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NOTE TO THE BOARD: IRAQ HANDLING: PRIORITISATION

1. It is not possible to accurately forecast staffing needs at the time of a crisis. For a possible conflict in Iraq, a great deal will depend on how it develops and how long it goes on. The Emergency Units have now moved to 24-hour rosters. Although exact numbers needed over the medium term are not known, a sizeable depth in reserve in all grades is necessary to allow for an increase in staffing for rest days and unavoidable absences etc.
2. So far, reprioritisation has worked largely on a "salami-slicing" basis. Volunteers have staffed the Emergency Units (mainly from the FCO but with a few from OGDs), with most non-frontline Departments across the Office experiencing a modest loss of capacity. Departments with reduced capacity have taken their own decisions about priorities.
3. To secure further staff for the Emergency Units and create further "reserve list" of staff guaranteed to be available at very short notice, there are a number of possible options.

Option 1: No FCO-wide reprioritisation

5. We could repeat the office-wide trawl for volunteers on the same basis as before (i.e. only with the consent of Heads of Department), but this would be unlikely to secure a substantial number of staff.

Option 2: FCO-wide reprioritisation of cross-cutting work

4. Possible areas for reprioritisation are identified in the attached draft. An early draft of the attached note was circulated to the Directors' Committee on 6 March. There would appear to be some consensus on which types of work could be given a lower priority – e.g. letters, briefing and background analysis (where these are not related to the crisis).
5. Instructions to reprioritise could be combined with an office wide trawl and increased pressure to volunteer/release staff. Alternatively requirements could be placed on each Department to release a given number of staff.
6. In addition we could consider recalling staff from leave, language and other pre-posting training.

Option 3: Reprioritisation of geographical/functional work

7. The attached notes identifies possible geographical and functional areas of work where there could be scope to reprioritise. This does not imply that certain Departments or functions could be shut down entirely; only that some Departments may still have room to reprioritise internally, and others not.
8. Several Directors have questioned the lower priority accorded to their geographical/functional areas. But if the Board agreed lower priority geographical and functional areas of work, the Emergency Units could then look

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to these Departments to make more staff available. The arrangements would need to be flexible to take account of unexpected events (e.g. natural disaster in an OT)

Options 4: Suspending certain geographical/functional work

9. The Board may wish to consider whether a more radical approach is necessary to deal with an unexpected situation such as a second simultaneous crisis. Consideration could be given to putting some parts of the office on a care and maintenance basis. Careful thought would need to be given to how stored-up work could be dealt with once we return to normality.

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