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11 May 2007

**MEMORANDUM FOR Commander, MNF-I**

**SUBJECT: Kagan Trip Report, May 2007**

**General Impressions**

The security situation in Iraq has improved significantly since the beginning of Operation Fardh al Qanoon. Security has improved in almost every area of Baghdad, although improvement has been very uneven and remains tenuous in certain areas. Security has also improved in most areas outside of Baghdad with the exception of Diyala Province, which is currently under great strain. Evaluating the security of the central and southern provinces is more complex because of increasing conflict within JAM and between JAM and rival Shi'a militias and political organizations.

**Sectarianism**

Sectarianism is the most dangerous challenge facing the coalition effort in Iraq across all lines of operations. Coalition undertakings in Iraq must proceed from the fact that many senior leaders, politicians, bureaucrats and certain units, especially within the IP and NP, are pursuing sectarian agendas and/or responding to pressure or control by extremist leaders. Therefore, simply working to increase the capacity of the Iraqi Government and its security forces to function effectively will result in empowering an extremist sectarian coalition that is working against reconciliation and the development of a stable, multi-sectarian, multi-ethnic Iraq.

Not all coalition forces and Embassy personnel understand the magnitude of the sectarian problem and the danger of empowering sectarian actors in the name of capacity building. There are multiple layers to this challenge. In some cases, such as the CPATT, advisors have gone native and actively deny the presence of sectarianism within the organizations they are advising. In other cases, such as the BOCAT, the IAG, and the team advising the IGFC, coalition leaders recognize the presence of sectarianism and watch actors within their partnered organizations actively pursue sectarian agendas, but are either unwilling or unable to take effective counter-measures. At lower levels of the military hierarchy, some unit commanders continue to press subordinates to partner with malicious and criminal ISF units pursuing sectarian agendas despite having been informed of the problem, because they believe that partnership is their priority mission. The MiTT teams are in a difficult position, because their mission is to improve the capacity of the organizations in which they are embedded and the capabilities of the individuals with whom they work, and they feel that they are evaluated on the basis of their accomplishments along these lines. These problems are particularly acute for USM-I personnel working directly with Iraqi ministries, because it is often the case that building the capacity of a ministry is equivalent to strengthening the sectarian agenda of malicious actors within the Iraqi government.

One of the sources of the continuation of this mind-set is the momentum that remains from nearly four years of focus on train-and-transition as both the means and the end of coalition strategy. Although most senior leaders within MNF-I and its immediate subordinate commands have adjusted to the new mission that places securing the population above transitioning, some more junior subordinates, and a few senior leaders have not yet altered their own mission statements and areas of focus to align with the new approach.



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This problem is exacerbated by the emphasis in the current plan on the triple partnership of coalition, Iraqi Army, and Iraqi National Police forces at all levels. This focus influences some subordinate commanders to prioritize partnering even with units that are accelerants of sectarian violence because they believe that they will be evaluated on the degree of that partnership. The dual chain of command between coalition and Iraqi forces contributes to this confusion, because even coalition commanders who do recognize the negative effects of malicious Iraqi units can exercise only indirect pressure and control over those units, but cannot redeploy them, countermand illegal orders, or even verify the origin and legitimacy of orders those units claim to have.

Sectarian agendas range in intensity and malignity from extermination or complete displacement of the Sunni population to conscious attempts to manipulate services so as to place pressure on Sunni populations to displace voluntarily to deliberate efforts to drive Sunnis from leadership positions in key ministries and military and police posts to more or less conscious refusals to consider the needs of Sunni communities in mixed areas to simple discrimination. At the current moment, when significant elements of the Sunni community are reaching out to coalition forces and the Government of Iraq in the provinces and even in Baghdad, all of these forms of sectarianism directly undermine coalition efforts to bring the Sunni insurgency to a peaceful conclusion (a task that is separate from but essential to reconciliation).

