

Post security note for PUS rev 1 (conf system)

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From: Rosalind Marsden  
Date: 31 August 2006

Nigel Casey

#### BASRA: POST SECURITY

1. Thank you for inviting my thoughts on security in Basra.

#### The level of risk staff face

2. The following strikes me, as a newcomer:

- (a) how exposed the Basra Palace Compound (BPC) is. We abut the city: houses, parks and fishing boats crowd around our walls. The "badlands" start about two hundred feet from my office. Many Iraqis fear coming into the Palace, knowing that the militia have eyes and ears all around it and monitor who comes in and out;
- (b) the risks our local staff run to work for us. One of our colleagues, \_\_\_\_\_ was killed on 18 June. His wife, \_\_\_\_\_ was seriously wounded and is recovering in Kuwait. She will not be able to return to Basra. Three of our former local staff have reported death threats against them. Over the last week militias have kidnapped, tortured and killed two UK military interpreters and shot two LE female interpreters employed by US Regional Embassy Office contractors (one killed, one seriously injured).
- (c) the fragility of our transport and supply links to the airport. Basra Palace is dependent on a tenuous air bridge. Since the Lynx was shot down in May, travel to and from the airport, including for leave, is by UK military helicopter in the hours of darkness. There are few helicopters in theatre, those that we do have are prone to breakdown (because they are worked so hard) and, when it comes to getting a seat, the military take priority over civilians. I am grateful to the Department for issuing a tender notice for a dedicated helicopter service: it will transform our ability to work closely with the military and cut back the time wasted in transit. Our supplies are bought in Kuwait, and are brought in with military convoys;
- (d) the difficulty and danger involved in moving around Basra City. The threat from IEDs, particularly Explosively Formed Projectiles (EFPs), imposes severe constraints on road moves around the city. Two of our CRG close protection staff were killed by an EFP last summer. In certain areas of the city, we can move around in convoys of three armoured vehicles using the back streets. But in many areas, we have to travel by Warrior tank, the only vehicle that can withstand EFP attacks (a very hot and claustrophobic experience in plus 50C in the summer). Because we depend on the military for support, road moves have to be planned well in advance and are sometimes cancelled at the last moment because of other operational priorities. Arranging meetings with Iraqi contacts in the City is doable, but quite a major undertaking.
- (e) the vulnerability of the BPC to Indirect Fire (mortars and rockets). IDF attacks into the BPC (which is divided into separate US, UN, British military and British Embassy sub-compounds) have steadily increased since the beginning of the year. There was a temporary spike in July following the arrest of the local JAM leader. The number of accurate rounds is increasing with the overall increase in the number of attacks. Around 45% of IDF attacks directed at the BPC impact somewhere within the perimeter. But of that 45%, less than 10% impacts in the British Embassy compound (partly because it is a relatively small site and partly because it is situated right on the edge). There has also been a recent spate of daytime attacks. We are well protected (though not immune) in our office buildings and hardened living

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accommodation. But we cannot keep people locked indoors all the time. We cannot count on IDF always missing. There is always a risk that someone will be caught in the open or that we will suffer a direct hit. I attach a paper by (OSM) and (SMO) which covers the ground in more detail.

3. We need to accept that the risks for UK based staff are high and do everything possible to mitigate them. For example, we have mitigated the major threats (IDF, EFP and kidnapping) to an acceptable extent by providing hardened living accommodation, limiting helicopter flights to the hours of darkness, varying routes, using Warriors or 3 vehicle convoys, as appropriate, requiring minimum movement outside after dark and full body armour and constantly reviewing our Alert Status in the light of the latest intelligence. Keeping staff safe is a complex business and requires a proactive security management approach. I am lucky to have such a strong Security Management Team.
4. It is worth noting that the US Regional Embassy Office (US REO) which conducted a temporary relocation of staff last month after the spike in IDF attacks, has now decided to bring all its staff back. The REO is also investing, belatedly, in hardened staff accommodation (which will mean bringing in 300 Turkish building workers for up to 8 months).
5. For LE staff, the threat is much greater and, I judge, increasing. We and IPU are wrestling with the dilemma of how to justify continuing to employ a bare minimum of local staff (who still want to work for us, indeed would be distraught if we laid them off) in the light of the current threat to them.

What are we able to achieve in the current security environment?

