

## Delegation Observations from Baghdad

### Background

- 6.1 The delegation concluded its visit to Iraq with a day and a half in the capital, Baghdad. The delegation flew to Baghdad from Camp Smitty in Al Muthanna province with the assistance of the US Army, who provided three Blackhawk helicopters and a pair of escorting helicopter gunships.
- 6.2 The delegation flew direct to the centre of Baghdad to the International Zone (or as it is often called in the media the Baghdad Green Zone). The International Zone occupies the leadership and ceremonial district established by the former regime. It is home to several palaces, the former Baath Party Headquarters and the famous Rashid Hotel. It is now home to the Interim National Assembly and a number of the new Government Ministries as well as the new site of the US, British and Australian embassies.
- 6.3 In the immediate aftermath of the defeat of the former regime the Coalition Provisional Authority, under the charge of US Ambassador Paul Bremer, made its base in one of the largest of Saddam Hussein's ceremonial palaces. Since that time the institutions of the newly democratic nation have grown slowly from this site. The Australian embassy recently moved to a site close to the centre of the zone after being earlier located at the site of the former Australian Chancellery, in the Karada district outside the International Zone. This site became untenable when it was subject to attack by anti-coalition forces using a Vehicle Based Improvised Explosive Device (VBIED or car bomb). The new embassy is in a property formally owned by one of Hussein's sons which was secured by ADF personnel in the immediate aftermath of combat operations.

## Conduct of the Visit

- 6.4 The visit program in Baghdad was very full. It was conducted as follows:
- The delegation were met on arrival in the International Zone by the personnel of the Baghdad Security Detachment in ASLAV and taken to the Australian Embassy to change into business attire;
  - The delegation then travelled with the Ambassador, Mr Howard Brown, to the Iraqi Transitional National Assembly (TNA) where they met with the Speaker Mr Hajim al Hassani and members of the TNA. At the conclusion of the meeting the delegation leader, the Hon Mr Scott MP and the Australian National Commander, Commodore Geoff Ledger, gave a media interview to a local Iraqi news services;
  - The delegation returned to the embassy for lunch with the ambassador, his key staff and selected senior embedded Defence officers;
  - The delegation then toured the remainder of the International Zone and was shown the capabilities of the SECDET personnel and vehicles. The delegation stood on the famous balcony on which Saddam Hussein waved his gun over his parading military formations and then posed for a photo under the crossed swords marking the commencement of the Regime victory parade;
  - The delegation had a brief afternoon tea with the soldiers of the SECDET before flying by US helicopter to the HQ of the Multi-National Forces Command - Iraq;
  - On arrival at the Al Faw Palace (or Camp Victory) the delegation met with US General George Casey, Commander of coalition forces;
  - The delegation then spent the night in temporary accommodation at the camp before receiving a classified briefing from the staff of the Australian National Headquarters.

## The Iraqi Transitional National Assembly

- 6.5 After the Hussein Regime was deposed by the coalition in 2003, a governing council set up by the Coalition Provisional Authority signed an interim constitution for Iraq which called for the election of a transitional National Assembly no later than the end of January 2005. This Assembly was to draft a permanent constitution which would then be submitted to approval by the Iraqi people in a general referendum.
- 6.6 Elections for this transitional National Assembly took place on January 30, 2005. The United Iraqi Alliance (UIA) Party won 48% of the popular vote,

resulting in 140 seats in the Assembly. Eighty-five members of the assembly are women.

- 6.7 Talks between the UIA and other parties to form a coalition government began soon after the election. The assembly had its first meeting on March 16, 2005. After weeks of negotiations between the dominant political parties, on April 4 2005, Sunni Arab Hajim al-Hassani was chosen as speaker; Shiite Hussain Shahrstani and Kurd Aref Taifour were elected as his top deputies. The Assembly elected Jalal Talabani to head the Presidency Council on April 6, and approved the selection of Ibrahim al-Jaafari and his cabinet on April 28.
- 6.8 The delegation met with the Speaker, Mr Hajim al Hassani, at the Iraqi National Assembly in Baghdad. Mr al Hassani is a moderate Sunni Arab and relative outsider, having spent much of his life in the United States. He was identified as a compromise candidate for the speaker's post after weeks of deadlock between Iraqi political parties. Al-Hassani had previously been a member of the Iraqi Islamic Party in exile and was industry minister under the interim government of Iyad Allawi.

