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From: Michael Jay

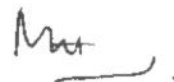
Date: 25 November 2003

cc: Peter Collecott
John Buck
Howard Drake

Philip Parham

IRAQ: CALL BY SIR HILARY SYNNOTT

1. Many thanks for your minute of 25 November ahead of Hilary Synnott's call on me this afternoon. We talked about the political and security scene in Iraq, but mainly about staffing issues.
2. Hilary Synnott said that he was concerned about the growing difficulties in recruiting people to go to Basra. There were a number of vacancies in key areas, and he understood that the latest Whitehall trawl had not gone well. He thought that unless there were some more positive approach to recruitment, the whole policy risked failure. He said that he had discussed these issues with the Secretary of State yesterday. The Secretary of State had suggested that the administration, (and by extension other departments in Whitehall) should try to encourage people to apply by pointing out the career advantages there would be for them. Hilary himself had suggested paying people more.
3. I said that I recognised the difficulties, but that there were drawbacks to these solutions. The strong view hitherto in Whitehall had been that all postings to Iraq should be volunteers. Andrew Turnbull had also taken the view that we should not try to pay people the market rate to get them there. This would work for the private sector, but not for us with our duty of care to staff, which was uppermost in the minds of a number of my Permanent Secretary colleagues.
4. I said I would reflect further on the conundrum. It was important to maintain Whitehall solidarity if possible. The need to do this had lain behind my request to Baghdad and Basra draw up lists of essential and non-essential staff. Hilary Synnott confirmed that he had been reluctant to do this since he was at present lacking both.
5. I should be grateful for your views on how serious the staffing issue is, and for any advice on how we can overcome it. Are there issues under discussion in the Cabinet Office machinery?



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