

may security - 225 update - 3 Feb 06 (Conf system)

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Reference

**FROM:**

Ext:

**DATE:** 8 February 2006

**CC**

PS/PUSS  
PS/Suma Chakrabarti  
Mark Lowcock  
Minouche Shafik  
Martin Dinham

Lindy Cameron

**To:**

1. Michael Anderson (*agreed*)
2. PS/Secretary of State

Barry Kavanagh, Basra  
Tim Foy, Baghdad

Kabul

FCO

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**INFORMATION NOTE: SECURITY UPDATE – BASRA, IRAQ**

**Issue**

1. To update the Secretary of State on security issues in Basra.

**Summary**

2. The security situation in Basra this week has raised concerns over staff safety both for international members of staff and staff appointed in country (SAIC). We are monitoring the situation closely with the FCO and assessing options to temporarily reduce staff numbers should this be deemed necessary. All non-essential visits to Basra are on hold until further information is available. We will revert to the Secretary of State should any immediate action be required.

**Information (not for proactive disclosure)**

3. Three rocket attacks occurred on 5 and 6 February. No injuries or damage were sustained. Two rockets were fired at Basra Palace at 1.05am local time on 5 February. One fell to the North of the perimeter wall and the second in the Shatt Al Arab. This was followed by another

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attack on the Palace compound at 23.05pm local time on 6 February. Three rockets were fired, one of which fell in the Romanian area of the compound, one on the island 600m from the Consulate and the third in the Shatt Al Arab. At 23.50pm, another three rockets were fired at the Palace from a point 4km north west of the compound. They were less accurate than the first three. It is unclear where they fell. Both attacks are believed to be the work of a renegade Jaysh al-Mahdi (JAM group). For full details see e-grams 2402/06 and 2577/06 attached at Annex A.

4. Relations with the Governor of Basra are not improving and demonstrations continue over the detentions of members of the Iraqi Police Force. It is worth noting that on previous occasions, demonstrations have been followed by rocket attacks in the evening. The view of the Security Manager in Basra is that the frequency of attacks is unlikely to decrease in the short term. The accuracy of attacks is judged by the military to have increased in the last few months and is continuing to improve. The Security Manager in Basra is currently discussing with the UK military whether any pre-emptive measures can be taken in order to avert further such incidents.
5. The Consul General (CG) is currently assessing whether the number of international staff deployed in Basra needs to be temporarily reduced. DFID has 2 UK members of staff, 12 international consultants and 8 locally employed members of staff in the compound. The CG will consult with the security team in Basra and with the FCO in Baghdad and London before making any decisions. He has asked DFID Basra to consider the possibility of delaying the return of staff from leave, encouraging early leave and limiting the number of incoming visits over the next 10 days. Options being considered also include temporarily basing staff at the airport or moving them to Kuwait. DFID Basra will join a meeting at the Chancellery later today to discuss possibilities further.
6. It is worth noting that the rationale for reducing numbers is not based on decreased mobility or effectiveness. Road movements have not been affected by the attacks, although extra precautions are currently being taken due to the holy festival of Ashura. The proposed temporary reductions in staff are being discussed with a view to reducing the risk of someone being hit by indirect fire within the perimeters of the Palace compound.
7. In the meantime, the need has been re-emphasised for everyone to wear body armour as instructed by the Security Manager and to carry radios at all times after dark. International staff remain positive and morale is generally good. Barry Kavanagh, Head of DFID Basra is currently on leave but is being kept informed of developments until his return on 18 February.
8. Another current concern is that of the security of SAIC staff in Basra who increasingly fear for their safety after reports of intimidation and

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murders of local staff employed by the UK and increased tensions surrounding the Ashura festival. The CG and others in Basra have briefed local staff and do not believe there is much substance to the rumours. However, DFID Basra have offered local staff the option of taking time off if they feel unsafe, have advised varying routes for those who do come in and have made arrangements for varying access times and gates to the compound. They have also arranged for the Security Manager there to brief local staff more regularly

9. No immediate action is required. We will revert to the Secretary of State if action is deemed necessary.

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