Figure 6.1 The Hon Mr Bruce Baird MP and Hon Warren Snowdon MP meet with members of the Iraqi Interim National Assembly in Baghdad



- 6.9 Mr al Hassani received the delegation for an extended meeting. Some of his observations were as follows:
- The Speaker observed that the members of the new Parliament are learning the conduct of democratic practice “from scratch”. They have no experience of the processes required to conduct democratic exchange, to establish and conduct an executive Government and to

hold an executive to account, using a process of Parliamentary scrutiny. He indicated that he would welcome a Parliamentary exchange with the Australian Parliament to observe how Australia manages these issues.

- Mr al Hassani echoed the position stated by the Governor of Al Muthanna province when he said that Iraqis were frustrated by the lack of progress with reconstruction. He understood that western aid organisations and businesses would be discouraged by the impression of a lack of security for reconstruction tasks but he regarded this as a shallow view of Iraq. He encouraged the delegation to view Iraq's regions differently with the north and south as largely stable and "open for business". He understood that reconstruction operations in the central region or Sunni triangle would remain problematic for some time yet.
- The Assembly is seeking support from western countries to pressure Iraq's neighbours diplomatically to reduce uncontrolled or illegal movement across shared borders. Many of the suicide bombers causing terrible damage to the Iraqi population are foreign fighters arriving in Iraq through neighbouring countries.
- The Assembly would also welcome access to Australia's universities for Iraq's students. He described the advantage for the young people of Iraq in experiencing for themselves the advantage of living in a peaceful and stable democracy.
- Mr al Hassani understood Australia's expertise in dry continent agriculture. He identified this as a specific area in which Iraq would welcome Australian assistance.
- Mr al Hassani expressed his confidence in the democratic process. He described the Constitutional Referendum, the results of which had just been announced, as a great success. The electoral participation of the Sunni population was identified as a particular key to the success of the vote.
- Mr al Hassani expressed his gratitude for Australia's ongoing involvement in the coalition to reconstruct Iraq.

## **Current Operations**

### **Headquarters Joint Task Force 633 (JTF 633)**

- 6.10 Headquarters Australian JTF 633 exercises National Command over Australian Defence Force maritime, land and air elements deployed in the Middle East.

- 6.11 ADF military operations are normally conducted by one or more JTFs. A JTF for a particular contingency will be assembled from ready forces to meet the specific needs of an operation. The size and composition of a JTF Headquarters will be influenced by such things as force composition, mission, political considerations, concurrent operations, geographic location and coalition partnering arrangements. The aim when determining the best structure must be to make the command chain as simple, unambiguous and unified as possible.
- 6.12 To ensure that commanders at various levels are given command and or control of assigned forces commensurate with their level of responsibility, the ADF uses 'States of Command' to assign authority. These States of Command describe the degree of authority which exists between headquarters in Australia, Joint Task Forces, Task Groups, and formations or units.
- 6.13 The Commander JTF 633, Commodore Geoff Ledger, has a number of command authorities over assigned forces. The delegation was briefed on the implications of three of these:
- National Command. National Command is a standing authority conferred upon the senior Australian operational commander in the area of operations. Its purpose is to safeguard Australian national interests in coalition operations. This is sometimes referred to as exercising the National 'Red Card' when a proposed coalition tasking does not accord with the mission or Rules of Engagement (ROE) directed by Government at the time of deployment. Exercising the National Red Card prevents mission creep for Australian task groups and ensures Australian forces adhere to defensive ROE.
  - Tactical Command. Tactical Command allows a commander to specify a mission or task to subordinate units as long as they comply with the broad intent of the Government as directed by the CDF. Commander JTF633 has this level of command over those assets allocated to the operation that specifically support Australian interest such as the Baghdad Security Detachment. These forces do not respond to coalition tasking.
  - Operational Control. Most other Australian force elements are assigned under the operational control of the coalition. Operational control allows coalition commanders, such as the British Division HQ with authority over the AMTG, to direct assigned or attached forces but limited by function, time or location, all of which are agreed in advance.
- 6.14 To exercise his National Command Commodore Ledger has a staff of approximately 60 personnel. The Headquarters is divided using the standard defence functions as follows:

