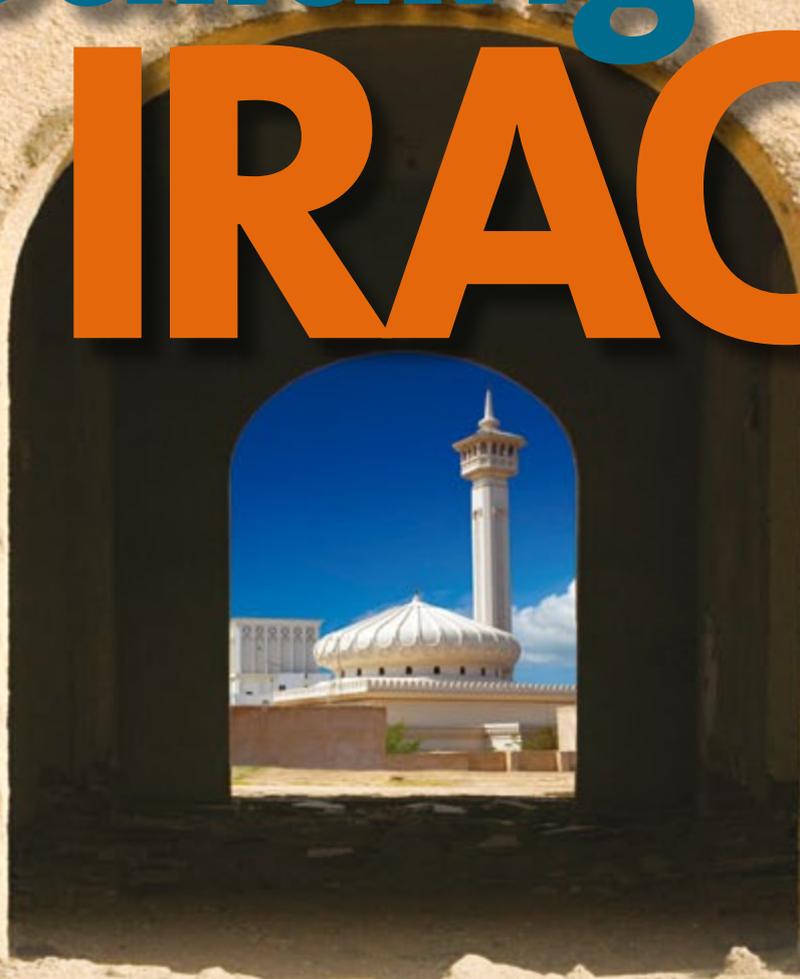


Rebuilding IRAQ



► **Due to the high threat of terrorism throughout Iraq**, the Foreign & Commonwealth Office currently advises UK nationals against all travel to specific parts of the country, including Baghdad, and advises against all but essential travel to other provinces. However, as **Elizabeth Gates** reports, some UK companies are still managing to explore business links in the country, and with this new business comes new health and safety challenges.

“People are safer at work than on the streets in modern-day Iraq. And occupational health and safety has to be seen through this prism.”

So says Alan Hawley – medical commander when Iraq was invaded in 2003, recently retired director-general of Army Medical Services and currently Professor of Disaster Studies at the University of Glamorgan.

“We are talking relative risk here,” continues Professor Hawley. “Although there

are high rates of unemployment in Iraq and therefore – as we all know – higher risk of ill health because of it, there are high morbidity and mortality rates because of continued insurgency, shootings and bombings and so on.”

Set against this backdrop, healthcare professionals have had to prioritise. And as a result, public health is the supreme concern. Alan Hawley again: “There is an understanding that health is a critical part of societal development which can lead

to maximum productivity and human flourishing.”

So Iraqi healthcare has focused on infant and maternal mortality, respiratory disease (because smoking is highly prevalent) and diarrhoeal illness, which although multi-factorial, owes something to poor water, sewage treatment and suspect foodstuffs. There is also the complication of diseases common in that part of the world such as malaria and meningitis.

Says Professor Hawley – also an occupa- ►



This situation presents Iraq with a unique opportunity. Occupational health and safety protection in the oil and gas industry could be revamped to the highest possible levels.

