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FROM: P F Ricketts
Political Director

DATE: 2 December 2002

cc: Mr Ehrman
Mr Fry
Mr Collecott
Mr Wood
Mr Oakden
Mr Stagg
Mr Fraser
Mr Charlton
Mr Gass
Mr Gray, MED
Mr Watt, Consular Division
Mr Williams, News Dept

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IRAQ: HANDLING THE CRISIS

1. I undertook to let you have a note on the state of our preparations for handling an all-out Iraq crisis and the structure in the FCO we envisaged for doing so.
2. The FCO has already geared up to deal with the increased intensity of work on Iraq:
 - MED have been reinforced with an extra Deputy Head, and the attachment of Dominick Chilcott to handle in particular interface with the EU;
 - on the press and public handling side, the CIC has been activated, Mark Sedwill deployed to Amman, and arrangements are in hand to co-locate key staff from CIC, IMU and the Press Office;

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- NPD have been reinforced to handle UNMOVIC issues, and Security Policy Department have an officer attending MOD meetings regularly;
- David Lyscom has worked up plans for the future Baghdad Embassy (procurement of long lead-time items has begun) and has worked on contingency planning for CBW protection in the region;
- this fed into the Consular Conference on 29 November and the continuing contingency planning in Consular Division;
- as you know, the Emergency Unit is being refurbished to an early January deadline.

3. To coordinate this widening spread of activity, I hold meetings which are now daily at 09.00 (in my absence another Board member or Edward Chaplin takes the chair). In practice, we already have a virtual Iraq team with strength in depth. William Ehrman deals with the JIC and MOD; Graham Fry supervises work on consular planning, into which James Watt and his team have put a lot of work; Edward Chaplin and Charles Gray take the lead on policy advice, working with DSI for longer range thinking, with the UN and CFSP teams, with the Legal Advisers and others. I have deliberately involved a wide spread of senior managers, because we may well have to sustain an intense crisis for a significant period.

4. I propose that we activate the Emergency Unit and go to 24 hour working once it is clear that military operations are imminent. This could arise very rapidly (e.g. as a result of an NFZ shoot-down). But if it is the result of Saddam's failure to comply, we are likely to have some notice while an effort is made to get a further UNSCR. We should clearly activate the Unit in good time to ensure that the staff

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are in place and ready to deal with all the unpredictable requirements once conflict begins.

5. We have had recent experience of running the Unit during the Afghan crisis and I plan to build on that model, which worked well. I expect the Iraq crisis to involve a more significant consular/evacuation/CBW defence element, and more public/parliamentary correspondence (because more controversial domestically). We may need to sustain the Emergency Unit over several months of working.

6. Before setting out the proposed FCO structure, it may be worth recapping on the likely pattern of Whitehall work. On the basis of the Kosovo and Afghanistan crises, I think the Prime Minister will run the crisis through frequent (but not regular) No.10 meetings, with the Foreign and Defence Secretaries, CDS and other Ministers as necessary. You would attend with the Foreign Secretary and deputise in his absence. They are normally in the morning. Whitehall preparation for them includes Current Intelligence Group meetings at 05.00 or 06.00 to produce an Intelligence Update (we will need to cover these meetings). We found that an FCO coordination meeting in the Emergency Unit was needed at around 08.00 each day. This allows the main players to be briefed by the overnight team, assess developments, assign tasks and look ahead. You might wish to attend this meeting on days when there is a No.10 meeting. A core group would then go to brief the Foreign Secretary on his arrival.

7. We also found that an early evening meeting in the Emergency Unit was useful, at least for the main players. FCO will also of course have to staff a wide range of other Whitehall meetings (Manning meetings, Chiefs of Staff and JIC and many others). It is worth taking the trouble early in the crisis to ensure a logical flow of coordination meetings, and that their total numbers do not get to the point where work is not being done.

8. The FCO structure flows from these requirements. You will of course want to be closely involved in all the policy-making. One of the key tasks of the Emergency Unit is to prepare the Foreign Secretary and you for the No.10 meetings, to ensure that the FCO is pro-active and thinking ahead. I propose to take responsibility under you as the overall coordinator. I would normally chair the meetings in the Emergency Unit (William Ehrman or Edward Chaplin in my absence). I would devote most of my time to the crisis (some of this would be spent on out-reach using the Political Directors' network: I would restrict my travel to essential crisis-related multilateral meetings). I expect that William Ehrman and Graham Fry would be deeply involved, leading work in their areas of responsibility. Peter Collecott would also be an important part of the senior team. At Director level, Edward Chaplin would be my alternate and act as the Crisis Coordinator as set out in the standard procedures for the Emergency Unit. I expect that he would have to devote himself in practice full-time to the crisis, including its wider regional implications. Edward Oakden, Dickie Stagg and Simon Fraser would all have important roles to play, as will Alan Charlton and Simon Gass in their areas. I would expect all to be regular attendees at the morning coordination meeting.

9. The Emergency Unit itself would be headed by Charles Gray as Crisis Manager, who would physically re-locate to the Unit. I attach an organigram of the Unit's organisation. The three Deputies at SMS level ensure that the Unit can be led at SMS level seven days a week for a prolonged period. Our Afghanistan experience suggests that the overnight team can be at D6 level, but we would review this in the light of experience. Others physically located in the Unit would be a Sec Pol implant, a Consular Division implant and (crucially important) a management team. The Briefing and Correspondence Unit might be located outside the Unit but closely linked to it and essential to relieve policy staff of these tasks.

10. Many other parts of the FCO will be essential members of the wider team, without having to be co-located. The boxes along the bottom of the chart show most of those involved. I would hope that a Legal Adviser would normally attend. On the Afghan precedent, MOD, DFID and sometimes British Council may also wish to participate in the morning or evening meetings.

11. You have seen separate proposals for the coordination of the press/media operation led by John Williams, who will be a key participant at the Emergency Unit meetings.

12. MED and Personnel Command discussed again this week the staff numbers required to produce this structure, and other essential augmentation (for example, for the Press Office and Consular Division). Personnel Command have assembled a list of volunteers. But to get the essential policy augmentees, we will have to pull some officers out of Commands. If regional posts reduce their staff, we can absorb some returnees into the overall effort, either in the Emergency Unit or in the consular or press/IMU operations. But it will be vital that the Board meets early and decides which tasks can fall away (we are already doing some thinking about a list of likely candidates, which would probably include stopping project work, asking Research Analysts to back-fill Departments who release staff to the Unit, etc).

13. It will be important that key Ministers, including Mr O'Brien as well as the Foreign Secretary, clear their diaries to cope with the crisis.

14. This all looks unwieldy, but I am confident that it will work. An Iraq crisis will ripple out to affect the work of many FCO Commands and many Posts. In managing this, the trick will be to have a clear coordination and tasking

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arrangement, without vast meetings. I will be looking to designated representatives of many parts of the Office to act as relays for work back to their areas. We will need to keep Posts well briefed and targetted, while encouraging them to exercise maximum restraint in reporting. As senior managers, we will need to deal with this crisis while keeping enough capacity to handle essential continuing work, and separate emergencies. I think the above is the right structure to achieve this.

Peter Ricketts

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