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From: Deputy Regional Coordinator, ORHA South

To: IPU, Dominick Chilcott

Date: 1 June 2003

Subject: ORHA SOUTH – FIRST IMPRESSIONS

I have now been here 12 days or so and thought a sitrep might be in order.

I arrived to find an office that had been set up in indecent haste and which, two weeks later, was suffering the consequences. Office infrastructure was (and still is) virtually non-existent, living conditions were (and still are) pretty miserable, large numbers of Danish staff were passing through on their way to Baghdad imprinting their own organisational ideas, and the handful of Brits who had arrived a few days earlier were feeling a bit bemused.

Amb Olsen arrived in the office from Damascus the same day as me. Ole Olsen is 61 years old and has had spent much of his career in Africa and the Middle East. He is used to hardship postings and is taking this one in his stride, albeit it takes its toll on him. He makes no secret of not wanting this posting but is determined to do it to the best of his ability. He has a strong sense of humour and organises regular games' nights and informal parties. His forte is in interfacing with the locals – his Arabic is excellent – and he has struck up a good rapport with the UK military commanders (which I and my military colleagues have been keen to facilitate). He also has a sense of urgency and is keen to see tangible results. He relies heavily on me as the Deputy, the COS, Col Peter Duklis (US), and a Danish Political Adviser, Morten Sejr and we work together well as a team. :

I have used my time so far in structuring the office, process-building and resource issues. Olsen's Algerian born Doctor wife, Fatima, has accompanied him and assists in a number of areas around the office. Together they share a small room in the building which serves as our office space and our living quarters and which we share with the Royal Military Police and the Civil Affairs staff from HQ 1 Div. We have plans to move into a newly renovated building a short distance from our current office accommodation, hopefully within 3 weeks although ORHA Baghdad has still to sign a contract. We also have a plan to move some staff into a (basic) hotel pro temps to free up office space for newcomers. The longer term intention (6-8 weeks) is that we move into another renovated accommodation block next door to our new office space but again no contract has yet been let. To date, the only assistance we have had from ORHA Baghdad is 7 vehicles and a Raytheon operated 'Batmobile' which facilitates internet connection (patchily). We have no operating budget (despite repeated letters and e mails and meetings) and are running, sparsely, on Danish Foreign Ministry cash and Amb Olsen's own bank account. Unlike the other regional offices, we also have no security guards or caterers (we eat with B Coy, Black Watch) and have been forbidden for contracting for them independently. This situation is

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untenable and we continue to exert pressure on Baghdad. Any pressure that can be exerted on Washington from London (I understand State are not releasing the purse strings to ORHA Baghdad) would be appreciated as ORHA Baghdad re currently renegeing on their promise to set up the office and support it financially.

At time of writing we currently have 21 staff : 5 Danes (4 of whom are contractors), 8 UK civilians plus 5 UK military, 2 US military and 1 Japanese. Our concept of operations is to glean as much information as possible from the international organisations, NGOs and military who have been working the area, and then to proceed hand in hand with the UK military (and US military in Thi Qar and Muthanna provinces), setting priorities jointly. At the point where we have the knowledge base and the necessary resources we will move into the lead, allowing the military to focus on security and their exit strategy. Clearly this will not begin to happen until we have considerably more people, and for a while yet we will be largely re-active, although in some areas eg health where we have a strong 3-person UK team, significant progress is already being made. Other areas the UK team members are involved include trade, education, customs, utilities and pay. We are attempting to mirror the ministry structure replicated at regional level (less MFA and defence) but two members, for instance, to cover oil, water, sewerage and sanitation, gas and electricity across 4 regions is ambitious by anyone's standards. Additional staff are arriving in trickles but are predominantly military and directed to us by HQ 1 Div and Tim Cross. Although they fill stopgaps and we are exceedingly grateful, Baghdad will need to help populate the office with the experts we require. Interaction with Baghdad on policy issues is virtually non existent despite our best efforts to engage by e mail. It is still impossible to telephone anyone in Baghdad.

We are currently Basra based and focused but are now actively shifting up a gear and putting our first officer in Thi Qar province tomorrow with more to follow soon. The plan is to cover Muthana from Dhi Qar as Samawah takes it lead from An Nassariah. Gen Mattis of 1 Mar Div, within whose AO Thi Qar and Muthana fall, has been exceptionally helpful and supportive. Despite Buck Walters of ORHA Heartlands having been up and running in the region for many weeks now, at a meeting today Gen Mattis was scathing about what they were achieving and the lack of cooperation with the US military on the ground.

In addition to ORHA South (or CPA South as we hear on the grapevine we should now be called!), Local Governance Teams (LGTs) have also been set up and one exists in Basra headed by a 73 year old Texan. These are USAID contractors, RTI, working to the Head of Reconstruction in ORHA, Baghdad. But their mandate is virtually identical to what we perceive ours to be (less the overarching policy responsibility) on the basis that LGTs were set up before the regional coordinator idea was conceived. ORHA Baghdad has so far avoided realigning mandates or bringing the LGTs under the control of the Regional Coordinators. I gather this is causing confusion across the regions and Tim Cross is, quite rightly, trying to get Bremer to focus on the issue. The issue hasn't yet come to a head in Basra but it is certainly wasteful of resources to have two teams fishing in the same pond.

