

6 Nov 14

STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS AND MEDIA OPERATIONS SUPPORT TO THE SYRIAN MODERATE ARMED OPPOSITION – STATEMENT OF REQUIREMENT

BACKGROUND

1. Strategic Communications (StratCom) support to the Syrian Moderate Armed Opposition (MAO) is an existing element of HMG's Syria programming. Note that MAO is an HMG internal term. Externally, the MAO is variously described, including as the Free Syria Army (FSA) (increasingly less so), the Supreme Military Council (SMC), Revolutionary Forces Syria (RFS) and by the names of the mid level units (such as Syrian Revolutionaries Front, Jaysh al-Islam, Harakat al-Hazm and so on). The current project was launched in Oct 13 and a comprehensive and effective (in terms of output) programme has been established since. Work has evolved to best match HMG intent in line with the realities of the conflict in Syria, and the divisions and difficulties within the MAO (see below). While there is satisfaction with the existing delivery arrangements, there is a need to re-compete to ensure HMG continues to achieve the best technical and commercial solution for its needs in this area. This is routine practice and the same process is being applied to other Syria StratCom work.

2. While it has grown a StratCom capability through the last 13 months, the MAO's credibility has not improved to the desired extent and considerable further effort is required. Whilst most Syrians have rejected Islamic extremist groups such as ISIL, the drift within oppositionist armed groups over the past two years has been towards the 'extreme' end of the spectrum and away from than the secular-leaning FSA. For instance, due to their battlefield effectiveness, the likes of the Al Qaida-linked Jabhat Al-Nusra are now widely supported by Syrians as a credible alternative (to MAO) in the fight against Assad. While improved StratCom can only build on what exists in reality, it can ensure that MAO military proficiency, operational performance and good standard of battlefield behaviour, where this does exist, is fully exploited to enhance MAO credibility at the expense of the more 'extreme'.

3. Efforts to impose a 'top down' StratCom solution from the SMC have not, so far, been successful. Accordingly, a more 'bottom up' approach has been pursued. Currently, therefore, the provision of StratCom assistance to the MAO leadership is now done via its key Fronts (Northern, Southern and Eastern). Future work would require a continuation of the current arrangements, a gradual 'knitting together' of the units within Fronts and greater coordination between Fronts, pending the re-establishment of a strategic pan-Front leadership (such as an effective SMC or whatever other structure may emerge in the future). In the event of a significant Coalition-enabled MAO Train and Equip programme, the significance and scale of MAO StratCom could grow and it may then be possible to achieve more from the 'top down'.

HMG INTENT

4. The UK's National Strategic Aim is for "a more stable and democratic Syria that better meets the needs and aspirations of its people and presents a significantly reduced threat to regional and international security and stability". The National Security Council has set out three priorities for the UK Government's contribution to the international efforts to resolve the situation in Syria: support efforts to find a political solution to the conflict; alleviate humanitarian suffering; and protect UK security by tackling extremism and getting rid of Assad's chemical weapons (the latter issue has largely been resolved since the priorities were set).

5. An effective and credible moderate Syrian political and military opposition will be part of the resolution of the Syria situation. It will pressure the Regime and its support base to reject the

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Assad leadership and seek a settlement, whilst simultaneously countering the radicalising ideologies and influence of violent extremist (VE) groups.

6. The actual and perceived effectiveness of the Syrian MAO should convince the Syrian population, its neighbours and the international community that it offers that best tool for achieving their desired military outcomes for Syria (helping to create the conditions for a political solution); StratCom and, in particular, Media Operations support to the MAO will help to enable this.

PROJECT PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVE

7. The purpose of the project is to contribute to an effective and credible Syrian MAO through StratCom¹ and Media Operations² capacity building; as part of the achievement of wider HMG intent. This should take the form of centrally coordinated support to the RFS, at the operational and tactical levels, with the capability to expand back into the strategic space as and when the opportunity arises, to help build an effective opposition political-military interface.

8. The objective of the project is to contribute to the transition away from the current regime and VE to a more stable, accountable, open and inclusive Syria founded on respect for human rights and rule of law through building the communications competence and reputation of the MAO.

PROJECT SCOPE

9. This project will build on existing HMG-enabled communication activities undertaken on behalf of HMG between Oct 13 and Dec 14. It is focused on supporting, through training and mentoring, the MAO's StratCom and Media Operations capabilities.

