Declassified by: MG Michael X. Garrett,
USCENTCOM Chief of Staff
Declassified on: 201505

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TAGS: PREL, PGOV, MOPS, MCAP, IZ, UK
SUBJECT: CROCKER/PETRAEUS MEETINGS WITH UK DEFENSE SECRETARY AND SENIOR MILITARY OFFICIALS, SEPTEMBER 18, 2007

Classified By: Ambassador Robert H. Tuttle, reasons 1.4 b, d

1. ~~(S/NF)~~ SUMMARY: With Prime Minister Gordon Brown set to deliver a widely-anticipated statement on HMG's policy in Iraq to Parliament on or about October 10, the UK needs the USG to define clearly its expectations for the British presence in Iraq as soon as possible, UK Defence Secretary Des Browne told U.S. Ambassador to Iraq Ryan Crocker and Commanding General of Multi-National Force-Iraq (MNF-I) David Petraeus September 18 in London. Over lunch and a follow-on meeting, Browne said the UK is frustrated by the lack of progress in Basrah, both politically and economically. This frustration has led the British to question the entire purpose of maintaining a presence there. Petraeus and Crocker argued that Basrah's position as Iraq's second largest city, combined with its vast oil resources and a homogeneous Shi'a community, make its fate critical to Iraq's future, and that the UK role in securing that future is vital. Petraeus asked that the UK retain its base of operations in the south in Basrah, and not move it elsewhere in the British sector of Multi-National Division-South East (MND-SE). Petraeus said that he would discuss separately with UK Chief of Defence Staff Air Marshall Jock Stirrup a list of critical tasks for MND-SE. On Basrah's transfer to provincial Iraqi control (PIC), Petraeus said that it could happen in late fall or winter, depending on how the conditions in Basrah evolve, including how the situation with Basrah's governor evolves. END SUMMARY.

U.S. and UK Need to Discuss Expectations

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2. ~~(S/NF)~~ Summarizing the U.S. and UK positions on Iraq, Browne said: "We are on the same page on both path and message -- although we may have been on different paragraphs at different times." He assured Crocker and Petraeus that the UK will see its commitments through: "We are not rushing for the door." Stressing that he values his close contacts with U.S. Defense Secretary Robert Gates, particularly Gates' candor, Browne said the time has come for the U.S. and UK to enter into detailed discussions on U.S. expectations for the UK in the south. Up to this point, he said, Gates and other U.S. officials have put off discussions of future Iraq strategy until the September 10-11 Congressional hearings on Iraq have concluded. Now that the hearings are over, these discussions need to take place as soon as possible, to avoid giving pundits and the media the opportunity to shape the debate in unhelpful ways.

3. ~~(S/NF)~~ U.S./UK discussions on the way ahead in Iraq are also vital, Browne said, because PM Gordon Brown will make a statement on HMG's Iraq policy soon after Parliament reconvenes on October 8. PM Brown is currently planning to make the statement on October 10, early enough in the session to prevent the opposition parties from getting the upper hand on the Iraq debate. PM Brown will need the statement to carry a certain amount of substance on issues such as assessing Iraqi governmental capacity and defining goals and timelines, Browne stressed. Petraeus said the U.S. would be happy to work with the UK on this, as it has in the past. Browne expressed HMG's hope that the policy discussions would not be limited by U.S. domestic events such as the next report to Congress by Petraeus and Crocker, currently scheduled for March. Crocker noted that he and Petraeus had stressed in their testimony that the situation is not evolving predictably, or via a timeline, and that the U.S. would need to be in Iraq for
a long time, so that long term planning should be possible.

UK Role in Basrah
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4. ~~(S/NF)~~ The UK needs to continue to base its MND-SE operations in Basrah, Petraeus said to Browne. Noting the possibility that the UK might consider moving to Talil Air

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Base in Dhi Qar, Petraeus stressed that Basrah itself is critically important: it is the second largest city in Iraq; 90 percent of Iraq's oil wealth flows through it; its airfield is critical to MNF-I operations in the south, and it serves as a base for special forces operations, intelligence operations, ground and air quick reaction forces, air medevac, diplomatic elements and PRTs, and manned and unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs). Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki understands the challenges facing Basrah, Petraeus said, as he has demonstrated by appointing General Muhan as Head of the Iraqi Security Forces and Major General Jaleel as Head of Police. With no sectarian conflict or al Qaida presence, Basrah represents an opportunity for Maliki to demonstrate how Iraqi central government can liaise with

regional governments; UK support will be critical as Maliki achieves this. Crocker said that Basrah is a metaphor for the challenges that Iraq faces. Since it has become clear that Iraq will not be completely centrally controlled, the UK needs to be on the ground to assist the Basrahwis to find Basrahwi solutions to Basrahwi problems.

5. ~~(S/NF)~~ The UK has stressed Basrah's importance to Maliki from the beginning, Browne said. As a fellow Shi'a, Maliki could have taken advantage of Basrah's relative homogeneity to reward his people without offending the Sunni. Had Maliki recognized this from the onset and at strategic points along the way, notably during Operation Sinbad, it would have helped enormously, Browne said. Mohan and Jaleel are excellent, but they are the exceptions. The rest of the Basrahwi political class is corrupt. The economy is terrible; young men are joining the Jaysh al-Mahdi out of lack of any other opportunity. Officials are not moving on proposed British infrastructure projects. All of these frustrations have led the UK to question why it maintains a role in Basrah at all. Petraeus replied that he would meet with Chief of Defence Staff Air Marshall Jock Stirrup after the meeting to discuss the list of tasks that the U.S. envisions remain in Basrah. He also said he would push key MND-SE projects with the Iraqi government (NOTE FROM BAGHDAD:

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General Petraeus met with PM Maliki September 20 and stressed the need to help Basrah and discussed the same with DPM Barham Salih as well.)

Basrah Transfer to Provincial Iraqi Control
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6. ~~(S/NF)~~ Basrah should be able to transfer to Provincial Iraqi Control (PIC) by late fall or winter, Petraeus said, although the decision would have to go through the normal PIC process first, which could take some weeks. The issue of Basrah Governor Waeli remains unresolved, and that would need to be factored in as well, Petraeus said: for example, it would not be realistic to PIC at the same time that another governor might be taking over, if the situation comes to that. Browne pressed for a specific date, or at least concrete wording that PM Brown could use in his statement to Parliament.

HMG Attitude Towards Its Performance in Iraq
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7. ~~(C)~~ Finally, Petraeus asked Browne why the UK seems to be beating itself up over its performance in Iraq. Browne answered that the Labour Government under Tony Blair and now Gordon Brown have been effectively without domestic opposition for five years. During that time, the UK media, which has appallingly low standards, has taken on the role of the opposition, and the constant barrage of criticism and misinformation is wearing officials down. Petraeus noted that the UK has helped with a number of accomplishments in recent months, including orderly handoff of the Basrah Palace and State Building and establishment of the Basrah Operational Command.

8. ~~(SBU)~~ Ambassador Crocker and General Petraeus have cleared this cable.

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