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Thank you.

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Foreign Secretary (✓)
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13 JUN 2006
Foreign Secretary

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From: Michael Jay

Date: 12 June 2006

cc: (see end)

Foreign Secretary

IRAQ: SECURITY OF OUR POSTS IN BAGHDAD & BASRA

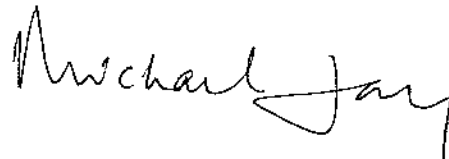
1. Our Overseas Security Adviser has just returned from a visit to our posts in Baghdad and Basra. He is currently finalising his detailed report. But his headline findings, as set out in Andrew Noble's 6 June note (A) are sobering.
2. We have always been aware of the risks of operating in Iraq. Because of the political importance to the UK of our work in Iraq, we have judged it acceptable to tolerate a higher level of risk there (and in Southern Afghanistan) than elsewhere in the world. But our obligation of duty of care towards our staff, and towards those from other Government Departments who work in our posts, remains.
3. We invest considerable resources in reducing as far as is possible the risk to our staff, and all those for whom we are responsible. We have in place robust structures and procedures to manage and mitigate risk, which are subject to constant review, in response to changes in the situation on the ground. We recognise, however, that there remains a residual level of risk in operating in such an extreme environment, against which we cannot wholly protect ourselves.
4. The four conditions I set at the outset for any FCO member of staff working in Iraq remain in force:
 - All staff must be volunteers;
 - They must be fully aware of the security risks;
 - We must do all we reasonably can to reduce the risks they face; and
 - Conditions on the ground must be such that staff are able to do their jobs effectively.
5. We are all too aware of the seriousness of the security situation outside our compounds in Baghdad and Basra. In March, in response to deteriorating conditions, I asked both Posts to conduct an audit of their staffing levels against the conditions set out above. We concluded then that existing staffing levels

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should be maintained. In early April, in response to a particularly serious set of rocket attacks on our compound, we decided temporarily to draw down our staff in Basra to a minimum. I agreed last month to allow the post to return to full strength, following a resumption of co-operation with the Basra Provincial Council and a reduction in missile fire against our compound.

6. In response to this latest report from our Overseas Security Adviser, I think it right that we should take another careful look at this issue. I have therefore asked for a rapid review in the coming week, looking at the context for our operations in Iraq; our broad approach to the risks we face; the structures and procedures we have in place to manage the risk; the extent to which these are being observed in practice; and whether these satisfy our legal obligations towards our staff. I hope this review will enable us to satisfy ourselves that an acceptable basis for continuing our operations in Iraq remains.
7. In the meantime, I have sought reassurances from our Heads of Mission in Baghdad and Basra that they are satisfied that the structures and procedures they have in place to manage and mitigate risk in their daily operations remain robust and appropriate to the current security circumstances. Both William Patey and Robin Lamb have assured me that they are. They have both rejected entirely the suggestion that 'senior staff in our missions are facing undue political pressure to 'produce the goods' which could lead to the acceptance of inappropriate levels of risk:' and I accept this. There is of course a strong political interest in our working hard to deliver results in Iraq – were there not, we might well not be there. But that does not mean that inappropriate risks with the security of our staff are being taken. William Patey has made clear that the advice of our professional security advisers on the ground has never been over ruled.
8. I will keep you fully informed of the progress of this review. Depending on the recommendations in the Overseas Security Adviser's report, there may be some specific policy decisions that need to be addressed in respect of the way we, and particularly our colleagues from other Government Departments conduct our work in these posts.



Michael Jay

Cc PS/Dr Howells

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John Sawers
Dickie Stagg
David Richmond
Dominic Asquith
David Warren
Daniel Bethlehem
Andrew Noble

Greg Dorey

William Patey, BAGHDAD
Robin Lamb, BASRA

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