



House of Commons
Defence Committee

**UK operations in Iraq
and the Gulf:
Government response
to the Committee's
Fifteenth Report of
Session 2007–08**

Tenth Special Report of Session 2007–08

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The Defence Committee

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The Reports and evidence of the Committee are published by The Stationery Office by Order of the House. All publications of the Committee (including press notices) are on the Internet at: www.parliament.uk/defcom

Committee staff

The current staff of the Committee are Mike Hennessy (Clerk), Eliot Wilson (Second Clerk), Ian Rogers (Audit Adviser), Lis McCracken (Inquiry Manager), Richard Dawson (Committee Assistant), Christine McGrane (Secretary) and Stewart McIlvenna (Senior Office Clerk).

Contacts

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Tenth Special Report

The Defence Committee published its Fifteenth Report of Session 2007–08 on *UK operations in Iraq and the Gulf* on 22 July 2008, as House of Commons Paper HC 982. The Government's response to this Report was received on 29 September 2008. This is appended below.

Government response

The Government welcomes the Committee's report and its conclusions and recommendations. The Government's formal response is as follows:

1. (Recommendation 1) We are reassured that Operation Charge of the Knights has been broadly successful, and has substantially weakened the power of the militias in Basra. While some areas of the city are not yet fully under the control of the ISF, a high degree of security has been restored and the preconditions are in place for political progress and economic recovery. There is no doubt that more remains to be done. The UK Government must ensure that it continues to provide support to the ISF to ensure that the progress which has been made is not lost and that Basra does not slip back into instability. (Paragraph 16)

2. (Recommendation 2) The UK MiTTs are doing an excellent job in enhancing the capacity and self-sufficiency of the Iraqi Army. Their work is vital to the future of the Iraqi Security Forces and therefore to stability in southern Iraq. The contrast with what we saw last year is stark and profound, and the MoD must continue to support the MiTTs in what will inevitably be a medium-to long-term project. The larger the military training commitment we can maintain, the greater will be UK influence in Iraq, and in the region as a whole, as Iraq recovers its position as a wealthy and powerful Middle East nation. The UK has an opportunity to maintain a substantial position of influence for the common good in southern Iraq, if we can commit the military capacity to do so. (Paragraph 24)

We agree with the Committee's assessment that Operation Charge of the Knights has been a success, and are grateful for its acknowledgment of the excellent work being done by the UK Military Transition Teams (MiTTs). The security situation in Basra has improved further since the Committee's visit. With support from the Coalition, the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) are continuing to clamp down on any remaining militia and criminal elements in and around the city. As the Prime Minister explained in his statement to Parliament on 22 July, the focus of UK forces in southern Iraq is on completing the task of training and mentoring the 14th Division of the Iraqi Army in Basra. Subject to security conditions on the ground, our military commanders expect 14th Division in Basra to be fully trained during the first months of 2009. We are examining, as part of our plans for a long-term bilateral relationship, how we might support capacity building of the Iraqi Security Forces, beyond the completion of our key tasks in Basra.

3. (Recommendation 3) The UK Police Mission is a small component of Coalition efforts in developing the IPS. We were impressed by the work it is doing and by the systematic and organised nature of its plans, and hope it can continue to provide valuable support to the IPS. We also hope that the Police Mission can extend its reach and enhance its training capacity as the security situation in Basra becomes more stable. (Paragraph 30)

Facilitated by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, a UK police mission has operated successfully both in Basra and Baghdad since 2003. Following 23 years of Saddam's rule, little of a law-based system remained, and, in the violence that followed, existing

infrastructure and skills were further eroded. There are problems across the spectrum: a lack of trained investigators, judges, lawyers and court staff; lack of due process in courts; and limited understanding of an evidence-based system. The aim of the UK mission has been to train and mentor the Iraqi Police Service at various levels: from designing and implementing national policing strategy down to civil security at the local level, including crime detection and prevention. The Government welcomes the Committee's recognition of these efforts.

The UK Police Mission is part of a wider programme of Police reform conducted by the Coalition in Iraq. The UK's work in Basra has now been complemented by the deployment of US-led Police Transition Teams, which are training and mentoring the Iraqi Police Service at local level. The scope of a future UK Police Mission in Iraq will depend upon Iraqi requirements and the UK's wider presence and strategy in Iraq.

4. (Recommendation 4) The UK-led Naval Training Team is performing a vital role in training and mentoring the Iraqi Navy, and we pay tribute to the excellent work which UK Forces are doing at Umm Qasr. It is clear to us that the mission of the NaTT is a long-term one, and, while we understand that the UK Government may not wish to make public pronouncements on future dispositions in Iraq, we encourage the MoD to consider how a UK presence can be maintained in Umm Qasr beyond any drawdown of forces in Basra. (Paragraph 37)

We welcome the Committee's acknowledgement of the excellent work of the UK-led Naval Training Team and UK MiTTs, in building the capacity of the Iraqi Navy and helping the ISF to deliver security at Umm Qasr Port respectively. The Iraqi Navy is making good progress, and is now responsible for the defence of one of Iraq's two oil platforms. We are examining, as part of our plans for a long-term bilateral relationship, how we might continue to support capacity building of the Iraqi Navy.

5. (Recommendation 5) The work of UK and Coalition maritime forces in the Northern Arabian Gulf is crucial to the security and economic prosperity of Iraq, as well as to wider regional stability. We pay tribute to the work that UK Service personnel are doing and recognise the often difficult, sometimes dangerous and always delicate nature of operations in the area. (Paragraph 44)

The Government welcomes the Committee's recognition of the importance of the work that UK maritime forces are doing in the Northern Arabian Gulf. The Royal Navy contributes to a Coalition task force that is responsible for the security of Iraq's Territorial Waters and two oil platforms, in support of the existing United Nations Security Council Resolution (1790) and the Government of Iraq. Aside from these security operations, Royal Navy ships also help to ensure stability in this key area through regional engagement and bilateral operations with other Gulf states.

6. (Recommendation 6) It is important that the 'civilianisation' of Basra International Airport continues, and the UK Government must take account of this in any plans to draw down UK Forces and to reorientate the COB. (Paragraph 51)

With support from the Royal Air Force, Basra International Airport reopened to commercial air traffic in January 2005 and the Iraqi authorities now manage all civilian flights through the airport during daylight hours. As the Prime Minister set out in his

statement of 22 July, finalising the preparation of Basra airport for Iraqi civilian control is one of our key remaining military tasks in southern Iraq. We continue to assess that—subject to security conditions on the ground—the Iraqi authorities will be able to take over development of the airport around the turn of the year.

7. (Recommendation 7) Economic prosperity and increasing security and stability are inextricably linked. The proper harnessing of oil revenues will provide the Iraqi government with an invaluable source of income, which will in itself contribute to the development of the ISF. At the same time, growing prosperity and the reduction of unemployment in Basra will have a serious impact on the popularity of the militias. Unemployment and poverty are among their greatest recruiting sergeants. Iraq is not inherently a poor country, and the UK Government has the opportunity to help Iraq realise and reap the benefits of its potential wealth. (Paragraph 52)

The Government agrees that economic development is essential to Iraq's continuing progress and to sustain improvements in security. The Prime Minister indicated on 22 July that we will continue to focus on helping the Government of Iraq to rebuild their economy. In Basra, the UK is providing support to the Basra Development Commission and Basra Investment Commission in order to encourage private sector-led growth and investment, as well as helping to establish the Basra Development Fund, which will provide loans to the small and start-up businesses. The UK's Provincial Reconstruction Team is also helping to develop the capacity of the Provincial Council to improve essential services for the people of Basra.