Professor Hawley comments: "Currently, Iraqis don't have the level of health and safety protection there is in the UK and the US. Which leads to a management problem. There are two levels of health and safety policy: one for the UK, European and North American workers; and one for the Iraqi workers. The simplest strategy is to bring both to the highest level but you need profitability to do this in an evolving situation. And multi-national organisations could be the catalyst necessary for raising the Iraqi system to internationally acceptable levels."

A case study¹ of the ExxonMobil Esso Petroleum Refinery at Fawley – written up in RR450 (2006) for the Health and Safety Executive by Greenstreet Berman Ltd – serves further to illustrate how oil and gas companies can develop good practice from a low-starting point.

The Fawley refinery – with its 750 employees and 450 contractors on site – was doing poorly. Its personnel safety record placed it 32nd out of 35 ExxonMobil Refineries world-wide. However action points recommended externally by HSE and internally by site manager Tom Katinas resulted in:

- Reduced corporate risk
- Reduced disruption regarding H&S problems
- Improved business performance
- Fulfilment of corporate social responsibility aspirations
- Improved corporate communications and PR

tional physician and spokesperson for the Society of Occupational Medicine: "These issues – exacerbated by years of under-investment and sanctions against Saddam – have not been helped by the invasion which further damaged the infrastructure. So at present occupational health and safety is not a priority."

But, he warns, Iraq needs to regenerate and repair the damage done by Saddam's years in power, the invasion and what has been happening since. It needs profitability to do this and to achieve profitability it needs to regenerate industry and trade.

Furthermore, as he explains, a rapidly re-developing oil and gas industry is the means to these ends. And the UK

government would agree. It has already engaged in supportive activity to help the Iraqi oil and gas industry, as a Foreign & Commonwealth Office spokesperson explains: "The Iraq-UK Energy Sector Skills Initiative, led by DECC (Department of Energy & Climate Change), aims to build skills and capacity within the Ministry of Oil in Iraq."

"In 2009, 88 per cent of Iraq's revenue came from the oil sector. As such, the effective functioning of this Ministry is key to the country's economic prosperity. Our assistance aims at enabling this. We have also set up a joint Iraq-UK Steering Group for Energy Sector Skills Development. This group will oversee development in the Iraqi energy sector and the Ministry of Oil in particular."



“The rewards are great but so is the necessary investment in security.”

- Improved relations with regulators
- Improved relations with external financial stake-holders
- Improved relation with workforce
- Improved H&S record (ie. fewer measurable injuries)

Leadership – and a raised profile on site on the part of the board – led to a culture change which encouraged managers and the workforce to be responsible and accountable, organisation-wide, regarding personal safety. This new employee ‘engagement’ arose from safety becoming a base performance expectation. And it is easy to see how this could be relevant in Iraq.

A start has been made. Since September 2008 – after several years’ discussion – Royal Dutch Shell, Mitsubishi and Iraq’s South Gas Company (SCG) have been involved in a joint venture called the Basrah Gas Company (South Gas Company is the 51 per cent majority shareholder in the new company).

The prospective partners in the joint venture have agreed to adopt principles and working standards based on those implemented by international oil companies (IOCs) in similar operations, while adhering to local laws and regulations. According to a Royal Dutch Shell (RDS) spokesperson, the

new company aims to:

- Pursue the goal of no harm to people
- Minimise impact on the environment
- Respect the rule of law
- Conduct business with integrity
- Adhere to the principles of sustainable development through the way the Company operates and conduct business
- Engage with stakeholders
- Play a leading role in promoting international HSE and Social Development (SD) standards in the Iraqi industries
- Foster a culture in which all employees, partners, and contractors share this commitment.

So far, South Gas Company and Shell have jointly completed a preliminary assessment of the safety and environmental conditions of the SGC gas facilities. The next steps will include a full water and soil sampling exercise to provide a baseline picture.

