advice to say:

“... we urge all British nationals in Iraq to consider whether their presence in Iraq is essential at this time ... Any British nationals in Iraq should, as a matter of urgency, review their security arrangements and protection and seek professional advice on whether they are adequate. These arrangements should cover: security at the workplace, at the place of residence and travel. Where security is not adequate, British nationals should either immediately move to premises within guarded areas and avoid unprotected travel outside these more secure areas, or leave Iraq as soon as possible.”⁸²

Mr Bigley was beheaded by his captors on 7 October.⁸³

The murders were attributed to Abu Musab al-Zarqawi.⁸⁴ The JIC had described him in March 2004 as being “the most important terrorist leader in Iraq”.⁸⁵

Mr Chaplin reported that the murder had been “universally condemned” in Iraq and that the “sense of shock was palpable”.⁸⁶ He went on to note:

“Unfortunately beheading has become all too common. In the last week there have been at least nine other people who have been beheaded including one woman, and a 15 year old Kurdish boy whose body was also burnt.”

Mrs Hassan, who was married to an Iraqi citizen and a long-term resident of the country, was kidnapped in Baghdad on 19 October.⁸⁷ Her captors released film of her requesting

⁸⁰ [JIC Assessment, 11 November 2004, ‘Iraq Security – Current Concerns’](#).

⁸¹ *The Guardian*, 16 September 2004, *Briton among three kidnapped in Baghdad*; *The Guardian*, 21 September 2004, *Second US hostage murdered*.

⁸² FCO Travel Advice for Iraq, 18 September 2004.

⁸³ *The Guardian*, 8 October 2004, *Hostage Ken Bigley is killed*.

⁸⁴ CIG Assessment, 19 April 2005, ‘Al-Zarqawi Threatens UK Forces in Iraq’.

⁸⁵ [JIC Assessment, 10 March 2004, ‘Islamist Extremism: The Iraq Jihad’](#).

⁸⁶ Telegram 286 Baghdad to FCO London, 15 October 2004, ‘Iraq: Internal: Political Round Up 9-15 October’.

⁸⁷ *The Guardian*, 19 October 2004, *Charity worker kidnapped in Iraq*.

the withdrawal of British troops from Iraq and the halting of their deployment to Baghdad, assumed to be a reference to the Black Watch.

Based on video evidence, it was thought probable that Mrs Hassan had been murdered by her captors in November.⁸⁸

In the UK one commentator suggested that Mrs Hassan's kidnapping exposed the continuing "absence of basic law and order in the Sunni enclaves in central Iraq".⁸⁹ The fact that Iraqi citizens who had been glad to be rid of Saddam Hussein were now turning to extremists in the hope of restoring the basic fabric of life was "an indictment of the way the post-Saddam transition has been carried out by the allies: not enough troops on the ground and an administration content to hide inside the heavily-protected Green Zone".

The UK's emergency response mechanism, COBR, was activated in relation to both kidnappings. Its activities are not described here, both because the Inquiry's terms of reference do not cover detailed investigation of individual cases, and in order not to prejudice COBR's future work in similar cases.

Sir David Richmond told the Inquiry:

"I don't think anybody could have been ignorant of the dangers of living and working in Iraq at that time ... I think that most of the people who went out there would have been well aware of what the problems were and would only have gone if they had taken the necessary precautions in terms of their own security ..."⁹⁰

In an update sent to Gen Walker on 26 September, Lt Gen McColl observed that:

"Kidnapping is 'headline news' due to the UK/US hostages. It is however not a spike, but a constant in Iraq at present, with most kidnaps inspired by monetary gain rather than being political/terrorist related."⁹¹

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175. Mr Blair spoke by telephone to Prime Minister Allawi on 3 October, who was hopeful of reaching agreement that foreign fighters would be told to leave Fallujah by local leaders.⁹² They would be given three days to do so.

176. At the end of his record of the conversation, Mr Phillipson wrote: "we will need to assess tomorrow the prospects for a deal in Fallujah ... and the consequences if the foreign fighters do not leave".

177. In his weekly report on 3 October Lt Gen McColl expressed concern to Gen Walker about the timing of the full offensive operation being planned against Fallujah, while agreeing that Fallujah was "a cancer that must be dealt with".⁹³

⁸⁸ Minute Cabinet Office [junior official] to Sheinwald, 16 November 2004, 'Iraq- Kidnap of Margaret Hassan'.

⁸⁹ *The Scotsman*, 20 October 2004, *The kidnapping goes on*.

⁹⁰ Public hearing, 26 January 2011, page 99.

⁹¹ Minute McColl to [CJO], 26 September 2004, 'Report 130 of 26 September 04'.

⁹² Letter Phillipson to Owen, 3 October 2004, 'Phonecall with Prime Minister Allawi, 3 October'.

⁹³ Minute McColl to CDS, 3 October 2004, 'Report 131 of 3 Oct 04'.

178. Lt Gen McColl did not consider Fallujah vital to the conduct of the elections. Rather, the offensive risked “total Sunni disenfranchisement” and therefore jeopardising the elections. He was also concerned about potential damage to the cohesion of the Interim Government and about the resilience of the Iraqi security forces.

179. In preparation for a visit to Iraq, the British Embassy Baghdad briefed Mr Straw that there was “a lively debate, including between us and the Americans locally, about how and when to deal with Fallujah”.⁹⁴ The UK view was cautious, “questioning whether Fallujah can be dealt with quickly and decisively and insisting that we think through carefully the consequences of military action”.

180. Visiting Baghdad on 5 October, Mr Straw found Prime Minister Allawi cautious about the operation.⁹⁵

181. Mr Straw recommended to Mr Blair that the UK impress on the Americans “the need for a thought through military plan, complemented by an Allawi-led political strategy”.⁹⁶

182. Lt Gen Fry provided the Chiefs of Staff with a paper for discussion at their meeting on 6 October which incorporated Lt Gen McColl’s analysis of 23 September.⁹⁷ In the paper he sought to define “an achievable and acceptable exit strategy for UK forces in Iraq”.

183. Lt Gen Fry recommended the first option set out by Lt Gen McColl and wrote that the MOD “should initiate debate across Whitehall arguing that the UK’s policy should be for the MNF-I to withdraw from Iraq in its current form on expiry of its current UN mandate”. He warned that failure to persuade the US to that view could leave the UK with “an unpalatable choice between unilateral withdrawal or an enduring commitment that runs a high risk of strategic failure and which would severely constrain our strategic aspirations for N[ATO] R[esponse] F[orce] 6 and Afghanistan in 06”.

184. The Chiefs of Staff concluded that the review of the MNF-I’s UN mandate in mid-2005 “could present a more appropriate opportunity for a wider review with MNF-I Partners avoiding pre-empting early coalition draw-down decisions”.⁹⁸

185. Gen Walker commissioned a submission for Mr Hoon to send Mr Blair before Lt Gen Fry’s paper was taken further.

186. Mr Straw raised UK troop numbers with Mr Blair the following day.⁹⁹ Having recently returned from a visit to Iraq, he wrote:

⁹⁴ Telegram 245, Baghdad to FCO London, 4 October 2004, ‘Your Visit to Iraq, 5-6 October: Scenesetter’.

⁹⁵ Telegram 251 Baghdad to FCO, 6 October 2004, ‘Iraq: Foreign Secretary’s Meeting with Prime Minister, 5 October’.

⁹⁶ Minute Straw to Prime Minister, 7 October 2004, ‘Iraq’.

⁹⁷ Minute DCDS(C) to COS, 1 October 2004, ‘Iraq – Achieving Strategic Overwatch of Iraqi Self-Reliance’.

⁹⁸ Minutes, 6 October 2004, Chiefs of Staff meeting.

⁹⁹ Minute Straw to Prime Minister, 7 October 2004, ‘Iraq’.

“I was struck by the limited UK inputs beyond the relatively quiet South-East. The Americans are pressing us again to provide troops in the main areas of conflict, though General McColl saw problems in just putting a British battalion in the middle of a US division. A better way might be to relieve the US of some areas neighbouring MND(SE). I think we need to show some flexibility, and possibly increase troop numbers for a period, if we are to keep a handle on US decisions and, albeit at the margins, better complement the US effort on the ground. We also need to think through what we should say about our longer term plans. We shall have to be there through 2005, but it would play helpfully in Iraq if we and Americans could set a target date, say Spring 2006, when we would aim to draw down to a much smaller presence. It would undercut those who say we want to occupy Iraq indefinitely, make Iraqi political leaders face up to their responsibilities and might also help us domestically. I would like to talk this through with you.”

187. Mr William Ehrman, Chairman of the JIC, visited Iraq alongside Mr Straw.¹⁰⁰

188. Mr Ehrman reported to Sir Nigel Sheinwald that security in Baghdad was deteriorating:

“The fact that travel by road between the Green Zone and the airport is not possible after dusk highlights this. The first IED in the Green Zone was discovered while I was there. But I nonetheless returned encouraged by the clear efforts of the IIG to reach out to the Sunni areas. They have not got a group of Sunnis there publicly to stand up and support the IIG. But they are trying.”

189. Mr Ehrman judged that:

“To mount an assault or not on Fallujah was the issue of the day ... Fallujah is no Najaf or Samarra where there were maybe 500 serious insurgents to deal with. In Fallujah the estimate is 3-4,000 FRE [Former Regime Elements] and another 500-1,000 foreign fighters ...”

190. Mr Ehrman also reported that the Head of the UN Election Assistance Mission in Iraq, Mr Carlos Valenzuela, was “doing a good job on election preparations. Despite lack of personnel, the technical work is on schedule.”

191. Mr Straw echoed that judgement in his report to Mr Blair, where he wrote:

“I came away reassured that elections in January were still doable, and that the deadline was helping to force the pace.”¹⁰¹

192. On 10 October, Lt Gen McColl reported to Gen Walker and ACM Torpy on the continuing lack of clarity in US thinking on the future of the MNF-I after the January elections:

¹⁰⁰ Minute Ehrman to Sheinwald, 7 October 2004, ‘Visit to Baghdad, 4-6 October’.

¹⁰¹ Minute Straw to Blair, 7 October 2004, ‘Iraq’.

“... the US ... do not appear to appreciate that it will be an issue for their coalition partners and possibly have a substantial impact on the cohesion of the alliance. We should continue to press for greater clarity at the political level and Warsaw [a meeting of NATO Defence Ministers] may be an opportunity for this.

“Interwoven with the debate on force posture has been discussion of the potential value of making an early announcement of the intention to withdraw, prompted by the SBMR-I paper ... Although the potential positive impact on the insurgency is accepted, doubt over whether the announcement would have the desired impact and a pessimistic assessment of the military risk had led [to] an unconvincing proposal to make an announcement.”¹⁰²

193. Lt Gen McColl also reported that the US saw Fallujah as a decisive point in the campaign and had asked for UK assistance. Following informal discussions between the US and UK military in Iraq, MND(SE) had concluded that supplying troops to relieve US forces in North Babil, so that they could participate in action in Fallujah, was “the most suitable option”.

194. The US then made a formal request for the UK to deploy troops to North Babil for 30 days. Lt Gen McColl advised that the UK’s aspirations to influence the broader campaign needed to be supported by commitment if the UK was to “retain leverage”.

195. Lt Gen McColl’s report was provided to Mr Hoon with the manuscript comments: “A very thorough piece from Gen McColl – Para 10 [lack of clarity in the US position] is a continued frustration.”¹⁰³

196. On 11 October, the FCO submitted to No.10 a paper commissioned by Sir Nigel Sheinwald which considered contingency plans if elections were postponed for six months.¹⁰⁴ It had been agreed with the MOD and was copied to SIS and the Cabinet Office.

197. The first half of the paper considered the arguments for and against postponement of the Iraqi election.

198. A shorter, technical delay was considered to be “difficult but manageable” but the paper described the key elements of managing a longer delay as:

- Prime Minister Allawi seizing the initiative and using the delay to push a political solution to the insurgency;
- pursuing Sunni outreach;
- a Cabinet reshuffle (possibly to allow the entrance of former Ba’athists);

¹⁰² Minute McColl to CDS and CJO, 10 October 2004, ‘Report 132 of 10 Oct 04’.

¹⁰³ Manuscript comment to Secretary of State on minute McColl to CDS & CJO, 10 October 2004, ‘Report 132 of 10 Oct 04’.

¹⁰⁴ [Letter Owen to Quarrey, 11 October 2004, ‘Iraq: Contingency Planning’ attaching Paper FCO, ‘Iraq: Contingency Planning’.](#)

- an announcement of the phased withdrawal of the MNF-I in 2005; and
- a new resolution, to endorse the changed electoral timetable.

199. The FCO wrote that there was no guarantee that the plan would have the desired impact on the insurgency. The insurgents might conclude they were winning and step up their campaign, leading to further postponement of elections.

200. In the paper the FCO concluded that this was:

“An unappealing contingency plan in almost all respects, underlining the importance of doing everything we can to hold to Plan A, or, if there is to be a delay in elections, arguing the case for a short delay, on UN advice, to a fixed date.”

201. The FCO view was that in order to stay on track, the UK should:

- ensure the UN remained engaged, including by supporting the security of UN staff;
- ensure adequate Sunni outreach;
- reduce opposition to the presence of the MNF-I;
- ensure Grand Ayatollah al-Sistani remained supportive; and
- “sell” the importance of sticking to the January 2005 timetable to Iraqis and the international community.¹⁰⁵

202. The second half of the paper considered a scenario in which the MNF-I reduced in size before Iraqi Security Forces were capable of maintaining security themselves.

203. The FCO judged that, while the insurgents “do not have the military capability to force the US to withdraw ... they could intimidate some coalition partners into leaving”. Although that would require the US and UK to “make up the numbers”, it was considered a manageable risk.

204. A more significant risk was the emergence of a strong “troops-out faction” in the Transitional National Assembly, which required members of the MNF-I to stay in their barracks. With Iraqi Security Forces unable to play their role, different insurgent criminal or tribal forces would seek to fill the security vacuum:

“In the Sunni triangle it would be the insurgents; in the Kurdish and Shia areas the established militias ... other parts of the country (e.g. Maysan and Dhi Qar) would be dominated by criminals or tribes (or both) ...

“In the worst case scenario, Iraq would disintegrate into civil war.”

¹⁰⁵ Letter Owen to Quarrey, 12 October 2004, ‘Iraq: Contingency Planning’.

205. The FCO judged that:

“The wider strategic consequences of a worst-case scenario like this would be appalling:

- Iraq would become a long-term source of instability in the region ...
- Iraq could become a permanent base for Al Qaida and Sunni Islamic terrorism, further destabilising Saudi Arabia.
- Jihadist elements would declare victory and be strengthened, with significant implications for the Global War on Terrorism and the prospects for the Arab-Israeli conflict.
- Prospects for reform in the Arab world could be set back a decade.
- Having seen the US fail, an increasingly self-confident Iran steps up efforts to become the major regional power, accelerates its nuclear programme and triggers a regional arms race.
- Instability causes oil prices to rise further.”

206. The paper concluded that scenario was a long way off. There was likely to be scope, even with a significant “troops out majority” in the Transitional National Assembly (TNA), to negotiate a phased withdrawal to mitigate the risk of a downward spiral.

207. The covering letter from Mr Straw’s Private Secretary to Mr Blair’s Private Secretary highlighted that Prime Minister Allawi might “take the sting out of nationalists’ and Sunni rejectionists’ grievances that the MNF-I (US presence) represents indefinite occupation by a different name” by making an announcement about withdrawal in November. The FCO and MOD would be working on a joint paper for discussion with the US and then Prime Minister Allawi.

208. On 12 October, Mr Hoon wrote to Lord Goldsmith, the Attorney General, reporting that the security situation had deteriorated since transfer of sovereignty in June.¹⁰⁶

209. While there was no state of armed conflict between the UK and Iraq, the MOD believed that a state of armed conflict existed between the IIG and certain insurgent groups within Iraq. In Mr Hoon’s view, international humanitarian law (IHL) would provide a more appropriate legal framework for UK forces operating within Iraq and he therefore considered it necessary to activate the dormant provisions of the Targeting Directive which allowed the Joint Commander to seek Ministerial approval to conduct operations governed by the Law of Armed Conflict (LOAC). That would enable UK forces to engage certain clearly defined insurgent groups under IHL and would also clarify the position of UK service personnel embedded in the US command chain.

¹⁰⁶ Letter Hoon to Goldsmith, 12 October 2004, ‘Review of Legal Framework for UK Forces and for ‘embeds’.

210. Ms Vivien Rose, Head of the General and International Law Team in the MOD, wrote to Ms Cathy Adams, Legal Counsellor to Lord Goldsmith, setting out details.¹⁰⁷ Her letter drew out the parallels with UK operations in Afghanistan and supplied a detailed new Targeting Directive modelled on the one in use there.

211. In a telegram to the FCO in London on 12 October, Mr Chaplin wrote that he suspected the ISF would be less ready by the end of October than Iraqi Ministers were claiming.¹⁰⁸

212. Mr Chaplin also reported that Gen Casey had:

“... concluded that a major operation before Ramadan is not possible, but has produced a hybrid military option to keep up pressure on the insurgency, while responding to Allawi’s concerns about an Iraqi face on any full scale operations in Fallujah.”

213. In a further telegram the following day, Mr Chaplin supported Lt Gen McColl’s 10 October recommendation that the UK should backfill US troops in North Babil, seeing it as an opportunity to “make a real contribution to the success of the Fallujah operation” without joining the operation directly or deploying a battlegroup to Baghdad.¹⁰⁹

214. Both Mr Chaplin and Lt Gen McColl recalled the UK’s rejection of two requests for a deployment beyond MND(SE) over the summer, which had led to criticism and a sense “that we have a lot to say for ourselves, but that when it really matters – getting stuck into the insurgency, contributing to SSR acceleration – we prefer to look the other way” and that “we have it a bit easy in MND(SE)”.

215. Mr Chaplin observed that if the UK wanted to retain influence over plans to take action in other insurgent areas, it needed to “build up a bit of credit”.

216. At Cabinet on 14 October Mr Straw’s update on Iraq focused on the need for more UN effort to support election preparations.¹¹⁰ UN reluctance to deploy more staff was a result of the attack on its HQ in August 2003. It remained unclear which forces would provide protection. Nonetheless, preparations were “on track” for elections in January 2005.

217. In the Agenda for the Ad Hoc Ministerial Group on Iraq on 14 October, Cabinet Office officials advised Mr Blair:

“You may want to conclude the discussion of security by asking Geoff Hoon to comment on initial ... drawdown of forces in early 2006.”¹¹¹

¹⁰⁷ Letter Rose to Adams, 15 October 2004, ‘Operations in Iraq: Revision of the Op TELIC targeting directive and the position of embedded personnel’.

¹⁰⁸ Telegram 271 Baghdad to FCO London, 12 October 2004, ‘Iraq: update on Fallujah operational planning: comment’.

¹⁰⁹ Telegram 274 Baghdad to FCO London, 13 October 2004, ‘Iraq: Deployment of UK Battlegroup’.

¹¹⁰ Cabinet Conclusions, 14 October.

¹¹¹ Agenda, 14 October 2004, Ad Hoc Ministerial Group on Iraq meeting.

