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Philip Parham  
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3/2 hateful if this could

CS/1007

The Foreign Secretary

From: Michael Jay

Date: 26 January 2004

cc: Baroness Symons  
Jeremy Greenstock, Baghdad  
Hilary Synnott, Basra  
Suma Chakrabarti, DFID  
John Sawers  
Simon Gass  
John Buck  
Peter Millett  
Philip Parham, IPU

was very interested  
for this role;

discussed with  
the Post Sec  
rises.

Cherry Jones 30

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→ Secretary of State

#### VISIT TO IRAQ: 21-23 JANUARY

1. I visited Basra and Baghdad from 21-23 January, accompanied throughout by Philip Parham and in Baghdad by John Sawers. In Basra I saw Hilary Synnott, General Stewart, members of CPA South and the SCIRI representative on the Basra City Council. In Baghdad I saw Jeremy Greenstock and David Richmond, members of his staff and British members of the CPA, General Figgures, Chris Segar and the staff of the British Office, and spoke at an open meeting of all British staff in Baghdad. I called on Jerry Bremer, Dick Jones, his Deputy for policy issues, and General Sanchez.
2. John Sawers will minute separately on the policy issues arising from the visit. The main purpose of my visit was to discuss the implications for our presence in Iraq of the move to a transitional Government. We worked on the assumption that this would take place as planned on 1 July, though our conclusions hold good even if this were delayed.
3. We worked from the assumption, too, that Iraq, like Afghanistan, will be a foreign policy priority for the medium to long term, and that after the transition we shall want a substantial but affordable British presence, working closely with but separately identifiable from the Americans, able to continue to influence Iraq's political and economic development. I am clear from my visit that the only safe assumption on security is that for the next 18 months or so – roughly the period we were considering – the environment will be no more benign than now.
4. It follows from this that we shall need a substantial Embassy in Baghdad, a Consulate General in Basra and ideally some presence in the North.

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## BAGHDAD

5. As you and I have discussed, we shall need an authoritative and experienced Ambassador to succeed Jeremy Greenstock and (from April to June) David Richmond. I shall minute separately to you about this.

6. Structure. Our present thinking is that the Ambassador will need support from a DHM, a political and economic section, a Defence section to liaise with what will become a multinational force under UN auspices, a UKTI presence, a DfID office and a consular and visa section. (Managing a visa operation in the security environment likely to prevail over the next two years will present real challenges). So will the British Council. We are working further on this.

7. Location. The Embassy will need to be in the Green Zone (i.e. the area covered by Coalition forces), which seems likely to continue in some form or another for the foreseeable future. (In the longer term I suspect it may shrink and turn itself into a protected diplomatic area, rather like Riyadh.) We identified two options:

- a seven acre site, unbuilt on save for a school, on which we could build a temporary, and in due course, permanent Embassy plus residential accommodation;
- the building now used by General Figgures, together with contingency waste land which in turn joins up with a more substantial building used by the US military which we might be able to acquire, . This site could provide satisfactory temporary and in due course permanent facilities.

8. In either case, we envisage keeping the present British Office as a Residence, at least initially. Our presence will be at its largest during the next 2-3 years, and we will be able to give up some buildings thereafter. (I visited the former Embassy compound, outside the Green Zone. This has strong historical associations, but overlooked on almost all sides, and insecure.)

9. We have lodged these bids with the US authorities. We now need to work them up in more detail with a view to an early decision, formal approval by the Americans, and an early start on construction. We shall need to move a lot ore quickly than usual on an estate project if we are to have something in place by 1 July, even rudimentary. I shall pursue this with Dickie Stagg.

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## BASRA

10. Basra is more complex. In Basra tel no 9 (attached), Hilary Synnott argues that the assistance operation he has built up in CPA South should be maintained under British leadership. This would mean the Americans agreeing essentially that we would manage and disburse their aid (the lions share of international donor funds) in the South. The view in Baghdad was that this is unlikely. Nor is it clear that transition from the current CPA South operation to co-ordinated bilateral programmes would necessarily be harmful, though it would need careful management. I am discussing this further with Suma Chakrabarti this week. But in any case we should take full advantage of the UK profile which Hilary Synnott and MND (SE) have build up in the South. From our discussions in Baghdad, the Americans seem to envisage that the UK will remain the lead partner there.

11. Site. Satisfactory sites are available within the al Sarraji complex.

## THE NORTH AND THE GOVERNORATES

12. The Americans told us that they envisage a presence in the Governorates. There is a political case for some British presence – at least in the North, where Jeremy Greenstock and John Sawers believe that complete withdrawal would be a mistake. I do not see that we will have the resources for anything other than a minimal presence. Co-location with the Americans may be the answer. We will work further on this.

13. Resources. We shall cost these proposals in more detail. Preliminary estimates suggest that the recurring cost of our bilateral presence in Iraq could be around £30m a year (largely because of the security requirement) in addition to the cost of buildings. This is unfunded at present. Treasury agreed funds for Iraq expire on 30 June. I will discuss with Simon Gass the best approach to the Treasury, to ensure that we can carry out the tasks Ministers want. This will involve an SR04 bid but also a bid to the Reserve next year for Iraq – on top of our bid for the G8 and EU Presidencies and for additional security for our posts.

## THE NEXT SIX MONTHS

14. Like others before me, I was greatly impressed by the commitment and enthusiasm of British Staff, from a wide range of government departments, operating in difficult and dangerous circumstances. The recruitment and deployment arrangements seem to be working well, though we need to speed up the process a bit. There are some tensions on the ground, notably over

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security, particularly in Baghdad: staff tend to put a greater premium on quality of life (a relative concept in Iraq) than on security. I believe Jeremy Greenstock's maxim that no British staff should be killed or injured by a predictable attack is right. There are concerns, too, that service in Iraq is not properly recognised by Departments when people return to London. I will take up all these points with Permanent Secretary colleagues. I shall also write to all families, to follow up the reception here early in the month.

*Michael Jay*

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