10. The project is to be based in Istanbul to help enable contact with key moderate opposition political leaders and MAO commanders and with forward Syrian elements collocated in the various 'Front' headquarters³. From these locations it will be able to access the networks inside Syria and the information, material and understanding required to conduct effective Media Operations. It is also highly desirable that a supporting media office in Jordan be included as part of any bid (below for planning guidance) to enable better linkages with the Southern Front.

11. The project should be cognisant of and be prepared when requested (and within allocated resources) to complement other strands of the Conflict Pool-funded HMG StratCom programme. This could include support to grassroots opposition media activism and, in particular, its lines of operations: 'Identity' - highlighting the moderate and inclusive nature of Syrians and 'Free Syria' – Keeping the spirit of the revolution alive, to live in a peaceful, free and prosperous Syria. Presenting the MAO as an alternative to VE will make a particularly valuable contribution towards the 'Free Syria' narrative.

REQUIREMENTS

12. Capabilities (Means).

- a. Maintain a central media office to deliver a coordinated MAO StratCom and Media Operations plan.⁴

1 There is no single common UK definition for StratCom, although the current NSC draft version represents cross-government thinking: The systematic and coordinated use of all means of communication to deliver national security objectives by influencing the attitudes and behaviours of individuals, groups and states. Taken from Joint Doctrine Publication 1-12, January 2012.

2 Defined as: That line of activity developed to ensure timely, accurate and effective provision [through the media] of Public Information (P Info) and implementation of Public Relations (PR) policy within the operational environment whilst maintaining Operations Security. Joint Doctrine Publication 3-45.1, September 2007.

3 Northern Front in Reyhanli; Southern Front in Amman; Eastern Front in Istanbul.

4 In Jan 14 a MAO StratCom Strategy was developed and approved by the SMC. Its status may be uncertain but its intent should remain relevant.

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- b. Maintain media elements at the operational level (currently Northern, Eastern⁵ and Southern Fronts), with credible Syrian spokesmen, to conduct effective Media Operations.
- c. Develop the capability to coordinate operational level media activity with the central MAO StratCom plan.
- d. Maintain an effective network of correspondents/stringers inside Syria to report on MAO activity.
- e. Select and train a spokesman able to represent all the MAO groups as a single unified voice, thereby reinforcing the unity and coherence of the MAO.
- f. Provide training and mentoring to influential MAO officials to ensure they are well prepared to engage successfully in Key Leader Engagement, and with the media.
- g. Improve communication and coordination between MAO central media office and the other moderate opposition actors (notably the National Coalition).
- h. Build, maintain and develop an effective MAO social media presence and international outreach programme.
- i. Build Syrian sustainability within the project by reducing dependency on expatriate staff over time.

13. **Tasks (Ways).**

- a. Enhance the reputation of the Syrian MAO amongst the Syrian population, the Region and the International Community; Syrians are to be the primary target audience.
- b. Promote the MAO as a credible guarantor of future security in Syria.
- c. Build greater Syrian popular support for the MAO and strengthen the RFS brand.
- d. Undermine the Assad regime narrative through the effective use of communication.
- e. Counter violent extremist⁶ narratives by promoting the MAO as a credible alternative.
- f. Promote and reinforce positive attitudes and behaviours within the MAO.

14. **Outputs – Desired Effects (Ends).**

- a. A MAO central media office (operating 24/7) with media production capability.
- b. Fronts that are Media and StratCom aware and can use communications to best effect.
- c. Campaigns to create a compelling narrative to enhance the reputation of the MAO so it is broadly accepted as the alternative to both the Assad regime and extremism.

COORDINATING INSTRUCTIONS

⁵ Currently co-located with the central media office in Istanbul.

⁶ ISIL/IS explicitly and ANF indirectly.

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15. **Timeframe.** The implementer will assume responsibility for the project from 1 Jan 15 for a period of 15 Months to the end of FY 15/16 (31 Mar 16). This period will, however, include a break point on 31 Mar 15, pending confirmation of the available funds for FY 15/16. The reporting requirements will begin the week commencing 5 Jan 15.