218. At the meeting, Ministers agreed that “the MOD and FCO should provide some initial thoughts on future force levels”.¹¹² The FCO contingency planning paper was not discussed.

219. Ministers were also briefed that the US military was planning military action in Fallujah.

220. An MOD note provided in advance of the meeting said the US military view was that if Fallujah was not dealt with, the MNF-I would be unable to control the level of violence in the run-up to the January elections.¹¹³ The US intention was that the operation should destroy remnants of the former regime, kill or capture Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, regain the initiative from the insurgents and demonstrate both campaign progress and the IIG’s resolve.

221. The MOD did not agree that ‘solving’ Fallujah was a prerequisite for holding successful elections, which were unlikely to happen in the city in any case. The UK view was that the operation carried a very high risk of unifying the insurgency, acting as a trigger for Shia violence, “over-facing” the ISF and so delaying Iraqisation, endangering UN support for the elections and undermining coalition cohesion.

222. Ministers agreed that an operation to clear Fallujah was right in principle but the UK should try to persuade the US to give Prime Minister Allawi time to improve the political environment.¹¹⁴

223. Mr Blair was recorded as saying that the UK’s overarching political and military objective was to create a security situation that allowed elections to be held in an environment which gave Prime Minister Allawi a good chance of fielding a winning slate.

224. Mr Blair raised the formal US request for a UK deployment to North Babil.

225. Gen Walker told the Group that the UK had the capability to meet the US request. Although North Babil was a more dangerous area of operations than MND(SE), this was a militarily less demanding request than the UK had faced in the past or might face in the future. But it seemed unlikely that the 30 day timescale for the deployment would hold.

226. In discussion, a member of the Group observed that “the risks of agreeing were more political than military, and related to the UK being involved in facilitating a Fallujah operation that might draw criticism”.

227. A final decision was deferred to the following week, when the MOD would provide advice.

¹¹² Minutes, 14 October 2004, Ad Hoc Ministerial Group on Iraq meeting.

¹¹³ [Note MOD, 12 October 2014, ‘Fallujah’.](#)

¹¹⁴ Minutes, 14 October 2004, Ad Hoc Ministerial Group on Iraq meeting.

228. In a telephone conversation on 15 October, Mr Blair was reported to have said to President Bush that “we had to deal with Fallujah. But it was important that Allawi had the politics right before action was taken.”¹¹⁵

229. Mr Blair told President Bush that the UK “would try to help” in North Babil.

230. On 15 October, in a round up of political events in Iraq, Mr Chaplin reported an increase in political activity to the FCO in London, observing that parties had “shifted up a gear as they realised that the clock was ticking”.¹¹⁶

231. As well as the established political parties, Mr Chaplin wrote that:

“... more than 300 parties and movements have been formed since the fall of Saddam and there is a growing realisation among the smaller parties that they need to consolidate to gain seats.”

232. Mr Chaplin reported that Prime Minister Allawi:

“... has been making all the right noises about the elections being open to everyone, and emphasising that the prospects for the residents of places like Fallujah, Mosul, and Sadr city would be much better if there was political dialogue and participation in the electoral process.”

233. On 17 October, a statement appeared on an Islamist website containing a personal pledge of allegiance to Usama Bin Laden by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi.¹¹⁷

234. Shortly afterwards, the name of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi’s organisation changed to “Base of Jihad (ie Al Qaida) in The Land of The Two Rivers”.¹¹⁸ It was normally referred to in UK documents as Al Qaida in Iraq (AQ-I).

235. In a report to Gen Walker and ACM Torpy on 17 October, Lt Gen McColl called for “an early and unambiguous decision in principle for the deployment [to North Babil] to proceed, allowing the necessary battle procedure and preparation to start as soon as possible”.¹¹⁹

236. The same report covered planning for the US force posture in Iraq. Lt Gen McColl reported that US discussions had concluded with the decision “not to pursue the possibility of making an early announcement of intention to withdraw”.

237. Mr Hoon made a statement in the House of Commons on 18 October in response to “considerable speculation in the media ... about the United Kingdom deploying forces

¹¹⁵ Letter Quarrey to Adams, 15 October 2004, ‘Prime Minister’s Phone Conversation with President Bush, 15 October: US Politics, Iraq and Iran’.

¹¹⁶ Telegram 286 Baghdad to FCO London, 15 October 2004, ‘Iraq: Internal: Political Round-up 9-15 October’.

¹¹⁷ *BBC News*, 18 October 2004, *Zarqawi ‘shows Bin Laden loyalty’*.

¹¹⁸ [JIC Assessment, 11 November 2004, ‘Iraq Security – Current Concerns’](#).

¹¹⁹ Minute McColl to CDS & CJO, 17 October 2004, ‘Report 133 of 17 Oct 04’.

outside its current area of operations”.¹²⁰ He confirmed that a request for UK ground forces to be made available to relieve US forces was under consideration and that a recommendation from Gen Walker was expected by the middle of the week.

238. Mr Hoon said:

“This request, if agreed, would involve UK land forces operating outside MND(SE). It is worth bearing in mind that Royal Air Force personnel have been operating over the whole of Iraq when required to support the coalition, and that some British personnel are based in Baghdad to support coalition operations. Other British land forces have previously operated outside MND(SE).”

239. Denying speculation that the request was “somehow political” and linked to the US Presidential Elections, Mr Hoon stressed that it had been “a military request ... linked to ... efforts to create the best possible situation in which to hold the Iraqi elections in January”.

240. In a press conference the following day, Mr Straw was asked whether the deployment was a “done deal” and replied that the UK was “very sympathetic” to the US request, but “no final decision has been taken”.¹²¹

241. Mr Straw told journalists:

“I understand the concerns that have been expressed. I think the concern is as to whether or not there is so-called mission creep, whether we will be there longer than anticipated.

“We are not proposing to increase the total number of troops that would be in Iraq, nor would we be extending the normal tour of duty of this particular unit [the Black Watch].

“The purpose of these military movements is to stabilise the security situation as quickly as possible so that we create a more satisfactory security environment more quickly so that, in turn, the elections can take place by the end of January so that in turn the Iraqis can start more quickly to take more and effective control of their country.”

242. On 19 October, Lt Gen Fry provided a paper for the Chiefs of Staff outlining the background to the request and the necessary timeline for any decision on deployment.¹²² He did not make any recommendation as to whether or not the UK should agree to the US request.

¹²⁰ House of Commons, *Official Report*, 18 October 2004, columns 625-626.

¹²¹ *ITN*, 19 October 2004, *UK: Annan, Straw Speak to Press After Talks on Darfur and Iraq*.

¹²² Minute DCDS(C) to COS (via COSSEC), 19 October 2004, ‘Iraq – Potential UK Battlegroup Deployment to North Babil’.

243. Gen Walker chaired an internal MOD meeting on 19 October to discuss Lt Gen Fry's paper.¹²³ He underlined the need to consider the request in terms of military advantage and to have a good understanding of the likelihood of success in Fallujah within the 30 day time period.

244. Air Chief Marshal Sir Jock Stirrup, Chief of the Air Staff, noted that "the key question in relation to military benefit was whether the UK contribution in North Babil would increase the chance of success in Fallujah. If this was the case, then a clear logic chain existed in support of the UK deployment." Both Lt Gen McColl and Maj Gen Rollo saw military benefit in the deployment.

245. Sir Kevin Tebbit, MOD Permanent Under Secretary, considered that the Black Watch could help prevent insurgents spreading out from Fallujah but "there would be a casualty issue".

246. At the end of the meeting, Gen Walker commissioned the DIS to prepare a one-page threat assessment for North Babil compared with MND(SE), including a casualty assessment.

247. Mr Blair's Private Secretary provided him with a Cabinet Office brief on the pros and cons for the different timing options of a decision.¹²⁴ It highlighted that an early decision would mean that UK troops (the Black Watch) could be in place in good time, but that it would mean extending their tour of duty. A delayed decision would mean that the next troop rotation would have arrived (the Scots Guards) and could backfill the Black Watch as the MND(SE) armoured reserve. But delay might also lead the US to conclude that the UK would always turn down such deployment requests.

248. In his covering note, Mr Blair's Private Secretary told Mr Blair that he would get "firm advice" later in the week, but that Gen Walker and Mr Hoon would discuss options with him the next day. Gen Walker was reported to favour limiting any offer of support to 30 days, to discourage early deployment.

249. Anticipating a positive decision on the North Babil deployment, Mr Ian Lee, MOD Director General Media and Communications, wrote to Mr Martin Howard, MOD Director General Operational Policy, with some thoughts about announcing it. Mr Lee observed that "journalists find it hard to believe that the US military machine needs this UK help, and this in turn leads them to the conclusion that (US) politics is driving the issue".¹²⁵

250. The Defence Intelligence Staff (DIS) reported on 20 October that there had been no MNF-I fatalities in the previous month within the area the US was proposing UK forces should deploy to, but that they could "expect a hostile local population", and might

¹²³ Minutes, 19 October 2004, 'Record of Discussion – CDS O' Group – 19 Oct 04'.

¹²⁴ Minute Quarrey to Blair, 19 October 2004, 'Iraq: Possible Troop Redeployment' attaching 'Iraq: UK Deployment to North Babil'.

¹²⁵ Minute Lee to DG Op Pol, 19 October 2004, 'Troop Movements in Iraq'.

see “a surge of attacks as popular anti-MNF-I sentiment is inflamed” by events unfolding in Fallujah.¹²⁶

251. The Chiefs of Staff met on 20 October to prepare advice for Mr Hoon on a potential deployment.¹²⁷

252. The minutes said that the Chiefs supported the deployment but highlighted the need to plan for the possibility that the campaign would last longer than 30 days. Gen Walker concluded the meeting by stating that “no decision had been made but that the military advice would be to accede to the US request”.

253. That advice was submitted to Mr Hoon the same day.¹²⁸ It described a “clear military benefit” to the North Babil deployment and said that the Chiefs of Staff recommended that the US request should be met. The expected length of the operation remained 30 days, but Mr Howard reminded Mr Hoon that Prime Minister Allawi had yet to authorise the operation, and had some political difficulties to resolve in doing so which might cause delay.

254. Mr Michael Howard, Leader of the Opposition, called on Mr Blair to clarify the proposed Black Watch deployment at Prime Minister’s Questions on 20 October.¹²⁹ Mr Blair confirmed that no decision had yet been taken. He told the House of Commons:

“A request has been made. There is now a military assessment. The military will make a recommendation and a final decision will be made.”

255. Lt Gen McColl concluded his tour in Iraq in October 2004 and was succeeded by Lieutenant General John Kiszely.¹³⁰ In his “hauldown” report covering his six months in Iraq Lt Gen McColl wrote that the relationship between the CPA and the military had been “hampered from the outset by inadequate post war planning” and by close supervision and intervention by the Pentagon.

256. Lt Gen McColl also judged that:

“Since the transfer of power, the emergence of a sovereign government, the passage of responsibility from Defense to State, and the increased focus on MNF-I on strategic issues, the climate of decision-making has changed. The process is now more consultative and sensitive to the broader pol/mil implications, within Iraq, regionally and internationally. The dialogue between the political elements, IIG/Embassy, and MNF-I had improved significantly.”

¹²⁶ Briefing DIS, 20 October 2004, ‘Predicted insurgent activity in North Babil’.

¹²⁷ Minutes, 20 October 2004, Chiefs of Staff meeting.

¹²⁸ Submission DG Op Pol to APS/Secretary of State [MOD], 20 October 2004, ‘Potential movement of troops in Iraq’.

¹²⁹ House of Commons, *Official Report*, 20 October 2004, columns 882-885.

¹³⁰ [Report McColl to CDS and CJO, 20 October 2004, ‘SBMR-I Hauldown Report – Lt Gen McColl’.](#)

257. Lt Gen McColl characterised the insurgency in Iraq as “an extreme manifestation of the national pride felt by the overwhelming majority of the public, who feel a deep-seated desire to ‘liberate’ Iraq from foreign ‘occupation’”. He judged that the diverse groups with the insurgency co-operated “purely to be rid of MNF-I”, and were unified by high unemployment and shared religion. Based on “objective metrics” such as number of attacks and casualty rates, the insurgency was “increasing in intensity and lethality, and is sustainable in the medium term”.

258. Although there were troops from 30 nations deployed as part of the coalition, Lt Gen McColl recorded that only the UK sought to influence the campaign strategy and operational policy in theatre. On a number of occasions, the UK had successfully influenced the conduct of the campaign in line with its own strategic objectives. That influence was based on “the political capital invested”, troop contribution, financial contribution, the quality of staff officers and counter-insurgency expertise. However, repeated rejections of US requests for the deployment of UK resources beyond MND(SE) had “chipped away at the US/UK relationship”.

259. In summary, the report said: “Our wish to contribute to campaign direction beyond the boundaries of MND(SE) needs to be visibly supported by a reasonable commitment and participation if we are to retain credibility.”

260. Lt Gen McColl wrote that:

“Ejection of the coalition in 05 would risk mission failure but the timing of planned withdrawal thereafter is critical ... there is much to commend a withdrawal in early 06 in accordance with the UN mandate. This is the natural political, legal and (if we do our job well) security culminating point.

“If we are indeed to be committed to withdraw at that point, then we should seriously consider announcing that intention early. Any such announcement would undercut the insurgency, address public suspicion over MNF-I’s long-term intentions, and reinforce the moderates of all hues.”

261. That view was not, however, shared by everyone:

“Discussions with US interlocutors have identified little appetite for declaring early ... based upon the underlying perception ... that the operation will extend well beyond 2006 ...

“Any end state that envisages a continued coalition presence after the spring of 06 (allowing time to withdraw) would require either a new UN mandate or the consent of the Iraqi Government ... It is at this point that the national goals of coalition members may diverge. No firm decisions on the long-term US presence have been made, but some US planning at least envisages a long-term basing strategy. Current UK planning does not. As such, there is, therefore, a pressing need to define [the] UK’s long-term end state in the region, and to accept that this may differ from that of the US. If a decision is made that [the] UK’s national interest lies alongside that of the

US, that decision must be taken in the expectation that any US/UK forces in Iraq will continue to be a target and spur for insurgency as long as they remain.”

262. Lt Gen McColl ended his report by writing:

“There have already been two strategic errors in the post war campaign, the dissolution of the Army and de-Ba’athification. Lack of clarity on the timing of our intent beyond the Dec 05 elections would be a third. A clearly defined and articulated intent to withdraw once the mission had been completed in the spring of 06 provides the most effective way to separate the insurgents from the mass of the people.”

263. A CIG assessed the security situation in North Babil on 21 October and reached similar conclusions to the DIS.¹³¹ It judged that recent MNF-I attacks against insurgents there had disrupted but not significantly weakened them. The majority were disaffected local Sunni Arabs, including former military or other state employees, but there were also cells of hardline Ba’athists, Iraqi Islamist terrorists and possibly foreign jihadists. The CIG judged that the local population would be “more hostile to a UK presence than the population in southern Iraq”.

264. Mr Hoon wrote to Mr Blair on 21 October that the Chiefs were “of the view that there is a clear military benefit in carrying out the operation in terms of reducing the risk associated with the proposed ISF/US Fallujah operation”.¹³² Mr Hoon indicated that he intended to accept the Chiefs’ recommendation and to announce it that afternoon to Parliament.

265. In preparation for a discussion of the deployment at Cabinet later that morning, Mr Blair asked for “a better explanation ... of why the US Army cannot take on the task proposed for the Black Watch”.¹³³

266. Sir Nigel Sheinwald provided a brief which explained that although there were large numbers of US troops in Iraq, many were providing logistical support; the Black Watch provided the sort of armoured capability to be a like-for-like replacement in North Babil.

267. At Cabinet Mr Blair explained that it was necessary to conduct a “clearance operation” in Fallujah in the coming weeks in order to enable Iraqi elections to proceed.¹³⁴ The deployment of the Black Watch to North Babil was recommended by the British military. For the Black Watch, “the danger to which they would be exposed was not qualitatively different from that which they had experienced to date in their current tour”.

¹³¹ [JIC Assessment, 21 October 2004, ‘Iraq: Security Situation in North Babil’.](#)

¹³² [Letter Hoon to Blair, 21 October 2004, ‘Deployment of UK forces to the North Babil region’.](#)

¹³³ Minute Sheinwald to Prime Minister, 20 October 2004, ‘Iraq: North Babil’.

¹³⁴ Cabinet Conclusions, 21 October 2004.

268. Mr Blair concluded that providing forces in support of the Fallujah operation meant that the UK would maintain an influence on its planning.

269. Mr Hoon announced the deployment to Parliament that afternoon.¹³⁵ In his statement he said:

“We cannot consider the current UK area of responsibility in isolation. What goes on in the rest of Iraq affects southern Iraq and affects UK troops wherever they are based. We must therefore consider our contribution in the context of the overall security situation right across Iraq. This means that an armoured battle group consisting of the 1st Battalion the Black Watch and supporting units will deploy to an area within Multi-National Force (West) to relieve a US unit for other tasks. They will be deploying with the necessary combat support services such as signallers, engineers and medics, resulting in a total deployment of around 850 personnel. This deployment will be for a very limited and specified period of time, lasting weeks rather than months.”

270. In a telephone call on 22 October, Prime Minister Allawi told Mr Blair that he was “pursuing a fresh political initiative on Fallujah and would exhaust the peaceful options before considering military action”.¹³⁶

271. The decision on whether to commence military operations rested with Prime Minister Allawi, who was assured by the British Embassy Baghdad that “HMG would back [his] judgement”.¹³⁷

272. Towards the end of October, UK officials in Baghdad reported that Prime Minister Allawi was showing “early signs of a wobble on timing” for the election.¹³⁸

273. Mr Blair’s Private Secretary briefed him that he should “put down a firm marker” on this subject when speaking to Prime Minister Allawi.¹³⁹

274. On 23 October, Prime Minister Allawi agreed that the necessary ISF troops could be moved into place for the Fallujah operation.¹⁴⁰ In parallel, he continued to pursue a political solution.¹⁴¹

275. Of the Iraqi forces identified to deploy in Fallujah, Major General Andrew Farquhar (the British Deputy Commanding General of Operations in the Multi-National Corps –

¹³⁵ House of Commons, *Official Report*, 21 October 2004, columns 1035-1037.

¹³⁶ Letter Quarrey to Wilson, 22 October 2004, ‘Iraq: Prime Minister’s Conversation with Allawi, 22 October’.

¹³⁷ Telegram 303 Baghdad to FCO London, 24 October 2004, ‘Iraq: Fallujah Meeting with Allawi, 24 October’.

¹³⁸ Minute Heatly to Prime Minister, 22 October 2004, ‘Your telephone call with Allawi’.

¹³⁹ Minute Quarrey to Prime Minister, 22 October 2004, ‘Iraq: Allawi Phone Call’.

¹⁴⁰ Telegram 302 Baghdad to FCO London, 24 October 2004, ‘Iraq: Fallujah: Meeting with Allawi 23 October’.

¹⁴¹ Telegram 303 Baghdad to FCO London, 24 October 2004, ‘Iraq: Fallujah Meeting with Allawi, 24 October’.

