

DECLASSIFIED

DFID

Department for
International
Development

Reference

RESTRICTED

From:

Ext:

Date:

7 April 2006

Submission to ministers

CC:

PS/PUSS
PS/Permanent Secretary
Nemat Shafik
Mark Lowcock
Martin Dinham
Liz Davis

To: 1. Michael Anderson (agreed)
2. PS/Secretary of State

Iraq Programme Team
Special Advisors
Mike Green

BASRA SECURITY UPDATE AND CONTINGENCY PLANS

Issue

1. Whether, in light of the recent sustained rocket attack on Basra Palace, to temporarily reduce the number of DFID core staff and consultants based at the compound.

Recommendation

2. Following yesterday's discussion with the Secretary of State, we recommend a temporary reduction in staff covering a two week period, as set out in **FLAG A**. This can be accomplished with relatively little disruption to the programme in the short term, by slightly modifying current rotation and leave schedules. The reduction would leave 5 international staff based in Basra (2 DFID and 3 consultants) and 2 additional consultants in Dhi Qar and Maysan provinces. FCO are today recommending a similar level of reduction in their staff. We are working closely with them.

Timing

3. Immediate. We should initiate action to reduce staff levels as soon as possible.

DECLASSIFIED

DECLASSIFIED

Communications and Parliamentary Handling

4. Defensive press lines are at **FLAG B**. However, current leave schedules mean that there are anyway a small number of staff and consultants present in Basra at this time. The reduction will therefore be less visible than would otherwise be the case.

Information

5. Last month the Secretary of State approved contingency plans for staffing in Baghdad and Basra which identified three levels:

- *Level 1*- situation remains at current threat levels, no change to staffing. Total staff = 17/18
- *Level 2* – Significant increase in threat levels and/or hostile activity. Total st. = Between 3 and 12 staff
- *Level 3* – Security situation deteriorates further and the Embassy Evacuation Plan is activated. Total staff = 0-2 depending on the situation

6. Threat level: We believe the situation has now transitioned in the short term to 'Level 2'. On 4 April at least ten rockets were fired at Basra Palace, in a series of four salvos at regular intervals between 18:30 and 20:43 hours (See **FLAG C** for the reporting e-grams on this incident). There were no injuries, although the third rocket of the fourth salvo hit Building 5 and exploded, spraying shrapnel into the empty room and causing structural damage. The 4 April attack is of particular concern because this was the first episode of sustained fire on Basra Palace as a single target. FCO security officers believe that the attack reflects either an increased level of skills on behalf of the extremists behind it, or greater confidence by them to mount such a sustained attack.

7. This was the fifth attack on Basra Palace in seven days. FCO report that Palace compound is under close observation with all road moves in and out being noted. The number of improvised roadside explosive devices (IEDs) is higher than at any time since the current Consul General arrived, acting as a further constraint on road moves within Basra. It is becoming increasingly difficult for the UK military to control the ground in Basra as militia, especially the Jaish-Al-Mahdi (JAM), have increased the number and sophistication of their operations

DECLASSIFIED

DECLASSIFIED

8. The Consul General, James Tansley, has sent written advice to London suggesting that we have probably reached a point where the security situation has deteriorated, and the ability to staff to function reasonably effectively has also thereby decreased, due to worsened security combined with non-cooperation of Basra (and now Maysan) Council (see **FLAG D**). I have been in regular contact with James and concur with his view that we should now consider a reduction in staff.

9. The joint DFID and FCO view is that the conditions necessary to return to current staffing levels are more likely to be met once there is a new government in place. We will review the situation near the end of the proposed two week reduction period.

10. Proposed staff reduction and programme impact: **Flag A** sets out our proposal for reducing staff based in Basra Palace compound. The reduction would leave us with two core DFID staff (Deputy Head of Programme and Programme Officer) and three consultants. This can be accomplished relatively easily by relocating two consultants (possibly to Baghdad and Kuwait) and slightly delaying the return of those presently on leave. The remaining consultants would include the Regional Team Leader for the Governorates Capacity Building Programme (also responsible for DFID's PRT liaison), a technical specialist for our water projects and a technical specialist for our power projects. They should be able to continue meeting with local contractors and overseeing programme activities in the short term. We would also keep two governance consultants based in Dhi Qar and Maysan respectively. We are actively monitoring the security of local staff, who are now wearing body armour while moving about the compound.

11. This will bring our staff numbers down from nine people currently in country to five. (In total, 15 international staff are based at Basra, although only eight to ten staff are physically present at any given time due to rotations). This reduction of 44% compares with the proposed FCO reduction in staff by 54%, including FCO core staff and police and prison project advisers. FCO are also exploring options for moving some staff to Basra Airport on a temporary basis and we await further details.

DECLASSIFIED

DECLASSIFIED

12. The proposed staff reduction is likely to have little impact on the programme over the next two weeks. If the situation continues over a sustained period, however, we will not be able to deliver everything that is now planned and programmes will be delayed. In that case, it will be important to ensure those remaining in Basra do not feel pressure to deliver the full programme.

13. We will shortly produce a more detailed assessment of the implications of a medium to longer-term reduction in staffing levels.

Senior Programme Manager Iraq

MENAD

DECLASSIFIED