

John Sawers

UK Police Assistance to Iraq

I would be grateful if you would personally grip this issue and ensure that the key action points arising from Chief Constable Kernaghan's report of his Iraq trip are dealt with as soon as possible. A combination of the Byzantine bureaucracy of ACPO and a lack of understanding in the FCO about police issues and practice (in strong contrast to the FCO's obvious understanding of the UK military) threaten further delays and a sub-optimal delivery in an area where the UK has a serious contribution to make.

The imperative is that the UK police officers already volunteered as trainers in Basra must be deployed as promised by mid-December (ie in less than three weeks) as promised. But Kernaghan's report (para 3.3) says that this deployment to Basra "has not yet been formally requested" (by the Home Secretary and me) and "is subject to an appropriate security assessment". Are these two claims correct? If so, why? The formal request, if still outstanding, must be put in hand today (27 November). What is the further "security assessment" involved, in addition to that carried out by Kernaghan? We cannot have a situation where there is a higher level of security comfort provided to UK police than to UK civilian staff – yet this seems to be one implication from this.

The specific Police Assistance Recommendations at Section 6 of the Kernaghan's report all seem sensible. 6.2(b) (the 24 trainers) is already in hand – the others should be actioned too. (There is obviously a wider resource issue of CPTs for the proposed four Governate police advisers.)

Kernaghan is right to highlight the difficulties in securing volunteers from the 43 ACPO (territorial) forces, given the current autonomy of their Chief

Constables, and that 16 of these 43 have simply refused to cooperate with this request. The short-term way through is for Kernaghan's recommendation at 8.2 for a letter to issue from the Home Secretary to all Chief Officers, with a parallel letter to the Chairman of the Association of Police Authorities (para 8.4) seeking APA endorsement for overseas missions.

I should like a draft minute from me to the Home Secretary for my weekend box. (My Private Secretary will send a personal copy of the draft to PS/Home Secretary to alert him and seek comments on the draft.) The minute should also propose that the Home Secretary use his powers of direction under the Police Reform Act 2002, for all the very good reasons in Kernaghan's report.

What adds to the urgency of all this (and potential embarrassment too) is that we have paid for the training school, which is, I am told, ready and standing empty: everyone knows that building up Iraq's own security and police is essential and urgent, and that in Basra we are in many other areas leading by example. And there is the fact that Denmark (5 million population) has managed to deploy a squad of trainers whilst the UK (60 million population) has so far failed to do so.

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 (JACK STRAW)

cc: Sir N Sheinwald, 10 Downing Street
Michael Jay
John Buck