Iraq) assessed that those drawn from the Iraqi Counter-Terrorism Force and the elite Iraqi Intervention Force were “capable”, but expressed concern about troops deployed from the regular Iraqi Army.¹⁴²

276. The Black Watch began its deployment to North Babil on 26 October and left 39 days later, on 4 December.¹⁴³

277. Following discussion between the Attorney General, the MOD and FCO officials, on 27 October Ms Adams replied to Ms Rose’s letter of 15 October.¹⁴⁴

278. Ms Adams reported Lord Goldsmith’s agreement with the military assessment that the level of violence in parts of Iraq constituted a state of armed conflict. It would be impractical to operate under different rules in different geographical areas but Lord Goldsmith felt it important that the revised Targeting Directive said explicitly that force was “only authorised where it is strictly necessary and proportionate”.

279. On 27 October, the JIC conducted a review of insurgencies in Iraq at the request of the FCO.¹⁴⁵

280. The JIC judged that there was “no unified national insurgency” although “all insurgent groups have a perceived common enemy: the MNF-I and Iraqis who support the ‘occupation’”. In general:

“The level of sustained violence in Iraq shows no sign of diminishing. The considerable efforts of the Multi-National Forces (MNF) and the Iraqi security forces (ISF) are constraining the insurgents but not defeating them.”

281. The JIC judged that, of the groups operating:

“The **Sunni Arab** insurgents have the greatest depth and means to conduct a long-term campaign. They pose the most serious threat to the Iraqi government. They enjoy a degree of popular sympathy within the Sunni community. The Iraqi government’s outreach efforts have not yet diminished this.

“The scale of the Sunni Arab insurgency will be influenced in the short term by events in Fallujah. More broadly, it will be affected by the outcome of the January elections – a result which deepens Sunni political exclusion could fuel the violence – and by the MNF presence, against which the overwhelming majority of attacks are directed. A significant Sunni insurgency will probably continue through 2005 and beyond.

¹⁴² Telegram 301 Baghdad to FCO London, 24 October 2004, ‘Iraq: Fallujah: Military Preparations: ISF Numbers and Capability’.

¹⁴³ MOD Defence Factsheet, [undated], *Operations in Iraq: News and Events, January-December 2004*.

¹⁴⁴ Letter Adams to Rose, 27 October 2004, ‘Iraq: Revision of Op TELIC Targeting Directive and position of embedded personnel’.

¹⁴⁵ [JIC Assessment, 27 October 2004, ‘Iraq: A Long-Term Insurgency Problem’](#).

“A **Shia** insurgency, small at present, will persist. Its scope and scale will depend on the degree of political inclusion (particularly as regards al-Sadr) and the success of economic improvements in poor Shia areas, and could be affected by how the Sunnis react to the election results.”

282. In Baghdad, the JIC judged that:

“With a deal struck between representatives of al-Sadr and the IIG, violence in the Sadr City area of Baghdad has reduced significantly. Isolated attacks, mainly against the MNF, have continued in Baghdad and elsewhere in Shia areas. Most are conducted by renegade Mahdi Army elements determined to continue to attack the MNF, but other Shia groups are also involved. Intelligence continues to indicate confusion and dissent among the Mahdi Army and al-Sadr’s supporters.”

283. For Sunni groups, the JIC assessed that the next few months would be:

“... important in shaping the scale of their insurgency. There are signs that some of the insurgents may be susceptible to overtures from the IIG. Prime Minister Allawi and other senior figures in the government have invested considerable effort in establishing dialogue with a variety of Sunni insurgent leaders ... In the short term much may depend on **Fallujah**. Long drawn out fighting with heavy civilian casualties will reinforce the broader Sunni Arab insurgency and may jeopardise attempts to bring Sunni Arabs into the political process. Success in Fallujah, either through negotiations or a successful military operation – particularly against foreign jihadists – will result in the IIG maintaining momentum and offers the prospect of further progress after the elections. But, whatever the outcome in Fallujah a significant Sunni Arab insurgency will continue through 2005 and beyond. The election will bear on its scale. An acceptable outcome for the Sunnis could lead to a reduction in violence. A result which deepens their political exclusion may see a continuation of the current level or perhaps an increase.”¹⁴⁶

284. The JIC assessed that Abu Musab al-Zarqawi’s position might be strengthened by his pledge of allegiance to Usama Bin Laden, enabling him to attract more foreign recruits and funding, and making his group a long term threat. But the AQ “brand” was expected to reinforce further the fears of Iraqi citizens opposed to the jihadist agenda.

285. On 27 October, Maj Gen Farquhar reported that “the Independent Electoral Commission of Iraq (IECI) had formally requested logistic support in the distribution of electoral registration papers.”¹⁴⁷

286. A report from Maj Gen Rollo in MND (SE) on the same date suggested that the prospect of elections was having a “positive effect” although the timetable remained

¹⁴⁶ [JIC Assessment, 27 October 2004, ‘Iraq: A Long-Term Insurgency Problem’.](#)

¹⁴⁷ Report Farquhar, 27 October 2004, ‘MNC-I Security Update – 27 Oct 04’.

“very tight”.¹⁴⁸ IECI activity was also visible in the South – registration forms and explanatory material would be distributed with the November food ration.

287. Maj Gen Rollo wrote:

“My main concern is security. I will press the local police in particular to provide the necessary protection for the IECI offices ... We will provide the back-up ...”

288. At the meeting of the Ad Hoc Ministerial Group on Iraq on 28 October, Mr Straw said the election was “broadly on track, thanks to the work of Carlos Valenzuela and his team”.¹⁴⁹

289. In discussion, a member of the Group commented that the Iraqi public was starting to believe the elections would happen.

290. Mr Hoon briefed the Group on US military plans for a “short, sharp campaign” in Fallujah. UK forces would be in place in North Babil by 2 November. He said that the UK needed to press the US to ensure that its operation would be as targeted as possible. Many civilians had already left the area in anticipation of an attack.

291. Mr Hoon told the Group that the IIG should be encouraged to make political contacts with Sunni leaders in Fallujah so that there would not be a political vacuum following the military operation.

292. In discussion, a member of the Group observed that popular support for the insurgents within Fallujah was waning.

293. The Ad Hoc Ministerial Group on Iraq concluded that the UK should emphasise to the US that:

“... British Ministers needed to understand the plan for military action in Fallujah and be given sufficient prior warning of the commencement of operations to have the opportunity to intervene politically.”

294. By 29 October preliminary airstrikes had begun.¹⁵⁰

295. Lieutenant General Sir John Kiszely told the Inquiry that there was:

“... a great deal of preparatory, what the Americans would call shaping of the battlefield, in particular quite a lot of artillery and air-delivered munitions ...”¹⁵¹

296. On 31 October, Lt Gen Kiszely reported that between 50 and 75 percent of the inhabitants of Fallujah were estimated to have left the town.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁸ Report Rollo, 27 October 2004, ‘GOC MND (SE) – Southern Iraq Update – 27 Oct 04’.

¹⁴⁹ Minutes, 28 October 2004, Ad Hoc Ministerial Group on Iraq meeting.

¹⁵⁰ Minute Dowse to Sheinwald, 29 October 2004, ‘Iraq update – 29 October’.

¹⁵¹ Public hearing, 14 December 2009, page 16.

¹⁵² Minute Kiszely to CDS, 31 October 2004, ‘SBMR-I’s Weekly Report (135) of 31 Oct 04’.

297. Mosul, situated in MND(NE), was reported to be “increasingly in the grip of intimidation” and was “increasingly being seen in MNF-I and IIG circles as ‘the operation after next’”. Lt Gen Kiszely considered that:

“... intimidation in Mosul is a microcosm of much of Iraq, especially the Sunni areas. It is my perception that this widespread intimidation is deepening ... The number of kidnaps, in particular, is increasing, with the victims including the close relatives of senior Ministers, Generals, Provincial Governors and Police Chiefs.

“The level of intimidation is severely undermining the rule of law ... Criminals and insurgents operate with impunity and rule by intimidation. The police are either driven out, cowed, or are actively collaborating with the criminals and insurgents. This is true in many areas designated by MNF-I as ‘at or near Local Control’. Since Local Control is defined only in terms of internal security, and not in terms of the rule of law, it is perfectly possible for areas to appear controlled – a relative absence of acts of insurgency; some uniformed police on the streets by day – although in reality this is a façade. It is actually the insurgents who are in control.”

298. Lt Gen Kiszely advised “we shall need to watch this very carefully when proposals are made in the up-coming Force Posture Review” because a premature move to the wrong structure would be “likely to result in a loss of the gains we have made and a regression in the counter-insurgency campaign”.

299. On election preparations, Lt Gen Kiszely reported:” The distribution of voter registration material is almost complete, and in time for the start of registration in the coming week.” He considered that timing was “at-risk to unforeseen circumstances”. Some concerns remained about election security, but responsibility was clearly with the Iraqi police. The MNF-I would “appear at or near election facilities only in extremis”.

Mortality in Iraq

On 29 October, *The Lancet* published the results of a survey which compared mortality rates in Iraq before and after the invasion.¹⁵³ The authors concluded:

“... the death toll associated with the invasion and occupation of Iraq is probably about 100,000 people, and may be much higher.”

The study stated that violence accounted for most of the excess deaths, that violent deaths were “mainly attributed” to coalition forces, and that most individuals reportedly killed by coalition forces were women and children.

There had also been an increase in the infant mortality rate based on the households interviewed for the study, from 29 deaths per 1,000 live births to 57 deaths per 1,000 live births. Causes of death had also changed:

¹⁵³ Roberts, L, Lafta, R, Garfield, R, Khudhairi, J and Burnham, G. Mortality before and after the 2003 invasion of Iraq: cluster sample survey. *The Lancet* **364**: 1857-1864 (2004).

“The major causes of death before the invasion were myocardial infarction, cerebrovascular accidents, and other chronic disorders whereas after the invasion violence was the primary cause of death.”

The study identified Fallujah as an outlier. Of the households visited in Fallujah, 44 percent were temporarily or permanently abandoned. The survey had nonetheless completed a Fallujah sample in which:

“... we recorded 53 deaths when only 1.4 were expected under the national pre-war rate. This indicates a point estimate of about 200,000 excess deaths in the 3 percent of Iraq represented by this cluster. However, the uncertainty in this value is substantial and implies additional deaths above those measured in the rest of the country.”

On 18 November, Mr Straw briefed the AHMGIR that:

“... he had issued a Ministerial statement on civilian casualties in response to the study reported by the Lancet. The key points were that the Lancet findings were heavily dependent on the data set they had used and that their statistical assumptions were flawed (and this could be demonstrated if, for example, a case study was made of Fallujah).”¹⁵⁴

Mr Straw’s statement to Parliament said:

“The Multi-National and Iraqi forces continue to act so as to minimise civilian casualties. This is despite the fact that the insurgents have shown no compunction in using mosques, schools and hospitals as defensive bases.”¹⁵⁵

Mr Straw quoted alternative casualty figures from the Iraqi Ministry of Health and from www.iraqbodycount.org.

Casualty figures are considered in more detail in Section 17.

November 2004

300. In November 2004, Major General Jonathon Riley succeeded Maj Gen Rollo as General Officer Commanding Multi-National Division (South East) (GOC MND(SE)).

301. On 1 November, a CIG considered the current intelligence on Fallujah and the potential impact of military action on the security situation.¹⁵⁶

302. The CIG judged that “prospects of a negotiated solution remain poor”. The US estimated that around 3,000 insurgents were still in the city. Of those:

“Some will certainly stay and fight but we are unable to judge the potential size of this hard core. Some may fight initially and then disperse. Others may have already left the city. A number will lie low in Fallujah to mount a longer-term resistance.”

¹⁵⁴ Minutes, 19 November 2004, Ad Hoc Group on Iraq Rehabilitation meeting.

¹⁵⁵ House of Commons, *Official Report*, 17 November 2004, columns 92WS-95WS.

¹⁵⁶ JIC Assessment, 1 November 2004, ‘Iraq Security: Fallujah’.

303. The CIG assessed that intensive fighting in Fallujah would trigger a surge in violence elsewhere in Sunni Arab areas, although the scale of such activity would depend on what happened in Fallujah. If the attack was short and precise the consequent violence was expected to be limited; long drawn out fighting with heavy civilian casualties was expected to provoke a more intense reaction.

304. Mr Blair's Private Secretary briefed him on 2 November that Prime Minister Allawi was concerned about aspects of the military plan.¹⁵⁷ He added that "planning for the post-conflict phase remains inadequate, and the US now seem resigned to this".

US Presidential election 2004

Iraq was a significant theme of the US Presidential election campaign in autumn 2004. One US poll conducted at the start of the campaign indicated that Iraq was the most important issue to 17 percent of US voters, behind the economy (25 percent) and the war on terror (24 percent).¹⁵⁸

According to Mr Bob Woodward, although the level of violence in Iraq remained high throughout the campaign and surged in the weeks leading up to election day, the absence of a strategy for Iraq and the mounting violence "never quite grabbed hold in the campaign".¹⁵⁹ Mr Woodward also reported the views of Mr Blackwill, who had been struck by the lack of time to discuss Iraq policy during the campaign and President Bush's "round-the clock, all-consuming focus on winning the election". According to Mr Blackwill, the President "talked about goals, expressed his optimism ... and gave pep talks", but the administration had "no real strategy".

President Bush was elected for a second term in office on 2 November 2004.

Secretary Powell announced his resignation from government in November 2004. He was succeeded as Secretary of State by Dr Rice, who in turn was replaced as National Security Advisor by her deputy, Mr Stephen Hadley.

305. On 3 November, the JIC assessed the political prospects for the forthcoming elections.¹⁶⁰ As well as assessing that a strong Sunni Arab turnout would be essential for credibility and that the forthcoming events in Fallujah would be critical in determining how things would unfold, it considered the likely impact of a delay. The JIC judged that:

"A limited delay to the elections – of a month or so – would have little impact on the political process. A longer delay will undermine Allawi's credibility and that of the coalition, and would be likely to lead to increased violence, including from the Shia."

306. That judgement was based, in part, on the position of Grand Ayatollah al-Sistani. He had recently issued a statement encouraging all Iraqi citizens to register to vote and was "the only significant Iraqi voice to emphasise the need for representation in the TNA

¹⁵⁷ Minute Quarrey to Prime Minister, 2 November 2004, 'Fallujah'.

¹⁵⁸ *Time*, 3 September 2004, *Campaign 2004: Bush Opens Double-Digit Lead*.

¹⁵⁹ Woodward B. *State of Denial*. Simon & Schuster UK Ltd, 2006.

¹⁶⁰ JIC Assessment, 3 November 2004, 'Iraq Politics: From Here to the Elections'.

for all communities and denominations proportional to their numbers". The JIC assessed that his statement would be "very persuasive for the Shia and may even have some effect among Sunnis".

307. The JIC judged that Grand Ayatollah al-Sistani "would accept a limited delay of no more than two months, if clearly required for security or technical reasons".

308. In preparation for a breakfast meeting with Prime Minister Allawi on 5 November, Mr Blair was briefed that there were "growing doubts" over the commitment of the IIG and Prime Minister Allawi to January elections.¹⁶¹

309. Mr Blair's Private Secretary also provided a list of "points that Allawi needs to cover before he approves any military action", which included:

- demonstrating publicly that there had been "every reasonable effort to identify and negotiate with representatives from Fallujah";
- having a political strategy to deal with the impact of military action on party registration for the elections and on planned international conferences;
- ensuring he was content with the military plans and the role of the ISF; and
- preparing a "follow-up package of political and economic measures".

310. Over breakfast, Mr Blair advised that:

"... he knew the military commanders were keen to move now. But it was vital that we balanced the political and military priorities. Unless there was an argument for an immediate move, then he believed we needed to take the necessary time to exhaust all avenues of dialogue with the Sunnis. He also thought that we needed to issue an ultimatum to Fallujah."¹⁶²

311. Mr Blair also set out the reasons why holding elections on time was crucial. He advised "we needed to portray this to the outside world as the justification for everything we had done to date and for any operation in Fallujah".

312. On 5 November, Mr Straw's Principal Private Secretary sent an IPU paper on phased drawdown in Iraq to Mr Blair's Private Secretary.¹⁶³ The paper considered:

"... whether we should make public our intention that the MNF presence in Iraq will alter during 2005 and end soon after the December 2005 elections (with any further troop presence in Iraq being purely to train and support the ISF, and under a new arrangement with the Iraqi government)."

¹⁶¹ Minute Quarrey to Prime Minister, 4 November 2004, 'Iraq: Breakfast with Allawi'.

¹⁶² Letter Phillipson to Adams, 5 November 2004, 'Iraq: Prime Minister's Discussion with Iyad Allawi, 5 November 2004'.

¹⁶³ Letter Adams to Quarrey, 5 November 2004, 'Iraq: MNF Presence in Iraq in 2005: Phased Draw-Down' attaching Paper 'Iraq: MNF Presence in Iraq in 2005: Phased Draw-Down'.

313. The IPU concluded that there should be a public statement, which would make clear that drawdown was conditional on successful elections in January and December 2005, progress in training the ISF and completion of the Petraeus Plan. The IPU considered the relationship between the insurgency and drawdown and observed that:

“... some insurgents are beginning to conclude that US/UK refusal to specify an end-date is evidence that we are in it for the long haul, that they are not going to win militarily and, therefore, that they should engage on the political track ...”

314. The IPU also proposed that a public statement “should make clear that MNF would not be able to draw-down quickly, or could even increase numbers, if the insurgency continued as now”.

315. The following day, the media reported that Mr Annan was urging caution.¹⁶⁴ In a letter to leaders of the US, UK and Iraq he warned of the potential impact of major military offensives on Iraq’s political process and warned:

“The threat or actual use of force not only risks deepening the sense of alienation of certain communities, but would also reinforce perceptions among the Iraqi population of a continued military Occupation.”

316. Mr Annan wrote that “forthcoming elections are the keystone in a broader process to restore stability and legitimacy in Iraq”.

317. The BBC reported that Prime Minister Allawi called the letter “confused” and said:

“... if Mr Annan thought he could prevent insurgents in Fallujah from ‘inflicting damage and killing’, he was welcome to try.”¹⁶⁵

318. A copy of Prime Minister Allawi’s written response was provided to Mr Blair. It said:

“Even now, the door remains open to these groups [insurgents] to embrace the rule-of-law, to put down their weapons, and to join the political process ... But, again I fear that we have all but exhausted the comprehensive dialogue that we have conducted. We are now left with few options. I believe it is the Government’s duty now to act in order to safeguard lives, elections and democracy in Iraq from those choosing the path of violence and atrocities.”¹⁶⁶

319. Mr Chaplin told the Inquiry:

“In the end I think Allawi felt compelled to act – the reason he felt compelled was because it was such a serious part of the security threat.

¹⁶⁴ *BBC News*, 6 November 2004, *Kofi Annan’s letter; Falluja warning*.

¹⁶⁵ *BBC News*, 6 November 2004, *US strikes raze Falluja hospital*.

¹⁶⁶ Letter Allawi to Annan, 6 November 2004, [untitled].