It is therefore vital to redefine the purpose and method of all training and capacity-building, as well as partnership, undertakings. They cannot focus simply on increasing the ability of Iraqi units, agencies, and individuals to perform their tasks. They must work first to prevent malicious actors from pursuing sectarian agendas, forcing others to pursue sectarian agendas, and replacing non-sectarian actors with sectarian ones. They must also work to identify capable non-sectarian leaders and to encourage their empowerment and promotion. All coalition forces and USM-I personnel should understand clearly that empowering sectarian actors at any level undermines the mission and must not be tolerated.

This issue is a matter both of national security and of ethics and morality. America's interests will be harmed by the creation of an extremist Shi'ite state that has created a large community of angry, displaced, and disenfranchised Sunnis. Such a community will be a permanent magnet for intervention on its behalf by Iraq's Sunni neighbors and a fertile breeding ground for al Qaeda and associated Islamist movements that will promise to defend and avenge and return the Sunni community to power. The internal conflict that is nearly certain to result will tend to drive the Shi'ite government into the

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In addition, American soldiers should never be accessories to sectarian cleansing, let alone targeted or indiscriminate killing. For this reason, if for no other, it is essential to emphasize to all subordinate commands that Iraqi units engaged in such activities should not receive American support.

### **The Iraqi Political Process**

Iraq today suffers from the problem that its government is not representative of its people in a number of respects. It is well known that Sunni participation is inadequate. But it is increasingly the case that government factions retain a willingness to tolerate violence and armed conflict in pursuit of their own agendas far beyond what the mass of the Iraqi population supports. In addition, the coalition faces the challenge that virtually all of the political parties now prominent in office have been weakened with the exception of the OMS, which appears to be growing in strength. The OMS is also the best organized and has the strongest grass-roots appeal of any major party, which is unfortunate, because its aims are entirely sectarian and anti-American. There do not appear now to be any trends that promise to ameliorate this situation, despite the fact that the military arm of the OMS is under great pressure from the coalition, from individual Iraqi leaders, and from internal dissension. Nevertheless, Sadr has



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maneuvered skillfully to distance himself from his militia publicly and also to disclaim responsibility for the incapacity of a government his supporters dominate. His recent skill in this regard, in marked contrast to his past record, suggests that he might be receiving expert advice and guidance from his current hosts.

There appear to be four possible ways of confronting this challenge. First, the coalition can work to re-associate Sadr with the activities of his militias, particularly in their more violent and extreme forms, as a way of attempting to discredit him as the perpetuator of sectarian violence that is increasingly unpopular with the Iraqi people. Second, the coalition can work to associate Sadr closely with [1.4b] conducting a significant IO campaign that relies on available [1.4b, 1.4d] to JAM and Sadr's presence in [1.4b]. This campaign would play to the hypocrisy of his simultaneous claim to be a champion of Iraqi nationalism and his actions as an [1.4b]. Third, the coalition can work to identify local charismatic Shi'ite leaders and help them to develop effective and well-organized political organizations with which to challenge Sadr within the Shi'a community. The extant political parties and personalities are unlikely to be effective in this role, although they should not be excluded from careful consideration. Fourth, the coalition can work to bring Sadr into the fold through some combination of carrots and sticks, although this prospect appears to be the least plausible and most dangerous.

In the short term, of course, resolutions to this problem are not available, and the coalition will have to work with the current Iraqi political scene in some form. Coalition leaders and advisors suffer in their efforts from their own perception that they lack any effective leverage with their Iraqi counterparts. It is true that coalition does not have the degree of leverage that might be desired, but it is not the case that the coalition has no leverage at all. Coalition forces are increasingly in control of much of the Iraqi capital, and most of Central Iraq's key cities and regions. In a certain sense, coalition leverage will never be higher than it is in such conditions, and coalition leaders should not be bashful about using this very real de facto control to press for necessary changes. In addition, Iraq is now completely defenseless against its neighbors, and is unlikely to be able to defend itself realistically for many years. The continued survival of an Iraqi state can result only from American defense guarantees, almost certainly combined with the continued presence of American soldiers—or alternatively, from the complete subjugation of Iraq to [1.4b] a prospect that will be extremely unpopular with the overwhelming majority of Iraqis. Therefore, the coalition can work to gain more leverage with the current Iraqi government by using the possibility of a meaningful, long-term defense guarantee or, alternatively, by withdrawing that prospect.