SGC and Shell staff also participated in a safety workshop, in October 2009, at the KAZ facility in Basra that addressed health,

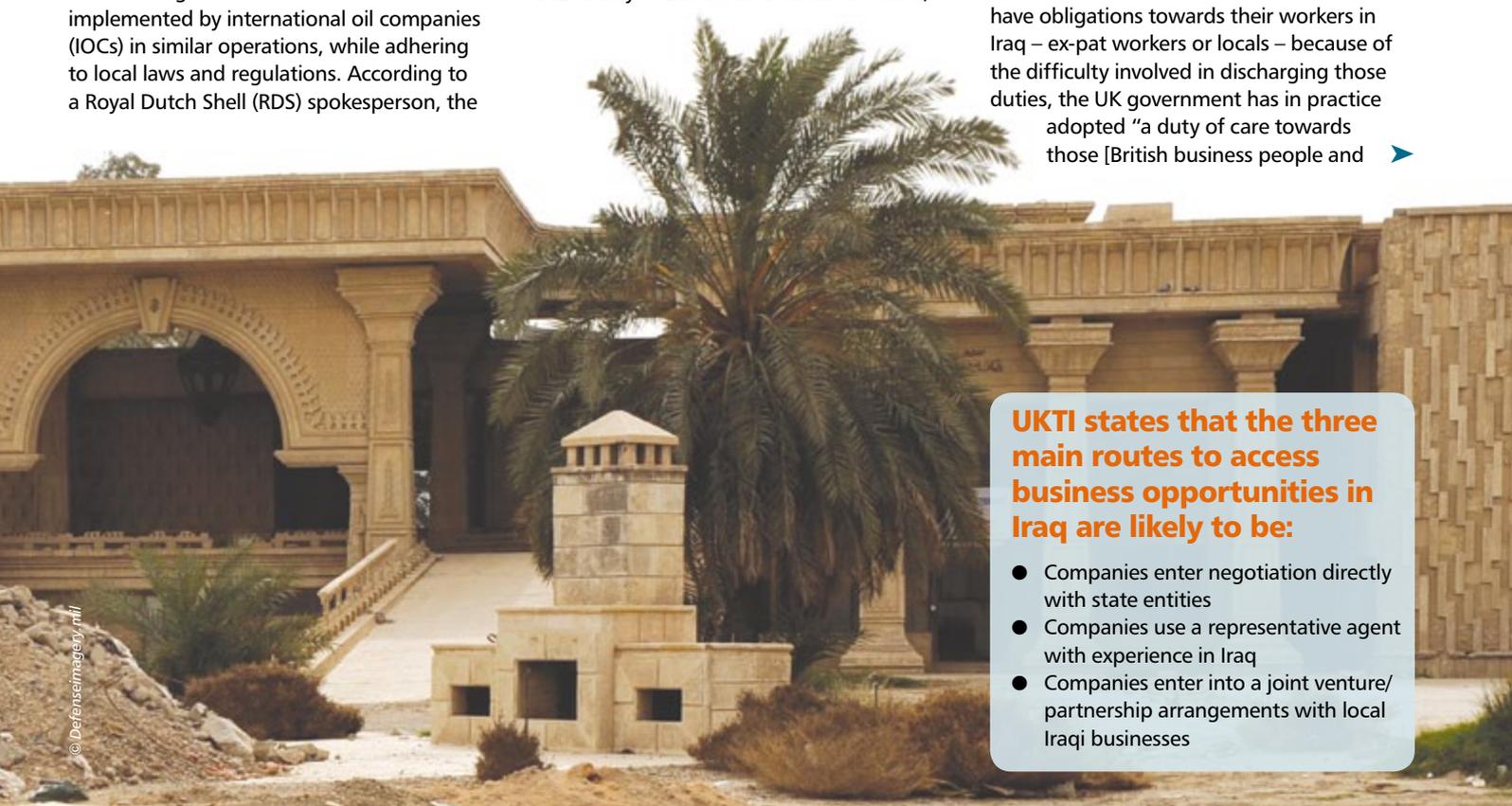
safety and environment requirements during shutdown activities. During this workshop, the *Shell Life Saving Rules* – organisation-wide whether Shell staff are in a London office or somewhere more remote – were introduced to the SGC staff through a presentation, in Arabic, by Mr Aqeel Abdulameer (SGC HSE engineer at the North Rumailah plant).