- J0 Command Spt Cell, comprising the Chief of Staff and the Command Sergeant Major;
- J1/4, personnel and logistics;
- J2, intelligence;
- J3, operations;
- J5, planning; and
- J6, communications and information systems.

6.15 The principal staff officers in each of these areas briefed delegates on their role and processes during a tour of the Headquarters. The J2 and J3, the principal operational staff officers, provided the delegation with classified briefings on their own impressions of the counter insurgency operation in Iraq and likely future scenarios.

## The Baghdad Security Detachment

6.16 Australian diplomatic and military staffs in Baghdad are protected by the Baghdad Security Detachment (SECDET). SECDET has distinguished itself in the period since the end of conventional conflict. They have successfully protected the Australian Diplomatic staff from attack while facilitating the conduct of diplomatic operations. They have conducted many hundreds of foot and vehicle patrols through the city, earning the trust of the locals amongst whom they have lived.

Figure 6.2 Delegates pose with SECDET personnel and ASLAV under the ceremonial arch of the Hussein Regime victory parade in the International Zone, Baghdad



- 6.17 The detachment has been attacked at least twice. The first, a VBIED attack on an ASLAV patrol near the former Chancellery, wounded a number of soldiers and seriously wounded their commander, Lieutenant Callender. The second attack was a VBIED attack on the SECDET patrol base and accommodation facility next door to the Chancellery. A number of soldiers received relatively minor wounds in this attack but the building defences otherwise worked very well.
- 6.18 SECDET has recently relocated to the International Zone where it shares the former Baath Party Headquarters building with similarly tasked US units. SECDET is currently Commanded by Major Malcom Wells and its structure comprises the following elements
- A small HQ reinforced with intelligence and information systems personnel;
  - An infantry element for conducting dismounted security patrols and conducting static security of Australian facilities, including the Embassy;
  - A cavalry element, mounted in ASLAVs, for patrol and escort tasks outside the International Zone; and
  - A Military Police Close Personal Protection Team with specific responsibility for the safety of the Australian Ambassador.

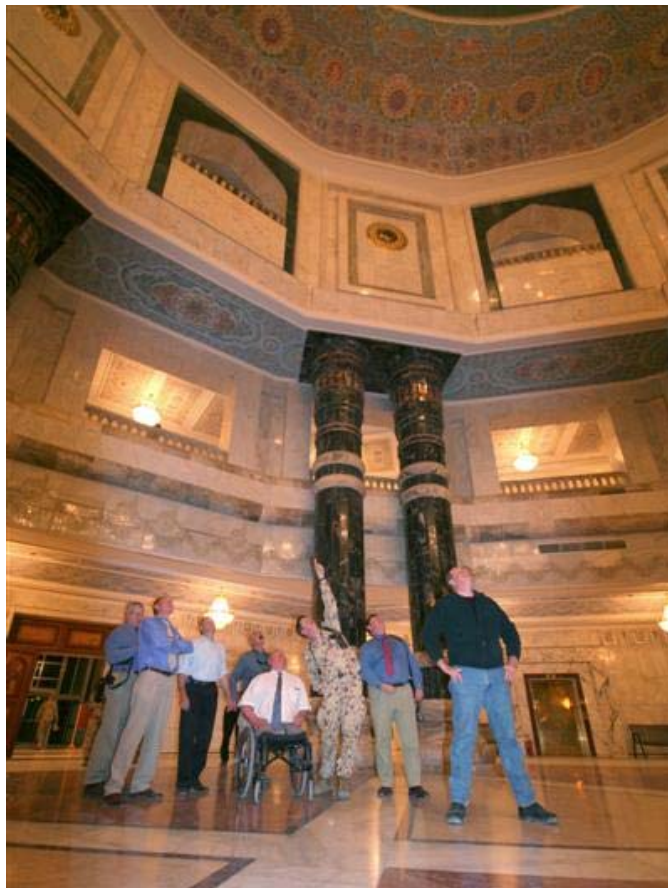
### **Multi National Forces Command – Iraq (MNF-I)**