*Leverage*  
In addition, there is more complexity in the Iraqi political system than many coalition leaders appear to recognize. The composition and political functioning of the CoR and the Iraqi government in general is not as well understood as it should be. The coalition should have detailed biographies and knowledge bases about every member of the CoR, every senior ministerial official, every senior IA and NP officer. This knowledge base should serve to assist coalition interlocutors as they attempt to work legislative and bureaucratic issues through Iraqi institutions. The security guarantee may provide a useful tool for persuading the Iraqi government to request and support a continuation of the current UNSCR agreement, but it should be used to gain more than that if at all possible. The coalition should make every effort in the next few months to use available leverage and to find ways to generate additional leverage in order to move the current Iraqi government in the right direction, which will inevitably require presiding in some way over significant changes to the composition and functioning of that government. Now is not the time to consider actually changing the government through any means.



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Another important way to change the Iraqi political system is provincial elections, but this issue is fraught with complexity and danger. It is certain that elections held soon, on the basis of the previous election law with minor modifications, and on the basis of the current system of national lists will be counter-productive and will seriously undermine coalition efforts by strengthening the power of malign actors and continuing to disenfranchise the growing community of moderate leaders who are emerging. The most obvious approach would appear to be conducting provincial elections on a rolling basis, and on a district basis. There are considerable obstacles to such an approach, including the difficulty of conducting a census rapidly and accurately, the opposition of UNAMI and international elections monitors generally to such an approach, and the tensions that will arise from prioritizing some areas over others. In principle, one would like to see early elections in Anbar, Diyala, Ninewah, and Salah-ad-Din in order to empower the Sunni leaders who are now stepping forward and create provincial leadership in mixed areas that is actually representative. There is a certain tendency to want to make Anbar a model and test-bed for such an exercise. This tendency should be resisted, because it is difficult objectively to explain why only the Sunni in Anbar should receive the benefit of new elections. It is much easier to argue for rolling elections on the grounds of redressing the sectarian discrepancy that resulted from the Sunni refusal to participate in the 2005 elections in the first place.

Elections held soon in the south would almost certainly give the OMS significant gains at the expense of SCIRI, Fadhila, and Dawa, which is undesirable. However, holding elections in the Sunni areas is very likely to lead to demands from the Sadrists to conduct simultaneous elections in the southern provinces for exactly that reason, and the Sadrists are in the best position to exert considerable pressure both politically and through public demonstrations and violence to insist on their view. Finally, there is the problem of Kirkuk. We did not travel to that region and were not able to discuss it in any detail with anyone, and so cannot offer informed opinions beyond the obvious observation that the timing of elections in Kirkuk is certain to be highly charged. Deciding upon which course of action to take is difficult, and must rely on solid analysis of the feasibility of various approaches and the likely outcomes of elections at various times. The changing status of the OMS over time is something that must be studied and extrapolated. At the same time, it is urgent to come to a consensus within the coalition about the desired approach because of the impending change in the leadership of UNAMI. If the coalition desires to conduct rolling elections on a district basis or even nation-wide elections on a district basis—something that will inevitably lead to greater confusion and less perfect electoral processes—it will be essential for the U.S. to press for a new UNAMI head that will be supportive of such an approach. Our discussions with personnel at USM-I suggest strongly that the Embassy is working toward nation-wide elections on a list basis at an early date because it is the easiest way to produce a quick apparent success. In reality, this is almost certainly the worst possible and most dangerous solution to this problem and should be resisted.