But the push towards establishing a healthy, safe and environmentally-friendly Iraq is not confined to multi-national organisations and their HSE departments. The UK government in the form of UK Trade and Investment (UKTI) – a unit which reports to the Foreign Office and the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills – is bullish in its intention to stabilise the Middle East region through trade links with Iraq. Its head, Paul Taylor, feels that the situation in Iraq has evolved from the point at which the sole priorities were security and defence. He says: “Iraq can now engage in commercial, cultural, sport and educational exchange with other countries. With the UK, for example, we are now achieving normalisation in the relationship. Our relationship with Iraq is now more the kind of relationship we have with other countries.”

However, volatility in the situation persists. And, warns Professor Hawley, although under health and safety law UK employers have obligations towards their workers in Iraq – ex-pat workers or locals – because of the difficulty involved in discharging those duties, the UK government has in practice adopted “a duty of care towards those [British business people and

UKTI states that the three main routes to access business opportunities in Iraq are likely to be:

- Companies enter negotiation directly with state entities
- Companies use a representative agent with experience in Iraq
- Companies enter into a joint venture/partnership arrangements with local Iraqi businesses



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Safety and security: targets

Terrorists, insurgents and criminals conduct frequent and widespread lethal attacks on a wide range of targets in Iraq (except in the Kurdistan Region). British and western organisations, non-governmental organisations and contractors working – or perceived to be working – in support of them (particularly those who live and work outside of military protected bases or the International Zone in Baghdad) are at high risk of attack, as are commercial, aviation and maritime infrastructure targets as well as Iraqi government and other related political and security facilities. There have been attacks on the International Committee of the Red Cross, the UN, journalists, foreign contractors and visitors to Iraq. There have also been attacks within Baghdad’s International (or Green) Zone. Indiscriminate attacks against civilian targets also occur.

Targets have included places such as hotels, restaurants where westerners congregate. In January 2010 there were major bomb attacks against a number of hotels in Baghdad that are popular with British and western organisations. Terrorists and insurgents continue to attack mosques, large gatherings, churches, army recruiting centres, public transport, police stations, government buildings and party political offices. Ceremonies to mark Islamic and Christian festivals have been targeted, including near churches or holy areas. Rocket and mortar attacks occur sporadically in Baghdad (including the International Zone) and Basra.

Civilian and military aircraft arriving in and departing from Baghdad International Airport and flying to other major cities in Iraq have been subjected to attack by small arms and missiles. The standard of security at Baghdad International Airport’s civilian terminal has improved, however, there are still concerns and visitors should exercise caution if using the civilian terminal.

Methods of attack include shootings, bombings, suicide bombs, vehicle bombs, rockets and mortars.

Source: FCO



you travel to Iraq you should register your presence with LOCATE [an FCO database]. We will always do everything we can do help British nationals in the event of an emergency, but in areas where we advise against all travel, we cannot offer any guarantees that we would be able to help.”

The FCO certainly advises taking out comprehensive insurance cover before you go. Professor Hawley also points out: “Occupational health support is available for those working for multi-national companies, but small organisations may have more of a hit and miss approach... At present there are no private companies offering specialist OH services in Iraq. Some healthcare companies are there, providing first aid or primary level

technicians] who are going out to Iraq – effectively to assist with government policy of building normal relationships within the Middle East.”

The result is a partnership between British companies and the UK government, with close involvement on the part of UKTI. As Paul Taylor comments: “Iraq is still a very challenging market. The rewards are great but so is the necessary investment in security. You can’t do Iraq on a shoestring. Some companies operate under the wire but this is not what we would advise.”

UKTI has a dedicated team of specialists to help provide potential UK business representatives with information about cultural matters, business etiquette, putting in project tenders and potential Iraqi partners. Through the UKTI Overseas Market Introduction Service, for example, it sets up programmes for companies to explore potential opportunities. It also organises trade missions and events. And it facilitates. But it does not offer protection. Warns UKTI head Paul Taylor: “Although our teams in Baghdad, Erbil and Basra can direct companies to local contacts who can support them in this – we maintain a list of providers – we have left protection to the private sector.”

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office

(FCO) offers travel advice, updated daily, through its website. But, it warns, in the event of an emergency, British Embassy Offices in Basra and Erbil are only able to offer limited consular assistance. Baghdad is the best-equipped. 23 British nationals required consular assistance in Iraq in the period 1 April 2009 – 31 March 2010.