- 6.19 The delegation met with the Commander of all coalition forces in Iraq, US General (four star) George Casey. General Casey had discussions with the delegation in his office in the former Hussein Regime Palace known as the Al Faw Palace. The Palace, a massive, ornate facility was built by the former Regime to mark the occasion of its 'victory' over Iran on the Al Faw peninsular near Basrah. It has since been converted into one of the most sophisticated command and control facilities in the world.
- 6.20 MNF-I is a strategic level HQ, meaning General Casey's task is to operate at the political - military interface. He is charged with supporting the emerging democratic process, the development of indigenous Iraqi Security Forces, and setting the broad military objectives for the fighting force commanders in the country. As the Australian National Commander in Iraq, Commander JTF633 interacts directly with General Casey.
- 6.21 MNF-I military operations are conducted through a standing US Army Corps Headquarters capable of commanding multiple Division sized organisations. To put this in some perspective the entire Australian regular Army combat component equates to a single reinforced Division. The US Corps HQ commands subordinate Divisions which are allocated

responsibility for large portions of Iraq. Their responsibilities include security, training the new Iraqi security forces and administering large portions of the reconstruction program. The subordinate Divisions include the following:

- The Multi National Division – South East: a British led Division comprising Dutch, Italian and Australian forces (Al Muthana Task Group) based in the Shiite south.
- Multi National Division - Central South: a Polish led Division which includes a Ukrainian Brigade centred on Babylon and the Shiite religious heartland south of Baghdad.
- Multi National Force – North West: includes the South Korean contribution and is based in the predominantly Kurdish North.
- Multi National Divisions North Central and Baghdad: two large US Divisions with responsibility for the most contested areas in Iraq.
- Multi National Force – West: a predominantly US formation tasked with closing the infiltration routes from neighbouring countries to the west.

Figure 6.3 Delegates view the entrance to the Al Faw Palace, a former Regime palace now home to General Casey's Headquarters MNF-I





6.22 General Casey spoke at length with the delegation. He explored a range of issues, including expanding on his recent testimony to the US Congressional Committees. Some of his main observations were as follows:

- General Casey expanded on his statement to the US Congressional Committees that only a single Iraqi Army Battalion was capable of independent operations. He described the progress of developing Iraqi Army units through a three phase transition process from being under the control of coalition forces through to complete independence. In the first phase Iraqi forces were completely subordinate to the coalition, operating only as small teams within larger US formations. He explained to the delegation that this phase has largely passed. In the second phase, in which the majority of Iraqi units currently fall, Iraqi units have operational authority over large areas of Iraq but rely on the coalition for specialist support. This support includes planning, logistics, intelligence and air support.
- This description accurately reflects the status of Iraqi forces in the Al Muthanna province. Before Iraqi forces transition to complete independence they will need support building the remaining skill sets. General Casey commented that Australia's recent efforts in establishing a logistics training centre were extremely valuable in this regard and that Al Muthanna was one of the provinces closest to being ready for complete transition to Iraqi control.
- General Casey expanded on his view of the insurgency. He explained that insurgent attacks were now less frequent in Iraq but the attacks were more lethal. He explained this was not an unexpected outcome as the coalition had killed or captured many of the less skilful members of the insurgency while those that remained were now hardened by the conflict. He explained how Iraqi insurgents were using international Jihadists as fodder, setting up lethal attacks and then using those willing to die to conduct the attacks. The current coalition emphasis is on preventing the uncontrolled movement of foreign fighters across shared borders.
- The insurgency was described as having three parts. The majority part, which General Casey called the centre section of the bell curve, comprised 'rejectionists' or Iraqi nationalists who simply wanted the coalition to leave Iraq. General Casey described how this group needed to be managed until the coalition departed but that he did not expect this group to pose a major problem for the Iraqi Security Forces after coalition forces departed. At the extremes of the bell curve are two groups the coalition believes they must defeat before they depart. The first, the international terror groups such as al - Qa'ida, were the current

