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Date: 27 May 2004

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4/6

28 MAY 2004

To: PS

IRAQ: CIVILIAN STAFFING AND SECURITY

1. We have been reviewing with SSU our security arrangements once more in the light of Monday's attack in Baghdad which killed two British civilians and wounded another. A joint FBI/British police investigation into the attack is underway. The indications are that an explosive device was attached magnetically to the bottom of the vehicle.
2. assessments from post conclude that we should be prepared for an increase in attacks over the next two or three months intended to disrupt the handover and the new Iraqi Interim Government. The attackers are being bolder with more incidents in daylight.
3. At present we have around 180 civilian staff throughout Iraq, 115 of which are in Baghdad. These include staff from a range of Government departments – UKTI, HMT, Home Office, DoH, DfES, NIO, Northern Ireland Civil Service - as well as staff from DFID and MOD. OGD staff, except for those from DFID and MOD, fall under our duty of care. We remain in close touch with these departments and all their staff receive the same security briefing and training as ours do. Their home departments could withdraw their staff at any time if they so decided, though none has yet taken this step. DFID currently has about 22 staff in Baghdad and 57 in Basra and is giving serious

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consideration to accelerating the drawdown of some due to leave on or before 30 June, about a quarter of the total, mostly from Basra.

4. The view from post and SSU is that we are currently at the limit of the technical measures we can apply to protect staff in Iraq. They have armoured cars and armed protection teams. Electronic Countermeasure Devices to protect vehicles against remotely detonated bombs are on order and we have chased the MOD to speed up delivery. All staff have body armour and helmets. Everyone in Baghdad now sleeps under hard cover. Similarly, procedures have been reviewed once more following Monday's attack and have been further tightened. The security managers are constantly reviewing the threat and apply the security guidelines robustly: if travel becomes too dangerous, staff are required to remain in the secure zone. It would be difficult to do much more and still allow staff to carry out their jobs.
5. There are, however, three options for further minimising the risk to staff:
 - i) We could bring forward departure dates for those staff scheduled to leave in June, as DFID are planning.
 - ii) We could delay the deployment of new staff going out to fill jobs at the Embassy
 - iii) We could reduce our presence in Baghdad.

In conjunction with David Richmond and Christopher Segar, we are already bringing forward a few departure dates where this does not greatly affect our work in Iraq. We have delayed one deployment considered non essential under option two. We have not yet moved to option three, beyond bringing home four forensic scientists whose work required them to work in isolated locations and would have put them at risk

6. We are, though, working on contingency planning should the situation continue to worsen. We have to be ready to conclude that the nature and extent of attacks have reached a point where we are no longer able to fulfil our duty of care. The security of our staff must remain paramount and we can not ask people – even volunteers – to take risks that could lead to further casualties. In particular, we envisage three possible scenarios which could trigger a withdrawal of staff:
 - a) An increase in violence and targeting of our staff outside the Green Zone which made it impossible for staff safely to operate outside the Green Zone. At this point we would consider withdrawing those staff whose jobs depend on being able to get out into the city.
 - b) A further deterioration in security on the airport road. Though dangerous at present it is passable with care. If we reached a stage where getting into and out of the country became too hazardous we would consider withdrawing all but the most essential staff.

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- c) The Green Zone itself becoming too dangerous to live and work in due to, for example, an increase in frequency and accuracy of rocket attacks or serious security incidents in the Green Zone itself. We would need to consider withdrawing remaining staff.
- 7. We are working with Baghdad to identify those staff who would be affected in scenarios a) and b) above. We are also drawing up departure and arrival plans for the transition period which avoid having too many staff travelling together at the end of June/beginning of July when there may be a rise in attacks.
- 8. The above applies mainly to Baghdad. We constantly monitor and review security in Basra and the governorates. Whilst Basra has seen an increase in incidents over the last month the situation is nevertheless more stable than Baghdad. Patrick Nixon does not think we need to consider reducing staff, although DFID may accelerate the return of some of their staff.



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