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From:

OD Secretariat  
Cabinet Office

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## COBR: IRAQ SECURITY SITUATION: UPDATE

### Summary

1. Situation remains volatile with security concerns focusing on Basra. Steps being taken to protect CPA, UN and NGO personnel in theatre. JIC to produce broad assessment on the security situation in Iraq next week.

### Detail

2. COBR met again this morning to review the security situation in Iraq. Graham Fry (FCO) was in the chair. FCO, MOD, DFID, Met Police, DfT, Cabinet Office, JTAC and the Agencies attended. This note records the key points.

### Latest intelligence

3. The security situation in both Baghdad and Basra remains volatile.

### Security arrangements

4. DFID and FCO Security advisors; who returned from Iraq over the weekend, briefed COBR on their assessment of the security situation:

5. In Baghdad, the picture is relatively reassuring. Overall security and staff awareness within the CPA zone, where the British Office (BOB) will be located for the foreseeable future, has improved. Steps were being taken to address recent lapses and to strengthen emergency response procedures (such as drills), but there was still more to be done to re-enforce a climate of security awareness more generally. DFID and the FCO agreed to take this forward as a matter of urgency. The position was not helped by US reluctance to share their assessments. FCO are pursuing.

6. In Basra, security advisers agreed that the situation was more alarming and,

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though being downplayed locally, the co-ordination and targeting of recent attacks suggested more than criminal activity. Security at the CPA compound was still inadequate despite a number of enhancements and staff there were still deemed to be at risk. COBR therefore agreed that their preferred course of action would to move staff from the existing CPA compound to more secure locations within Basra airport until satisfactory physical security measures were in place. FCO would seek advice overnight from Hilary Synott on whether this was a sensible precaution that would not compromise the operational effectiveness of the CPA in Basra to an unsatisfactory level.

#### UN and other Agencies

7. Existing security measures at UN and NGO sites in both Baghdad and Basra were assessed as inadequate and their desire for openness to the Iraqi public judged incompatible in the current climate. It was important to devote more time and resources anticipating attacks rather than reacting to them. DFID was in discussions on these issues to identify what immediate steps could be taken to address security concerns; including the movement of UN personnel to the secure zone. A balance had to be struck between the political desire to be independent of the coalition presence and the need to be protected from terrorist attacks. The FCO in consultation with DFID would convey this message to the UN in New York and underscore the need for significantly improved security around its sites.

COBR agreed the following:

- FCO and DFID would meet tomorrow to consider a timetable for early implementation of the recommendations in the Security Advisers reports. A combined action-sheet with timescales would be produced and circulated.
- FCO would consider the designation of permanent security managers for both Baghdad and Basra who could provide a rolling review of the threat; act as interlocutors and keep the relevant people on the ground informed. They would also be better positioned to re-enforce the seriousness of the threat and assess the need for additional physical security measures as and when necessary.
- FCO would press the US (at the local and strategic level) for an assessment of the security situation outside the CPA secure zones in Baghdad and Basra and, in particular, encourage them to develop appropriate measures for enhanced security for NGO's and UN personnel that will allow them to operate effectively

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- MOD would review what security measures/requests have been made locally and provide a considered view of its legal responsibilities (in line with FCO legal advice) for protecting UN and NGO staff in Basra
- The Cabinet Office should raise the seriousness of the current situation at the next Ministerial on Iraq and re-iterate the need to deploy only those staff deemed essential. Any other pressing concerns/implications should also be raised.

Resumption of commercial flights

8.

. There were a number of concerns remaining on the UK's legal obligations for flights into Basra, not just for UK carriers. The Cabinet Office would therefore convene a separate meeting tomorrow to urgently consider this together with the implications of, and likely timescales for, a resumption of commercial flights to Basra.

Next meeting

9. It is not intended to hold another COBR meeting on this issue but rather to take forward and keep under review security measures within the existing Whitehall mechanisms for dealing with Iraq. The JIC will be producing a formal assessment of the security situation next week.

10. I am copying this note to Geoffrey Adams, Graham Fry and Neil Crompton (FCO), Andrew Campbell (DfT), Peter Watkins (MOD), Jonathan Sedgwick (Home Office), and (DFID), (JTAC), and Sebastian Madden, Julian Miller, Jim Drummond and (Cabinet Office).

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