“Fallujah by October/November 2004 was, by all accounts, a major terrorist haven ... there were said to be thousands of terrorists, and it was certainly a factory for car bombs.”¹⁶⁷

320. Lt Gen Sir John Kiszely told the Inquiry that Prime Minister Allawi sought regular advice from US and UK Ambassadors as he considered action in Fallujah:

“But on the coalition side we were careful to make sure that any decision that was made was, and was seen to be, an Iraqi Government decision and nobody else’s.”¹⁶⁸

321. Mr Chaplin said:

“Our own view was one of caution, highlighting the risks and making sure that Allawi considered really carefully the pros and cons. But in the end it was his decision, and of course an American decision ...

“Our main involvement and the main thing we emphasised afterwards was that if there had to be military action, then the government needed to organise itself to ensure there was rapid follow-up ...”¹⁶⁹

322. Following authorisation by Prime Minister Allawi, offensive operations began in Fallujah on 8 November, at 1900 local time.¹⁷⁰

323. An update on the operation sent on 9 November reported that initial resistance had been light, but was likely to increase as US forces and the ISF closed in on insurgent strongholds.¹⁷¹

324. On 10 November Mr Chaplin reported from Baghdad:

“Only a week ago, Sunni and Shia parties appeared to have drawn the same conclusions ... that the elections should be delayed for a few months. The Sunnis were worried that a January election would see insufficient security in the Sunni triangle for a good Sunni voter turnout. The Shia parties ... had woken up to the fact that more time would be needed to make a success of diaspora voting ...

“The arguments for delay are, for now, in abeyance.”¹⁷²

325. On 10 November, ACM Torpy reported to Gen Walker the results of an interim Force Level Review.¹⁷³ It had concluded that no additional deployments were required in support of election security, but one more battalion was required for SSR tasks.

¹⁶⁷ Public hearing, 7 December 2009, page 5.

¹⁶⁸ Public hearing, 14 December 2009, pages 14-16.

¹⁶⁹ Public hearing, 7 December 2009, page 19.

¹⁷⁰ *CNN World*, 9 November 2004, *Battle for Falluja under way*.

¹⁷¹ Letter Baker to Phillipson, 9 November 2004, ‘Fallujah’ attaching Paper, 9 November 2004, ‘Fallujah Update – 091200Z Nov 14’.

¹⁷² Telegram 369 Baghdad to FCO London, 10 November 2004, ‘Iraq: Elections: The Politics; Part two of two’.

¹⁷³ Minute CJO to CDS, 10 November 2004, ‘Iraq – Interim Force Level Review’.

326. Three days after the start of the operation in Fallujah, on 11 November, Mr Straw told Cabinet that it was going “slightly better than had been anticipated”.¹⁷⁴

327. Although there had been civilian casualties, Prime Minister Allawi had gone to great lengths to pursue a political solution. Mr Straw considered that it was necessary to “deal with Fallujah” if elections were to be held.

328. In a telephone conversation with Mr Straw on the same day, Secretary Powell said that operations in Fallujah were going “relatively well” although Mosul, where the police structure had entirely broken down, was a concern.¹⁷⁵ Mr Straw commented that Mosul “had the potential not only to be a centre of insurgency, but also of ethnic civil war”.

329. On 11 November the JIC issued an Assessment covering current themes relating to the security situation in Iraq.¹⁷⁶

330. The JIC judged that insurgent violence would continue at a high level in Iraq over the next few months, however effective the operation in Fallujah was. It judged there to be evidence of local co-operation between insurgent groups, but no overall co-ordination.

331. In Fallujah, US and Iraqi forces were making “good progress” and:

“A large number of insurgents have left the city, although the risk of significant attack remains. Insurgents outside Fallujah will continue responding to the offensive with an increased effort, including in the UK area of responsibility in North Babil.”

332. It was the JIC’s view that:

“There are still too few capable Iraqi forces to cope with the widespread security problems. Attacks and intimidation by insurgent groups against the Iraqi security forces are undermining their effectiveness, in some cases. All Iraqi official institutions, including the security forces, employ individuals who give information to insurgents, either willingly or under threat.”

333. The JIC judged that the new relationship between Abu Musab al-Zarqawi and Al Qaida had had “no immediate impact on the security situation in Iraq” and was “unlikely to alter it in the short term”. There were, however, indications that other AQ operatives were sending trainers to Iraq.

334. Mr Blair visited Washington from 11 to 12 November to “look ahead strategically with President Bush to the key issues of his second term”.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁴ Cabinet Conclusions, 11 November 2004.

¹⁷⁵ Letter Owen to Sheinwald, 11 November 2004, ‘Conversation with US Secretary of State, 11 November 2004’.

¹⁷⁶ [JIC Assessment, 11 November 2004, ‘Iraq Security – Current Concerns’](#).

¹⁷⁷ Minute Sheinwald to Prime Minister, 5 November 2004, ‘Visit to Washington’.

335. On Iraq, Sir Nigel Sheinwald suggested that the main areas to cover were:

- Unambiguous commitment to elections on time in January.
- US and UK to stay the course, but MNF will be able to draw down as Iraqi capability increases next year.
- Fallujah.”

336. During their meeting on 12 November, Mr Blair asked President Bush whether Iraqisation of security was having any impact on the ability of terrorists to operate.¹⁷⁸

337. Mr Blair said that it was important to keep reiterating that if insurgents laid down their weapons then operations like the one in Fallujah would cease.

338. After returning to the UK, Sir Nigel Sheinwald wrote to Mr Straw’s Principal Private Secretary to describe the follow up work required.¹⁷⁹ He wrote:

“I discussed Iraq in 2005 in some detail with Condi [Rice]. But we need to put flesh on these bones too. The issues are familiar: improving security; follow up to Sharm el Sheikh; getting to elections and our 2005 strategy. **Action:** FCO to send advice this week please in the run up to the Sharm meeting.”

339. Lt Gen McColl called on Mr Blair in London on 16 November.¹⁸⁰ He said that in the election in January, and especially during the election scheduled for late 2005, some would be calling for the MNF-I to leave. He advised that the UK “should use this to our advantage, not least in terms of empowering the moderates”.

340. Mr Blair said he agreed and “had said as much to President Bush” the week before.

341. Mr Blair added: “There was no question of setting a timetable for withdrawal, but we could indicate that once certain conditions had been fulfilled the role of the MNF-I would no longer be necessary.”

342. Lt Gen McColl told Mr Blair that:

“... the decision to deploy the Black Watch to North Babil had been absolutely right. The UK were possibly the only nation who could influence US military thinking. This was why our assistance had been sought, and why it was so important that we were able to offer that assistance.”¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁸ Letter Phillipson to Adams, 12 November 2004, ‘Prime Minister’s meeting with President Bush, 12 November’.

¹⁷⁹ Letter Sheinwald to Adams, 16 November 2004, ‘Prime Minister’s visit to Washington: follow up’.

¹⁸⁰ Letter Phillipson to Baker, 16 November 2004, ‘Prime Minister’s meeting with General John McColl, 16 November’.

¹⁸¹ Letter Phillipson to Baker, 16 November 2004, ‘Prime Minister’s meeting with General John McColl, 16 November’.

343. Lt Gen Kiszely was the first Briton to visit Fallujah following the start of offensive operations, and was put in charge of reconstruction in the city by Gen Casey.¹⁸²

344. Lt Gen Kiszely reported to the MOD and to the IPU that the scale of the damage he had witnessed dramatically outstripped the figures that the MNF-I had used in its press statements. Mr Crompton's note of a discussion with Lt Gen Kiszely said that he was "calm, but clearly taken aback by the damage he had seen".

345. In response, the IPU was "in touch with DFID to see whether they can assist with the humanitarian effort, and are feeding in some ideas to Kiszely on how best to approach the reconstruction task, using lessons learnt in Kosovo and elsewhere".

346. Sir Nigel Sheinwald passed a copy of Mr Crompton's note to Mr Blair, with the single word annotation "worrying".¹⁸³

347. Mr Blair replied:

"Yes but if there is still resistance, it means we are getting some of the insurgents. When will F[allujah] start to be re-built?"

348. The Annotated Agenda for the 18 November AHMGIR said that in Fallujah "the main assault phase has been completed and gone largely according to plan".¹⁸⁴ It suggested that Mr Straw should ask for an update on the security situation:

"... in particular, on Fallujah following Gen Kiszely's recent visit and on the morale of the Black Watch. Discussion might then briefly focus on what comes next. Should we anticipate this being a 'decisive battle' with the insurgents or will similar operations be needed in further cities?"

349. Lt Gen Kiszely had reported significant structural damage in Fallujah and that the city was "littered" with IEDs which would need to be located and made safe before reconstruction could begin in earnest.

350. The Annotated Agenda also stated that:

"There has been a spike in activity in **Mosul**, almost certainly as a result of operations in Fallujah and compounded by the weakness of the local police. Police stations were overrun by insurgents across the city. Bridges have also been attacked. In response, the governor imposed a curfew and US forces have been redeployed from Fallujah (without any material impact on the Fallujah operation). A new police chief has also been appointed. This has improved the situation and police stations are steadily being brought back under IIG control, but the insurgents remain active."

¹⁸² Minute Crompton to Private Secretary [FCO], 16 November 2004, 'Fallujah'.

¹⁸³ Manuscript comments, Sheinwald and Blair on Minute Crompton to Private Secretary [FCO], 16 November 2004, 'Fallujah'.

¹⁸⁴ Annotated Agenda, 18 November 2004, Ad Hoc Group on Iraq Rehabilitation meeting.

351. When the AHMGIR met, Gen Walker told Ministers that “exchanges with the insurgents continued in a number of sectors of the city”.¹⁸⁵ He reported the loss of 54 US troops, six Iraqi troops and 2,080 insurgents.

352. Gen Walker described a slow start to reconstruction in Fallujah. This was a failure of the IIG and, in part, non-military US agencies, although there was no indication of an immediate humanitarian crisis.

353. Ministers concluded that Mr Straw should telephone Mr Jakob Kellenberger, President of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), to discuss ICRC access to Fallujah.

354. The AHMGIR also discussed elections, and was informed that the IECI had decided to allow out of country voting. Arrangements for that to happen in the UK were being discussed.

355. Sir Nigel Sheinwald and Dr Rice discussed Fallujah during a telephone conversation on 18 November.¹⁸⁶

356. Sir Nigel expressed concern about the pace of the humanitarian assistance and reconstruction operations. Dr Rice shared that concern, but thought that some assistance was reaching the north-west of the city. She considered that the next step was “to get the city cleaned up so that the IDPs [internally displaced persons] would return”.

357. On 19 November, Mr Straw’s Private Secretary wrote to Mr Blair’s Private Secretary:

“... we believe about 1,000 insurgents may have departed Fallujah for other towns or cities ... We believe the largest group have headed for Baghdad. But North Babil, Mosul, Ramadi and Al-Qaim have also seen an influx.”¹⁸⁷

358. In relation to the election:

“The critical challenge now is ensuring credible Sunni participation in the process. Operations in Fallujah have led to renewed calls by senior Sunnis and members of the IIG for a postponement of elections ... But Fallujah has not caused a definitive boycott by Sunni groups.”

359. In his weekly report on 21 November, Lt Gen Kiszely reported that a Campaign Progress Review was about to get under way, to inform a strategy for the size, shape and posture of the MNF-I in 2005.¹⁸⁸ The US was already anticipating that three or four additional brigades were required over the election period.

¹⁸⁵ Minutes, 18 November 2004, Ad Hoc Group on Iraq Rehabilitation meeting.

¹⁸⁶ Letter Sheinwald to Adams, 18 November 2004, ‘Conversation with US National Security Adviser: 18 November 2004’.

¹⁸⁷ Letter Owen to Phillipson, 19 November 2004, ‘Iraq: The Political Process – Prospects for Elections and Sharm El-Sheikh’.

¹⁸⁸ Report Kiszely to CDS, 21 November 2004, ‘SBMR-Is Weekly Report (138) of 21 Nov 04’.

360. Lt Gen Kiszely reported that 446 out of 542 voter registration centres had opened and that 30 January 2005 had been formally announced as election day.

361. Lt Gen Kiszely described Fallujah as a “ghost town” and the scale of damage as “breathtaking”. He reported that US planning for reconstruction was well advanced and that he had been appointed by Gen Casey as the MNF-I co-ordinator for humanitarian assistance and reconstruction with special responsibility for liaison with the IIG. The immediate priorities were a needs assessment and co-ordination of reconstruction efforts.

362. From 22 November, the Secretary to this Inquiry, Ms Margaret Aldred, held the post of Deputy Head of the Overseas and Defence Secretariat within the Cabinet Office, succeeding Mr Desmond Bowen. Ms Aldred routinely chaired the Iraq Senior Officials Group and deputised for Sir Nigel Sheinwald as Chair of the Iraq Strategy Group or at meetings of the JIC.

363. An international conference on Iraq, bringing together Iraq’s neighbours,¹⁸⁹ the G8,¹⁹⁰ China and a number of other states and international organisations,¹⁹¹ was held in Sharm el Sheikh on 23 November.

364. Briefing prepared for Mr Straw by the IPU set out UK objectives for the conference. They were to:

- maintain momentum towards elections in January;
- lock the neighbours [of Iraq] into support for the political process; and
- broaden international consensus by focusing the international community on a forward looking agenda for 2005.”¹⁹²

365. The conference’s final communiqué¹⁹³ reflected those objectives and stated that a follow-up meeting would take place in February 2005.¹⁹⁴

366. In a letter to Mr Blair’s Private Secretary, Mr Straw’s Private Secretary described the outcome as “a step forward”.¹⁹⁵ Together with the Paris Club deal to write off 80 percent of Iraq’s debt (see Section 10.3), it had “strengthened the impression of the international community putting differences behind it and focusing on the future”. It would be important to build on that with a “forward looking agenda for 2005”.

¹⁸⁹ Iran, Jordan, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Syria and Turkey.

¹⁹⁰ Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Russia, UK and the US.

¹⁹¹ Egypt, Bahrain, Algeria, Tunisia, Malaysia, Netherlands, League of Arab States, Organisation of the Islamic Conference, EU and the UN.

¹⁹² Minute Fitzgerald to Crompton, 18 November 2004, ‘Iraq: Briefing for Bilaterals at Sharm el Sheikh Conference, 22/23 November’, attaching briefing IPU ‘Iraq: Sharm el Sheikh International Conference 22/23 November’.

¹⁹³ A communiqué is a summary of a conference’s conclusions.

¹⁹⁴ Final Communiqué of International Ministerial Meeting of the Neighbouring Countries of Iraq, the G8 and China, Sharm El-Sheikh, Egypt 23rd November 2004.

¹⁹⁵ Letter Owen to Quarrey, 26 November 2004, ‘Iraq: The Path to Elections on 30 January’.

The UK should also “continue talking up the role of the UN in advising on the constitutional process as set out in SCR 1546” and “find roles for countries which give them a stake in the process”.

367. The letter also stated that:

“Fallujah was a tactical success. Although many insurgents slipped away, it achieved its primary military objective of denying the insurgents their main safe haven. Politically it has boosted the authority of the IIG, while the domestic and regional fall out has been limited.”

368. Looking ahead to election security, the letter stated that:

“The sheer number of polling booths will make it hard to provide security for them all, but also makes it hard for the insurgents to close down voting in whole areas.

“The level of threat in some areas is clear from the attacks already being attempted in registration. In Salah ad Din province the Iraqi police report terrorists have already been distributing 120 IEDs and VBIEDs [vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices] to disturb the elections.”

369. During a video conference with President Bush on 30 November, Mr Blair said that Fallujah “had gone well” and the story of what US forces had found there – including evidence of torture chambers – should be put into the public domain.¹⁹⁶

370. Mr Blair suggested that the operation had “sent a clear message that the insurgents could not win”.

December 2004

371. The JIC reviewed the impact of Fallujah on 8 December.¹⁹⁷

372. It judged that “Fallujah has been removed as a symbol of the impotence of the Iraqi Interim Government (IIG) and of resistance to the Multi-National Force (MNF)”.

373. Whilst the area was “no longer a major insurgent base” the JIC observed that “details of how the insurgency operated in the city, and in particular the relationship between the various insurgent elements, are yet to emerge”. Overall:

“Fallujah has been a setback for the insurgents, but in response they demonstrated a high level of capacity to mount attacks across Sunni Arab areas of Iraq and they are far from defeated. The present lull in violence is unlikely to last. Further surges in violence should be expected, particularly to disrupt the electoral process. Intimidation of voters and attacks on election and other infrastructure will be key objectives.

¹⁹⁶ Letter Quarrey to Owen, 30 November 2004, ‘Prime Minister’s VTC with President Bush, 30 November: Iraq, Syria and Iran’.

¹⁹⁷ [JIC Assessment 8 December 2004, ‘Iraq Security: The Impact of Fallujah’.](#)

“The immediate outcome in Fallujah has boosted the authority of the IIG. But in the longer-term substantial Sunni participation in the election remains vital. If a significant number of Sunni Arabs fail to vote, the elections will at best lack international credibility and at worst could be destabilising.”

374. The JIC reviewed Iranian support for insurgents within Iraq on 9 December.¹⁹⁸ It judged:

“Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) remains intent on supporting anti-coalition resistance in Iraq ...

“We have no firm evidence linking Iran to specific insurgent attacks since August, but intelligence suggests activity in support of potential attacks continues. Supreme Leader Khamenei probably continues to provide tacit support for this.

“Iran will persist with a twin track approach, supporting the holding of elections in January, while providing limited backing to Shia militants. But with the Najaf crisis having subsided and elections on track, Iranian support for Shia militants may continue at a lower level in the short term. There is no intelligence to show current Iranian support to Sunni insurgents.

“Iran would be likely to ratchet up its support to Shia militants in the event of any renewed confrontation between Shia elements and the coalition. It would also back the Shia in the face of growing sectarian violence.

“A constraint on the Iranians will remain their concern at the threat of US military action against them. In consequence, while Iran will be tempted to take advantage of any opportunity to support new attacks in Iraq in order to make life difficult for the coalition, any significant escalation would depend on IRGC confidence in its ability to avoid exposure of its role.”

375. On 9 December, Mr Straw’s Private Secretary sent a paper on handling Iraq in 2005 to Mr Blair’s Private Secretary.¹⁹⁹

376. The paper, described as an agenda for discussion with the US, recommended maintaining momentum in the political process, broadening international consensus on Iraq, reaching early agreement on the future of the MNF-I and making progress on reconstruction and economic reform.

377. The FCO considered that continued progress on Iraqisation would allow the MNF-I to move from primary responsibility for security in all areas to a supportive role during 2005, working either in support of ISF operationally or as trainers or mentors. A transfer of lead responsibility for security to the ISF could occur in summer 2005.

¹⁹⁸ JIC Assessment, 9 December 2004, ‘Iraq: Iran’s Support for Insurgents – Updated’.

¹⁹⁹ Letter Owen to Quarrey, 9 December 2004, ‘Iraq: 2005’ attaching Paper ‘Iraq: 2005: Forward Look’.

378. The UK objective described in the paper was “a stable, democratic Iraq at peace with itself and its neighbours”.

379. In a note to his No.10 staff dated 12 December, Mr Blair commented that the situation in Iraq was “worrying”.²⁰⁰ Iraqisation was not yielding the looked-for progress; the insurgent attacks were continuing far beyond what was manageable; there was a risk that insufficient Sunni Arabs would participate in the election; life in Basra had not sufficiently improved; and reconstruction remained a problem.

