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SUBJECT: IRAQ: SECURITY/MORALE/STAFFING

1. I heard a wide range of views during my short visit to Basra and Baghdad. Overall I was impressed by the resilience and good spirits of staff (many of whom extend beyond 6 months) in exceptionally testing circumstances. These encompass not only the constant security threat, but also living conditions which are way below what we should be offering our staff (other than in a short-term emergency).

2. We need urgently to make living conditions in both posts as good as possible. The main accommodation issues should be sorted by early next year (some of them well before then); although the new accommodation will still compare unfavourably with that in most posts around the world. We must also improve the amenities available to staff who have few alternatives (none in Basra) outside the immediate compound. This means swimming pools, tennis courts, gyms, easy Internet access. I am happy to help in any way I can.

3. The improvements above are essential. Similarly we need to deliver on the promised "golden tickets" for the increasing numbers with Iraq experience. None of this, however, will be enough to prevent significant numbers leaving (particularly the married unaccompanied) if there is a serious security incident in which members of staff are hurt/killed. Morale is fine, but fragile. It would not take a lot to change this. The threat is as high as ever – with some evidence that insurgents are looking at new ways of attacking the Green Zone. And it may well get worse as the planned elections approach.

4. Conclusion:

a) We need to review constantly the number of staff in both posts to ensure that they all really can add value, in a situation in which movement off compound is so constrained. Nobody should be there unless we are clear their role is critical to the achievement of our (very important) goals in Iraq. I am sceptical about the impact of those trying to help the

Iraqis reform their Ministries on the basis of 2-3 meetings a week. Similar work in Sofia (a much less difficult environment) was impossible without having people working in the Ministries full-time.

b) We must have adequate security staff in both posts. I wasn't convinced that the arrangements in Baghdad are adequate (only one Security Officer, with a non-DV'd DFID back-up; and a likely gap at SMO). These should be urgently reviewed.

c) We need to have a contingency plan for how to handle things if many fewer staff (at all grades) were willing to serve in Iraq because of the security situation (this would need to cover some form of communication strategy – ie how to explain this to the outside world).

[signed] Dickie Stagg

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