And, an FCO spokesperson warns: “If



care. But before we move onto occupational health provision, we need more stability.”

However, in spite of the perceived and real risks, travel agency CT Business Travel is currently involved in facilitating travel to Iraq for several hundred business clients per month. And this, says managing director Mark Kempster is only “at the very early stages”.

CT Business Travel is the first UK travel management company to open offices in Iraq, organising corporate travel and providing local support.

Says Kempster: “This is a joint venture with

“Regarding health issues, Green Zone accommodation is newly built. New drains, new sewers, everything. You get can stay in a basic bedroom, en-suite – with safety features such as blast-proof windows – and our clients have experienced no gastric problems, no cholera, nothing – because the water supplies are safe in the Green Zone.

“However, travelling from the airport to the Green Zone, you have to travel along two kilometres of road which is still regarded as ‘risky’. This is an opportunity for insurgents or terrorists. They know this is a weak link in a tried and tested route. So we work

And when you get out there, you can be met by our expert team who will facilitate getting you to a safe house.”

But, before you go off to Iraq in idealistic fervour, UKTI’s Paul Taylor warns: “There are potentially massive opportunities in Iraq but you still need to take care.”

References

1. *Case studies that identify and exemplify boards of directors who provide leadership and direction on occupational health and safety.* Prepared by Greenstreet Berman Ltd for the Health and Safety Executive. 2006. www.hse.gov.uk/research/rrpdf/rr450.pdf



► The CT Business Travel office in Erbil, Iraq

a local Iraqi company – so there is no risk to UK staff – because we saw this – working with a local partner – as the quickest route to that market. And we specialise in moving people from A to B.”

As a result, the travel company can provide its clients with tickets, office space, and other services – such as accommodation booking, translation services, or local introductions – with minimised risk. As Mark Kempster explains: “Most clients want to travel to Baghdad and to conduct their business in the Green (International) Zone. This has been made safe – or as safe as possible – by the coalition troops over the last few years, so the threat is minimal. And most people can operate or conduct business there. Entry is checked. Exit is checked. You’re fairly safe and you don’t need to go outside – even though the rest of Iraq may seem like the Wild West.

with very carefully-selected locally-based UK security companies – a lot of other companies have sprung up recently – who use hand-picked ex-US and UK military bodyguards.

“We don’t provide close protection – that’s a science all of its own – but we can facilitate it. This is the best security measure. And, basically, you get what you pay for. At the cheaper end, you may be happy to chance it with an unmarked vehicle and a bodyguard. But if you want to travel in a convoy of armoured vehicles, it could cost you maybe £4,000 but we can arrange that too. The level of security you choose is your personal choice.”

Being properly briefed before you go is essential. CT Business Travel provides ‘rigorous and regular’ awareness training for clients in the UK in advance. UKTI’s Paul Taylor also advises: “Talk to us before you go.

Resources

Before you go

- For up-to-date Foreign Office advice on health and safety, please check: www.fco.gov.uk/en/travel-and-living-abroad/travel-advice-by-country/middle-east-north-africa/iraq
- British Embassy Baghdad <http://ukiniraq.fco.gov.uk/en/>
- UK Trade & Investment (UKTI) Senior country manager for Iraq Karl Bruce is happy to discuss business issues. Call him on 0207 215 4929. www.ukti.gov.uk/pt_pt/home.html
- The UKTI team in Baghdad have also produced a booklet, *Doing business in Iraq*. This offers a broad span of advice ranging from business etiquette to security. www.ukti.gov.uk/pt_pt/export/countries/asiapacific/middleeast/iraq/doingbusiness.html?null
- CT Business Travel www.ctbusinesstravel.co.uk or email Mark Kempster at: mark@cttgroup.co.uk and he will put you in touch with the best person to talk to within his organisation

While there

- Contact the British Embassy for support
Telephone: (964) (0) 7901 926 280
Embassy office hours:
GMT: Sun-Thur: 06.00-14.00
Local time: Sun-Thur: 09.00-17.00
Duty Office (for out-of-hours consular emergencies involving British citizens)
(964) (0) 7901 935 149