

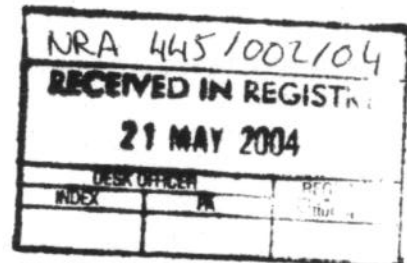
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From: Philip Parham  
Date: 18 May 2004

cc: PS  
PS/Baroness Symons  
William Ehrman  
Dickie Stagg  
John Buck  
David Warren  
Peter Millett, SSU  
Neil Crompton, IPU  
Andrew George, HW  
Jim Drummond, DFID  
David Richmond, Iraq Rep  
Patrick Nixon, Basra

To: PS/PUS



**SUBJECT: IRAQ: SECURITY OF CIVILIAN STAFF**

1. The PUS might welcome an update. This covers all the staff under FCO/DFID duty of care who are not embedded with the military.

Baghdad

2. All staff are accommodated under hard cover. There have been relatively few rocket attacks over the last fortnight, although one rocket landed inside the Green Zone on 15 May. Movements outside the Green Zone are carefully managed and considered case by case. Very few road journeys beyond Baghdad itself are authorised. There is heightened concern about the road between Baghdad International Airport (BIAP) and the Green Zone. I copied to you my letter to David Richmond about this last week (Flag A). David and his Security Committee have considered this carefully. They concluded that:
  - the threat was likely to remain high for the foreseeable future;
  - but there was no operational alternative: British staff would continue using the road while mitigating the risk as far as possible, eg moving in convoys of four armoured

Page 1

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238

vehicles, varying times, travelling in daylight only. We should also expedite the procurement of electronic countermeasures (ECM) which could increase protection against radio-controlled bombs. (Comment: this is in hand.) And the UK military would pursue with CJTF-7 whether more could be done to secure the road.

- the level of threat would be kept under constant review.
  - prospective UK visitors to Baghdad should be informed of our risk assessment of the BIAP road and left to decide for themselves whether to proceed with a visit in the light of that. US helicopter transport was not a realistic option except, possibly, for the most senior VVIPs.
3. SBMRI's staff advised David Richmond that the military were unlikely to accept that there was a need for dedicated RAF helicopter transport for UK civilian staff between BIAP and the Green Zone. But David would have no objection to our pursuing that idea. I recommend that we should do so, once we have resolved the question of military protection for the Consulate General in Basra after 30 June (see below).
  4. Baghdad have been preparing an updated evacuation plan, which should reach us tomorrow.

#### Basra

5. Security in Basra has deteriorated in the last two months, restricting staff movement. Patrick Nixon is content with current security arrangements. There have been five or six security incidents in the area of the Al Sarraji complex over the last two months, none of which has - fortunately - penetrated the compound itself. Staff are accommodated in soft-skinned CPA trailers. We have accepted this because of British military patrolling in the area and the relatively benign security environment. But the trailers are being sandbagged to give some increased lateral blast protection. (This has been moving very slowly, but is now being expedited.) And our Consulate General staff will in any case be under hard cover after 30 June.
6. The drawdown of CPA(S) staff will begin in early June as we approach the transition. DFID are considering whether to bring forward the departure of any of their experts performing non-essential tasks.
7. ACDS(Ops) has now replied to John Buck about the retention of troops in the Al Sarraji complex after 30 June. He says that "the need to maintain a British Military Capability in the complex - both to act as a QRF and to give the additional reassurance your people need - has been accepted. The size, sustainment and operating practices of the troops allocated to this task is probably best agreed by those on the ground in theatre." (Comment: no mention of patrolling the surrounding area, the other key task for which

we had argued the troops were needed.) General Stewart has told Patrick Nixon that he proposes to retain only a platoon of 35 on the site. SSU doubt this would be sufficient for the tasks we deem necessary. This will be taken up with General Stewart and his staff. William Ehrman has offered to raise this at a senior level with MOD. The PUS might like also to raise it with Kevin Tebbitt at Permanent Secretaries tomorrow, following up on his letter of 14 May.

#### Nasariyah

8. As reported elsewhere, the CPA compound came under sustained small arms, RPG and mortar attack from Sadrists between the afternoon of 14 May and the night of 16 May. All but one of the British CPA staff were evacuated (under fire) on 15 May. Rory Stewart (British Deputy Governorate Co-ordinator, who had been in charge until the Co-ordinator's return on 15 May) was evacuated with the Co-ordinator and the Control Risks team last night. They are now in the Italian military base.

9.

As with the similar incident in Kut last month, the decisive factor was the deployment of US airpower. But this did not happen until the evening of 16 May.

10. A British battle group is now being deployed to Nasariyah and is expected to be operational there by tomorrow evening. Its task will be to clear the Sadrists out of the city. But neither Patrick Nixon nor General Stewart think it will be sensible to send civilian staff back to the CPA office. Instead, a core staff may remain at the Italian military base and operate from there as security allows.

#### Samawah

11. Deputy Governorate Co-ordinator, is the only British member of the Governorate Team. Samawah has been relatively quiet, although there were exchanges of fire between the Dutch troops and Sadrists on 14 and 15 May, and mortars and RPGs are reported to have been fired near the CPA compound late on 15 May. The Dutch contingent is considered to be reliable. Patrick Nixon and (Basra Security Manager) will visit Samawah tomorrow to assess whether should remain there.

#### Kut

12. The Governorate Team led by Mark Etherington is re-established and working on tasks confined to the city itself. US troops and armoured vehicles are securing the CPA

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compound itself and taking robust action against the Sadrists remaining in the city. If the US troops were to be withdrawn, we would withdraw our staff.

Kirkuk

13. Paul Harvey and his Governorate Team are securely established in a well protected compound. US military are based at the airport nearby and patrol the city.

Irbil

14. Liane Saunders (Regional Co-ordinator, CPA-North) is based in an isolated compound, which our Security Manager in Baghdad regards as very secure and well guarded. She operates over a wide area. But her movements are carefully planned to minimise risks.

CBW

15. As widely reported yesterday, US troops appear to have found an improvised explosive device (IED) incorporating a shell which may have contained sarin. Even if the presence of sarin were confirmed, this would not necessarily indicate a deliberate use of chemical weapons. Many IEDs use old shells: the bomb-maker may not have known what the shell contained. JTAC had already been commissioned to provide an updated assessment of the CBW risk, which is promised by the end of this week. It is likely to conclude that, while some groups would like to deploy CBW if they could, there is no indication that they have the ability to do so effectively.

*Philip Parham*

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