



Behind the Lines

By Colonel Mike Dewar

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Policy issues

Iraq Report

Those pictures

These have been testing times for British Forces in Iraq. Probably very wisely the MoD has released only very sparse information on the operational situation there.

The situation in MND (SE) is currently extremely unpleasant, with one newly arrived Infantry Company Commander reporting 15 'contacts' in 14 days adding that his reactions were circumscribed by the Rules of Engagement. The MoD is releasing virtually no details about the wounded.

British troops continue to patrol either on foot or in soft skin landrovers. There are plans to introduce so called 'snatch' vehicles, which do have some armour plating.

One of the battalions currently deployed in Iraq is IRHF. They have a total of 310 personnel in Iraq, a rifle company deployed to the Falkland Islands and headquarter elements remaining in Cyprus.

Interestingly 1st Regiment, Royal House Artillery (1RHA) is about to deploy to Iraq. The Regiment will leave its 155mm AS90 self-propelled guns in the UK and, presumably, act in the infantry role. This tactic was used in Northern Ireland in the 70s and 80s at the height of the Emergency. It is an interesting

development that the MoD has had to resort to this measure again.

It did not need the expertise of a military man or indeed of a professional photographer to work out that the Daily Mirror photographs were a hoax. Only a newspaper that wanted them to be true would have been so easily



fooled. 1QLR are understandably relieved that their honour has been restored. Even The Officer was under fire for its Jan/Feb issue showing 1QLR operating in the Basra area. The photo (above) showing a soldier grabbing an Iraqi by the t-shirt who had just been arrested was the subject of intense questioning by a number of journalists – one really does wonder which planet some of these media people inhabit.

Afghanistan

Slow progress

The Defence Secretary stated recently that the UK had about 460 personnel deployed to Afghanistan. 360 are serving with the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) and the remainder (about 100) are with the US-led coalition. Those with the US include 90 with the Provincial Reconstruction Team in Mazar-e-Sharif.

In a written statement the Armed Forces' Minister said that the UK had told NATO that it was prepared to lead the ISAF expansion process in Northern Afghanistan. The UK would lead a second multinational PRT to be established in Meymaneh. It was planned to transfer command of the PRT in Mazar-e-Sharif from the coalition to ISAF. The Minister was unable to say how many additional troops would be required.

NATO reportedly plans to establish five additional PRT. It is understood that the second UK PRT will be formed in conjunction with Finland and Norway. Clearly these PRTs are proving highly effective and, of course, are seldom reported in the media, because they are part of the good news. The MoD really must get its PR together. Journalists should be invited to join a PRT.

Senior Officer Appointments

A shrinking hierarchy

There are currently 12 serving four-star Officers: four Admirals, four Generals and four Air Chief Marshals. In addition to the six Officers on the Defence Council (see below); C-in-C Fleet, Land and Strike are four-star appointments. The other three are NATO appointments held by two Admirals and a General.

Some ill-researched remarks about Senior Officers appeared recently in the national newspapers. As the size of the Services has declined, senior posts have been downgraded or abolished. There were 20 four-star appointments in 1992 and 15 in 1996. By way of example, the senior personnel Officer in each service has been downgraded from four to three stars.

The Defence Council consists of: Politicians

1. Secretary of State for Defence (Defence Secretary). Chairman of the Council: The Right Honourable G W Hoon MP.
2. Minister of State for the Armed Forces (Armed Forces' Minister): The Right Honourable A P Ingram JP MP.
3. Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State and Minister for Defence Procurement (Defence Procurement Minister): The Lord Bach of Lutterworth.
4. Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State and Minister for Veterans (Junior Defence Minister): I K Caplin Esq MP.

Military Members

5. Chief of the Defence Staff (CDS): General Sir Michael Walker GCB CMG CBE ADC Gen.
6. Chief of the Naval Staff (CNS) and First Sea Lord: Admiral Sir Alan West GCB DSC ADC.
7. Chief of the General Staff (CGS): General Sir Mike Jackson KCB CBE DSO ADC Gen.
8. Chief of the Air Staff (CAS): Air Chief Marshal Sir Jock Stirrup.

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White Paper Inquiry

Deployment Limitations

Government priorities

Giving evidence to the Defence Committee recently on the 2003 Defence White Paper, the Chief of the Defence Staff confirmed that the Armed Forces would not be able to undertake another large scale Operation until "around 2008/09" and during a Defence Debate, the Defence Secretary confirmed that "it will take a number of years to recover properly...."

While all three Service Chiefs of Staff conceded shortages in specialist personnel, the Army is particularly deficient in the areas of medical services, human intelligence and communications.

The Joint Rapid Reaction Force (JRRF)

"packages" are currently undergoing reassessment and conclusions should be forthcoming in the "next nine to ten months". However these conclusions are dressed up, the stark truth is that the Armed Forces, in particular the Army, are too small to carry out the tasks given to them by this Government worldwide. Not only are they too small, but they are also lacking in certain crucial equipment. In short too little money is being spent on Defence. An indication of the Chancellor's priorities is given by the percentage of Total Managed Expenditure (TME) allocated to the four largest spending departments:

% TME	2003/04 Estimate	2004/05 Plan	2005/06 Plan
Social Security	27.3	27.0	26.2
Health	14.3	14.7	15.2
Education	12.9	13.0	13.1
Defence	8.4	7.8	7.6

If this is set against service deployments (see table below) it can be seen that nearly 50% of trained strength is deployed or stationed overseas. This is unsustainable and neither could or has been achieved by

any other Army. No wonder that no further large scale operations can be undertaken until "around 2008/09". But what a disgraceful state of affairs. Our servicemen and women deserve better.

Discipline issues

Compulsory Drug Testing

2003 Results

The Junior Defence Minister said recently that 119,403 members of the Armed Forces had been subjected to CDT in 2003, of whom 592 (0.5%) had tested positive. By Service, the results were: RN/RM – 56 (0.4%) positive from 13,803 tested; Army – 516 (0.6%) from 93,168 and RAF – 20 (0.2%) from 12,432.

Traces of 666 substances were detected in the 592 Servicemen and women who tested positive, the most

common being: cannabis (327), cocaine (149) and ecstasy (136). The youngest and/or most junior may have received warnings, but otherwise those tested positive will have left the Armed Forces. This is a remarkable result. One suspects that, if a similar sample were taken from the same member of young men and women of a similar age and background in civilian life, the results would be vastly different.