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From: Michael Jay

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cc: Ministers
Board Members
Directors
Heads of Departments and
Strategy Units
Special Advisers

Secretary of State

IRAQ CONTINGENCY PLANNING AND PRIORITISATION

1. The FCO Board met on Tuesday to take stock of arrangements in place to deal with the Iraq crisis and consider further possible contingency arrangements.
2. Although it is still very early days, the arrangements we have already put in place so far appear to be working well. The two Emergency Units are operating on a 24-hour basis. There are 51 staff redeployed to the main Emergency Unit and 119 redeployed to the Consular Emergency Unit. Volunteers come from across the Office. In addition to the Emergency Units we have prepared the nucleus of a mission in Baghdad, set up the Iraq Planning Unit to deal with post-conflict issues, and seconded staff to the US Office for Humanitarian and Relief Assistance and other bodies. In all, this amounts to a redeployment of almost 5% of FCO staff in London.
3. In order to allow us to re-deploy to this extent all FCO Departments have had to show flexibility and have had to make choices about reprioritisation. This has mainly meant moving to streamlined working practices. Some of the ways in which Departments have begun to prioritise and now need to go further include:
 - Sending out standard rather than individually tailored replies to routine letters from members of the public – wherever possible;
 - The use of electronic signatures for replies to some MPs' letters;
 - Postponing non-essential internal meetings;

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- Cancelling non-essential overseas travel - including familiarisation visits and rationing attendance at Working Groups in Brussels;
 - Postponing non-essential training;
 - Cutting-down on non-essential submissions and ensuring that the length of briefs is kept to a minimum;
4. With some staff returning from Middle East posts, and the possibility of reallocation between the two units, the Board is satisfied that we have identified enough people to staff the two Emergency Units at the current level for the immediate future.
5. But we need to be prepared for an unforeseen escalation or a second emergency e.g. a major terrorist attack. We have identified staff for rapid deployment teams to be sent immediately overseas. Their departure would be an additional strain on the system. In addition to that, we need to consider arrangements for undertaking further emergency work in London. This will mean thinking more radically about re-prioritising.
6. In the event of a second crisis, we may need to transfer people from lower to higher priority areas of work. The Board agreed that we should initially look to the following areas of non-crisis related work in London where, depending on the nature and scale of the crisis, curtailing work in some areas might be possible.
- Geographical: Latin America, Caribbean, bilateral European desks, North America, North East Asia and Pacific, China and Hong Kong.
 - Functional: maritime, economic analysis, non-FCO lead EU multilateral, environmental policy, science and technology.
 - Administrative: Protocol, public diplomacy, records and historical, management consultancy.
 - Use Research Analysts to backfill gaps in Departments on a full- or part-time basis as people are moved to emergency work.
7. In the case of a major emergency, we might need to rely on staff in embassies overseas to carry out some tasks normally filled by staff from London, e.g. briefing for and attending international meetings. On the other hand, there are many areas of business which we shall want to maintain at full stretch, for example our ability to lobby on key issues, public services, and long-term projects crucial to the future of the FCO.
8. Reprioritisation in such circumstances will mean that it may not be possible to give Ministers the level of service in all areas that they have come to expect. But there is a

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positive side too, showing the FCO flexible, responsive and able to prioritise: After the event, we will need to look carefully at whether some of the changes we are making now could, in the interests of efficiency, become permanent.

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