Provincial elections serve several purposes potentially. They can definitely empower local leaders, enfranchise the Sunni community, and buy time by showing concrete progress toward reconciliation. It is less clear that they by themselves will lead to greater integration between local communities and the national government. In fact, it is quite possible that elections that are effective in empowering good local leaders will lead at first to even greater distance between the national government, which remains highly sectarian and ineffective, and increasingly representative and effective local governments. Pressures already in the southern provinces between Sadrists and non-Sadrist provincial leaders suggest that the Sadrists in the national government will work actively to hinder the delivery of services even to Shi'a provinces if they are controlled by non-Sadrists. It is a fact that even in Shi'a provinces now, provincial leaders regularly complain about the failure of the national government to provide services, which appears to be a reflection of the government's continuing incapacity. It is worth noting this point well to remember that although sectarianism plays an important role in the denial of services to Sunni



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communities, it is not the only factor. There is also the problem, finally, that modern Iraq was built to be a centralized state in which the central government provides most key services to all Iraqis. Empowering local governments with their own processes for developing and executing budgets is desirable, but will at least initially lead to tensions between local governments and the national government, and even between local governments and their people as expectations are not met.

### **Operational Issues**

The operational concept overall is clearly sound. Engaging both JAM and AQI in both Baghdad and the belts is essential. Managing the situation in Diyala is important, although we need to be realistic about what we can achieve there while Baghdad is the main effort. We are accepting risk in the north and south in order to concentrate on the center. The risk in the south seems to us to be acceptable; we were not in the north and so cannot offer an informed opinion on that risk.

There are certain tensions within the operation, however, that seem to be causing some confusion to lower-level commanders. Operations in the belts are different in purpose and technique from operations in Baghdad, and commanders must be clear with their subordinates about their major focuses and methods. Clear-and-hold is a good method in Baghdad, but is not always appropriate in areas outside where the main mission is to interdict the flow of fighters and supplies to the capital. There are some pressures within MNF-I that drive toward a homogeneous approach to mission analysis and the development of subordinate operational concepts. The COIN academy is in general excellent and vital, and it clearly tries very hard to prepare units appropriately for their projected battlespace. Nevertheless, the curriculum focuses very heavily on COIN techniques and principles that are not always of primary importance to subordinate units in particular areas and can help foster excessive homogeneity of approach. It is important to emphasize there and elsewhere that not all units are conducting COIN operations all the time, even if the command as a whole is continually engaged in COIN. Some small units appear to feel pressure to establish JSSs and COPs as a priority, requiring increased troop densities in parts of their AORs, even at the expense of covering sufficient battlespace to interdict enemy LOCs. Some units focus on ensuring that there are progress bars moving along all six LOOs all the time, even when their AORs really require progress only along some. These are generally unit leadership issues, but they can be assisted with clear guidance from the commands and from the COIN academy about the need first to identify the unit's core mission and then to choose among possible approaches. MNF-I should also be alert to the tendency for local commanders and local Iraqi leaders to want to run mini-FaQs because of the perceived success of FaQ in Baghdad or because of the value and priority that MNF-I places on such an approach. In the areas where we observed this trend so far, particularly in Diwaniyah (where I believe they actually called the operation Fardh al Qanoon), its application was appropriate. But the mindset that favors this approach may lead to its inappropriate application in other areas.

We observed a number of problems, both in terms of force density and in terms of the orientation and methodology of certain units within their battlespace, along the Kut LOC. We believe that these problems are recognized by higher commands and will be dealt with as additional units arrive in theater.

Another unintended consequence of the excellent program at Taji is to reinforce in the minds of some commanders who arrived in theater last year the belief that their mission is to transition to Iraqi control as rapidly as possible. Some are even still saying that transition is the fastest way to establish security. In this way, in a few cases, the current strategy is being subsumed by a mindset formed under the previous strategy, and a few units are therefore allocating their focus excessively on transition and insufficiently on securing the population. This problem can probably be resolved fairly easily with



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clear guidance from higher command echelons and an emphasis on security as the criterion by which unit success will be measured rather than progress toward transition or along other LOOs.

