

DECLASSIFIED

CONFIDENTIAL

From: Peter Ricketts

Date: 1 September 2006

cc: PS / Dr. Howells
John Sawers
Dickie Stagg
David Richmond
Simon McDonald
David Warren
Daniel Bethlehem
Andrew Noble
Nigel Casey

Dominic Asquith, Baghdad
Rosalind Marsden, Basra
Malcolm Chalmers, Sp Ad
Richard Vincent, MOD
DFID

Foreign Secretary

SUBJECT: IRAQ: SECURITY OF OUR POSTS

1. I chaired a meeting this morning to review security of our posts in Iraq in advance of your visit next week. At my request, MOD and DFID officials participated, reflecting our close relationship on Iraq policy and staff security.
2. My predecessor set four conditions for any FCO member of staff working in Iraq. They are:
 - All staff must be volunteers
 - They must be fully aware of the security risks
 - We must do all we reasonably can to reduce the risks they face; and
 - Conditions on the ground must be such that staff are able to their jobs effectively
3. We saw no need to change them. We keep the situation under regular review. There was a roadside bomb attack yesterday on an UK embassy convoy in the Baghdad Red Zone. We assess this was not targeted specifically at HMG but was an attempt to hit a Western target of

DECLASSIFIED

CONFIDENTIAL
DECLASSIFIED

opportunity. This morning in Nasariya, southern Iraq, there was a similar attack on a DFID convoy. None of our or the DFID contracted staff have been injured although two close protection staff were injured in Nasariya: one of the injured staff is likely to have his leg amputated.

4. These are two of the most recent examples of the evolving threat and risks. Others include increased indirect fire attacks on our Baghdad and Basra compounds and intimidation of our locally engaged staff, particularly in Basra. We have invested considerable resources in reducing the risks faced by our staff, and for all those for whom we are responsible. As the risks increase, our security measures evolve to mitigate them. This month Dominic Asquith will conduct an Iraq wide review of staff and their ability to deliver on the ground. I am therefore satisfied that the conditions set out in paragraph two are being met.
5. However I have concerns over two issues. First, the useable space in Baghdad and Basra is increasingly at a premium. We face pressure to accommodate increasing numbers of officials and/or military staff. It is for posts to manage but the basic principle should be that billets go to those with the highest priority. In the meantime, I have asked officials to consider if functions, particularly on the management side, currently carried out at posts, could be relocated / outsourced to other regional posts or back to London.
6. I also remain concerned about the vulnerability of the Basra compound. As you will see, the helicopter airbridge to the compound is mission critical and – because of wider problems with MOD helicopter availability – we have had to begin a procurement tender process for a dedicated Basra helicopter service paid for by the FCO. MOD expertise will be fully part of that tender process, not only to ensure that the equipment is up to UK military specifications, but also to reassure our staff.



Peter Ricketts

DECLASSIFIED