focus of coalition operations and are reported to be responsible for the majority of high profile attacks. The final group described by General Casey are the Shiite religious extremists. This group, he explained, had the ability to ignite large portions of southern Iraq into violent action within very short time frames if left unchecked.

- Like Speaker al Hassani, General Casey was very pleased with the outcome of the referendum on the Iraqi Constitution. He was particularly pleased with the voter turn-out amongst the Sunni population, who he believed were now aware that their earlier electoral boycott had been a mistake, leaving them without adequate representation.
- The delegation asked General Casey for his thoughts on the likelihood that the Japanese might withdraw their forces early in 2006. General Casey did not offer an opinion on the Japanese, rather he stated that he accepted that each member of the coalition needed to act in a manner that achieved their national interest. He then stated that additional Australian forces would be more than welcome because of their first tier skill levels in operating in a demanding counter insurgency environment.

## Observations

6.23 The delegation made the following observations in Baghdad;

- The Australian doctrine in relation to National Command has been one of the keys to the success of the Australian military contribution to both the offensive phase of operations during Operation Falconer, and now the defensive phase – Operation Catalyst. The ability, and willingness, of the senior Australian military officer in the theatre to ensure that allied tasking requests meet Australia’s Rules of Engagement has ensured that all actions involving Australia in the theatre have supported Australia’s national objectives and successive commanders are to be commended for their diligence in this regard.
- The ADF support to the protection of Australian diplomatic operations in Baghdad is world class. Without the professional and courageous actions of successive Baghdad Security Detachments Australian Diplomatic operations would have ceased as the insurgency grew.
- Equally, the courage and determination of the Ambassadors and staffs of the Australian Representative Office and now the Australian Embassy to conduct business in the chaos of post war Iraq has been particularly noteworthy. That they have continued to function has not

been lost on the emerging Iraqi Government and institutions and will earn Australia great credit with Iraq for many years to come.

- The Australian National Headquarters in Baghdad is a valuable asset. It clearly enables the Australian Commander of JTF633, Commodore Ledger to exercise his National Command responsibilities. It also appears to be a valuable filter for Australia to enable the Australian military to provide the Government an accurate view of events on the ground in Iraq. The delegation welcomed the opportunity to receive an insight into this independent view.

## Final Comments

- 6.24 The visit was a remarkable opportunity to meet with the soldiers, sailors and air men and women of the ADF involved in this most complex of military operations. The delegation is now able to better understand the nature of the operations in which they are engaged and to appreciate the circumstances and environment in which they are operating.
- 6.25 Although they are working in chaotic and frequently dangerous conditions and in an oppressive climate the members of the ADF are performing their duties with pride, commitment and professionalism. The members of the ADF from all three services are performing with distinction and attracting great credit to themselves, their service, the ADF and to Australia.
- 6.26 The visit was also an important opportunity to convey directly to all the personnel deployed to the Middle East, the bipartisan support of the Parliament for their performance under such demanding conditions. The service men and women are aware that differences of opinion exist in Australia about the merits of Australia's involvement in operations in Iraq. These differences do not impact on the regard with which our service people are held by the majority of members of the Parliament and the Australian public.

**Bruce Scott, MP**

**Delegation Leader**