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## Abstract

Basra has seen an on-going Shia battle for control of the port, a vital national asset for oil, trade, and under the control of organized crime. PM Maliki has been under pressure for a long time to do something about Basra. The SGs finally had crossed the line of what was acceptable. Basra represented a fault-line in coalition strategy because US and UK views varied on PIC, but the sum of analysis was for PIC. The Shia flats in Basra, a large part of the population, lives in abject poverty. PM Maliki's operation and decision making surprised everybody. The units who did well were cohesive, trained, and well-led; it was the new, untried units with new leadership that crumbled. The PIC MOU puts the BOC directly under control of the PM in a state of emergency (key factor). The situation today is much more stable. Jaish al-Mehdi has not fought back against pressure. Basra has been good for Iraqi morale. Iraqis approve of the PM's decision making.  
27:11.

## Interview

### *Can you explain the events of the last month?*

00:45. It would be easy to be distracted by what we might perceive to be failings within the coalition . . . coalition partners, but I will start from a completely different perspective, that of the Iraqis, and try to look at the way the significance of what has happened and subsequent developments in Baghdad from an Iraqi standpoint. Some sense, from my understanding of what happened in Basra, some sense seems to be made of it if we recognize the importance of Basra both as Iraq's second city with over 2 million people and an on-going, unresolved battle for power, political power and economic power, a battle of resources, which has been the underlying problem for . . . the MND-SE has faced, a battle between Shia factions over control of the port, and that is the second reason Basra is important. It is Iraq's only significant sea port, it is the only access to the Arabian Gulf. It is a significant form . . . sort of income nationally and for those involved in criminal activities and organized crime within the port. Umm Qasr is well known and well discussed. It is important to the Shia, not on the order of Karbala or Najaf, but certainly as a focal point for Shia religious discussion and political and ideological development. It is important because of the oil, the largest source of oil in the country. Those are big enough points.

I returned from leave on 4 April. The operation had taken place and settled down. We were beginning to see the development of Operation Charge of the Knights II, with embedded MiTTs and MNCI command and control.

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Now, why would PM Maliki want to act in Basra? Well, we've been after him for a long time to act against Shia extremists, particularly JAM, and my understanding is, over a period of three or four weeks, he was presented with evidence from his own side that levels of intimidation, violence against people, particularly women, the more overt aspects of Iranian influence, the more militant aspects of Jaish al Mehdi and the Special Groups had crossed . . . in all of those areas . . . had crossed the line of what was acceptable. And what has been acceptable is one of the key principles, or problems, that the coalition and now the Iraqi government has faced. What level were we willing to put up with? What were we willing to tolerate? In order to try to get things beyond where they were and into a position where reconciliation and development and political accords and a more stable and secure environment could be created.

5:26. And we haven't really wrestled with that properly, but Maliki, for whatever reason, and my understanding is it was all that evidence that was dumped in front of him and people all around him just pushing him hard, eventually decided to react. Now, of course, in coalition terms, he could not have chosen a more complicated target, from our perspective. But I don't really think, and this is just an (b)(6) guess, that this crossed his mind at all.

6:00. He was . . . here is the Iraqi Prime Minister acting against a problem which is essentially Iraqi but with a strong 1.4b, 1.4d These are Iraqis not behaving well, and 1.4b, 1.4d behaving badly in Iraq in a readily identifiable way, challenging his authority. So the fact that it couldn't be more difficult given that there are on-going questions, discussions, concerns, and debates about the PIC process that allowed Provincial Iraqi Control to be passed to the provincial Iraqi government in Basra, that was just by-the-by. And of course, from the coalition perspective, we wound up with the most significant political-military operation that the Iraqi government has taken up since it was created, challenging every single aspect that it has bothered both them and us: JAM, 1.4b, 1.4d sectarian, intra-Shia disagreements, unresolved problems, organized crime, and I haven't mentioned organized crime and why Basra is important in it. Organized crime is a key factor. And he . . . he acted, the fact that it was on a fault line within the coalition . . .

