

We lost our political officer when he cracked up under the pressure and started attacking people in the street. His partner, my deputy, also left. That was all of my British political and economic resource gone.

Personnel Department sent out an officer, Colin Reynolds, ostensibly on a pastoral visit following these events. In fact he had been primed by the Foreign Office to look for excuses to remove me, and briefed on rumours originated by the US Embassy that I was an alcoholic and kept a "Love-nest" in Tashkent - both completely untrue.

In fact Reynolds' report was very fair. His comments that some procedures were not followed correctly were accurate - he does not note my response, that the tiny staff of our Embassy in Tashkent was not equipped to carry out the full FCO bureaucratic requirements.

Craig Murray
May 2006

RESTRICTED STAFF

From: Colin Reynolds, PMU1
Date: 26 June 2003

cc: Linda Duffield
Simon Butt, Eastern Dept
Simon Pease
Howard Drake
Rufus Legg
Jon Hews, Head, Internal Audit
Harvey Bowyer, FCU

To: Alan Charlton

SUBJECT: MY VISIT TO TASHKENT

1. I visited Tashkent on 19-20 June. There were two main purposes: to follow up on the removal from Post of Chris Hirst (Third Sec Pol) and Karen Moran (C5 DHM and Chris' partner); and to discuss with the Ambassador the reports we were receiving in London about his activities outside of the office.

Chris Hirst and Karen Moran

2. I had meetings with all embassy staff, both collectively and individually. It is clear that the post has gone through an extremely difficult time. Chris Hirst's behaviour both inside the office and out has impacted all staff. The LE staff were afraid of Chris. Matters were made much worse by Karen Moran's behaviour. Not only was she trying to cover Chris' tracks, but it would seem that her management style left a lot to be desired. I heard several accounts, and saw minutes myself on files, which showed that she sacked staff without following proper procedures, and more than once docked an LE member of staff's salary for minor misdemeanours (e.g turning up late). This left LE staff both afraid of Chris Hurst, and afraid to say anything to their DHM for fear that they would lose their jobs.

3. The other UK-based staff (Steve Brown, acting B3, MO); and Angela Clarke (A2 PA/Registry/ECO) also had difficult relations with Chris and Karen (though they both only arrived at post in March this year). Angela's arrival at post was unpleasant. Karen was unreasonable on accommodation arrangements, and did little to help Angela settle into post.

LE Staff

4. In my meeting with LE staff, we went over the ground on Chris Hirst and Karen Moran. I tried to reassure them that we were unable to move as quickly as we would like due to employment law angles in London. We very much regretted that they had been put in this awful situation and were grateful for their perseverance and professionalism throughout. While I have no evidence, I suspect that it was the LE staff who provided the Ministry of Foreign Affairs with the information they needed to enable them to call Craig Murray in and ask for Chris Hirst's removal (no one else would have had the detail they needed). I would also be surprised if they were not behind the recent article which appeared locally on the subject.

5. The LE staff are divided into two distinct factions. The long-standing LEI's are on one side, with the fairly new team of LE IIIs on the other. They have recently established an LE Staff Association, which is a good thing. I had a wide ranging discussion with them, touching on salaries (too low), health care (when are we going to hear what you're offering us?), local amenities (an embassy club would be nice), procedures for recruitment (concerns that a proper, transparent procedure was not being followed), dismissal (whenever it suited the DHM, rather than through proper procedures), and the Embassy's reputation outside (see below).

Relations between the UK-based staff and LE staff

6. There is much work to do. Relationships have broken down to a severe extent following Chris Hirst and Karen Moran. There is much suspicion among LE staff. Craig will have to quickly re-establish the trust of the staff. I have spoken to Craig about reports I picked up about the relationship between the Management Officer, Steve Brown, and his LE AMO. They have become friendly outside of the office. The latter is not much liked by the rest of the LE staff. I was told that he was using the official vehicles for private use at the weekends and in the evenings, that he was a bully, and that he used his friendship with Steve to inappropriately influence the other staff. I discussed all this with Steve and with Craig. Both were aware of the problem, and undertook to tackle it quickly.

7. Angela Clarke seems to be doing some good work in trying to mend fences with the LE staff. She takes her job seriously, perhaps a little too seriously, and seems to be settling into post following a very difficult time with Karen Moran on her arrival. She will, however, need to be careful about getting too close to the LE staff outside of the office.

