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From: Major General J N R Houghton CBE



Assistant Chief of Defence Staff (Operations)

MINISTRY OF DEFENCE

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Whitehall

London

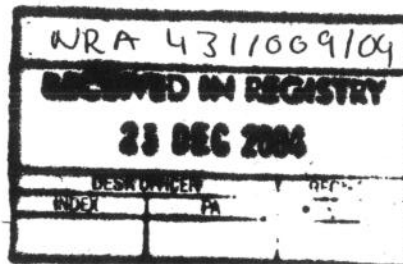
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3 December 2004

Thank you for your letter of 29 Nov requesting UK military helicopter support for movement of FCO staff in Baghdad between the IZ and BIAP. As you will be aware, we have been giving this our fullest attention and your staff have been kept abreast of developments during the week. This letter is merely to confirm the short term arrangements which we intend putting in place to assist the UK Embassy's operations.

We recently deployed additional helicopters to Iraq to support the Black Watch Battlegroup in North Babil. Although these helicopters were deployed for a limited duration only, it will be possible to extend their tour for a short period. Therefore, we intend to redeploy these helicopters (one Puma and one Lynx) from North Babil to Baghdad after the Black Watch has finished its operation. They should be ready for flying operations in Baghdad from 7 Dec. The additional Puma and the Lynx will be under command of SBMRI (Lt Gen Kiszely), whose staff will allocate their use across FCO, UKSF and SBMRI staff.

Unfortunately we can only guarantee, at this stage, to provide this level of helicopter support until the end of the year; or earlier, if Route Irish is re-opened to FCO vehicle traffic. Please understand that aircraft availability will not be continual, as routine aircraft maintenance and repairs will keep the aircraft grounded on occasions.

For the longer term, we are examining 'how' and 'if' we could sustain helicopter support to the FCO into 2005. We will need to clarify a number of issues in due course. First, acting on advice from theatre, MOD and FCO should consider the level of threat to, and security on, Route Irish which would allow FCO vehicle movement to resume. Secondly, we will need an estimate on when these conditions might be met. Thirdly, we will be reviewing the scale of helicopter tasking required to support the FCO and other customers in

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Baghdad. This will become clearer once the Puma and Lynx begin to provide their support next week. We will also need to take account of our overall military force posture and commitment to Iraq in early 2005 as well as our wider strategic priorities.

I will write again in mid-Dec to let you know our conclusions on the viability of a medium term solution for helicopter support. As before, we will consult closely with FCO staff, in Whitehall and Baghdad, during our consideration. We fully understand that the operations of the UK Embassy will be critical as we approach Iraqi elections. Hence we will endeavour to continue our support; but cannot guarantee it.

Original signed

ACDS(Ops)

Information:

SofS / CDS / PUS / VCDS / CNS / CGS / CAS / DCDS(C) / Policy Director / CJO / DG Op
Pol / ACDS(RP) / DG RP / Comd JHC / DJC-Mil / DJtCap

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