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From:
Date: 19 December 2005

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(agreed in draft)
Dr Howells (copied in parallel)
Foreign Secretary

**IRAQ: PROPOSED CHANGES TO TRAVEL IN SOUTHERN IRAQ FOR HMG
CIVILIAN STAFF**

ISSUE

1. Should security rules for HMG diplomatic and civilian staff travel in southern Iraq be amended in the light of the Senior Overseas Security Adviser's 1 December report on security in Iraq?

TIMING

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2. Immediate. If the proposals below are accepted, the changes to staff travel rules could be implemented immediately, permitting greater HMG engagement on the ground.

PREFERRED OPTIONS

3. I recommend that, subject to regular review:
 - (i) All HMG diplomatic, DfID and civilian staff be allowed to travel in British Military Warrior Armoured Fighting Vehicles (AFVs) for any journey within Basra city where there is a significant risk from armour piercing roadside bombs.
 - (ii) Where it is assessed (by the Consul General and the Head of the British Civilian Police in Basra) as critical to the Mission, UK civilian Police Officers (CivPol), may travel with the contracted British Iraqi Police Advisers (IPA), in their (FCO) armoured vehicles, escorted by UK military snatch vehicles (lightly armoured Land Rovers).
 - (iii) Road moves outside Basra city should recommence in FCO armoured vehicles along the main road between Basra Airport and Nasariyah and from Basra Airport to the border with Kuwait.
4. Security Management Directorate and DfID agree. DfID have submitted to the Development Secretary in parallel.

BACKGROUND AND ARGUMENT

5. The FCO Senior Overseas Security Adviser (SOSA) visited Iraq from 10 to 21 November. I attach (at A) a copy of his report, in which recommends changes to some of our current rules on travel in southern Iraq.
6. The report describes the current security situation in Iraq in so far as it affects our staff. This has not changed significantly. Insurgent activity remains concentrated in and around Baghdad and in the Sunni triangle, with the north and south of the country remaining generally quieter.
7. In the south, the increased threat from Explosively Formed Projectiles (EFPs) or shaped, armour piercing charges, has led to a reduction in road moves for staff in Basra and the three southern Governorates in recent months. The Consul General continues, however, to use imaginative alternatives to enable staff to carry on with much of their work, including the use of helicopter and river transport, and accommodating staff at Basra Airport and other key locations. While these have

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improved our and DfID's programmes of activity, a safe and measured return to road moves is essential in order to fully promote HMG objectives in the south.

8. The SOSA recommends a number of changes to current policy. They are:
 - That all staff when necessary, may travel inside Warrior AFVs (with a CRG bodyguard when appropriate) within Basra city.
 - That UK civilian Police Officers (CivPol), should be allowed to travel with the Iraqi Police Advisers (IPA, retired British Police Officers contracted from ArmorGroup), in their (FCO) armoured vehicles, escorted by UK military snatch vehicles (lightly armoured Land Rovers).
 - Following a recent review by the Consul General and his Security Manager, that road movements along two main routes, between Basra Airport and Nasariyah (Route Tampa) and from Basra Airport to the border, should restart.
9. We agree with these recommendations, for the following reasons:
 - While helicopters are our preferred method of travel, we cannot always rely on them and they are administratively intense to arrange. The next best alternative is to allow staff to travel in AFVs which offer the best available level of protection against EFPs (the main threat to staff travelling by road outside the Basra Palace compound).
 - Travelling with a military escort will enhance the security afforded to CivPol. All such movements will be closely monitored to ensure that high risk routes are not used.
 - The recommendation to restart road moves along two major routes in the south would be an appropriate and measured step given that military convoys, a number of private security details and the US and Danish offices in Basra have begun to use them; and that we have just established accommodation for staff at the Airport, where they can stay overnight on their way to and from the Basra Palace compound. The Overseas Security Manager in Basra will continue to have the final say over each journey after assessing all available local intelligence.
 - All of the above will make it easier to fulfil our current project workload in Iraq, particularly on policing.
10. But there are risks. While much will be done to minimise the EFP threat by assessing each journey, travelling with the military and by using well tried tactics, techniques and procedures and electronic countermeasures, this threat cannot be entirely eliminated.

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PARLIAMENTARY AND MEDIA

11. Five members of the Foreign Affairs Committee are travelling to Iraq from 23 to 27 January 2006. They will be subject to the same travel restrictions and may comment on this in their subsequent report. We will be stressing to them the importance of staff safety and the measures taken to mitigate the security risks.

Iraq Directorate

Travel in Iraq Submission 19 12 05

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