380. Mr Blair’s conclusion was that:

“... this may be lower down the media profile; but it is not getting sorted. We need to sit down with the US in the New Year and work out a proper strategy based on a hard-headed reality check. The paper I have seen for 2005 is inadequate.”

381. The Inquiry assumes that the paper referred to is the one sent by Mr Straw’s office on 9 December, and asked Sir Nigel Sheinwald what it was about the paper that the Prime Minister had considered inadequate.²⁰¹

382. Sir Nigel said that Mr Blair’s:

“... consistent worry during this period was: ... was our government applying a sufficient level of effort to this problem? Were we doing everything that we could with the Americans to get things moving? He continually looked for ... the missing pieces in the strategy. Were there game changers? Were there drivers which would help us on to more profitable and successful terrain?”

383. In a paper for the Chiefs of Staff to consider out of committee dated 13 December, Lt Gen Fry looked at the possible roles for the MNF-I in the run up to the election.²⁰² They included:

- Containing insurgent activity. This had “returned to pre-Ramadan levels” and could be expected to rise again in the run-up to elections. The US had decided to deploy an additional three brigades to strengthen the MNF-I. “But a balance will be needed between directly countering the insurgency and safeguarding the elections ... For example ... activity may have to be tempered to avoid further Sunni alienation.”
- Countering voter intimidation. Flyers had appeared in some areas warning: “You Vote, You Die.” This type of activity was expected to rise as elections grew closer. “ISF will need to counter this, but they lack capability. This poses us a dilemma: increase direct MNF-I support to elections, thereby reducing their legitimacy; or let the ISF lead and potentially accept a low voter turnout.”

²⁰⁰ [Note Blair, 12 December 2004, ‘Iraq’](#).

²⁰¹ Private hearing, 3 September 2010, page 65.

²⁰² Minute DCDS(C) to COS, 13 December 2004, ‘Iraq – Towards Successful Elections’.

- Protecting critical electoral infrastructure. Plans were in hand, but success could not be guaranteed. Although the IECE were in the lead on this, it was possible that the MNF-I would be asked for logistical support, which in Lt Gen Fry's view could undermine the legitimacy of the elections.

384. On 14 December, Mr Blair commented to President Bush that:

"The good news from Fallujah was that it had not prompted a serious escalation elsewhere. But, equally it had not ended the insurgency."²⁰³

385. Mr Asquith commented after visiting Iraq that the after-effects of Fallujah would:

"... persist beyond the elections as the scale of destruction becomes apparent to returning families and the wider public. Restoring more than very basic services will take months. The insurgents are returning and the MNF/IIG relationship is fractious."²⁰⁴

386. Meanwhile, Mr Asquith reported that some considered the problems in Mosul would trigger a "grim conflict that will dwarf Fallujah".

387. Lt Gen Sir John Kiszely told the Inquiry that the main lesson from Fallujah was "don't allow a safe haven to take effect in an insurgency situation".²⁰⁵

388. The deadline for both voters and political parties/candidates to register for the election was 15 December.²⁰⁶

389. In a briefing paper on 15 December, the IPU estimated that voter registration had been successful around the country with the exception of Anbar and, to a lesser extent, Ninawa provinces (both Sunni). Opinion polls over recent months had suggested that there was broad support for elections on time and a desire to vote, including among the Sunni community.

390. Over 200 political entities (party lists and independent candidates) had registered and the Independent Electoral Commission of Iraq had certified over 470 candidate lists (totalling more than 11,000 candidates). The majority of these were for the 18 provincial elections, with 11 for the Kurdish National Assembly and just over 70 for elections to the TNA.

391. A briefing paper for Mr Blair to use at the Ad Hoc Ministerial Group on Iraq on 16 December recommended that Ministers should focus on whether HMG had done everything possible to create the best possible conditions for the elections by:

- pushing hard on Sunni outreach;

²⁰³ Letter Phillipson to Adams, 14 December 2004, 'Prime Minister's VTC with President Bush, 14 December: Iraq and the MEPP'.

²⁰⁴ Minute Asquith to Owen, 20 December 2004, 'Visit to Iraq, 13-17 December'.

²⁰⁵ Public hearing, 14 December 2009, page 27.

²⁰⁶ Briefing IPU, 15 December 2004, 'Prime Minister's Mini-Ministerial on Iraq, 16 December'.

- making sure the UN and IEC had robust plans in place; and
- ensuring the best possible security conditions.²⁰⁷

392. The Cabinet Office described a JIC paper on Iraqisation issued on 15 December as “grim”. It described “high levels of dependency on the MNF-I until 2006”, “serious structural weaknesses within the ISF” and “an assistance programme that, while making progress, will take considerably more time to deliver significant impact”. By contrast, the MOD’s paper had suggested that the Petraeus Plan would deliver, given time. (See Section 12 for more detail.)

393. Mr Straw briefed the Ad Hoc Ministerial Group on Iraq that they should expect the elections to be far from perfect but that, if there were problems during the election period, it would be important to remind critics that these were the first democratic elections in Iraq for many years and that on this occasion the Iraqi people were only electing a transitional assembly.²⁰⁸

394. The Chief of the Assessments Staff told the meeting that the ISF would “face a major challenge in handling the elections”.

395. Mr Hoon explained that a battalion was on stand-by in Cyprus in case it was required during the election period. If the UK wanted to have the flexibility to deploy it during the election period, its “notice to move” needed to be reduced from five to three days by 1 January.

396. Mr Asquith wrote to Mr Straw’s Private Secretary following a visit to Iraq in mid December.²⁰⁹ He commented:

“The time had now passed to argue for a delay in the polling day ... Focusing on 30 January was the likeliest way to bring in the Sunni Arabs. When confronted with reality, they would not repeat the mistake of the Shia in the 1920s.”

397. The key issues for the UK in the weeks ahead were to:

- manage expectations for the elections; and
- build IECI capability to enable it to deliver the January elections, the constitutional referendum and the elections in December 2005, which could require “redrawing of boundaries, a new electoral law and a census”.

398. Mr Asquith considered that priorities for 2005 included:

- to make sure that the new Constitution reflected the voice of all the communities in Iraq;

²⁰⁷ Paper Cabinet Office, 15 December 2004, ‘Ad Hoc Ministerial Group on Iraq meeting to be held in the Cabinet Room on Thursday 16 December 2004 at 11:00 – Chairman’s Brief’.

²⁰⁸ Minutes, 16 December 2004, Ad Hoc Ministerial Group on Iraq meeting.

²⁰⁹ Minute Asquith to Owen, 20 December 2004, ‘Visit to Iraq, 13-17 December’.

- to deliver results to the Sunni Arabs, including incorporating “experienced Ba’athists (ex or otherwise)”;
- to continue to develop IECI capability to help it deliver the constitutional referendum and the elections in December 2005;
- either to invest significant additional resources in Security Sector Reform or to plan on the basis of a significant MNF-I presence in Iraq in 2006 or beyond; and
- to develop an effective relationship with the transitional government, while recognising that it would owe its appointment to the TNA, which would be “likely to reduce the ability of the US/UK and MNF-I to influence the policies of the ITG to the extent we have with the IIG”.

399. Mr Blair visited Baghdad on 21 December, where he commented to journalists:

“I tell you exactly what I felt coming in. Security is really heavy – you can feel the sense of danger that people live in here ... coming from terrorists and insurgents ... Now where do we stand in that fight? We stand on the side of the democrats against the terrorists.”²¹⁰

400. The No.10 report of his visit recorded that “Iraqisation and political outreach were key themes”.²¹¹

401. Mr Blair met Prime Minister Allawi and had been encouraged that he was working on a security strategy which he intended to publish shortly.

402. On reconstruction, Mr Blair was “very concerned about the slow pace of ... spending, especially in the South” and wanted the UK to make a major effort to secure greater funding.

403. During the visit, Interior Minister Naqib confirmed to Sir Nigel Sheinwald that the IIG would facilitate forced returns of Iraqis without immigration status in the UK to Iraq.²¹² Prime Minister Allawi indicated that a Memorandum of Understanding should be signed as soon as possible.

404. The JIC reviewed election prospects on 23 December.²¹³

405. It judged that the planned election date would stick, despite previous pressure for a delay. The likely extent of Sunni Arab participation in the election was unclear, although it was expected that many would be deterred by the security situation and some by a perception that the process was unfair or lacked legitimacy. In addition:

²¹⁰ *BBC News*, 21 December 2004, *Blair’s statement in Baghdad*.

²¹¹ Letter Quarrey to Owen, 23 December 2004, ‘Prime Minister’s Visit to Iraq: Follow-Up’.

²¹² Letter Quarrey to Adams, 21 December 2004, ‘Prime Minister’s Visit to Baghdad, 21 December: Meeting with Allawi’.

²¹³ JIC Assessment, 23 December 2004, ‘Iraq: Election Prospects’.

“Intimidation and assassinations will increase as the elections approach. Sunni Arabs will be most susceptible to intimidation, although attacks will not be confined to their areas.”

406. Whatever the outcome, the JIC judged that:

“Hard-line Sunnis will reject any new government and will continue their campaign of violence. Support for them could increase if the election outcome is perceived as grossly unfair. Other Sunnis may be encouraged to turn away from the insurgency if the election produces what they judge to be fair representation in the Presidency Council, Transitional Government and Transitional National Assembly (TNA). But any impact on the security situation will not be immediate.

...

“The Transitional Government is unlikely to request early MNF withdrawal but may try to insist on a timetable being formally agreed – even before UNSCR 1546 is reviewed in June 2005.”

January 2005

407. In a video conference with President Bush on 4 January, Mr Blair said that it should be made clear that it was violence and intimidation preventing people from participating in the elections, not questions about the legitimacy of the process.²¹⁴ He hoped that the UN would say publicly that people in Iraq wanted to vote, and should be allowed to do so.

408. On 6 January, Mr Hoon’s Private Secretary wrote to Mr Blair’s Private Secretary to say that the Defence Secretary would consider over the weekend whether to deploy the Cyprus-based battalion in mid-January to cover the election period.²¹⁵ Maj Gen Riley had requested the deployment, and Gen Walker endorsed it.

409. Following a request for additional information, Mr Hoon’s Private Secretary wrote again to explain that the additional 400 troops would be used:

“... to free up fully acclimatised theatre troops from static security tasks, who can then be employed on intelligence-led security operations in support of the election process.”²¹⁶

²¹⁴ Letter Quarrey to Owen, 4 January 2005, ‘Prime Minister’s VTC with President Bush, 4 January 2005; Iraq, Iran and MEPP’.

²¹⁵ Letter Naworynsky to Quarrey, 6 January 2005, ‘Iraq: Preparations for the Elections’.

²¹⁶ Letter Naworynsky to Quarrey, 7 January 2005, ‘Iraq: Preparations for the Elections’.

410. On 10 January Sir Nigel Sheinwald sent Mr Hadley a Note by Mr Blair and asked him to show it to President Bush before their discussion the following day.²¹⁷ Mr Blair's Note covered "our most pressing problems".

411. On Iraq he judged:

"All the problems go back to security. Without it the politics are difficult, the reconstruction shackled and the faith of Iraqis in the future undermined."

412. Mr Blair considered that four actions were necessary:

- the Iraqisation of security forces;
- spending money more quickly on reconstruction, especially of essential services;
- being "very tough indeed on the election", including by ensuring it went ahead on schedule and encouraging participation; and
- signalling a timetable for the withdrawal of US and UK forces "when and only when, we can point to real indigenous Iraqi strength".

413. In the video conference that followed on 11 January, Mr Blair reported that the UK was "upbeat" about elections.²¹⁸ Everything possible should be done on election security:

"But we also had to be very clear that where turnout was low, this was because of intimidation and terrorist violence, and did not undermine the legitimacy of the elections."

414. On 11 January Lt Gen Fry, Deputy Chief of the Defence Staff (Commitments), submitted advice to Mr Hoon on prospects for 2005.²¹⁹ In his view a "strategic watershed" was approaching in Iraq:

"The prognosis for the security LOO [Line Of Operation] in 05 is stark ... The Sunni insurgency will grow in scale and intensity ... Kurdish and Shia violence, recently quiescent, may be sparked by intractable constitutional discord over federalism ... The recent alignment of AQ and Al Zarqawi has formally established Iraq as the central front for radical Islamic terrorism ... the pace of ISF development is too slow for Iraq to manage the insurgency alone before 06 ... In sum, we are not on track to deliver the Steady State Criteria (SSC) before the UN mandate expires, or even shortly thereafter."

415. Lt Gen Fry judged that "only additional military effort by the MNF-I as a whole" might be able to get the campaign back on track. He identified three possible courses of action for the UK – increasing the UK scale of effort, maintaining the status quo or, if it was judged that the campaign was irretrievable, accepting failure and seeking to mitigate

²¹⁷ Letter Sheinwald to Hadley, 10 January 2005, [untitled], [attaching Note TB \[Blair to Bush\], 10 January 2005, 'Note'](#).

²¹⁸ Letter Quarrey to Owen, 11 January 2005, 'Prime Minister's VTC with President Bush, 11 January'.

²¹⁹ Minute DCDS(C) to APS 2/SofS [MOD], 11 January 2005, 'Iraq 2005 – a UK MOD perspective'.

UK liability. The second two options carried an inherent “acceptance of probable long term campaign failure”, which could destabilise the Middle East, create a safe haven for international terrorists and damage the reputation and morale of the UK defence forces.

416. Lt Gen Fry did not recommend a particular course of action but concluded:

“The situation in Iraq is grave and demands hard strategic choices for the UK, none of which are palatable and all of which carry far-reaching consequences. But we must not shirk a decision – more of the same will simply make the UK a spectator to failure. The purist military response would be to increase scales of effort, but the political will to do so will be minimal. Even then, an increased UK military effort alone may not deliver success. The opportunity for the UK, or even the MNF-I, to decisively influence the campaign may be gone. If we believe this to be the case, we should seek a strategy of limited liability. But this will be very difficult to actually bring off and accepts the inevitability of campaign failure in Iraq with far-reaching, long term, damaging consequences.”

417. Lt Gen Fry told the AHMGIR on 13 January that as expected there had been an increase in violence, focused on the ISF and those connected with preparing the elections.²²⁰

418. Mr Straw stated that the insurgents were “systematically targeting the democratic process in an effort to make it hard to claim the elections could be free and fair”. This should be countered by “making clear the degree of public interest in elections in Iraq and the progress that had been made in preparing for them”.

419. Ministers noted the “continuing need” to encourage Sunni participation and to ensure the broadest possible participation in the constitutional drafting process after the elections.

420. Mr Chaplin was also considering the future UK military role, and sent a message to the FCO in London that, whoever won the election, they were likely to “want something more definite about the MNF’s future” than the simple fact of resolution 1546, and might invoke the review clause in the resolution at any time.²²¹

421. In a press conference on 14 January, Mr Annan said:

“It is clear that the vast majority of Iraqis are eager to exercise their democratic right to vote. But it is equally obvious that the conditions in which the election is being held are far from ideal.

...

²²⁰ Minutes, 13 January 2005, Ad Hoc Group on Iraq Rehabilitation meeting.

²²¹ Telegram 31 Baghdad to FCO London, 13 January 2005, ‘Iraq: MIPT: MNF Mandate’.

“Even at this late stage, outreach to the Arab nationalist component of society – especially the Sunni Arabs – is critical ... I encourage the [Iraqi] Government to intensify its efforts, and I know the Government is making efforts in this direction.

“I encourage all Iraqis to exercise their democratic right to vote. Iraq needs as broad-based a government as possible for a successful transition.”²²²

422. The IIG’s National Security Strategy was issued on 15 January.²²³ In it, Prime Minister Allawi was reported to have increased the goal of training 100,000 Iraqi soldiers by July to 150,000 “fully qualified” soldiers by the end of the year.

423. During a video conference on 17 January, Mr Blair told President Bush that they had to give a sense that Iraqiisation was “going somewhere” and that things would change after the elections.²²⁴

424. Mr Blair suggested that the Luck Review (see Section 12.1) should feed quickly into a new, public, security plan which would be clear what was being asked of the Iraqis. In his view the weakness of Iraqi structures remained “a real problem”.

425. In advice to Mr Straw on 19 January, Mr Asquith identified three “immediate threats” as:

- the elections being declared illegitimate, most likely because of low Sunni turnout;
- the Sunni Arab community refusing to participate in the post-election political process; and
- excessive delay in establishing a government following the elections, with a consequential squeeze on the timetable for developing and agreeing the Constitution.²²⁵

426. The second of these was, in Mr Asquith’s view, the most serious. He recommended that the UK, working closely with the UN and other governments, should act to:

- encourage Sunni leaders to participate fully in the political process;
- ensure that Sunni Arabs were included in senior positions within the government; and
- support engagement with Sunni rejectionist groups by members of the Transitional National Assembly and Iraqi Transitional Government members.

427. The last of these should include being prepared to “be more forward on MNF-I timelines”.

²²² United Nations, 14 January 2005, ‘Transcript of the Secretary-General’s Press Conference’.

²²³ *New York Times*, 24 February 2005, *Iraqi Army Is About to Add National Guard to Its Ranks*.

²²⁴ Letter Quarrey to Owen, 17 January 2005, ‘Prime Minister’s VTC with President Bush, 17 January: Iraq and MEPP’.

²²⁵ Minute Asquith to PS [FCO], 19 January 2005, ‘Iraq: The Immediate Threats’.

428. The same day, a JIC Assessment said that Sunni turnout might be as low as one third of the eligible voters, which would give Sunni Arabs a disproportionately low representation in elected institutions.²²⁶

429. The policy implications of that were, in the view of the JIC, that: “Sunni outreach will need to intensify after the elections to ensure that Sunnis do not opt out of the political and constitution drafting process altogether.”

430. Sir William Ehrman told the Inquiry that the JIC had consciously sought to flag up to policy makers the risk that the Sunnis would be significantly under-represented in the TNA as a result of likely low turnout.²²⁷

431. Between 17 and 19 January the UK deployed approximately 350 personnel from 1st Battalion, the Royal Highland Fusiliers to Iraq to provide additional security across MND(SE) during the election period.²²⁸ They began returning to Cyprus on 21 February.

432. In mid January, senior US and UK officials were discussing the role of the MNF-I after the election, taking account of both security forecasts and the likely stance of the incoming ITG.²²⁹ Both the UK and US Governments considered that it was important to “strike the right balance between showing support for the transitional government and the development of the ISF on the one hand, while on the other hand not giving any impression of ‘cut and run’”.

433. In preparation for a planned discussion on 20 January on the UK’s military contribution in Iraq, Mr Blair’s Private Secretary told him that Mr Hoon would want to discuss the UK military deployment in Iraq in 2005 and whether to backfill after the Dutch withdrew from Muthanna province.²³⁰ He explained that Mr Hoon wanted to be able to tell the US as soon as possible that the UK could not make significant additional troop contributions or take on deployments outside MND(SE).

434. The Private Secretary recommended that Mr Blair’s response to Mr Hoon should be that “we will need to handle this issue carefully with the US” and that he should set out a “gameplan” for doing so.