### ***Why is it a fault line?***

8:05. Because there is an American view that the situation in Basra could not possibly add up to giving it provincial Iraqi control, and we the second coalition partner, who was responsible for MND-SE, creating a body of evidence, presenting a body of evidence, that was accepted in the PIC province as adding up to PIC. And it is worth exploring briefly, we mustn't forget . . . that that decision wasn't a unilateral one, it wasn't the UK delivering PIC on its own. The CG and the Ambassador and all the people up here in Al Faw Palace and across in the embassy and the annex in the IZ, the sum total of the analysis for all of us was we will PIC. There we were. However uncomfortable that decision was, we had a province that was PIC. We had a multi-national division small in size, 3,000 people, in the COB, doing what UK policy expected of it, which was to support the Iraqi Security Forces development, its training standards, its operational

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capability, and at the same time developing ideas for that essential economic growth and development that will be needed to lift Basra out of its woeful socio-economic conditions at the moment. The Shia flats in Basra are Sadr City to the power 10. So the abject poverty you find in Sadr City, it is even worse in Basra, which is rather strange because it is a totally Shia city, so why they allow such a large part of their population to live that way defies explanation so far as a simple western view is concerned.

10:30. So, that is the state of affairs. So off the PM goes, flies to Basra, takes personal charge. The first the Ministry of Defense knows and the Joint Iraqi Headquarters knows is on the Monday morning when the Minister of Defense phones up his people and says "Where are you? Why aren't you here supporting me?" That was the strategic surprise that Maliki was able to generate. Not just with us, not just with Jaish al-Mehdi, not just with the Special Groups, but amongst his own people. And I see this as the first great strategic surprise since 9/11. On a national scale, we were caught out completely by the operation, surprised completely. And I'm sure students at the war college will enjoy looking at the implications of this . . . of Maliki's decision, for some years to come, because it raises questions about our understanding of Iraqi intentions, Iraqi political intentions, it raises questions about our understanding of the socio-religious political dynamics within the Shia population. It raises questions about our responsiveness and our own understanding of our capabilities. So often when we begin a planning estimate, the first thing we look at tends to be our own capabilities. In this case, I don't think anybody had asked the question "what happens if this happens?" Now, having said that, if you speak with someone in the Corps, you might find a completely different perspective. I do think that the speed with which the Corps responded getting the DCG ops down there and getting established with the Corps TAC down there with the Corps Commander down there was a smart piece of work, exceptionally quick thinking, and it was the right call to make.

13:15. It was the right call to make because when I look at how the Iraqi planning shaped up, we can see that, beyond the order to "Move now," there was very little behind it. No understanding of committing troops to the fight, of committing bodies of men, the role of leadership, mentoring, support, guidance, access to fires, access to ISR, logistics, and medevac. And it is worth looking at the command and control, intelligence, information, maneuver and logistics, we can see how the strategic decision to move quickly and act in Basra was undermined in so many areas by the level of planning and the level of operational capability that was then committed to the fight. We had a look at the performance of the various battalions and brigades that were put into Basra, and it will come as no surprise that those battalions and brigades that trained together over a period of months and years, who'd had operational experience elsewhere in Iraq, who had strong leadership, who were unified, were coherent bodies, with good TTPs, good training and confidence in one another--they succeeded; they did well. Those who had been more recently formed, with less experience, but where a MiTT was present, they also performed reasonably well. But those who had only just been created, who had come straight out of training, committed to the fight, in some cases where they're leadership joined them almost on the line of departure, they failed, and it is understandable. They were in a new environment, they had no time for battle procedure, and they were

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confronted by people who challenged them who came from their own social and religious grouping, and as we know, I think 1,200 soldiers and policemen deserted and failed to press home and achieve their objectives, and . . . not surprisingly, caused . . . some real problems for the tactical commander, LTG Mohan operating out of the Basra Operations Center, and directly to the Prime Minister, because the Prime Minister was directing this almost one-on-one, direct to.

