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Reference

FROM:

Ext

DATE: 14 July 2006

CC

PS/PUSS
Minouche Shafik
Sue Owen
Liz Davis
Mike Green

Tim Foy, Baghdad
Basra

To:

1. Michael Anderson (agreed)
2. Martin Dinham (agreed)
3. Suma Chakrabarti (*The security situation is disastrous and no real prospect of it improving. In these circumstances, the approach to staff deployment and management set out in paras 17-20 (Baghdad) and 24-34 (Basra) seems sensible. It would be helpful to discuss with Secretary of State next week. S C 140706*)
4. PS/Secretary of State

Special Advisers

INFORMATION NOTE: SECURITY UPDATE - IRAQ

Issue

1. To update the Secretary of State on the security situation in Iraq, particularly in respect of locally engaged staff in Basra and on DFID's efforts to improve pre-deployment procedures for staff and consultants as part of FCO's wider review of security requested by Sir Michael Jay.

Summary

General Trends

2. In Baghdad, the overall security situation continues to deteriorate. In terms of reported attacks, casualties and sectarian murders the situation is at its worst. Kidnappings of politicians and senior officials (including a deputy minister subsequently released) are the latest trend. Both the attacks and kidnappings are conducted in an increasingly blatant, brazen manner, indicating a change in the tactics of the insurgency. Jaish al Mahdi (JAM) appears to be behind much of the violence. The Iraqi Security Forces and

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3. In Basra and the South, sectarian violence has increased of late, predominantly against Sunnis. Prime Minister Maliki is seeking an extension to the Basra State of Emergency. A Basra "Security Chief", central to the delivery of the Basra Security Plan has still to be appointed. Handover of responsibility for security from MND (SE) to the Iraqi Security Forces took place in Muthanna on 13 July.

Staff specific

4. In Baghdad, travel outside the International Zone (IZ) remains difficult due to the increasing incidence of improvised explosive devices (IEDs).

5. SAIC travelling in and out of the IZ are taking precautions to avoid certain entrances due to the targeting of checkpoints and are working shorter days due to the curfew. These restrictions may impact on our work in the longer term. The situation is manageable for now. One of our two SAIC in Baghdad, resigned this week to take up a position with the British Council. For the moment, we do not plan to replace him due to the security situation.

6. In both Baghdad and Basra, the incidence of indirect fire attacks (rocket and mortars) seems to have picked up again slightly with rockets landing close to the Embassy compounds but procedures worked well and no injuries or damage were sustained. The demonstration outside the Palace in Basra continues. There has been no violence, but the Consulate is working with MND (SE) to have it policed by the Iraqi Army as it has put off some visitors to the Palace.

Local staff in Basra

7. , the FCO member of staff injured in the shooting which killed her husband on 18 June is making good progress. The results of the FCO offer of a severance package to locally engaged staff following the shooting of two of their colleagues have followed expectations. Most FCO office-based staff have resigned, leaving gaps which will need to be filled by UK or third-country nationals. "Life-support" and maintenance staff and daily labourers, who are deemed as being at less risk, continue to come in.

8. The position on national DFID local staff remains the same. We are organising a development attachment in the UK for our one directly contracted member of staff. All others continue to work remotely. No local staff employed by DFID or our contractors will be required to attend work at the Palace for the foreseeable future. DFID's work has, as yet, not been significantly affected by these changes.

Improvements to pre-deployment procedures

9. As part of the response to Sir Michael Jay's request for a review of security of staff and missions in Iraq (circulated to the Secretary of State and others on 4 July), DFID was asked to review its pre-deployment procedures, and medical fitness clearance for staff in particular. We are in the process of revising our procedures following a number of problems relating to the fitness of some of our consultants. We shared information with FCO this week on

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some of the improvements in process (Full details in Note to FCO attached at FLAG B) We will update the Secretary of State on DFID's full revised pre-deployment procedures for Iraq in September.

Information (not for proactive disclosure)

Baghdad and the North

10. Security continues to deteriorate with Iraqi civilians continuing to bear the brunt. The overall level of attacks across the country continues to increase with an average of 850 per week across the country compared to 550 this time last year. Incidents in Baghdad make up about 40% of the total.

11. Sectarian killings are the greatest cause for concern although levels of general criminality have also increased. In June, the Baghdad morgue took in over 1400 bodies of victims of execution style killings, the highest ever recorded. By way of contrast, before the war, the murder rate in Baghdad was about 100 a month. On 10 July, between 13 and 40 Sunnis were rounded up and shot execution style in a mixed area of South West Baghdad in broad daylight. The attack was almost certainly carried out by renegade elements of Muqtada al Sadr's Shia militia. Incidents like these, typical of the Sunni/Shia "revenge cycle," appear to be becoming more blatant and the perpetrators, bolder.