### **Specific Recommendations**

*Detainee Policy.* MG Stone has made a number of excellent recommendations for changing our detainee policy, and they should be implemented as rapidly and completely as possible in our view. Simply holding detainees indefinitely on a large scale is clearly unacceptable. But releasing detainees back into the community on a large scale would be disastrous. When Sunni detainees are released, especially into mixed areas, they completely undermine the population's belief that either the coalition or the Iraqi government will protect them from terrorists, and thereby create fertile ground for militia activity and inchoate sectarian violence as the Shi'ite community tries to defend itself. Such actions also appear to validate the arguments of malign political actors who claim that the coalition is either complicit in the Sunni conspiracy to dominate Iraq or else is incompetent and that the Shi'a community must take matters into its own hands. MG Stone's insight that detainee policy is a core element of any sound COIN strategy is brilliant and should be applied.

- *Iraqi Army Size.* The IA is clearly too small. If nothing else, coalition forces will be reduced substantially within the next few years, if not sooner, and the IA as it is currently constituted cannot possibly maintain security in such an event. The proposed doubling of the force in three years is on the right track, but almost certainly inadequate. The increase must come sooner, and the ultimate end strength must almost certainly be larger. That said, we have seen and heard no analysis from either the Iraqis or from the coalition that supports any particular end strength for the IA. Such an analysis should be undertaken as rapidly as possible, and used as the basis for both short-term and long-term planning of IA growth. We should not be constrained in this exercise by a priori assumptions about what Iraq can afford. The United States provides billions of dollars in foreign military assistance to many countries in this region that are both less threatened and less central to the war on terror than is Iraq. We should assume in our planning that America's leaders will be sufficiently responsible to provide Iraq with military assistance, both financial and practical, for as long as Iraq remains an ally.
- *Iraqi Army Equipment.* We have heard from many sources, both coalition and Iraqi, that the IA badly needs to use the FMS program to purchase heavy equipment. Iraqi leaders at all levels express dismay that their forces often seem to be outgunned by the enemy. This appears to be true in areas where the IA is operating independently against JAM forces armed with 1.4b. They urgently require mortars and FA, counter-battery radars, and a larger number of armored vehicles, as well as IED-detection equipment and engineer assets. In our view, the growing reliability of this force and its importance for the long-term stability of Iraq and of the region should overcome any lingering concerns about providing them with what they need to survive in this war. We have also heard requests from Iraqis for assistance with developing an air force. We do not believe that this would be an effective use of anyone's resources at this point, since it will be many years before an Iraqi Air Force can be relevant in this fight, because the coalition is more than able to provide all the air support the Iraqis need, and because it is in our interest for the Iraqis to be reliant upon us for this essential capability.

*Iraqi Army Health Care.* We also received a number of complaints from Iraqi commanders at various levels about their health care system, which is virtually non-existent. As a matter of priority, we should help them to establish secure medical facilities and particularly secure recovery facilities in which their soldiers can recuperate without fear of being killed by insurgents or militias.

*Advisors.* We do not at this point support proposals to increase the size of MiTT teams dramatically. Important though they are, we do not believe that the pain that such an increase would inflict upon the



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American officer corps is justified by the benefit that would be received. On the other hand, we do believe that NPTTs should be increased (we heard a proposal for an increase of around 600 officers), but with caveats. NPTTs must understand clearly that their mission is not simply to enable their NP unit to perform well. They must also be constantly alert to sectarianism, must report it, and must work to curtail its illegal effects and to mitigate its technically legal manifestations. In some cases, it will probably be necessary to work to disband NP units that are irretrievably corrupted rather than attempting to re-blue them and/or embed NPTTs with them.

