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31 July 2008

Thank you for your letter of 10 July.

As the project at the Airport requires both military and civilian/commercial expertise, it is overseen in London by a cross-Whitehall group comprising the MOD (the chair), DFID, FCO and the Stabilisation Unit. Work in Basra is led by 903 Expeditionary Air Wing (903 EAW) on behalf of the General Officer Commanding (GOC).

The focus of the report from Paul Fox commissioned by the cross-Whitehall group was on the civilian support that HMG should provide the Iraqi Airport management until around mid-2009, and we are now implementing his key recommendations. The first of the consultants is working with the Iraqi airport management on a programme to take forward priority projects and later in the year the second will help the Iraqis to develop a business plan for the medium to longer-term. The consultants will provide further advice on the next steps we should take in supporting the Airport's management – indeed, the first such report has just been received. But given the constraints on us we have always tried to be realistic about what HMG can achieve at the Airport. Paul Fox was clear that the Airport's management would not have the capacity to absorb much greater levels of advice, a view shared by our people on the ground in

Michael Wareing

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Basra. Our experience in Iraq suggests that the quality rather than the quantity of advice is key. On that note, 903 EAW is arranging for the Iraqi Airport management to visit Amman in Jordan to see how a successful airport in the region operates and we are scoping a potential mentoring role for Manchester Airport, as Geoff Muirhead (the Chief Executive) is keen to get involved.

Good progress is being made in other areas. The current programme of infrastructure projects, which will enable the Iraqis to operate the Airport in daylight hours, is on course for completion and certification by the US Federal Aviation Authority by mid-October. An estate handover programme is being agreed with the Iraqis. Iraqi air traffic controllers and fire and rescue crews have received training.

Looking more widely, the appointment of a Minister of Transport following the return of the main Sunni bloc to Government is good news in terms of empowering the Ministry. The National Security Council has now decided to give the lead at Basrah Airport to the Ministry of Transport and also directed that a private security contract should be implemented there. This should resolve the impasse with the Interior Ministry over improving security. A plan is also being worked up to transition Iraqi airspace to Iraqi control, with the anticipated expiry of the UN Security Council mandate at the end of the year a driving factor. In practice, this could see the Iraqi Civil Aviation Authority 'owning' the airspace and delegating sectors back to Coalition Forces for their use.

You also asked me to look into our provision of a military officer into the Basra Support Office. I can confirm that the first officer to fulfill this role took up his post this week.

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I look forward to speaking to you again soon about the Airport and our other Basra initiatives.

*For [unclear],*  
*1/21/02*  
DES BROWNE

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