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From: Nigel Casey

Date: 1 December 2006

Cc: (see end)

PUS
Dr Howells
Private Secretary

IRAQ: FUTURE OF OUR PRESENCE IN BASRA

1. I attach a draft paper on the future of our civilian presence in Basra, as requested by the Foreign Secretary at the last meeting of DOP(I).
2. I hope the draft is self-explanatory, but would be happy to expand in writing or orally on any points that are unclear. This is a complex and fluid picture. We are reasonably clear about the direction we would like to go in the next 6 months. But predicting how the picture will look much further than that is extremely difficult.
3. In particular, we do not believe we are yet in a position to make a firm recommendation about the future of the **Basra Palace** site. There is more work needed, notably with the US, to establish whether maintaining our interest in the site for the medium to long term can be made a viable, affordable option. This is work we need to get done urgently. For practical reasons linked to the possible withdrawal of UK troops from Basra city, we are going to need to take what could be an irrevocable decision very early in 2007.
4. The immediate purpose of this paper is to present current FCO thinking to other Departments, notably MoD, to inform discussion at DOP(I) on 7 December. If the Foreign Secretary is content, we therefore recommend that she write to DOP(I) colleagues enclosing copies of the paper in advance of that discussion. MoD have been asked to produce a note in parallel setting out the state of their thinking on the UK military posture in Basra in 2007. We envisage officials being tasked to pursue these linked questions urgently together, in the light of Ministers' guidance at DOP(I).

Nigel Casey

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