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} by e-mail

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IRAQ

I spoke this afternoon to Lt Gen Kiszley about the position in Fallujah.

In amplification of his weekly report (which was sent am on Monday and should have reached you) he said that the IIG are slowly getting a grip on the position; and that Tony Lawrence from DFID and a female consultant, who had been attached to the Co-ordination Group, were beginning to make a difference. They are using Allawi's name and authority to crack the whip. Allawi himself visited Fallujah yesterday. Nevertheless, progress is still patchy.

On the substance of the problems, the displaced persons are in eight or nine towns and villages around Fallujah and Kiszley himself is unable to visit them without a major military exercise. There is, therefore, difficulty in assessing whether reports are accurate. He is dependent on Iraqis to provide information. His judgement is that there are several tens of thousands of displaced persons around Fallujah, but that the Ministry of Health estimate of "up to 200,000" is a significant over-estimate. (It is based on an assumption of an extended family of twenty and could be at least halved.) Most people left Fallujah some time before the fighting and are outside the immediate area. Nevertheless, in the surrounding towns and villages every available space is being used, and although there is no problem with food, water, medicine and blankets, there are sanitation problems that would be more acute if it were not winter.

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A decision on the timing for returns is likely to be taken by the IIG, on advice from the multinational force, around the middle of December. That is clearly going to depend upon a range of factors, both political and physical. Kiszley commented that, at this stage, there seemed to be no pressure from the population to return.

On the ICRC, he believed that relations were now "ok". The relation between the Red Crescent and the MEF was better, but still "fractious", with faults on both sides.

I expressed surprise at the casualty levels last week on both sides, which seemed to be rather higher than the reports of sporadic incidents might have led us to believe. Kiszley commented that it had taken some effort to extract those figures. They had, however, reduced considerably this week. Nevertheless, he expressed concern that reconstruction would be delayed if the security situation could not be contained.

Dr Gilbert Greenall, an ex-DFID employee who has extensive experience including in Bosnia, has arrived today. DFID said at the COS meeting this morning that he had been sent to advise Gen Kiszley. Jim Drummond and Suma Chakrabarti are visiting Iraq this weekend.

On the other Iraq issues you asked me to raise, the roulement of Royal Marines and PWRR, which was announced today, should be complete in mid-January, well before the elections. There will be no increase in current force levels. I also registered the need to be more cautious about future deployments outside MND South East than General Rollo had been.

MoD advised that the Memorandum of Understanding on Basra had been signed and that HM Treasury had agreed that it would accept contingent liability. A Treasury Minute will be laid before Parliament and the normal fourteen sitting days for approval reduced to allow

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clearance before the recess. Everybody seemed content that this would be adequate.

MoD has also agreed to provide helicopters to move personnel to and from Baghdad Airport, although the arrangement will be ad hoc until early next week. The FCO was very grateful!

Finally, Gen Casey is expected to submit proposals for future force levels on 14/15 December. The MoD were obviously keen to engage on the military net. This plays in to the proposals for wider consultations with the US, which are being worked up following the Strategy Group meeting chaired by John Sawers last Friday.

MARGARET ALDRED

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