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Home Office

Home Secretary
50 Queen Anne's Gate, London SW1H 9AT

The Rt Hon Jack Straw MP
Foreign and Commonwealth Office
King Charles Street
LONDON
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17 MAY 2004

Dear Jack

I am writing to you in your capacity as chairman of the Ministerial Group on Iraq to ask for your support in ensuring that the service of UK police officers working in Iraq, and that of other UK civilians operating in support of government policy there, is recognised with the award of a medal.

My officials believed that UK police officers seconded to Iraq might be eligible for the Iraq Campaign Medal, and indicated as much to Paul Kernaghan, ACPD's International Affairs portfolio holder. However, the Cabinet Office's Ceremonial Secretariat has now advised them that it is a military medal only and the police will not be eligible.

While I could accept the Ceremonial Secretariat's stance if the medal was to be awarded solely to members of the Armed Forces, I find that this is not to be the case; for example the criteria for eligibility for the Iraq Campaign Medal include "civilian members of any such other organisations as may hereafter be determined who served directly with the Armed Forces in support of Operation TELIC". The Ceremonial Secretariat contends that the UK civilian police seconded to Iraq cannot be included in this category as they cannot be said to be working in support of the UK military operation (Op TELIC). They say this is because civilian policing of a foreign country is not the responsibility of UK Armed Forces. Our officers are not, however, carrying out the policing of Iraq as such, but are engaged in a variety of advisory and training roles in an effort to reform the Iraqi Police Service - a vital part of our efforts to Iraqise and build security capability in Iraq. This, like the work of all the FCO and other departmental secondees in Iraq, is directly related to the restoration of stability

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in Iraq and complements the overall effort of the Armed Forces. So if it is not possible to exercise flexibility to interpret the existing eligibility criteria to encompass the work of these people, I would have thought that a separate criterion could usefully be created to do so.

The Ceremonial Secretariat argues that in awarding a military medal there is a clear distinction to be made between the risks run by members of the armed forces, who engage in open combat, and civilians. However, the medal's qualifying criteria include MoD civilians (although not, I understand, members of the Ministry of Defence Police, which is a civilian force) and MOD-accredited war correspondents, who would not be expected to engage in open combat. And it is abundantly clear that our civilians in Iraq run risks to their own lives often comparable to those faced by the military, and certainly probably greater than in civilian deployments almost anywhere in the world.

The repercussions of the police not getting this medal, after they have been given to understand in good faith to believe that they are eligible, could be very serious. As well as the issue of the officers' morale, we would certainly lose ACPO's goodwill. It could also lead to unfavourable publicity. It would be very difficult to defend their not getting a medal, particularly in the light of the recent suicide bombing incidents at the Az Zubayr Regional Police Training Academy near Basra, where a number of UK officers are deployed.

I know that you are aware of this situation and have commented to your officials that you would support the award of a medal to police officers. I hope therefore that you and colleagues will agree that there is indeed a case for awarding one to all UK civilians operating in support of UK government policy in Iraq. May I request you therefore to ask the Prime Minister to intercede with the Cabinet Office, either to:

(i) agree to extend the eligibility criteria for the Iraq Campaign Medal to include all civilians representing HMG in Iraq or seconded by HMG to the CPA in support of government policy in Iraq; or

(ii) if that is not possible or acceptable, agree to the creation of a separate Iraq (non-military) medal for such civilians.

I should be very grateful for any help you can provide to resolve this difficult situation. It would be a great shame not to honour those who have made an excellent contribution to the reconstruction of Iraq.

I am copying this letter to members of the Ministerial Group.

Best wishes,



DAVID BLUNKETT

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