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GOC MND(SE) - IRAQ UPDATE - 19 AUGUST 2004

SUMMARY

MND (SE)

1. There has been a significant mood change over the past week and a marked deterioration in the security situation in the South East. The operational environment has become less permissive and more restrictive. 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% over the previous peak in April 2004. These attacks have become more sophisticated and more lethal. Over the past ten days 1 Dutch and 3 British soldiers have been killed. In April there were no deaths from hostile forces.

2. The rise in attacks is the result of the tensions and confrontation in Najaf. In MND(SE) Moqtada al-Sadr sympathisers have become more aggressive, particularly against us and have intensified their intimidation of moderate or non-committed Iraqis. They have successfully prevented a large part of the Southern Oil Company HQ employees from working. They have shown a capacity, absent in the past, to sustain the tempo of their operations. The result has been that Moqtada sympathisers have become more confident and are able to operate unhindered by the local police and security forces in large areas of Basra and Maysan provinces. Local police and security structures have either ignored or in some cases collaborated in militia activity. The fragility of ISF has been exposed by this crisis.

OUR RESPONSE

3. 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. I intend to gradually hem the hard-core elements into the very limited space from which they plan and congregate. We will also be equipped and prepared to respond robustly to attacks, and will arrest and intern anyone who is considered an imperative threat to security. At the same time we will re-establish the contacts with the police and others which have been disrupted over the past weeks. There is no evidence of widespread or deep support for Moqtada, in the police or the population at large. Their loyalties have come under pressure as they watch the events unfold in

Najaf, presented in much of the Arab media as a led by the American occupiers, with whom we are closely associated.

4. My ability to sustain our response will depend on the outcome in Najaf. A relatively peaceful outcome will allow us to regain ground and continue the progress made in security sector reform. A violent outcome, with damage to the holy sites will result in a continuation and escalation of the violence here, and managing it will necessarily be our first priority.

{Signed on JOCS}

W R ROLLO
MAJ GEN
GOC MND (SE)