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From: Charles Gray, Head MED  
Date: 30 April 2003

cc. PS/Mr O'Brien  
PS/Baroness Symons  
Mr Ricketts  
Mr Charlton  
Heads: Press office, SSU  
, Press Office  
Mr Collecott

To: Mr Chaplin  
PS/PUS  
Private Secretary

#### **BAGHDAD: REOPENING OF THE MISSION**

1. Further to my submission of 11 April (attached) we are now in the final stage of planning for reopening of Embassy in Baghdad (under the provisional title of "The British Office").
2. The 24 April military reconnaissance of our building went well, and the building has been declared safe. We have settled on a spot for the Container Embassy within the compound. The staff, the container Embassy and the four armoured vehicles are in Kuwait. 1 Para are in Baghdad to guard the compound perimeter. The RMP close protection team will arrive in Kuwait on 2 May, and unless there is an adverse security report in the interval the convoy will leave Kuwait on 3 May under arrangements made by 1 Division. They will arrive in Baghdad late on Sunday or early on Monday.

#### Press arrangements

3. The opening of the first British diplomatic presence in Baghdad for more than 12 years offers an excellent opportunity for positive news coverage. It will allow us to demonstrate our commitment to engaging with the emerging political leaders and re-establishing bilateral links, tell a good story about the difficult work diplomats do in uncertain circumstances and show off our containerised embassy for the first time. We

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can expect strong media interest from the hundreds of journalists based in Baghdad, who will seek both political comment on the future of Iraq and colourful stories about the flag flying again from the compound and the team greeting the caretaker.

4. Press Office recommend that:

- the Secretary of State should agree the attached draft press release for 1 May announcing the imminent opening of the office;
  - Christopher Segar's team, with assistance from the Embassy at Kuwait should arrange access for the media to cover their departure from Kuwait on 3 May;
  - Christopher Segar should give a doorstep/photo op for British and Arab media on arrival in Baghdad on 4 May, with the assistance of Charles Heatly (seconded to ORHA Baghdad).
5. Villepin has said this morning that staff have arrived in Baghdad to reopen the French Embassy. We have no confirmation of this

. I have recommended to Press Office that to minimise the risk of "race for Baghdad" stories, they should if this is raised with them simply that any arrangements the French have made are a matter for them.

JCR Gray