Embassy procedures

8. I was surprised to see that very few standard procedures seem to be in place in the Mission. Not all LE staff have contracts, hardly any have job descriptions or objectives, and none seemed aware of the disciplinary procedures. I have asked Craig and Steve to tackle this as a matter of some urgency. There also seemed to be precious few meetings. This means that the UK-based and LE staffs have little idea of what is going on other than on their own desks. I encouraged Craig to introduce a regular pattern of meetings to discuss objectives, key tasks for the week etc.

9. Lack of rigorous financial controls is also a concern. When I was there one of the drivers was sacked for changing official money on the black market, and obtaining a forged receipt to cover his tracks. The arrangements for negotiating and then paying for staff accommodation also seem less tight than they should. Internal Audit (or the Financial Compliance Unit?) will wish to look very carefully at all the financial controls when they visit in July.

Craig Murray

10. I looked carefully at Craig Murray's handling of the Hirst/Moran situation. While matters were certainly made more difficult by the fact that Karen was covering Chris' tracks, it is still surprising that Craig was unaware of the extent of the damage that Chris and Karen were doing to the Embassy. He should have gripped the situation sooner, listening to the advice he was given in London last November. Craig acknowledges this. He expressed his surprise and disappointment that the LE staff had been unable to go to him direct (I too am surprised by this; the LE staff were uniformly positive about Craig during my visit).

11. In light of the recent article, and of other reports we have received from elsewhere on Craig's behaviour outside of the Mission, I dug fairly deeply in this area. While some of the staff commented that they were initially surprised by Craig's more relaxed style, none said anything about any activities outside the office which would cause us embarrassment. All the staff said they felt Craig's profile was high, and that while his style was undoubtedly unlike any Ambassador they had had before, they all said how much they enjoyed working for him and how much British businesses respected and liked him. They commented that the QBP was by far the best attended in Tashkent (1000 guests attended, including the President's daughter).

12. I was completely open with Craig in all of this. While he didn't hide the fact that he enjoys a drink and enjoys going out with the local British business community at the weekend, he vigorously denied that the article was true. While he was 'no saint', he was doing nothing which could cause any embarrassment. He denied that he had any share in a

property in Tashkent for which he and others use for "entertainment purposes" (a report which had come to us by a rather circuitous route).

Relations between the Embassy and Eastern Department

13. Relations are clearly strained. Craig complained bitterly that he was kept out of the loop, received very little communication, and that he and the Department had major differences on policy (in particular on Human Rights). He mentioned that only last week one of our Ministers had a conversation with the Uzbek Foreign Minister. Craig only heard about the telephone conversation 3 days after the event, and in the meantime had been put in an embarrassing situation when he had a meeting with the Deputy Foreign Minister (who clearly knew about the conversation and Craig did not). He commented that FCO and other Whitehall Ministers seemed to be pleased with the work he was doing, yet the Directorate were not. I know that Simon Butt is well aware of the problems, and that Linda is too. I recommend that the Department take advantage of his next visit to the UK to try and thrash any policy differences out. It is not good for others in the post to feel that their Ambassador is constantly in battle with the Department.

The way ahead

14. In the short-term I recommend that both PM (you and Howard?) and Eastern Department (Linda and Simon?) take advantage of Craig's next visit to the UK to a) speak to him at a higher level about the recent events in his post and b) for any policy differences to be resolved. Internal Audit (or FCU) will visit Tashkent in July, and MCS will review them in September. These visits are timely. After we have their reports, we will have a clearer picture of what needs to happen next.

15. Carl Garn, the new C5 DHM, and Daniel Grzenda, the new Third Sec Political, will be in post by the beginning of September. In Carl Garn we get a DHM with experience and good political skills. I will brief him fully before his departure. I very much hope that Carl will bring with him the stability and responsibility that has been lacking. He has a big job to do in getting the post back on track and getting the most basic of procedures in place. Daniel is a young officer on his first overseas posting. But he has done well so far, and will bring with him some relevant experience from his last job. He has visited post already and went down well, so he too should be a welcome addition.

[Signed: Colin Reynolds]

Colin Reynolds
PMU1
OAB 2/96