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You will be receiving sitreps from Baghdad so I will limit my impressions except to say that seen from here (and our regional UK and US military colleagues share these perceptions) ORHA Head Office is dysfunctional and totally pre-occupied with Baghdad. There has been no attempt to engage with us and communication is virtually non-existent. Even trying to get a contact list has been an uphill struggle – eventually it was pulled together by Tim Cross' MA. Olsen is very unhappy about relations with ORHA Baghdad, the lack of resources and the seeming indifference to our existence and, if matters don't pick up, it is not out of question he will leave. Certainly he is airing his views with Copenhagen. I understand Any Bearpark will take on the role of coordinating the regions when he arrives – this can't happen soon enough from our perspective.

Back to the Danes. There is huge Danish interest in the Ambassador's role and Danish media and TV crews are an everyday facet of our life here. There is also enormous pressure on Olsen to report back to Copenhagen daily, a task he finds quite onerous. The Danish Foreign Minister is likely to visit Basra shortly and has now taken to sending personal e mails to Olsen. Despite obvious Danish national pride in being asked to take on what they see as a very prestigious role, Olsen is the only Danish MFA officer. The other Danes are non government employees on contract. But teams pass through regularly eg to assess the state of the local judiciary (which can be something of a mixed blessing as their knowledge returns with them to Copenhagen).

Denmark is also keen to capitalise commercially from this venture, although Olsen is at pains to try to distance himself from this. I understand a Danish consulate is due to open in Basra shortly, to include a trade section. In the meantime, Danish commercial interests are being covered in two ways. Many of the Danish staff in ORHA South are sponsored by private companies. There are currently three senior managers from Maersk, and an agricultural specialist sponsored by the Danish Agricultural Council. The former have been provided under an agreement between Maersk and the Danish MFA to the effect that they will not pursue commercial opportunities for their company whilst working for ORHA. That said, they have focused their attention – and expertise – in the areas where future business may be forthcoming eg the ports, transport and infrastructure, and they will be free to pursue commercial ventures upon completion of their contracts. Contract lengths varied in from a few weeks to 6 months. The individual sponsored by the Agricultural Council is also assigned to ORHA but is encouraged to write reports for the Council, give presentations etc which can then be disseminated more widely amongst Danish companies interested in business opportunities in the agricultural sector. There is no pretence amongst Danish colleagues here that this is arrangement of mutual benefit. I am writing separately about our requirements for additional experts but, seen from here, the Danish model is an excellent one and something we should copy. From an ORHA perspective it provides exactly the sort of project managers we need in areas of particular need, whilst laying the groundwork to stimulate the commercial sector which will help sustain the economy in the longer term. From a national perspective, such an arrangement could help British industry to help itself whilst simultaneously contributing to the British effort.

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The second way in which Denmark is assisting Danish industry is by passing on requests for recce on behalf of Danish companies. One such recce was to a brewery in Al Amarrah at the request of Carlsberg. At present there is fairly limited scope for such activity – and Olsen is keen to pass this work to the Danish consulate – but I have nevertheless taken the step of re-tasking our DTI secondee, _____ to take the trade portfolio including, more surreptitiously, a watching UK trade brief.

I am getting stuck into women's issues in Basra. It hasn't been difficult. As one of only a few females in the international community, I seem to be the obvious focus (a role I hope Janet Rogan will adopt when I leave) and word is spreading amongst the women of Basra that this is an area I am keen to engage in. The situation is far worse than I had imagined. A large proportion of the female population wear Abaia (estimates vary from 50%-80%) and, although a small number of women work as teachers, clerks, bank tellers etc, we hear tales of women being sacked - post war – on the orders of the clerics. I have also heard several reports of so-called honour killings, the most recent today involving three female members of the same family. (I am working with the military police who are tasking the local police to have these crimes investigated but there is a long way to go with a population which takes turns a blind eye to such matters.) Women here are down-trodden, afraid and pre-occupied with basic survival. Their menfolk tell them what to wear and to whom they can talk. Those I have spoken to do not wear the abaya by choice but because without they risk physical abuse and being ostracised by their husbands and fathers. I have made contact with a member of Iraqi Women for Peace and Democracy, based in London but currently working in Basra (being reported separately) and through her I am attempting to reach out to other women with a view to establishing their priorities eg widows' pensions hitherto paid by the previous regime; exploring ways to tackle issues of mutual interest eg honour killings, and crime; and ways in which ORHA and the Coalition/ORHA can better communicate and consult with women. I also have a plan to use a Quick Impact Project to set up an office run by Iraqi women for Iraqi women in ORHA's new premises in order to facilitate such contacts. Amb Olsen supports this initiative wholeheartedly. I am also on the lookout for potential candidates of political office although such is the pre-occupation with the basics of life eg clean water, electricity, together with the climate of repression, that I do not expect to make early progress.

The key pre-occupation of Olsen for the last few days has been the setting up of the Basrah Interim Governance Committee (spearheaded by Comd 7 Bde). In theory a committee of technocrats to get the essential services up and running, the process has been hijacked by political parties intent on making the process a political one. We are equally adamant we are not prepared to switch the focus of attention from providing essential services to politics and are equally clear we are not going to give centre stage to unelected unvetted power-grabbers. Today's inaugural meeting broke up having got no farther than the introductory speeches – it is not clear when it will be reconvened and the locals are holding participation hostage to early elections.

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Please circulate this as you see fit (UK eyes only please). I would particularly welcome feedback as to what you would like me to focus on in future reports eg the organisational politics, women's issues or a particular sector.

I am sending separate notes on our detailed resource requirements and a proposal for an Iraqi Women's Conference.

Regards

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