16. **Constraints.** The implementer is to remain within the Statement of Requirement and take note of the following:

- a. This project is to focus on MAO voices and MAO issues; other work should be the exception, rather than common place.
- b. All product delivery is to be MAO-branded.
- c. ANF (and ISIL) successes against Assad regime forces are not to be promoted.
- d. Sectarian incitement is to be actively discouraged.
- e. Entering into the bidding war with pan-Arab mainstream media for stringer output is to be avoided where possible.
- f. The UK does not intend to fund capital investment in MAO owned media channels, with the exception of websites.
- g. The UK media should primarily be reached through the provision of support to the Cross-Whitehall Syria Comms Team at their request. However, it is accepted that the MAO central media office may, on occasions, need to directly and purposely engage with UK media, this is to be with the prior agreement of the Syria Office Istanbul (SOI).
- h. All activities must be conducted in accordance with UK law. Advice must be sought from HMG through MSE if there is a concern that Syrian partners are about to undertake activity, with HMG financial support or with the complicity of HMG-funded mentors, that HMG might consider unacceptable.

17. **Reporting.** The reporting requirement is:

- a. **Weekly.** A short situational update of the realities faced by the MAO.
- b. **Fortnightly.** A report on MAO activity and communications.
- c. **Quarterly.** A formal report of campaign activity against project requirements to the Conflict Pool board. This should detail product delivery, measures of output and impact and full details of actual expenditure against forecast expenditure.
- d. **Spot Reports.** Time-sensitive or especially noteworthy information should be delivered as spot reports.

18. **Assessment.** The project is to be externally evaluated by a Defence Science and Technology Laboratories (DSTL) scientist in direct partnership with the contractor, starting Jan 15. This process is to include robust measures of performance – that material is fit for purpose and delivered to target audiences - and assessment of its effect/impact. As stated, behavioural changes linked (correlation and/or causation) to campaign activity will be highly valued.

19. **Confidentiality and Publicity.** The UK's StratCom support to the Syrian opposition has been announced by the Foreign Secretary. However, media coverage of the project will be distinctly unwelcome due to the risks to Syrian employees and to project effectiveness that it would

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generate. The implementer is therefore not permitted to speak publicly (to the media or at academic conferences) about their work without the explicit permission of HMG. This will be enforced by a Non Disclosure Agreement.

20. **Linkage with Other Projects.** The project will fit into a network of HMG and international support activity which together will have a synergistic effect. SOI will coordinate the projects and ensure that they remain collaborative, exploiting each other's successes to meet HMG intent.

21. **International Partners.** In order to generate greater capability and output, international (funding) partnerships will be important. The contractor will play a key role in supporting this partnership building process, in conjunction with HMG.

22. **Administrative Provisions.** All supporting costs are to be covered by the project budget including (but not limited to): provision of an office (see below for planning guidance), insurance, translation services, and transportation. Some items are subject to strict caps (flights should be economy) unless specific permission is sought. This and other travel should be billed as actuals (plus administrative costs but less commercial margin).

23. **Duty of Care and Security.** There is a threat to those involved in supporting the Syrian Opposition. Accordingly the implementer will hold the duty of care responsibility for its staff and for the security of the project. It is to ensure that all reasonable security measures (physical, information and communication) are taken to reduce the threat to as low as is reasonably possible. This includes encouraging security awareness and best practice amongst its forward-based partners (networks).

24. **Cyber Security.** The MAO has been and will continue to be the target of (likely regime supporters) cyber attack. The implementer must ensure that every effort is made to provide the MAO StratCom and Media Operations capabilities with effective cyber security protection.

25. **Budget.** Planning should seek to deliver a solution for not more than **£2.4M** (including VAT where applicable) over 15 Months to 31 Mar 16 (£420k is currently confirmed as available for Jan-Mar 15). A 'head office' in Istanbul is provided without charge (the let has already been paid for) until 28 Feb 15 but, thereafter, office hire costs in Turkey must be factored into the budget. It should be assumed that office costs in Jordan and some Syrian staff working there will be funded separately, in the expectation that the requirement to operate in Jordan will continue. Despite the solution being envisaged as a 15 month project, the nature of the HMG funding cycle means that, irrespective of performance, funding beyond 31 Mar 15 cannot be guaranteed (although it is a realistic aspiration). Budget presentation should include all projected costs incl. staff rates, office and administration costs, a forecast of production and delivery costs etc. Framework conditions apply to how margins are attributed.

Any expansion of this project to support a MAO Train and Equip programme would need to be funded as an enhancement. There will be a requirement for transparent and accurate management of budget lines. Once set, amendments to the agreed budget can be made but this will require advance consultation with HMG.