16:15. I mentioned command and control. It is worth looking at the C2 relationships because the PIC MOU [places] the provincial operations center directly under the control of the Prime Minister in a state of emergency. This was a state of emergency, so the Prime Minister had direct control, command of, the Basra Operations Center. And this short-circuited IGFC (Iraqi Ground Forces Command), JHQ, and the Ministry of Defense. Now the Corps commander getting down to Basra to sit beside the Prime Minister and his DCG sitting alongside LTG Mohan in the Basra Operations Center started to give the Iraqi command and control structure some genuine structure on which it could hang its planning and response to the situation. And we find that the creation of another operations center, an MNFI operations center, within the Ministry of Defense, a small team of staff officers from Strat Ops and SPA, who had been working with JHQ, added another piece, gave another point of stability. And by the end of the first week, the battle rhythm that the Corps and the ops center, the MNFI people in MoD, and the . . . the two points of command in Basra and the point of control in JHQ, their battle rhythm, their presence, the information that they brought, their ISR, their situational awareness, and their groundedness in this sort of activity, gave the Iraqi Army, ISF, some stability, some planning stability.

18:20. The other interesting issue is what forces were committed to the fight. Basra is a large urban center. He chose light infantry and National Police, and the Hillah ISWAT proved to be exceptionally capable. The light infantry BCTs that were put in, although very mobile, actually lacked the organic firepower and protected mobility to be able to conduct this sort of urban street fight in the sort of way that would allow momentum to be maintained, allowed points of contact to be developed, allowed break in where break in was necessary, and it just made things very hard for themselves. And that was already touched on in terms by desertion levels amongst those who were inexperienced in this sort of fight. Firepower: it took some time, I think 36 hours really, to get JTACs and the fire control teams embedded within the Iraqi forces that were still fighting. But that was fine because once they were embedded, they provided situational awareness, another point of C2 for us, another point of situational awareness for us.

***What is your understanding of the situation in Basra today?***

20:30. It is much more stable. They're in a deliberate planning process period. The Corps TAC is forward, mentoring, leading, and assisting in the planning. It is a much more stable, considered operational environment from our perspective. And as far as Jaish al-Mehdi is concerned, I think there is a . . . I can't think of the best way to describe it. It is not a brokered agreement, but it certainly appears to me that there is a level of understanding that has prevented the need to go clear every house or fight through every

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room, displace every Iraqi that lives in every [unintelligible]. The other interesting thing is that the things that did work very well for the Iraqis--the air supply, the air bridge, and medivac, and casualty clearing and care--and although they did use the field hospital at Basra station for a bit, actually their air medevac cleared those casualties out fairly quickly. And we've all been impressed at how those two aspects of the operation unfolded. But I think there is a simple explanation for this. The air men are professional airmen, and that is what they do. They're used to flying logistics, and casevac and medevac are really nothing more than a specialized form of air logistics. And the medical people are also professionals. They're professional doctors and professional nurses with clearly defined professional standards to meet. And except for the bit that's in the fight, the rest of the operational environment was to all intents and purposes, stable, non-hostile, and allowed them to do their job unhindered by enemy action.

***What is your impression of the impact of these operations on Iraqi morale?***

22:55. My understanding is that overall, they see it as a great success, less for the obvious, the desertions, which almost true to form, the Iraqis are finding a way of forgiving and accommodating those failures by finding an excuse for them. Like saying, "if you stopped fighting because you were challenged by Jaish al-Mehdi, then we understand that. You can come back again." With two exceptions, Maj Gen Jalil and General Mohan, who were sacked, but not officially. Officially they were promoted and brought back here to Baghdad.

I know the UK mentor to General Mohan is a close friend of mine. GEN Mohan is a great planner, a great mover, a manipulator. He engineers things, but what he clearly isn't is a great tactical commander, and he was a casualty. It just shows the difficulty of trying to work with another cultural approach that we still haven't plumbed the depths of. We still don't have a full idea of . . . a true idea of how Iraq truly was under the previous regime, [to] know what the full strengths and weaknesses of those who were chosen to lead, either in the military or the police or within the administration, what those true strengths and qualities are. And it shows under fire.

25:20. As for the Prime Minister, I think that Iraqis broadly are getting used to him and approve of his actions in Basra. Since I returned from leave, all the Iraqis I've talked with consider the Prime Minister to be a strong leader, a good leader, they approve of what he did in Basra, and wonder why he doesn't do more of that . . . like in Baghdad and in other cities. The risk is that Maliki will believe his own success without recognizing the risks that he took, the true risk that I'm not even sure that within an Arab culture, that they would think that way, and even less would care about it, even if they knew about them. They would just get on and do it.

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