435. Mr Collis reported on 21 January that there had been a spate of attacks on the election infrastructure in Basra in recent days.²³¹ Some election officials had resigned due to intimidation. There were reports that some mosques were organising security for polling centres in Maysan and Basra. The Governor in Maysan had declared no

²²⁶ JIC Assessment, 19 January 2005, ‘Iraq: Elections Update’.

²²⁷ Private hearing, 14 June 2010, page 57.

²²⁸ Minute PJHQ-J9 POLOPS 3 to PS/USofS [MOD], 17 February 2005, ‘Iraq: Withdrawal of EHRR’.

²²⁹ Letter Quarrey to Owen, 19 January 2005, ‘Iraq’.

²³⁰ Minute Phillipson to Prime Minister, 19 January 2005, ‘Iraq: Meeting with Geoff Hoon and CDS 1130, 20 January’.

²³¹ Telegram 10 Basra to FCO, 21 January 2005, ‘Southern Iraq: security and political round-up 13 January-20 January’.

confidence in the Iraqi Security Forces and had “expressed a desire to mobilise JAM” in order to provide effective election security.

436. Mr Collis commented: “While all this suggests widespread determination to vote, there is also the risk of increased violence with militias on the streets and the IPS [Iraqi Police Service] nervous of attack.”

437. Mr Hoon and Gen Walker met Mr Blair on 21 January.²³² At the meeting,²³³ Gen Walker advised that the US campaign against the insurgency had stalled and the US was reviewing its operations. The UK “needed to recognise that if our voice was to count with the US we would have to offer to play a part in the plan that emerged”.

438. If the UK wanted to resist the likely request to extend its operation beyond MND(SE), it would need to accept reduced influence in strategic discussions about MNF-I strategy. Gen Walker did not consider the insurgency to be growing, but popular support for it was.

439. The record of the meeting stated:

“The Prime Minister said the bottom line was that we had to complete the mission. The key question was when we could hand responsibility for security over to the ISF. CDS [Gen Walker] said it very much depended on the environment. Muthanna and Basra were reasonably calm. But it was not clear that they would stay that way without any MNF presence ...

“The Prime Minister said he was only prepared to redeploy UK forces beyond our current area of operations if there was a viable plan or product. But he was not prepared simply to follow along with US wishes. We needed to have a coherent plan to do the job ... Simply asking us to take over MND(CS) was not a plan.”

440. Mr Blair and President Bush spoke by video conference on 25 January and discussed messaging around the imminent election.²³⁴ Mr Blair considered that talking publicly about withdrawal would smack of defeat. Rather, he suggested that: “Our aim was to make our role redundant.”

441. Mr Blair said that he would speak to Mr Annan before the election and encourage him to be positive about the impact of the vote. White House and No.10 staff would speak about the media plans for the days after the election.

442. At the last meeting of the AMHGIR before the Iraqi elections, the FCO gave a detailed briefing on the elections and the process required to form a government.²³⁵

²³² [Letter Phillipson to Baker, 21 January 2005, ‘Iraq: Future Strategy’.](#)

²³³ The Inquiry Secretary, Ms Aldred, was present at this meeting.

²³⁴ Letter Phillipson to Owen, 25 January 2005, ‘Prime Minister’s VTC with President Bush, 25 January: Iraq’.

²³⁵ Minutes, 26 January 2005, Ad Hoc Group on Iraq Rehabilitation meeting.

443. The FCO reported that the number of registered candidates was impressive, and one third were women; technical preparations were on track, including for out of country voting and results would likely be known by 10 February and certified 10 days later. The level of Sunni participation remained “the key variable” with turnout predictions between five and 40 percent, although the FCO considered that a key message for the period was “we should not judge the success of elections by the Sunni turnout”.

444. On 27 January, Mr Hoon told Parliament:

“Dutch forces have made good progress in Muthanna, both in ensuring the stability of the province and building the capability of the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF). This means a significantly smaller force package is now able to perform these tasks and the General Officer Commanding (GOC) MND (SE) has concluded that a force of some 600 personnel will be adequate to support and mentor Iraqi Security Forces in providing general security in Muthanna, as well as providing protection for the Japanese reconstruction battalion located there.

“The majority of the personnel required will come from UK units already deployed in Iraq.”²³⁶

445. Mr Hoon explained that an additional 220 UK troops would be deployed temporarily to assist with logistics and other essential support functions. That number would reduce by 70 once the initial deployment had been completed.

446. Elections for the TNA and Provincial Assemblies took place across Iraq on 30 January.²³⁷

447. The 5,232²³⁸ polling stations across the country were secured by approximately 130,000 Iraqi Security Forces personnel, supported by 184,500 MNF-I troops.²³⁹

448. Mr Quarrey reported to Mr Blair that “crucially, the ISF reported for duty in large numbers”.²⁴⁰

449. Maj Gen Riley described election day in southern Iraq as “extraordinary” with an almost festive atmosphere.²⁴¹ He observed that:

“We should not forget that this was an Iraqi election and in the end, it was Iraqis who organised it and whose forces secured it. The ISF needed our help but their momentum gathered. They had the courage to stand up and be counted. This is the heaviest blow that Iraqis could deliver to everything that the insurgency represents.”

²³⁶ House of Commons, *Official Report*, 27 January 2005, column 24WS.

²³⁷ Public hearing Chaplin, 7 December 2009, page 12.

²³⁸ Minute Quarrey to Prime Minister, 31 January 2005, ‘Iraq Elections’.

²³⁹ Wright DP & Reese TR. *On Point II: Transition to the New Campaign – The United States Army in Operation IRAQI FREEDOM May 2003 – January 2005*. Combined Studies Institute Press. 2011.

²⁴⁰ Minute Quarrey to Blair, 31 January 2005, ‘Iraq Elections’.

²⁴¹ Report Riley, 2 February 2005, ‘CG MND(SE) – Southern Iraq Update – 2 February 2005’.

450. In a Parliamentary Statement the following day, Mr Straw commented that the elections had been:

“... a moving demonstration that democracy and freedom are universal values to which people everywhere aspire.”²⁴²

451. A report on the elections sent to Mr Blair on 31 January suggested that overall turnout might exceed 60 percent and recounted a number of anecdotes “pointing to Iraqis’ courage and determination”, including:

“... in Sadr city, people wounded by a mortar attack rejoined the queue to vote; villagers near Abu Ghraib sought US military protection as they went to vote; relatives of terrorist victims told the media that voting was their duty to the memory of those who had died.”²⁴³

452. Reflecting on the election in a telephone call with President Bush on 31 January, Mr Blair said that the media had reported events positively, and had recognised the importance of the occasion.²⁴⁴ He considered that it was vital to use the elections to generate “some real momentum” in Iraq.

February 2005

453. On 1 February, Mr Blair suggested to President Bush that they should focus on four areas in order to exploit post-election momentum:

- Iraqiisation, including ensuring that the ITG had 8-10,000 “crack troops who could deal with any situation”;
- political outreach, including “whittling away at the opposition, so that the hard core were left isolated”;
- drawing in the international community; and
- reconstruction, including areas in which there could be a quick impact (eg power generation).²⁴⁵

454. Mr Blair proposed that these areas should be drawn into a plan by the ITG, which the UK and US could then support.

455. The UK provided a draft of such a statement to the US in early April, where it met “some scepticism at official level”.²⁴⁶

²⁴² House of Commons, *Official Report*, 31 January 2005, column 573.

²⁴³ Minute Quarrey to Prime Minister, 31 January 2005, ‘Iraq Elections’.

²⁴⁴ Letter Phillipson to Adams, 31 January 2005, ‘Prime Minister’s discussion with President Bush, 31 January: Iraq and MEPP’.

²⁴⁵ Letter Quarrey to Owen, 1 February 2005, ‘Prime Minister’s VTC with President Bush, 1 February’.

²⁴⁶ Minute Phillipson to Prime Minister, 7 April 2005, ‘Bilateral with President Bush: 0800-0845, 8 April’.

456. On 3 February, just before the election results were announced, the JIC assessed the nature and strength of insurgents in Iraq, the threat they posed and the response of both the ISF and the MNF-I.²⁴⁷ It judged:

“The scale and intensity of the Sunni insurgency continues to put at risk the achievement of a unified and democratic Iraq. In Sunni areas the military campaign is not containing the insurgency ... While the political process offers an opportunity to detach some insurgents from the hard core, a significant Sunni insurgency will continue through 2005 and beyond.

“Foreign jihadists continue to form a small minority of insurgents, but have been responsible for many of the most serious attacks. However, al-Zarqawi’s violent Islamist message, including his rejection of democracy, is not accepted by most Iraqis – including by some Sunni Arab insurgents.

“Shia insurgents are largely dormant. The threat of some Shia violence, however, will persist ...

“Insurgents are not unified among the Sunni or nationally, although they have a common enemy: the MNF and those Iraqis associated with supporting the ‘occupation’. This has led to possibly increasing local cooperation between some groups, notably foreign jihadists and Iraqi Sunni Arabs.”

457. The JIC judged that:

“... the military campaign is not effectively containing the insurgency in Sunni areas. Law and order, the pace of economic reconstruction, the availability of jobs and general quality of life have not matched expectation ... Sunni ‘hearts and minds’ are being lost.”

458. The JIC reported that there had been around 300 security incidents on election day itself, which had killed 30 Iraqis, but “the effect on the elections was not as significant as had been feared or as al-Zarqawi and others had threatened”.

459. On 3 February, Mr Straw told Cabinet that the elections had gone “better than anticipated”, which “provided an opportunity to shift the debate about Iraq”. The ISF had also performed better than had been expected.²⁴⁸

460. Mr Chaplin told the Inquiry that substantial numbers of Sunni Arabs boycotted the election, and those who voted did so largely on sectarian lines.²⁴⁹ He judged that there were a number of reasons why Sunnis felt unable to participate:

“One was security; another was I think they hoped until quite late on that the elections wouldn’t take place because of insecurity, and I think they felt very sore

²⁴⁷ [JIC Assessment, 3 February 2005, ‘Iraq: Insurgency and Counter-Insurgency’.](#)

²⁴⁸ Cabinet Conclusions, 3 February 2005.

²⁴⁹ Public hearing, 7 December 2009, pages 12-13.

and very excluded ... not just because of the attacks on Fallujah, but because of their exclusion from the process – what they saw as the government not paying enough attention to their particular concerns.”²⁵⁰

461. On 3 February, Mr Chaplin wrote to Mr Crompton setting out a “snapshot” of progress in drafting the new Iraqi Constitution and thoughts about the role the UK might play.²⁵¹

462. Mr Chaplin reminded Mr Crompton that they said that the TNA’s core task, as set out in Articles 60 and 61 of the Transitional Administrative Law, was to:

“... prepare a draft of a permanent Constitution, following public debate, by 15 August and to present it to the Iraqi people in a referendum by 15 October 2005. Our assumption is that the intervening period is for further debate and explanation, not for amendment. There is scope to extend the drafting process by six months by a majority vote in the TNA, but little indication of what the steps of that drafting process should be. Presumably this will be decided when the TNA draws up its own internal procedures and structures ...”

463. On the UK role in the process, Mr Chaplin wrote that it should include:

- encouraging the UN to take a leading role in co-ordinating the form of the Constitution and the drafting process with the TNA;
- encouraging broad political involvement and contributions from civil society; and
- exploring practical support such as funding the production of useful material.

464. Mr Chaplin suggested that “it would be good to do some rapid internal thinking, or commission others to think about the pros and cons of certain constitutional options in the Iraqi context” although any UK advocacy of a specific proposal would need to be “discreet”.

465. On 7 February, in response to a Parliamentary Question from Mr Bob Spink, Mr Hoon said that the additional 220 troops for Muthanna which he had announced on 27 January would be found by re-deploying other UK forces in MND(SE).²⁵² Mr Hoon said that the total number of UK troops in Iraq was 8,150 and was expected to fall to around 7,900 by March.

466. Ms Aldred and her team in the Cabinet Office co-ordinated a strategy paper for the 9 February meeting of the Ad Hoc Ministerial Group on Iraq which focused on how to achieve coalition objectives in post-election Iraq.²⁵³

²⁵⁰ Public hearing, 7 December 2009, pages 20-21.

²⁵¹ [Letter Chaplin to Crompton, 3 February 2005, ‘Iraq: Helping to Draft the New Constitution’.](#)

²⁵² House of Commons, *Official Report*, 7 February 2005, columns 1168-1169.

²⁵³ [Paper Cabinet Office, 7 February 2005, ‘Iraq Strategy for 2005’.](#)

467. The paper defined the key elements for the coming year as:

- building the capability of the Iraqi Security Forces;
- outreach by the ITG to bring in those currently supporting the insurgency;
- drawing in the international community and giving it a new sense of purpose; and
- reviewing reconstruction to find ways to make a difference quickly.

468. The paper concluded that the UK should not increase force numbers in Iraq and should not provide personnel for operations outside its current area of operations. Instead, it should continue with the training effort in MND(SE), develop a strategy for the Iraqi police service and offer support to the Iraqis in developing their intelligence capability, and in maximising and co-ordinating international assistance.

469. According to the paper, outreach to insurgents was primarily the responsibility of the ITG. The UK and US should encourage the active involvement of Sunni Arabs within the ITG, a relaxation of the de-Ba'athification rules and ensure that the arrangements for drafting the Constitution were inclusive. Further work to accelerate reconstruction was also essential, along with:

“... a clear **declaratory plan for MNF drawdown**, agreed with the ITG, which includes milestones on the progressive handover to Iraqi control. It may not, at this stage, require a timetable as such.”

470. The Chairman's Brief produced for Mr Blair ahead of the meeting on 9 February emphasised the need to “task MOD to lead work with FCO and DFID to prepare more detailed thinking on what we can offer” in relation to increasing the UK's contribution on “training, police policy, intelligence structures, and capacity building”.²⁵⁴

471. Mr Quarrey advised Mr Blair to press Mr Hoon on the proposals for Iraqiisation, observing that not all in the MOD were persuaded that the SSR effort should focus on developing counter-insurgency capacity in the ISF, arguing instead that a broader-based generalist capacity was more appropriate.²⁵⁵

472. Mr Quarrey also advised that Mr Blair should press for agreement on as much of the detail in the strategy paper as possible, and that it should be sent to the US as “the basis for a US/UK strategy review”.

473. When it met on 9 February, the Ad Hoc Ministerial Group on Iraq approved the strategy paper and agreed that No.10 should share an updated version with the US.²⁵⁶

²⁵⁴ Briefing Cabinet Office, 9 February 2005, ‘Ad Hoc Ministerial Group on Iraq meeting to be held in the Cabinet Room on Wednesday 9 February 2005 at 15:00: Chairman's Brief’.

²⁵⁵ [Minute Quarrey to Prime Minister, 8 February 2005, ‘Iraq: 2005 Strategy’](#).

²⁵⁶ Minutes, 9 February 2005, Ad Hoc Ministerial Group on Iraq meeting.

474. Ministers agreed that when sharing the paper, No.10 should also raise the question of US funding for reconstruction projects in southern Iraq, which had been diverted to other parts of the country.

475. Mr Hoon said that proposals in the paper should be applied “vigorously” in the UK area, where the UK had not yet made enough progress and there was a risk of providing a pool of supporters for Shia dissidents.

476. Sir Nigel Sheinwald sent a copy of the paper, updated to reflect the discussion and including a list of niche contributions that other countries might be pressed to provide, to Mr Hadley on 11 February.²⁵⁷ He suggested that they might consider a video conference between the White House and No.10 to discuss it.

477. In early February, Mr Asquith reported to Mr Straw’s Private Secretary that US priorities for the political process included ensuring that the ITG did not remove personnel or structures (such as Committees) that worked well, outreach to the Sunni community and establishing effective co-ordination with Provincial Councils.²⁵⁸

478. Mr Asquith’s own view was that “the security policies will be rendered ineffective unless the political process is adequately handled now”.

479. Sir David Manning reported from Washington that President Bush’s policy was that the US would not support specific parties or individuals in the process of forming the new government.²⁵⁹

480. The election results were announced on 13 February.²⁶⁰

481. Mr Abdul al-Hakim’s United Iraqi Alliance won 48 percent of the vote and 140 of the 275 seats, two more than were required to achieve a majority. In second place was the Kurdistan Alliance, led by Mr Jalal Talabani, with 75 seats and nearly 26 percent of the vote. Mr Allawi’s Iraqi List secured 40 seats and just under 14 percent of the vote. The Sadrist group National Independent Cadres and Elites secured three seats.

482. The British Embassy Baghdad told the FCO:

“We don’t yet know the final number of Sunnis who will be taking up seats in the TNA. But in addition to Sunni Kurds, there are significant numbers of Sunnis on the UIC (some six to eight Sunnis in their top 140 candidates) and Allawi lists, as well as Ghazi’s five seats [Iraqis] and the Liberation and Reconciliation Gathering’s one seat.”

²⁵⁷ [Letter Sheinwald to Hadley, 11 February 2005, ‘Iraq’ attaching Paper ‘Iraq: Strategy for 2005’.](#)

²⁵⁸ Minute Asquith to PS/SoS [FCO], 10 February 2005, ‘Visit to Iraq, 3-8 February 2005’.

²⁵⁹ Telegram 17181/05 Washington to FCO London, 11 February 2005, ‘Iraq: US Views; DG Political’s Visit to Washington’.

²⁶⁰ Telegram 99 Baghdad to FCO London, 13 February 2005, ‘Iraq: Provisional Election Results’.

Table 2: Iraqi election results, January 2005

Political Group	Seats
United Iraqi Alliance/Coalition	140
Kurdistan Alliance	75
Iraqi List	40
Iraqis Party	5
Turkoman Iraq Front	3
National Independent Cadres and Elites Party	3
People’s Union (Communist)	2
Kurdistan Islamic Group	2
Islamic Action Organisation in Iraq	2
National Democratic Alliance	1
Al-Rafideen National List	1
Liberation and Reconciliation Gathering	1
Total:	275

483. In a telephone call with President Bush on 15 February, Mr Blair described the electoral turnout in Sunni areas as “extraordinary”.²⁶¹

484. Mr Blair suggested that the elimination of the threat from Abu Musab al-Zarqawi – the most visible part of the insurgency – would make a big difference and offered the view that:

“Basically we had to reduce the insurgency to the hard core and then eliminate it.”

485. On 16 February, the JIC issued an Assessment of the emerging political landscape and of key political and security issues.²⁶²

486. The JIC assessed that perhaps fewer than 10 percent of voters had probably turned out in the Sunni heartlands, and only two percent in Anbar province. Overall turnout was 58 percent.

487. The JIC judged that the UIA was “likely to stick together long enough to decide on the new Prime Minister and makeup of the Presidency”. Prime Minister Allawi was unlikely to retain his post.

488. The JIC’s Key Judgements included:

“II. There are already encouraging signs of Shia outreach to the Sunnis, but the test will be the degree to which the Shia are willing to include them in the Government and in drafting the Constitution, and the extent to which Sunnis are willing to

²⁶¹ Letter Phillipson to Owen, 16 February 2005, ‘Prime Minister’s phonecall with President Bush, 15 February: Iraq and Syria/Lebanon’.