*IDPs.* The IDP situation in Iraq is extraordinarily complicated, and we do not believe that the coalition understands it adequately. It is well known that victims of forced or coerced migration tend to become radicalized and tend to radicalize the populations among which they settle. In many cases in Iraq, IDPs have moved from one area to another, and displaced inhabitants from their new neighborhood, creating a chain of radicalized migrants. This phenomenon has also created a small number of neighborhoods that consist almost entirely of transient populations. These neighborhoods pose significant challenges in collecting intelligence and establishing any degree of normalcy even after clearing operations create basic security. We did not see any coalition units attempting to track the movement of IDPs into or out of their neighborhoods in a systematic fashion, but we believe that such tracking is essential and must be standardized across the theater. It is also vital to support any resettlement policy that might be adopted in accord with the public statements of the Prime Minister and General Aboud.

*Census.* It is clearly vital from many perspectives that we assist the GoI in conducting a census (or that we conduct a census) as rapidly as possible. We observed one company that had developed what seemed to be an excellent TTP for doing so (sent under separate cover), and we recommend that this approach, suitably modified, be disseminated throughout MND-B at least. Beginning a census soon will facilitate conducting district-based rather than list-based elections later, and will be critical in overcoming UNAMI and other international and Embassy objections to attempting such a feat. It is also essential to evaluate the fairness of the distribution of GoI services and to demonstrate to the GoI inequities in its performance as they appear.

*Strategic Effects.* We have spoken extensively with the various organizations involved in Strateffects and IO. We strongly recommend, to begin with, that brigades be given release authority for IO products. It is essential to enable the commander on the scene to react to incidents and to enemy IO campaigns instantly. The enemy is regularly defeating us in this realm, and we are paying a very high price across the board. In addition, we believe that the PAOs from Force level down to division level should be willing to accept risk in return for more timely release of information. At present, PAOs appear to be unwilling to accept any risk, and insist upon investigations of every incident to ensure 100% accuracy before they release anything. This approach virtually ensures that PAO reactions to significant events will be irrelevant and will have minimal effect on public perception either in Iraq or outside. MNF-I is accepting significant risk throughout its AOR in almost every undertaking but this one, and at the moment, this arena is one of the most decisive fronts in this war. We understand and fully support the distinction between IO and PA. The recommendation about PA above aims at allowing MNF-I and its subordinate commands to get truth to the American and Iraqi people in a timely fashion, not to spin any story or offer any sort of deception. It is not deception or spin, however, to release a report rapidly, with the caveat that it is an interim or initial report that can subsequently be followed-up, expanded, or corrected. Neither is it IO to offer an actual story, context, and background when presenting information. Too often PAO restricts its release of information to bare facts about particular incidents. The net result of such an approach is to produce an erroneous impression of events on the ground in the minds of most Americans who are neither sufficiently expert nor sufficiently willing to take the time to put all the pieces together to understand how any given event fits into the



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larger picture.

*Evidence Packets.* Excellent work is being done by the Rule of Law TF and also at the BOCAT on preparing TTPs and forms to assist both Iraqis and American forces in the collection and processing of evidence packets from the initial point of capture to the completion of a packet that can support prosecution and conviction. These efforts should be disseminated throughout MNF-I as rapidly as possible and reinforced with strong messages from commanders at all levels. U.S. soldiers observing illegal activities by Iraqi units should automatically prepare evidence packets on the relevant individuals and there should be a clear procedure for transmitting these packets up the chain to the appropriate level for action.

*Extra-Constitutional Organizations.* We have observed the antipathy with which many coalition leaders view the various extra-constitutional and technically illegal command arrangements the Iraqi government has established and is proposing to establish. We are not certain that the motives behind these Iraqi actions are necessarily malign, although it is clear that some of these organizations are being used to pursue sectarian agendas. Nevertheless, we feel that it would be wiser for the coalition to accept these organizations once they have been established and to partner advisory teams with them in order to observe them and hinder any inappropriate activities in which they might engage. This effort may lead to the proliferation of such organizations as malign elements in the GoI work to create precisely such unobserved groups, but we should persevere with efforts to hug each one closely. On the other hand, it does not seem at all inappropriate for the Iraqis to desire a corps level command, and organizations like the BOC and the proposed DOC can de facto serve such a function. The issue lies less in the organization chart than in the manner of functioning of these institutions, something that we can only observe and effect if we are partnered with them.