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From: Peter Collecott

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Ref:

cc: PS/Ministers
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MED

Private Secretary

A BRITISH EMBASSY IN BAGHDAD

1. Now the military campaign is underway, Ministers might welcome an update on plans to establish an Embassy (initially an Office) in Baghdad - once it is safe to do so.
2. The existing Embassy compound in Baghdad is a 4 acre site on the banks of the Tigris, ours dating from 1922. The buildings have been unoccupied since 1991 and are unsafe for future use. Plans are in place for a two phase re-occupation of the site as soon as hostilities are over, and military ordnance personnel have declared the site safe. (We will rely heavily on support from coalition armed forces in the early days of the re-occupation: for explosive ordnance disposal, perimeter defence and defensive engineering works. We shall also need to call on the support of RAF or USAF flights in and out of Baghdad for carriage of FCO technical installation teams and their classified equipment.) These plans have had to be made on the basis of worst case assumptions - an insecure security environment; no secure office buildings or accommodation available off-compound; no available utilities.
3. Phase 1 of the re-occupation of the compound will consist of five 40ft specially converted to provide living and office accommodation for the four person team, led by Christopher Segar, who will re-open the office in Baghdad. The containers will arrive in Kuwait on 26 March by road from Dubai. When the compound and route northwards to Baghdad have been declared safe, the containers will be transported overland in convoy with the team's protected vehicles, escorted by the RMP close protection team. The Embassy team will have secure communications with the FCO from the outset. The containers will be entirely self-sufficient for power and water. The team will take several weeks supply of food and water with them.

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4. During the first week of May we will be ready to start Phase II, erecting a protected flat pack prefabricated "portakabin" Embassy on the compound. The Embassy village will be fully self-sufficient with its own water, drainage system and power supply. It will provide secure living and working accommodation for 44 staff, including military protection personnel. The facility is being manufactured in the UK and will be transported to site in flat pack form, with the associated engineering plant; all in all 65 20ft containers. The confidential area, accommodation for 12 staff and the protection team, messing, laundry and support facilities will be completed within seven weeks. The whole Embassy will be completed within 12 weeks of starting work on site.

5. This timetable is based on transport of the flat pack Embassy by sea from the UK to Kuwait, and by land from there to Baghdad. This exposes us to a very awkward period if relative normality returns quickly to Baghdad. We will understandably come under great pressure – including from Ministers - rapidly to expand our presence in Baghdad, but will have to wait some weeks for completion of the flat-pack Embassy. We will, of course, squeeze in as many as we can to the container Embassy and to the successive stages of the flat-pack village as it is built. If the security situation allows, and they are to be had, we can use hotel rooms or other accommodation temporarily. We are also keeping open the option of calling in a debt with the Americans by asking them to transport the flat-pack containers and equipment by air to Baghdad. (The RAF are not at all sure they can help.) Now is not the time to broach this. However, two or three weeks could be saved if we succeeded.

[Signed: Peter Collecott]

Peter Collecott
Director General (Corporate Affairs)

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