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To: Iraq Policy Unit
Subject: LEAD: OO BASRA/FCOLN 51: SOUTH IRAQ: BEFORE AND AFTER TRANSMISSION

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TO IMMEDIATE FCO
TELNO 51
OF 051445Z DECEMBER 03
INFO IMMEDIATE CABINET OFFICE, DFID, WASHINGTON

REF: YOUR TELNO 9 TO BASRA

SUBJECT: SOUTH IRAQ: BEFORE AND AFTER TRANSMISSION

please PASS TO IRAQ REP AND PJHQ

SUBJECT: SOUTH IRAQ: BEFORE AND AFTER TRANSITION

SUMMARY

1. Grateful for recruitment efforts up to now. Adequate human resources are yet more important within a compressed timetable. Some recommendations, drawing on impressions from my calls in London last week, for approaches up to and beyond dissolution of CPA. Feedback requested.

DETAIL

2. I am grateful for the considerable efforts which have been made to fulfil my requests for staffing and armoured vehicles (TUR). I realise that this intrinsically complex task has been made more difficult by the widely held perception that secondment to Basra might involve danger, discomfort and long hours with little reward (although, seen from here, some of these concerns are exaggerated).

3. But, without wishing to seem to complain, I must point out the long timescale involved in actual delivery (para 3 of TUR) and the implications of this for the future. In practice, a third of the 37 staff requested in early September are not expected to arrive until some time in January (para 3 of TUR), a lead time of

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over 4 months. Staff in other sectors, requested later, are hoped to be provided in December and January. I welcome that. And the establishment of a centralised spreadsheet covering slots and departure dates should facilitate the process from now on.

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4. I mention this not to go over old ground, but because the acceleration on 15 November of the timescale of CPA's dissolution (now to be 30 June 2004) renders our present activity yet more important. The overall objective of bringing about a stable, prosperous and non-threatening Iraq is in several respects more difficult to achieve if there is less time available for the Coalition to make progress over economic and infrastructure reconstruction, over law and order, and in influencing Iraqi perceptions. It becomes even more urgent to have reached a stage at which a sovereign Iraqi government asks us to stay as development partners so that we can continue to advance the objectives for which we engaged in the conflict in the first place.

5. It was put to me in London last week that the search for candidates had been rendered more difficult by lack of specificity over job descriptions, or by modifications to my original bids in the meantime. While I sympathise with this, I must emphasise that this reflects the very nature of the problem. As I have repeatedly stressed, the needs on the ground are virtually limitless. Tasks cannot be given precision until there is an expert on the ground who is capable of making an informed assessment. In the early stages my small team were almost entirely generalists. Once we have had experts in place we have found, almost invariably, that they successfully decide what needs to be done and get on with it. (It is particularly galling to have a new arrival in Baghdad pronounce on what is or is not appropriate in Basra with no prior consultation here (para 4 of TUR)).

6. These considerations have a bearing on future efforts over maintaining staff levels. It would be a mistake to take the view that the needs will fall away on 30 June, for the reasons in para 4 above. So we shall continue to need: expertise in fields for which we have already bid; replacements for existing staff; and, possibly, other staff to deal with unforeseen issues which may arise in the interim. Specifically:

(a) There is a mismatch between Ministers' emphasis to me last week on the political importance of our activity and Michael Jay's account of Whitehall Permanent Secretaries' concerns over duty of care. The latter may increase the difficulty of recruiting even willing civil servants (we have seen specific examples of this in relation to certain ministries). I am glad that Michael resolved to have another go.

(b) Further efforts may be needed to encourage recruitment of officials. An enhanced financial package might help (I am not convinced by the judgment conveyed to me by several officials last week that it would make no difference: that was not the case, in my experience, either here or when times were hard in Pakistan). In any event, officials will cost the taxpayer far less than those recruited on the open market.

(c) Because of the long lead times regrettably involved, the question of succession needs to be addressed at an earlier stage than hitherto (which has led to several officers leaving without replacement). This will be particularly relevant for key officers such as the Director of Law and Order whose contract is due to

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expire next month

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(d). Recruitment should look beyond the planned dissolution of the CF on 30 June. If all goes well, we shall need to sustain an intensive development cooperation/technical assistance relationship well beyond this, to consolidate progress made, perhaps based in a Consulate in Basra (possibly ultimately located in the present CPA building). The UK might usefully maintain an international coordination role. This will require a careful transitional process with maximum use of acquired experience.

e) We should not become mesmerised by job descriptions. The main need is to have relatively expert people on the ground in sufficient numbers and quickly. Resourceful officers will find plenty to do for themselves. Contracts need to be sufficiently flexible to allow for this. Important opportunities have been missed because of our collective failure to achieve people on the ground. This task will be enhanced further if the still-forming Governorate Teams in each of the 4 provinces were to fall away on 30 June.

7. My wider thoughts on the role and purpose of CPA (South) are set out in my paper of 12 November. Since it did not prove possible to discuss this collectively in London last week, and in the absence of any negative comment from either London or Baghdad, I and my staff shall continue to be guided by it. We have now also prepared a detailed Action Plan for each sector, taking account of the new timescale. We shall revise this in the light of further revisions of the Baghdad Strategic Plan, as and when these appear.

8. The foregoing relates only to the South. There may be a different balance of argument in other parts of Iraq. But, having invested so much in the South up to now, it would be a shame if the considerable beneficial results were to dissipate between now and June or thereafter. To prevent this will require a continued and sustained effort.

9. I should be grateful for feedback on this telegram. If my propositions are accepted, could I be assured of consequential and specific follow-up? If they are not, I would be glad to take the debate further. Either way, views on such matters will affect the direction of our efforts over the next seven months. I have shown this to Andy Bearpark in draft.

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