12. The frequency of bombings, focused on large concentrations of people, also continues to increase. On 1 July, a large lorry-borne IED detonated in a market in Sadr City. It caused the highest number of casualties for a single attack since September 2005.

13. The recent significant increase in the kidnapping of high-level officials along with their private security details (PSD) is of considerable concern and indicates a change in the modus operandi of the insurgency. On 1 July, Taysir al Mashadani, a female member of the main Sunni Tawafuq block, and member of the Council of Representatives (COR), was kidnapped and her whereabouts and those of her guards unknown. Tawafuq boycotted several COR meetings in protest, but have since returned.

14. Raad al Harith, the Deputy Minister for Electricity was also kidnapped last week, although he was later released. In addition to these incidents, which have made the headlines, there have been at least eight Directors General or Deputy Ministers kidnapped of late. Some of these are people we work with - two of our partners have been abducted from the Ministry of Finance in the last two months. The insurgents have shown themselves more willing to enter ministries directly and to take on large PSDs. Raad al Harith was taken with 19 bodyguards, 7 of who have not been returned.

15. These concerns are exacerbated by the apparent inability of the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) to control the situation, despite the Baghdad Security Plan. Despite the steady build up of trained and equipped ISF, they are not yet agile enough. (See e-gram 30270/06 at FLAG C) Full scale sectarianism is not judged to have taken hold over the average Baghdadis, so the prospects of outright civil war remains some way off, but the sectarian militias

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dominate the streets. The government seems in denial and at a loss how to react. The Baghdad Security Plan is therefore in the process of being reassessed. General Casey and the Iraqi Security Ministers hope to present a revised plan to Prime Minister Maliki by the end of this week. It will seek to identify the source of the "death squads" and increase offensive operations against them. The Iraqi Army will play a larger role.

16. Increasing sectarian violence is resulting in increasing population movement. Across Baghdad, Sunni and Shia families are moving, often exchanging houses with each other where family ties exist, or using the services of local estate agents quick to capitalise on a market. While many people are moving voluntarily others are not, and coercion is often criminally motivated. The incidence of internally displaced people (IDPs) continues to increase - IOM has reported another increase in IDPs to 109,728 - mostly from Baghdad to Karbala and Diyala and from Basra to northern and western Iraq.

Staff specific

17. In Baghdad, travel outside the International Zone (IZ) remains difficult due primarily to the increasing incidence of improvised explosive devices (IEDs). The use of explosively formed projectiles (EFPs) has fallen in recent weeks, reflecting the believed impact of successful operations interdicting the importation, local manufacture and distribution of these particularly lethal devices. We are not however dropping our guard and travel to locations that have been susceptible to EFP use (particularly the Ministries of Interior, Oil and Electricity) in the past remains restricted.

18. The Ministry of Finance remains out of bounds for us and we continue only to access the Ministry of Interior (MOI) through airlifts to Forward Operating Base (FOB) Shield except in very exceptional cases. The CRG team monitors the security of our staff and consultants working at MOI very closely. Two US officials had to be removed from the Ministry of Oil last week, when a standoff occurred between 40-50 armed disgruntled employees and the Oil Protection Force. There is also an increasingly high level of threat reporting in Mansour just west of the IZ, the area in which many embassies are located. For most of this week, the Germans, currently the acting EU Presidency, were locked down, as were most of the other European embassies located outside the IZ.

19. SAIC continue to work half-days due to the curfew and an ongoing threat of suicide, vehicle and other IEDs at certain IZ checkpoints makes travel in and out higher risk and increasingly complicated. One of our two SAIC in Baghdad, _____ resigned this week to take up a position with the British Council. For the moment, we do not plan to replace him due to the security situation.

20. After four weeks of respite from indirect fire attacks, there have been sporadic attacks on the IZ over the last two weeks. On the 5 July, a rocket landed close to the checkpoint nearest to the British Embassy compound. Some shrapnel landed inside the compound but procedures worked well and nobody was hurt. The origin of this and another rocket fired at the same time,

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which impacted in the same area just outside the IZ, is not clear. They are thought to have originated in a Sunni/Shia mixed area in the North or North East of the city and were probably launched by Shia elements aiming either at the IZ or the Sunni area immediately behind.

Basra and the South

21. There has been a gradual increase in execution style killings in the South, most of them Sunni. On 5 July, police arrested a man who had placed a bomb outside a Sunni mosque in Basra. Three men believed to be members of an assassination squad targeting Sunnis were arrested in Maysan on 4 July. The same day, the Iraqi Police Service reported the murder of a Government official responsible for Sunni affairs who was shot twice in the head, the mark of a sectarian attack. On 3 July, the Provincial Security Committee agreed to impose an indefinite six-hour nightly curfew for Basra city, which took effect from 7 July. The reported number of murders has since decreased although Sunni intimidation continues.