6. The next 6-9 months are critical to Basra and our legacy here. We have finally got a coherent Better Basra Plan that is about to start rolling out. We need to maintain a big operation here during that period – and indeed somewhat expand it - if we are to deliver this plan, set Basra on the road to transition and communicate our key messages to the Basrawis. I am confident that the Consulate-General can make a real difference to delivering these outcomes. The UK-led Provincial Reconstruction Team provides a focal point for coordinating the international effort on reconstruction, governance and rule of law. A number of DFID's major infrastructure projects will also bear fruit between now and March 2007.
7. The security environment undoubtedly imposes severe constraints on how effectively we can operate. The logistical difficulty of travelling between Basra Palace and the airport is a practical impediment to achieving the optimum level of coordination with our military colleagues. To attend one meeting at MND(SE) often requires spending two nights at the airport.
8. We all feel frustrated that we cannot move more freely in the City. Nevertheless, most staff do find ways to keep in touch with their Iraqi contacts, albeit with difficulty and not as often as they would like. Many Basrawi political, religious and tribal leaders are prepared to come into the BPC to see me. The PRT has developed good links with the Basra Provincial Reconstruction and Development Committee and attends sectoral working groups with senior Iraqi officials facilitated by the UN. But ordinary Iraqis are becoming increasingly too frightened to come into Basra Palace. DFID are hampered by rarely being able to visit their projects so as not to put their Iraqi contractors at risk. One way of circumventing this is to meet their contractors at the airport where they are not watched so closely. The PRT also has some Iraqi employees working from locations in the city who never come into the Palace. Our 35 police mentors go out to visit police stations several times a week with a military escort but can only remain on the ground for 1-2 hours at a time. In short, we cannot operate as we would like but, by being creative, we can still achieve quite a lot.

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What might force us to change our current approach

9. Critical triggers that would make us revisit our approach more radically include:
- another military helicopter being brought down by hostile fire
  - more sophisticated surface to air missiles deployed against our helicopters;
  - an increased EFP/IED threat as a result of Iranian attempt to put pressure on UK/US over the nuclear issue
  - an increase in the IDF threat eg more mortar attacks, more accurately and effectively delivered. The drawdown of UK forces draw down in other southern provinces (eg the recent closure of Camp Abu Naji in Maysan Province) may lead to more (and more professional) attacks by experienced IDF teams.
  - the use of heavy mortars (120mm) against which our existing hardened accommodation would not provide sufficient protection in the event of a direct hit
  - a reduction in UK military capacity to support our work (helicopters or cover for our road moves around Basra City and to Kuwait).
10. In the short-term, the level of risk is likely to increase as a result of the planned military surge operation (Operation Salamanca) in Basra City starting in mid-September. This will involve a concentration of military force in different districts of the City, on a rolling basis, followed up by high visibility quick impact projects and more intensive police mentoring (taking advantage of the improved security environment). The risk of retaliation against Coalition sites cannot be discounted. However, unless this surge operation takes place and we can deliver the rest of the Better Basra Plan, we will lose our best – and possibly our last - opportunity to regain the initiative and start to turn Basra round.
11. On the plus side, we should also benefit from the planned reinforcement of the British military presence in the BPC. The increase in the Battle Group from 430 to 600 with the arrival of an additional Warrior company, will mean better patrolling and harassment of potential firing points.
12. I see no option, at the present time, but to give the Better Basra our best shot and to ratchet up our effort accordingly. This looks like the last chance saloon. Morale here is good and the sense of job satisfaction is high. All our staff are volunteers and are able to perform a useful function, despite the security environment. Those who could not do so have already left. But we need to accept that, with a larger footprint, the associated risks are high, despite our best efforts to mitigate them. We should therefore be prepared to conduct a radical review of our operation here in 6 months' time (unless forced to do so at an earlier stage by any of the other triggers in para 9 above). If we succeed in delivering Better Basra, we should have started to see a real improvement by then in terms of security. If we fail, we are likely to be operating in a significantly worse security environment and it will be clear that radical decisions are necessary.
13. We also need to accept the funding implications of a larger operation. Basra Palace is already overextended in terms of supply routes, water, power and accommodation. Plans by the US REO and the UK military to build up their presence will increase the load on the Compound's creaking infrastructure. To deliver Better Basra, we need to invest urgently in our infrastructure (see Justine Allan's attached note).

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cc

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