²⁶² [JIC Assessment, 16 February 2005, ‘Iraq: Post Election Landscape’](#).

respond. Inclinations towards inclusiveness by Shia leaders will have to be balanced against wider Shia expectations of dominating the Government and transforming years of repression into real power.

“III. Without Sunni engagement in the political process, it will not be possible significantly to undermine the insurgency ...

“IV. The insurgents will maintain their attempts to derail the process. Sectarian attacks, especially on the Shia, and attacks on Iraqis associated with the coalition will continue. The announcement of the Assembly and the Government will give the insurgents a new range of targets.”

489. The JIC also assessed that Iran would want the new Shia-led Government to succeed but would try to influence it. A perception of strong Iranian influence or control over the Iraqi Transitional Government would undermine the potential for Sunni engagement.

490. In early 2005, consideration began to be given to whether the UK should seek to make contact with those close to the Sunni insurgency who would “retain a malign and potentially decisive influence unless squared”.²⁶³

491. To avoid creating distrust, Mr Asquith’s advice to Mr Straw on 17 February was that the UK’s work should be undertaken with the full knowledge (though not necessarily explicit agreement) of both the US and Iraqi authorities.

492. On 22 February, the Australian Prime Minister Mr John Howard announced that a 450-strong Australian Muthanna Task Group would be deployed to southern Iraq, to “provide a stable and secure environment for the Japanese Reconstruction and Support Group” and assist in training the Iraqi Army.²⁶⁴

493. Mr Blair and President Bush met over breakfast on 22 February, during the President’s visit to NATO and the EU.²⁶⁵ The record of their discussion indicates that they did not discuss the strategy for 2005.

494. Sir Nigel Sheinwald observed to officials across Whitehall and in diplomatic posts:

“You will have noticed that his [President Bush’s] formulations on Iraq, Iran and G8 in particular owed a good deal to the advice he had sought from the Prime Minister.”²⁶⁶

²⁶³ Minute Asquith to PS/PUS & PS [Secretary of State] [FCO], 17 February 2005, ‘Iraq: developing a dialogue with those close to the Iraqi insurgency’.

²⁶⁴ Australian Government Department of Defence, Annual Report 2004-05, ‘Special Feature – al-Muthanna Task Group’.

²⁶⁵ Letter Sheinwald to Adams, 22 February 2005, ‘Prime Minister’s meeting with President Bush: 22 February’.

²⁶⁶ Letter Sheinwald to Adams, 22 February 2005, ‘President Bush’s visit to Brussels: 22 February’.

495. On 24 February, the FCO briefed the AHMGIR on the election outcome.²⁶⁷ In discussion, the point was made that the elections would “change the feel of our bilateral relationship with the new Iraqi Government as they would now have the confidence that came from having a mandate”.

496. The FCO reported that several Sunni groups appeared to have recognised that boycotting the elections had been “counter-productive” and there were signs some were looking to join the political process.

497. In discussion it was suggested that a “key objective” for the UK would be to protect the provision in the TAL that the three provinces could veto the Constitution. Originally seen as safeguarding Kurdish interests, this was now even more important for the Sunni.

498. Ministers asked for a plan for “co-ordinated bilateral contacts” with the new Iraqi Government as soon as it was in place.

499. On 25 February the JIC considered the links between Syria and the Iraqi insurgency.²⁶⁸ It judged that:

“Syria’s policy towards Iraq is one of limited support for the insurgency ... Its attitude to jihadists and Iraqi Ba’athists differs markedly: some concern and action against jihadists; tolerance, even encouragement, of Ba’athists.”

500. Mr Blair wrote a note to his Private Secretary on 25 February instructing that Mr Straw be “put in charge” of the Ad Hoc Ministerial Group on Iraq and asked to minute him each week with actions on “eg reconstruction in the South; Sunni outreach; progress on security plan”.²⁶⁹

501. Ms Aldred chaired a video conference discussion of the strategy for 2005 paper with the US on 28 February.²⁷⁰ It was agreed that the UK should send the US further papers setting out areas to be covered by a national policing plan for Iraq; a high level security plan; and on a possible further international conference to follow on from the one held in Sharm el Sheikh in November 2004.

March 2005

502. Referring to negotiations on the formation of the ITG, Mr Blair commented to President Bush on 1 March that: “We needed a stable outcome.”²⁷¹

²⁶⁷ Minutes, 24 February 2005, Ad Hoc Group on Iraq Rehabilitation meeting.

²⁶⁸ JIC Assessment, 25 February 2005, ‘Syria and the Iraqi Insurgency’.

²⁶⁹ Manuscript comment Blair on Minute Quarrey to Prime Minister, 25 February 2005, ‘Iraq Update’.

²⁷⁰ Minute Fergusson to Sheinwald, 2 March 2005, ‘Iraq: VTC meeting with NSC/Department of State/Pentagon, 28 February 2005’.

²⁷¹ Letter Quarrey to Siddiq, 2 March 2005, ‘Prime Minister’s VTC with President Bush, 1 March: Middle East’.

503. On 7 March, UK forces assumed command from the Dutch battalion in Muthanna.²⁷²

504. Air Chief Marshal Sir Glenn Torpy told the Inquiry that there was “considerable concern” when the Dutch Government, an important contributor to MND(SE), announced its intention to withdraw:

“Despite the serious gap this would leave in the force structure, which potentially risked having to be filled by the UK, the FCO (and MOD) were slow to engage the Dutch diplomatically to persuade them to stay, to the extent that when they were eventually engaged preparations for their departure were too far advanced to reverse. Although the Australians stepped into the breach the outcome could have had serious implications for the UK, which could possibly have been avoided by earlier and more substantive action in Whitehall.”²⁷³

505. Lt Gen Riley told the Inquiry the Dutch withdrawal was disruptive for the MNF-I.²⁷⁴ In his view, the disruption was exacerbated by:

“... a great reluctance in Foreign Office circles to admit that what the Dutch were saying publicly was actually what would happen and somehow we could persuade them to stay, whereas it would have been much less disruptive to have recognised the reality and either talked early to the Australians, who had given indication that they would be willing to help if asked, or got on and made a contingency plan using British forces, which we were having to do with the help of PJHQ and elements of the MOD covertly anyway.”

506. In Baghdad, negotiations on the formation of the ITG continued.

507. In conversation with President Bush on 8 March, Mr Blair said that the US and UK should not seek to influence the selection of the new Government, but that they should try to “shape” how it would address certain issues, such as Iraqiisation.²⁷⁵

508. On 10 March, Mr Charles Heatly, a former Adviser to Prime Minister Allawi, reported to Mr Blair that the lack of a government was:

“... down to a combination of the Shi’a coalition list being badly divided with no obvious leader ... the Kurds making ... unreasonable demands, and the large number of groups/individuals getting involved directly or indirectly.”²⁷⁶

509. Mr Heatly considered that protracted negotiations over the formation of the ITG had exposed tensions between the political groupings in Iraq, which he thought would be evident as the process of writing the Constitution got under way. He predicted

²⁷² Press release MOD, 7 March 2005, ‘Dutch handover to British forces in al Muthanna – Iraq’.

²⁷³ Statement Torpy, 18 January 2011, page 8.

²⁷⁴ Public hearing, 14 December 2009, page 8.

²⁷⁵ Letter Quarrey to Siddiq, 8 March 2005, ‘Prime Minister’s VTC with President Bush, 8 March’.

²⁷⁶ Minute Heatly to Prime Minister, 10 March 2005, ‘Iraq: Risks and the Media Impact’.

that Sunni/Shia and religious/secular tensions could be exacerbated by the fact of a predominantly Shia religious government coming into power, with the new Government set to take early decisions (including on the de-Ba'athification process) which would confirm a sceptical Sunni audience's worst fears. Raised political tension and increased violence risked feeding off each other.

510. On 10 March, at the first meeting of the Ad Hoc Ministerial Group on Iraq since Mr Straw became Chair, Mr Straw explained that Mr Blair “had asked a core group of Ministers to meet on a weekly basis to focus more closely on the delivery of policy in Iraq”.²⁷⁷

511. The meeting discussed Iraqiisation, the political process, broadening international engagement and reconstruction. Ministers agreed that the FCO and MOD would circulate an outline of a possible security strategy announcement by the end of 14 March and that the FCO would circulate a note on forthcoming international events on Iraq. They asked the FCO to follow up concerns over the safety of judges, prosecutors and witnesses in the Iraqi Special Tribunal.

512. On 11 March, Mr Sawers sent Mr Straw a minute covering impressions from his visit to Iraq.²⁷⁸

513. Mr Sawers wrote that the situation was encouraging, which he attributed to the “boost” from elections. Politics remained “firmly on a confessional basis”, but:

“... each community is getting organised, good quality people are emerging as chief negotiators, and they are working for a consensus, building on existing agreements, above all the TAL.”

514. The Shia list had settled on Dr Ibrahim Ja'afari as its candidate for Prime Minister. Mr Sawers noted that “the Kurds are the most cohesive group”, and “the Sunni Arabs are beginning to sort themselves out too”, recognising in some cases that they had missed out by boycotting the elections. One of the keys to the next phase would be for each of the four main factions – Shia Islamists, Sunni Arabs, Kurds and Allawi's secularists – to be able to negotiate authoritatively on the constitution.

515. Prime Minister Allawi had absented himself from the political negotiations²⁷⁹ and Mr Sawers suggested Mr Blair should call him to encourage him to take part.²⁸⁰ In Mr Sawers' view, there was a need for a secular force bringing together Shia and Sunni Arabs, to keep the Shia Islamists in check. He also considered that the Sunni Islamists were uncomfortably strong.

²⁷⁷ Minutes, 10 March 2005, Ad Hoc Ministerial Group on Iraq meeting.

²⁷⁸ Minute Sawers to Foreign Secretary, 11 March 2005, 'Iraq: Impressions'.

²⁷⁹ Telegram 123 Baghdad to FCO London, 1 March 2005, 'Iraq: Formation of New Government: Allawi Bows Out'.

²⁸⁰ Minute Sawers to Foreign Secretary, 11 March 2005, 'Iraq: Impressions'.

516. Mr Chaplin told the Inquiry that Dr Allawi was seen as “a genuinely secular figure who was Shia but not sectarian, seen as non-ideological; a tough man, someone who would have some credibility with the military”.²⁸¹ For these reasons, Mr Asquith told the Inquiry, it had been the view of “quite a large number, yes, from the Prime Minister downwards” that it would have been better if Dr Allawi had stayed in government.

517. Mr Blair telephoned Dr Allawi on 14 March and encouraged him to remain in government.^{282,283}

518. The TNA met for the first time on 16 March.²⁸⁴

519. Mr Chaplin reported concerns about the impact of the delay in forming the ITG:

“... the longer the delay, the more frustrations grow and goodwill between the parties dissipates ... We have continued to press all our contacts hard to conclude their negotiations, at least on the core package, before the inevitable break for Kurdish New Year on 21 March ... pointing to the loss of credibility both internationally and domestically ... The parties assure us that they are keen to conclude their negotiations, and intend to wrap up a deal by the end of March at the latest. If they show signs of overshooting that target as well, we may need to step up the pressure with some co-ordinated high level UK/US messages.”²⁸⁵

520. On 18 March, Mr Blair reminded Mr Quarrey: “I need J[ack] S[traw] to do me a note each week on progress (to keep him at it).”²⁸⁶

521. Mr Straw’s first report to Mr Blair, dated 24 March, covered the first three meetings²⁸⁷ of the Ad Hoc Ministerial Group on Iraq.²⁸⁸ He summarised their content as:

“The shape of an early Iraqi statement on their security strategy is under discussion with the US, with a view to early agreement with the ITG. MOD work to deliver Military Transition Teams in MND(SE), as part of the move towards regional control, is well advanced. The continuing delay in the establishment of the ITG is a serious concern, and we are working closely with the US to push for speedy resolution. Plans for early engagement with the ITG are already in place. The concept of the International Conference is being fleshed out, with a focus on inclusivity and donor co-ordination. We are looking at how we can achieve both short and medium-term improvements in the power situation.”

²⁸¹ Private hearing, 15 June 2010, page 8.

²⁸² Letter from Quarrey to Siddiq, 14 March 2005, Iraq: Allawi’.

²⁸³ He did not, in the end, join the ITG, but took his seat in the National Assembly, where he formed a new alliance of political parties under the Iraqi National List, which contested the December 2005 elections to the Council of Representatives (see Section 9.4).

²⁸⁴ UN Security Council, Press Release 11 April 2005 (SC/8355).

²⁸⁵ Telegram 147 Baghdad to FCO London, 17 March 2005, ‘Iraq: Formation of the New Government: Slow Progress’.

²⁸⁶ [Manuscript comment Blair on minute Quarrey to Prime Minister, 18 March 2005, ‘Iraq Update’](#).

²⁸⁷ Held on 10 March 2005, 17 March 2005 and 24 March 2005.

²⁸⁸ Minute Straw to Prime Minister, 24 March 2005, ‘Iraq: Ad Hoc Ministerial Meetings’.

522. Mr Straw described the benefits of an early announcement on a security strategy as being “a sense of direction for the Iraqi people; and the beginning of a plan for draw-down for coalition partners”.

523. On the political process, Mr Straw reported that messages to Iraqi contacts had emphasised “the importance of getting good people into the key security related Ministerial positions (Defence and Interior)” and of the “enormous damage that could be done to efforts at outreach by a significant renewal of the de-Ba’athification drive”.

524. On international engagement, Mr Straw wrote that the objectives of a conference would be “ensuring an inclusive approach to build a wide base of support for the Iraqi political process; and a reformed approach to donor co-ordination”. The scope for bringing other international partners into key activities in Iraq was also being considered.

525. In the last week of March, the US and UK Governments were encouraging the Iraqi parties to conclude negotiations to form a new Government.²⁸⁹

526. Sir Nigel Sheinwald told Mr Hadley that the UK was increasingly frustrated with the stalemate and concerned about its consequences.²⁹⁰

April 2005

527. Lieutenant General Robin Brims, who had commanded 1 (UK) Armoured Division during the invasion of Iraq in 2003, succeeded Lt Gen Kiszely as SBMR-I in April 2005.

528. On 6 April, the JIC assessed the state of the insurgency in Iraq after the January elections.²⁹¹

529. The JIC judged that:

“A significant Sunni insurgency will continue through 2005 and beyond, but the opportunities for reducing it appear greater than we judged in early February.”

530. The JIC confirmed its earlier assessment that “there is no unified Sunni insurgency”. Although a high level of violence remained, the atmosphere created by the January election had encouraged some opposition groups, including some insurgents, to rethink their strategy. The actions of the ITG would be critical in changing Sunni perceptions. If it failed to respond effectively to Sunni concerns it would play into the hands of the insurgents and deepen the violence. But if the political process gained momentum, Sunni support for the insurgency would diminish.

531. The JIC reported that the week of the Iraqi elections had seen more than 1,000 recorded attacks by insurgents, one of the highest weekly totals since the invasion.

²⁸⁹ Letter Sheinwald to Adams, 23 March 2005, ‘Conversation with National Security Adviser, 23 March 2005’.

²⁹⁰ Letter Quarrey to Siddiq, 1 April 2005, ‘Nigel Sheinwald’s phone call with Steve Hadley, 31 March’.

²⁹¹ [JIC Assessment, 6 April 2005, ‘Iraq: The State of the Insurgency’](#).

532. Since the election the number of recorded attacks had reduced, and by the end of March had fallen to below 400 a week, the lowest level since March 2004. Attacks on the MNF-I, which made up 75 percent of the total, were down slightly whereas attacks on Iraqi citizens had increased slightly. The weekly average number of casualties was 300.

533. The JIC assessed the Shia militias as “largely dormant”. Muqtada al-Sadr was concentrating on the political process but his organisation remained “fractious” and the risk of some Shia violence by Sadrists and others was expected to persist. Foreign jihadists remained “capable of mounting attacks with disproportionate impact”.

534. On 7 April, the TNA elected its first Speaker and swore in the Presidential Council and Prime Minister Designate.²⁹² Mr Jalal Talabani, leader of the PUK, became President. Mr Adel Abdul-Mahdi (Shia) and Mr Ghazi Yawer (Sunni) were both appointed Vice-President. Dr Ibrahim al-Ja’afari, of the Dawa Party, was sworn in as Prime Minister Designate.

The Dawa Party

The Dawa Party, to which both Prime Minister Ja’afari and his successor Mr Nuri al-Maliki belonged, is the oldest of the two Shia Islamist movements in Iraq.²⁹³

Although there are differing accounts of the details of the party’s formation, it emerged in the late 1950s and was initially dominated by a young Shia scholar, Muhammed Baqir as-Sadr, who sought to reverse the decline of Islam within Iraqi society.²⁹⁴

The Dawa Party’s ideology is based on technocratic rule within the framework of an Islamic state.

After its formation, Dawa expanded rapidly until the Ba’ath Party took power in Iraq in 1968 and began a crackdown on Shia political activism, resulting in the imprisonment and execution of Dawa members throughout the 1970s. In 1977, despite a government ban, the party organised a religious procession (the marad al-ras) which was attacked by police, leading to a wave of protests in southern Iraq.

Dawa formed a military wing in 1979 and was proscribed by Saddam Hussein’s regime in March 1980. Following a failed attempt to assassinate Tariq Aziz, as-Sadr was detained and later executed.

At this time many Dawa members, including Dr Ja’afari and Mr Maliki, fled Iraq, and branches of the party were established in Tehran, Damascus and London.

After narrowly avoiding detention, Mr Maliki left Iraq in October 1979, settling first in Syria and then in Iran.²⁹⁵ He left Iran for Syria in the late 1980s, when Iranian security services

²⁹² BBC News, 7 April 2005, *Talabani: Iraq’s pragmatic new leader*.

²⁹³ BBC News, 17 June 2004, *Who’s who in Iraq: Daawa Party*.

²⁹⁴ Shanahan R, Shi’a political development in Iraq: the case of the Islamic Da’wa Party. *Third World Quarterly* **25**: 943-954 (2004).

²⁹⁵ Parker N & Salman R, Notes from the Underground: The rise of Nouri al-Maliki and the New Islamists. *World Policy Journal* **30**: 63-76 (2013).

began to harass and kill Dawa members. Mr Ja'afari served as the Dawa spokesman in London.

After returning to Iraq in 2003, Mr Maliki became the Dawa Party spokesperson, and represented the party on the United Iraqi Alliance's political committee.²⁹⁶

535. Mr Straw reported the election of President Talabani to Cabinet on 7 April and observed that it would be important to generate momentum for the new government, and to ensure “people understood how much progress had been made”.²⁹⁷

536. Mr Straw and Mr Hoon agreed that Iraq was moving towards a position where a drawdown of British troops could, in time, be possible.

537. In April 2005, an FCO delegation led by Mr Asquith had initial discussions with a group judged to have influence on the political leadership of the Sunni insurgency.²⁹⁸ Mr Asquith's report of the discussions concluded that:

“This was a worthwhile exercise ... They were appreciative of the opportunity ... However, the opposition remains incoherent ... Sunni distrust of the Shia political leadership of the ITG is matched by exasperation with US forces whose practices are strengthening support for rejectionists. The Sunni opposition leadership look on us as the only honest broker around with the necessary influence on the relevant parties. I made clear ... that we were not in the business of imposing outcomes and that this was an Iraqi affair, for Iraqis themselves to sort out.