22. Governor Wa'ili announced an extension of the Basra State of Emergency until 10 July last week. Prime Minister Maliki is seeking COR approval for the further extension of the State of Emergency before he will appoint a Basra Security Committee. A Basra "Security Chief", central to the delivery of the Basra Security Plan also has still to be appointed. Maliki has stated that the Security Committee will report direct to him and that Wa'ili will play no role in delivery of security. This is a step forward if Maliki can enforce this.

23. Handover of responsibility for security in Muthanna from MND (SE) to the Iraqi Security Forces took place on 13 July.

Staff specific

24. Staff security remains largely unchanged. Rocket and mortar fire on Basra Palace resumed last week after a period of relative calm. There were two attacks on 10 July, which included a rocket fired from the east side of the Shatt al Arab and two mortar rounds fired from central Basra. Security officials on sentry in the Basra Palace also saw mortars being set up not far from the Palace that evening and dispersed the perpetrators by firing in their direction. The attack on the 10th was the fifth in as many days.

25. The sit-in outside Basra Palace demanding the release of detainees held by MND (SE) continues. A deputation visited the Consul General on 4 July and the protestors march to the gate every evening to chant slogans but there has been no violence. The numbers of demonstrators encamped outside the palace appear to be dwindling but their presence is putting off visitors to the compound. The Consulate is working with MND (SE) to push the local authorities to ensure that the demonstration is policed, ideally by the Iraqi Army.

26. Camp Abu Naji in Maysan continues to be targeted sporadically with indirect fire, with an attack of 3 to 4 rounds on 10 July. Camp Smitty in Muthanna was also attacked, which is rare. Local tribesmen retaliated quickly.

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Local staff in Basra

27. , the FCO member of staff who was injured in the shooting which killed her husband on 18 June, is making good progress and her condition is much improved. She has been moved out of the intensive care unit and is now in a general ward. She was sitting up and able to have a conversation with the FCO management section staff who visited her at Shaiba Logistics Base on 9 July. She is still undergoing treatment. Of particular concern is a bullet lodged close to her spine. A spinal specialist will examine her in due course to determine how to treat this. FCO are looking for an apartment for mother as a short-term measure while recovers.

28. The FCO assess that the local staff employed on the compound are at different levels of risk. The office-based staff are considered most at risk and tend not to come in when security worsens. They are considered a more valuable target by terrorists. They tend to be members of Basra's middle class who are being targeted anyway, and who have fewer links to tribal networks that can offer a degree of protection. Staff working in the cookhouse, laundry and technical works staff are considered less at risk, as are daily labourers.

29. FCO offered their office-based staff three months' salary if they wanted to leave. We believe most have now accepted this offer. FCO is now deciding if and how to fill these positions with either UK or third country nationals. It is too early to tell yet what the impact of this will be on the running of the compound. Essential maintenance tasks continue to be carried out by the non-office based staff who continue to come into work, but roles such as the accountant, the IT operator, translators and others in management section will need replacements. Although far from ideal, this has so far had no significant impact on DFID's work.

DFID local staff member

30. Our one directly contracted local member of staff continues to work from home and carry out business for DFID in town, but will shortly travel to the UK on a development attachment as we had previously advised. We are putting logistics and a programme in place for this at the moment. The attachment is planned to take place from August to November 2006. He has been fully informed of the option available to him and others on FCO local contracts, but has chosen, for now, to continue to work for us remotely. This is not ideal, but having a link to the outside world is vital for us and we recommend continuing his employment for as long as he is willing to work for us, and the threat to him working remotely does not increase. DFID Basra is looking into ways of paying his salary, which he would previously have collected monthly in cash at the Palace.

DFID consultants' local staff

31. We have different types of local staff working for consultants who all accept different degrees of risk in continuing to work for us. Those most at risk, and for whom the threat has increased most over the last few weeks, are those based at Basra Palace, none of who have returned to the Palace

since the incident. They are Administrative Assistants working on our governance and infrastructure programmes who have both resigned. The one remaining Programme Officer working on our governance programmes is working remotely.

32. The governance and infrastructure team leaders suggest that, for the time being, we do not employ any further administrative assistance. This is not ideal – it will mean more administrative work for consultants – but we think that, for the moment, this is manageable. We will review this in one month.

33. We have several local staff members working for us on project sites in Basra and in the other southern provinces. While the general security situation in southern Iraq has worsened increasing the threat to them generally, the risks they take in working for us have not increased significantly.

