

March 10, 2004

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TO: Ambassador Richard Jones

FROM: (b)(6)

SUBJECT: Security concerns

Dick,

It has now been over 24 hours since our CPA colleagues in Hilla were murdered. Here in the north, we have received no report on this (other than an initial, sketchy "head's up" from Regional Ops), so we are relying on wire services, rumors and e-mail for details. None of that is sufficient for us to do an examination of our own procedures, at a time when we are groaning under the burden of multiple visitors, increased regional staff, and expanding demands from Baghdad, all of which require us to launch multiple trips each day. I know, too, that (b)(6) and his team had a narrow escape last week, but we have received no detailed read-out from Baghdad about what happened and what lessons might be learned from that incident.

I am deeply concerned by some of the exchanges that I have seen today that we, collectively (including Washington), are going to start engaging in a game of blaming either the victim or the victim's immediate supervisor in the field. But as a field supervisor, I urge CPA-Baghdad and Washington to use these murders to re-examine our profile and our mission here.

If we faced the dangers that have been routine here in any other diplomatic posting, the staff would have been evacuated and the Embassy shuttered long ago. Given the critical nature of our strategic objectives in Iraq, that solution is obviously not an option for us. But we can and must scrutinize each one of our activities in light of the very real security threats that we face every day, and we must work harder to minimize risks by providing the staffs that we do deploy with the resources they need to do their jobs in as safe a manner as possible. CPA-Baghdad is failing in both keeping our mission focused on the essential and on providing the resources the field needs.

Let me provide some examples from CPA-North, first regarding resource. Our teams in Diyala, Dohuk and Mosul still have no PSD. For Diyala, the team is in Baghdad, supposedly ready to go, but neither (b)(6) (GC in Ba'qubah) nor I (in my regional role) have been able, despite repeated inquiries, to get a straight answer from the security contractor or Regional Ops about the delay.

In another example, I have two armored cars in Arbil at my disposal – one provided for me under the Triple Canopy contract and an FAV Suburban provided by State (with another promised). (b)(6) has two additional FAVs, devoted to her movements.



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That is a relatively robust armored car fleet compared to other CPA Governorate Teams. Yet we have a GC and Arbi-based Regional staff of over 20 Americans, all of whom have reasons – or orders from Baghdad -- to travel. While Arbil itself is relatively safe compared to elsewhere in Iraq, our office supports the region, meaning our people must go on predictable routes to dangerous locations. Most must travel in unarmored vehicles. There are many more examples of where we have been asked to work in the most dangerous environment of any State Department posting in the world, yet without bare minimum of resources to deal with the threat.

Making this more difficult is the diffuse nature and overwhelming number of the taskers we receive on a daily basis from Baghdad, almost all of which require us to leave the relative safety of our compounds to carry out. This includes visitors that do not seem to meet the threshold of essential functions. One potential visitor wishes to come discuss links with the Kurdish Boy Scouts. StratCom people expect us to identify exchange visitors and MEPI participants, types of activities which are important, yes, but which could also be put off until after the transition by simply reserving spots for Iraqis now, to fill in the names later. We now have new taskers about filling positions on the Commission of Integrity and distributing leaflets about its work, yet we cannot tell whether this is simply a good idea or an essential one worth risking our lives for.

CPA-Baghdad is an enormous operation, with thousands of people working on a huge variety of issues. Each issue in isolation is probably important, and certainly the staff working on those issues can explain in great detail and with conviction why this tasker is critical or that visit essential to Iraq's success. But our teams (even our now expanded regional team) are small. We do not have the resources to jump to each of these taskers or support all of these visitors. Nor should we -- each time that we do so, we are putting our lives on the line. I expect CPA-Baghdad and my employees at the State Department to be much more discriminatory about a visit or tasker, determining whether it is absolutely essential to our mission or whether it is merely something that would be nice to have accomplished, if resources and security circumstances allowed. Now, everything proposed is reported to us as having "high level" support in Baghdad or Washington; we have not succeeded in turning off a single visit since I have been here, only to an occasional change in dates.

If I am going to risk my life or – worse – risk the lives of my staff by sending them into the field, I want to know that the proposed activity or visit is vital to our Iraq enterprise. In general, I consider our interactions with Iraqis on the specifics of the TAL and the details of the transition to be that sort of activity, public outreach worthy of our scarce security resources. The potential rewards in this case make it worth us taking the risks (while we still need sufficient resources to attempt to minimize them). On the other hand, I do not consider general, academic discussions on democracy to be of the same vital importance, particularly not in Iraqi Kurdistan where the locals have had an imperfect but nevertheless workable representative government now for more than a dozen years.