“We need to encourage their political networking efforts, giving due weight to the established Sunni political leadership. Left to themselves, the Iraqi parties will not sort this out ... We need to push the parties together, while avoiding appearing to interfere in the democratic process. Discretion is key.”

538. Mr Asquith recommended that the UK should continue its contacts with this and similar groups and press the US and Iraqi Government to make a similar effort.

539. In a meeting with Sir Nigel Sheinwald on 13 April, Mr Paul Wolfowitz, US Deputy Secretary of Defense, warned that there was a danger of losing the momentum generated by the January elections.²⁹⁹ In his view, “Iraq was going in the right direction, but not fast enough”. Sir Nigel agreed.

²⁹⁶ Briefing DIS [junior official], 24 April 2006, ‘Pen Picture – Jawad al-Maliki (aka Nouri Kamel and Abu Isra)’.

²⁹⁷ Cabinet Conclusions, 7 April 2005.

²⁹⁸ Minute Asquith to Sawers, 8 April 2005, ‘Iraq: Developing a Dialogue with Those Close to the Iraqi Insurgency’.

²⁹⁹ Letter Phillipson to Adams, 16 April 2005, ‘Nigel Sheinwald's Meetings in Washington, 13 April: Middle East Issues’.

540. The JIC assessed the impact of Iraq on the threat from global Islamic terrorism on 13 April.³⁰⁰ Its Key Judgements included:

- “I. The conflict in Iraq has exacerbated the threat from international terrorism and will continue to have an impact in the long term. It has confirmed the belief of extremists that Islam is under attack and needs to be defended using force. It has reinforced the determination of terrorists who were already committed to attacking the West and motivated others who were not.
- “II. The Iraq conflict has resulted in an increase in co-operation between terrorist networks ...
- “III. Some jihadists who leave Iraq will play leading roles in recruiting and organising terrorist networks ... It is inevitable that some will come to the UK.
...
- “V. Iraq is likely to be an important motivating factor for some time to come in the radicalisation of British Muslims and for those extremists who view attacks against the UK as legitimate.
- “VI. An Iraqi government that includes strong Sunni representation and speaks out clearly against the jihadists would carry considerable credibility in the Muslim world, and the ejection of foreign jihadists by them would be a powerful message.”

541. The JIC judged that Al Qaida had “capitalised on the Iraq jihad” and had benefited in particular from co-operation between terrorist networks to gain access to a broader range of operatives and support. New relationships across networks were allowing the exchange of expertise and skills.

542. Lt Gen Kiszely completed his tour as SBMR-I and sent his “hauldown” report to Gen Walker on 16 April.³⁰¹ Looking back at six months in Iraq, he wrote:

“... the insurgency has been confined to Sunni areas or to Sunni interfaces with Shia or Kurd communities. What little violence has been seen elsewhere – 10 out of 18 provinces see only 2 percent of the violence – can be categorised as terrorism.”

543. Progress in MND(SE) had been good, with all four provinces likely to be under Provincial Iraqi Control by March 2006, offering “the potential for considerable reductions in UK force levels”. Set against that was the possibility that other troop contributors would withdraw, creating a need to backfill, and the “yet to be articulated” US desire for the UK to take on MND(CS).

³⁰⁰ [JIC Assessment, 13 April 2005, 'International Terrorism: Impact of Iraq'](#).

³⁰¹ Minute Kiszely to CDS, 16 April 2005, 'SBMR-I's Hauldown Report'.

544. Lt Gen Kiszely reflected that:

“As a nation which contributes only about 5 percent of the forces and 1 percent of the money, UK continues to exert influence on campaign direction and conduct disproportionate to its contribution ...”

545. Of the 27 nations with the coalition, only the UK sought to exert influence over the US by committing significant numbers of officers to MNF-I and MNC-I headquarters. Lt Gen Kiszely considered that the ability to do so “results largely from identifying key posts and filling them with the right officers”. He suggested that the influence and effectiveness of some officers would be enhanced by increased tour lengths:

“With the US military on 12-month tours, the 6-month UK tours create turbulence and attract criticism. This is particularly the case for appointments involved in developing relationships with host-nation officers and officials. We should identify posts requiring longer tour-lengths, increase them to 9-12 month tours, and provide appropriate support packages.”

546. On 19 April, a CIG assessed the threat posed by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi’s organisation to British interests in Iraq, prompted by a statement claiming to be from AQ-I which had appeared on several websites, some of which had previously been used by al-Zarqawi for similar purposes.³⁰²

547. The statement threatened intensive military attacks against UK forces and their allies in the south of Iraq, and also attacks against Iraqi “agents and spies” and “collaborators” working with the UK.

548. Although the authenticity of the statement could not be verified, the JIC judged that “it must be taken seriously”. The JIC assessed that the threat posed in Iraq was “diverse”, as al-Zarqawi had in the past been responsible for suicide bombings, complex attacks and kidnappings.

549. The JIC judged that non-military UK interests in Iraq, although not specifically mentioned in the statement, could be under threat as well as military and civilian targets in the South. Attacks on UK interests outside Iraq could not be ruled out.

550. On 19 April, the Iraq Senior Officials Group was briefed that delays in forming the ITG were having an impact on the constitutional process, “putting its already ambitious timetable under even greater pressure”.³⁰³

551. Further delay was possible because of the TAL’s “lack of resonance as an Iraqi document”. Delays to the parliamentary elections scheduled for December would mean additional costs for the MNF-I in maintaining security.

³⁰² JIC Assessment, 19 April 2005, ‘Al-Zarqawi Threatens UK forces in Iraq’.

³⁰³ Letter Fergusson to Asquith, 19 April 2005, ‘Iraq: Senior Officials Group’.

552. Reporting a discussion of the Chiefs of Staff on 20 April about the threat from Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, Ms Aldred wrote to Sir Nigel Sheinwald: “as there is no information on possible targets or timing, the military view was that little more could be done. The Prime Minister should be alerted to the threat.”³⁰⁴

553. Ms Aldred also reported that the next military rotation would result in UK force levels increasing by around 480 personnel. Ms Aldred:

“... made the point that in circumstances where we were benefiting from the improvement in security in Iraq in general, and MND(SE) in particular, it would be very hard to explain why an increase in force levels of this magnitude was required on top of the increase which had already taken place to compensate for the Dutch withdrawal from Muthanna. Jock Stirrup ... saw the point ...”

554. On 28 April, Prime Minister Designate Ja’afari presented the majority of his Cabinet to the TNA for ratification.³⁰⁵

555. The list, which was approved by 180 of the 185 TNA members present, covered two of the four Deputy Prime Minister positions and 27 of the 32 Ministerial posts. Eight of the Cabinet had previously held Ministerial office in Iraq in either the Iraqi Governing Council or Interim Iraqi Government.

May 2005

556. On 2 May, Mr Chaplin reported that many Sunnis had:

“... responded critically to the announcement of the new government ... They are unhappy that Ja’afari chose to put his Cabinet to the vote before a satisfactory agreement had been reached on acceptable Sunni representation.”³⁰⁶

557. Negotiations between the political parties on how to fill the remaining posts had continued right up to the last moment. The British Embassy Baghdad reported that in the end Dr Ja’afari had concluded that announcing a nearly-complete list was better than announcing nothing.

558. Dr Ja’afari emphasised to the TNA that the Ministers were chosen for their competence and willingness to work as part of the team. Ministries were not fiefdoms and a Minister was “not an emperor”. Speaking about efforts to ensure Sunni Arab participation, he said the election results should be honoured but “the unfairness done to our brother Sunni Arabs in those elections” should also be acknowledged.

559. Mr Chaplin commented that, although the main Sunni parties had put forward a number of prospective candidates for Ministerial posts, very few had been appointed. Some suspected that Dr Ja’afari’s party intended to “impose” their own Sunni Arab

³⁰⁴ Minute Aldred to Sheinwald, 20 April 2005, ‘Iraq – COS 20 April’.

³⁰⁵ eGram 3590/05 Baghdad to FCO London, 28 April 2005, ‘Iraq: New Cabinet Ratified by the TNA’.

³⁰⁶ eGram 3762/05 Baghdad to FCO London, 2 May 2005, ‘Iraq: New Government: Finishing the Job’.

candidate for Minister of Defence. Mr Chaplin reported that UK and US officials were continuing to encourage negotiation.

560. Mr Chaplin reported that many Sunni Arabs were unhappy about the way in which the new Government had been formed but were continuing negotiations in a “last ditch attempt to secure acceptable Sunni representation”.

561. The atmosphere had been soured by a series of incidents on 29 and 30 April. A raid on the Baghdad office of the National Council for Dialogue on 29 April was followed by a car-bombing of the same office the following day.

562. Several senior politicians (including the TNA Speaker, Hajim al-Hassani, and one of the Vice-Presidents, Ghazi Al Yawer) had complained about the Iraqi security forces’ violent entry into a number of Sunni mosques, and the arrest of 32 Sunni imams on 29 April. Mr Chaplin had seen no evidence that the arrests had sectarian motives, but they were perceived by the Sunni Arab community as such.

563. Looking forward to the months ahead, Mr Chaplin commented:

“It remains clear that significant Sunni figures are seeking a way back into the political process for their community. They attach more importance to having a voice in the constitutional debate and retrieving their position in the next elections than the formation of this government. But having been led to believe that government positions are on offer, there will be a correspondingly negative reaction if these hopes are dashed, which will not help the next stage of negotiations over the constitutional process. The Shia meanwhile find the Sunnis disorganised and unreasonably demanding, given their boycott of the elections, and even those who do not share fears of re-Ba’athification believe that many Sunnis have not yet adjusted to the new realities of having to share power. The Kurds have made clear publicly their support for Ja’afari’s government, but would be very uncomfortable if credible Sunni representatives were not included.”³⁰⁷

564. On 3 May, members of the ITG were sworn in and formally took power.³⁰⁸

565. Six of the seven vacant Ministerial posts were filled on 8 May.³⁰⁹ The final post, Minister for Human Rights, was filled on an acting basis by another Minister for the duration of the ITG³¹⁰ after Mr Hashim al-Shible turned down the post shortly after the TNA had approved his appointment.³¹¹

³⁰⁷ eGram 3762/05 Baghdad to FCO London, 2 May 2005, ‘Iraq; New Government: Finishing the Job’.

³⁰⁸ *The Telegraph*, 3 May 2005, *Iraq’s new government sworn in*.

³⁰⁹ *BBC News*, 8 May 2005, *Iraq fills crucial cabinet post*.

³¹⁰ University of Utah Global Justice Project: Iraq, [undated], *Government and Legislature – 2003 to date*.

³¹¹ *BBC News*, 8 May 2004, *Iraq fills crucial cabinet post*.

566. In addition to the Prime Minister and his three deputies, the ITG included 31 Ministers, six of whom were Sunni, in line with the estimated Sunni proportion of Iraq's population.³¹²

567. Mr Asquith commented in his evidence to the Inquiry that the momentum injected into the political process by the elections was squandered because it took four months to form the ITG.³¹³

568. Lt Gen Brims told the Inquiry that the delay forming the ITG had created a political vacuum that had been filled by street violence.³¹⁴

569. In a telegram dated 6 May, Mr Chaplin outlined the key challenges facing Prime Minister Ja'afari:

- a progressive handover from the MNF-I to the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF);
- improvement in public services;
- managing the economy, including keeping inflation under control;
- progress on the Constitution; and
- managing public expectations.³¹⁵

570. Mr Chaplin added that the ITG had a clear electoral mandate and some experienced Ministers, but also a number of serious handicaps, including the risk of discord within Prime Minister Ja'afari's political grouping, the possibility that the Kurdish members of the TNA would seek to have him replaced, and other issues (such as de-Ba'athification) "which could stoke up tensions within government to the point of collapse".

571. Mr Chaplin concluded that "there are reasons to hope that the political imperative of delivering results, and the awfulness of the alternatives, will force the necessary compromises to be made".

572. Mr Chaplin reported on 6 May that there was "a widespread assumption that the timetable laid down in the Transitional Administrative Law ... is too tight, although we continue to insist that every effort should be made to meet it".

³¹² University of Utah Global Justice Project: Iraq, [undated], *Government and Legislature – 2003 to date*; *The New York Times*, 12 May 2005, Q&A: *Iraq's Cabinet*.

³¹³ Public hearing, 4 December 2009, page 6.

³¹⁴ Public hearing, 14 December 2009, page 28.

³¹⁵ eGram 4045/05 Baghdad to FCO London, 6 May 2005, 'Iraq: Prospects for the Ja'afari Government'.

The UK General Election

In the UK General Election of May 2005, Mr Blair's Labour Party was returned for a third term in office.³¹⁶

Following the election, Mr Jack Straw remained as Foreign Secretary and Mr Hilary Benn remained as Development Secretary. Dr John Reid was appointed Defence Secretary, succeeding Mr Geoff Hoon, who became Leader of the House of Commons.

573. In May 2005, a note to Dr Reid as incoming Defence Secretary from Sir Kevin Tebbit, said:

“Internally, your immediate focus will be on Iraq and Afghanistan. In Iraq, the US-led coalition's main effort will this year shift from providing direct security to building the capability and capacity of the Iraqi Security Forces ... significant reductions in Coalition force levels (including UK forces) are unlikely to be possible until 2006. This is 6-12 months later than our initial hopes. It inevitably has knock-on consequences for the next planned increase in our military effort – expanded stabilisation operations in Afghanistan – and the size of our force there.”³¹⁷

574. On 13 May 2005, Dr Reid's Private Secretary advised Mr Blair's Private Secretary that the rotation of troops in progress in Iraq would result in an increase of 435 UK military personnel in Iraq.³¹⁸ This was a result of UK forces:

“... shifting their main effort from framework security to security sector reform ... to create the conditions to transfer responsibility for provincial security to the Iraqis from autumn this year.”

575. The Private Secretary added:

“At this stage, it is too early to accurately predict the force levels required for the rest of 2005, but the next force level review, which will take place over the summer, will provide greater clarity. This review is expected to report in September.”

576. Mr Chaplin's valedictory report, dated 16 May, observed that a “certain gloom seems to have descended in London and Washington about prospects for Iraq”.³¹⁹ He acknowledged that there was “certainly plenty of bad news around”, citing the surge of violence that had followed the formation of the new government (around 70 attacks a day with a “nasty sectarian tinge to much of the killing”). But, despite acknowledging that his own perspective was limited to what he saw in the “Green Zone”, he pointed also to:

“... some encouraging signs ... credible Sunni figures in the Cabinet ... key Ministers look competent and have been saying all the right things about delivering results

³¹⁶ [BBC News, 7 May 2005, Final election results declared.](#)

³¹⁷ [Minute Tebbit to Secretary of State, 6 May 2005, 'Welcome'.](#)

³¹⁸ [Letter Naworynsky to Quarrey, 13 May 2005, 'Iraq: UK Roulement and Force Level Review'.](#)

³¹⁹ [eGram 4529/05 Baghdad to FCO London, 16 May 2005, 'Iraq: Valedictory: Still In The Balance'.](#)

and inclusiveness ... There are at last serious numbers of trained and equipped ISF to deploy ... With UK help, a coherent national policing plan should soon be in place ... Opinion polls show most Iraqis determinedly optimistic about the future.”

577. Mr Chaplin saw two key risks:

- that the constitutional process would be insufficiently inclusive, so that the debate “instead of being an instrument for bringing Iraqis together, will drive them apart, with moderate Sunnis retreating into the arms of the extremists”; and
- that the Alliance would split into factions, with Muqtada al-Sadr deciding that he could gain more influence by opposing the government: “Coping with Shia unrest in the south as well as a Sunni insurgency in the centre and north remains the nightmare scenario for any Baghdad government, and for the MNF.”

578. Mr Chaplin considered that both risks needed to be taken seriously, although in his view the second was unlikely to materialise unless Grand Ayatollah al-Sistani died. Although there was an aspiration to agree a Constitution that would be inclusive, “the missing bit is an inclusive constitutional process”.

579. On 19 May, Mr Blair commented to President Bush that the delay in forming the ITG had created uncertainty over its effectiveness.³²⁰

580. Reporting a recent visit to Iraq to Cabinet on 19 May, Dr Reid observed that the inclusion of Sunni Ministers in the ITG was encouraging, as was “their desire to be identified as Iraqis rather than by their religious or ethnic background”.³²¹

581. Less comforting was the lack of Sunni participants in the Constitutional Committee, which needed to be addressed if the process was to be successful.

582. Mr Blair confirmed the strategic importance of Iraq to both regional security and the establishment of democracy in the region. It was therefore essential to continue the fight against terrorism and to defeat the “campaign of destabilisation”.

583. On 25 May, Dr Reid told Parliament that after the forthcoming troop rotation there would be approximately 8,500 UK military personnel in Iraq, an increase of just over 400.³²² He explained that:

“The reason for this small increase is in order to allow greater effort to be put into the training, development and mentoring of the Iraqi security forces: this will enable them to take on ever greater responsibility for their own security and so pave the way for UK troops to withdraw.”

³²⁰ Letter Quarrey to Siddiq, 19 May 2005, ‘Prime Minister’s video-conference with Bush, 19 May’.

³²¹ Cabinet Conclusions, 19 May 2005.

³²² House of Commons, *Official Report*, 25 May 2005, column 15WS.

584. Mr Blair spoke to Prime Minister Ja'afari for the first time on 26 May and said that “we stood ready to help in any way we could”, in particular on developing the ISF.³²³

585. Mr Blair committed to reinforcing the ITG's message that it was “an inclusive Government for all Iraq's communities”.

586. On 26 May, Mr Blair told President Bush that he was concerned about increasing sectarian tensions in Iraq, and how they might be exploited by insurgents.³²⁴ He thought that the US and UK should make sure that the programme of Sunni outreach was pursued “with real vigour”.

587. The newly formed Iraq Sub Committee of the Defence and Overseas Policy Committee (DOP(I)) met for the first time on 26 May, chaired by Mr Blair.³²⁵

588. The Committee was briefed by Mr Ehrman on attitudes within the Sunni community to the political process, and by Gen Walker on the military campaign and Security Sector Reform.

589. In discussion it was observed that the number of sectarian attacks was increasing, and that in considering force posture in Iraq, the UK would also need to consider the “strategic balance with UK military activity in Afghanistan”. It was essential that operations in Iraq and Afghanistan each had sufficient military and civilian resources available.

590. Mr Benn gave an overview of the reconstruction process and the need to increase international involvement (see Section 10.2).

591. At the end of the meeting, Mr Blair asked for more advice, including a Sunni outreach strategy and an options paper on UK force posture in Iraq over the next nine months.

³²³ Letter Quarrey to Siddiq, 26 May 2005, ‘Prime Minister's Conversation with Ja'afari’.

³²⁴ Letter Quarrey to Siddiq, 26 May 2005, ‘Prime Minister's videoconference with President Bush’.

³²⁵ Minutes, 26 May 2005, DOP(I) meeting.