34. We suggest that, where staff can work remotely (on project sites, at home, in town), we should continue to employ them on the same basis as before and that we maintain our position on this as originally planned despite it differing from the FCO approach. Our circumstances are different. FCO local staff are needed on a daily basis at the Palace. Most of our local staff are not and the 2 administrative staff who were have already resigned. All of our local staff know that they have the option to work flexibly, to take time off if they feel threatened, and to leave if they feel it is too dangerous. No DFID local staff will be required to attend work at the Palace for the foreseeable future.

Improvements to pre-deployment procedures

35. In FCO's Security Review of 30 June submitted in response to Michael Jay's request for a review of security of staff and missions in Iraq, FCO highlighted the need for other government departments to review their pre-deployment procedures. Although in most areas DFID staff are covered by the procedures and provision, FCO have in place for their own staff, pre-deployment procedures is an area we manage separately.

36. Their concerns related specifically to problems we have experienced relating to the physical fitness of some of our consultants for work in Iraq, who have either been asked to return to the UK on arrival in Iraq or prevented from deploying at the last minute. We have since adopted various measures to prevent this from happening again and are working to formalise these measures further through discussions with the consultancy firms we work with, the human resources and welfare departments at DFID and FCO, and by looking into possible providers of independent medical assessments for difficult working environments to cover cases in which the usual medical screening procedures for overseas offices are not sufficient. We have updated FCO on the improvements we are putting in place and will update the Secretary of State on DFID's full revised pre-deployment procedures in September.

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DFID planned improvements to pre-deployment procedures
July 2006

DFID has had a number of cases over the last few months of consultants who have been asked to return to the UK as a result of concerns for their health or who have been identified pre-deployment as suffering from conditions or mobility issues which precluded them from working in Iraq at the last minute. Efforts underway to tighten up DFID's pre-deployment screening procedures include the following:

Medical Fitness Clearance

Staff complete an online medical clearance questionnaire managed by Capita. This is reviewed by an Overseas Health Adviser (OHA). Clearance is given by email and a referral provided for the individual to make an appointment for the necessary vaccinations. Should the form highlight any potential issues, the individual is referred to the OHA for a telephone discussion or physical examination. Staff are now also asked to complete the improved FCO-led "Posting to Iraq: Fitness pre-assessment" form. The forms are processed by Capita and the DFID Security Coordinator advised of clearance. As a "medical in confidence" questionnaire specifically tailored to the rigours of Iraq, this enables us to identify early on conditions which, although not a problem in an ordinary environment, could pose serious problems in Iraq. Should the form highlight any areas for concern, Capita's OHA can recommend a telephone consultation or face-to-face examination.

Consultants have, until now, been asked by the firm recruiting them to obtain medical clearance from their GP. We are now also discussing with the consultancy firms we work with, the possibility of all staff deploying to work on our projects in Iraq, undergoing a pre-assignment medical with an organisation specialising in assessments tailored to difficult working conditions and environments. We have already referred some consultants to Interhealth, one such organisation. We are also looking into other possible providers and services, including the Offshore Operators Association Medical

Where concerns have been raised regarding a particular individual, and especially in borderline cases, we ask that the examining doctor share the relevant information with the Frontier Medical teams in Iraq, who know best what the conditions are and what support systems they have in place, before taking the final decision on whether staff can deploy.

A further improvement we are considering is the possibility of pre-, during and post-posting psychological assessments of debriefs in addition to the health surveillance provided by Frontier Medical in country. DFID's Welfare Department is currently making arrangements to make a number of DV-cleared independent counsellors available to staff for consultations during their R&R breaks or at the end of their posting. We hope to have this service in place by September.

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Those being consulted on these improvements and options under consideration include the welfare and human resources departments at FCO and DFID, Frontier Medical, Iraq Policy Unit (IPU), project managers in the consultancy firms we work with and DFID staff in both London and Iraq.

Hostile Environment Training

The Iraq-specific AKE Hostile Environment training is mandatory for DFID staff and consultants visiting and deploying to Iraq. We have, in one or two very exceptional cases, allowed staff to deploy without attending the Iraq-specific training. This, however, generally only applies to individuals who have attended other similar Hostile Environment courses and have experience of working in either Iraq or Afghanistan. Similarly to FCO, although we have not used this option yet, we have considered a 2-day course for senior staff visiting Iraq whose schedules do not allow for the full 4-day course and are arranging one at the moment for one of our senior members of staff.

DFID have worked closely with IPU and Security Management Directorate (SMD) at FCO to make improvements to the AKE Iraq-specific Hostile Environment Training and to further tailor it to give staff the best possible preparation for Iraq.

One of the key changes has been the integration of a fitness assessment as part of the practical scenarios on the last day of the course, following or during which the course organisers alert us to any concerns they have relating to an individual's performance. We have also recently changed procedures for bookings on the course for consultants by asking them to reserve all places through the Iraq Programme Team at DFID. This enables us to monitor attendance and performance more closely for both staff and consultants.