Given our need to minimize risks, I would also like to ask CPA-Baghdad, and perhaps Washington, to cease with the "one-size-fits-all" approach to the 18 governorates. The

town hall meeting is a case in point. The town hall initiative is indeed a worthy one in places where the idea that locals can interact with officials publicly, candidly and without fear of retribution is novel. But civil society in Arbil, Dohuk, and Sulaimaniya is far different, as civic fora and public debates on political and economic issues are commonplace. Yet we are being forced to devote scarce resources to what will, up here, be an artificial exercise, just so that someone can say that "all 18 governorates have had town hall meetings." We are exposing ourselves and our Iraqi panelists and guests to real dangers for limited benefit. If the purpose of the town hall was to get the message out about the TAL, the Parliament up here has already had a lively session, moderated by someone who was involved in the drafting. Moreover, as we know, the Kurds are, if anything, too enthusiastic about the TAL. We don't need the town hall meeting to build support for the TAL or to get the KRG residents accustomed to discussing their future.

I would even go so far as to question why we have so many people in the field. The TAL has now recognized the KRG. Why, then, do we have a small team of three people risking their lives in Dohuk?

In these last critical months before the transition, when we are facing dangers such as those that killed our Hilla colleagues, we need to minimize our exposure to only the most essential tasks and visits. We can minimize this risk by withdrawing people from our most vulnerable or less strategically important places, by minimizing the number of taskers that require travel, and by minimizing the number of visitors. All of us working in the field want to interact with Iraqis and want desperately to play an effective role in helping see that our objectives in Iraq are met. But we want to know that we are risking our lives for the essential factors that would go into that success, not for taskers and visits generated by an enormous, hard-working, and well-intentioned staff in Baghdad that either do not understand or choose to ignore the constraints on resources and risks we face in the region.

I would like to make one more point. Regional Ops sent out a message, later modified to reduce the offensive suggestions, admonishing Governorate Coordinators and Regional Coordinators to keep in mind that they are ultimately responsible for the safety of their staffs. That is a reasonable enough burden to put on the shoulders of a career ambassador: The career ambassador has long experience to draw upon, as well as an RSO to advise him. Regulations and Emergency Action Plans will have been established, or a template in place to do so. Security resources would have been provided, and he (or she) will have the option to evacuate staff or refuse country clearance to visitors. But it is not a reasonable burden to place on GCs, who are in many cases O3 and even O4 officers and with no DS support. (This is not a criticism of (b)(6) for whom I have nothing but admiration, but (b)(6) does not have teams or authority in the field.)

In the immediate term, I would like to ask CPA-Baghdad to consider the following steps:

- There must be high-level pressure put on (b)(6) shop to get the PSD teams to all Governorate and Regional Teams immediately. Whatever needs to be done must be done to provide protection to our teams. Now.

- We need a hotline (probably by e-mail, since phone service is spotty) when the needs on the ground and the PSD contracts do not mesh. We had a problem here this week, for example, that Regional Ops did not address as quickly as we needed (although it was resolved), and we have not received answers to our multiple queries regarding the problem with the Diyala PSD team. As we gear up for the final stretch, we should not have to worry in the field about renegotiations of essential protective services.
- CPA-Baghdad must provide more complete information and on a more timely basis to the field on incidents so that we may assess our own procedures. We have heard, for example, that there was a link to the Iraq police (or people impersonating Iraqi police) in the Hilla incident, but do not know if there are ways to identify authentic Iraqi police checkpoints. We need a system for knowing when these attacks occur and an assessment within 24 hours, including recommendations on how to reduce our risks.
- Proposed visits and taskers to the field either need a higher-level scrutiny before they are conveyed, or there needs to be someone higher level to whom we can refer questions about the importance of the proposed activity.
- Ideally, we need a message from the Administrator as to what are our highest priorities -- a limited number of them -- for the next few months. To us, it seems intuitively clear, but, with our provincial perspectives, we could be wrong. Moreover, as the Baghdad bureaucracy has grown, there is no clear sense of the priorities that we can discern out of the jumble of taskers and proposed visits. Presumably, activities that can await the establishment of the Embassy -- e.g., IV programs and Boy Scouts -- should not require the devotion of time and resources now.
- Messages conveying taskers and proposed visits to the region need to explain who generated the idea and how it fits into CPA's strategic goals for the period up to transition.
- Regional Ops needs to devise a real country-clearance type procedure for people traveling to the field, to give GCs and RCs the opportunity to clear a visit before it is announced -- and before people simply show up, as they often do here in Arbil.

Dick, I accept risk as an unfortunate part of diplomacy today. You know from my previous tours that I do not choose easy and safe places in which to serve. But the risks here are far, far greater than anywhere else, which makes it that much more important that CPA-Baghdad and Washington start exercising more discipline immediately on what are our essential functions in this critical period. In essence, we need better definition of when to risk our lives, and we need better protection when we do so.

CC: NEA - (b)(6)