



OFFICE OF THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON BUSINESS APPOINTMENTS

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BUSINESS APPOINTMENT APPLICATION: LIEUTENANT GENERAL THOMAS BECKETT CBE

The Committee has been asked to consider an application from Lt Gen Thomas Beckett, former Defence Senior Adviser Middle East (DSAME) for advice on taking up a position as an Advisor to the Board of Optima Defence and Security Group Ltd (Optima), a company specialising in Explosive Threat Mitigation.

Lt Gen Beckett explained that his role would be to advise Optima and its Board on Middle East regional developments, providing: regional political insights; perspectives on business markets across the Middle East; and assisting with the identification of potential regional customers for explosive threat mitigation services. It would be a part-time, paid position. He has stated that he will not actively lobby, conduct business development nor secure business for Optima.

He informed the Committee that the appointment is not likely to include any contact or dealings with his former department or Government more generally.

Lt Gen Beckett has confirmed that he did not have any contractual dealings with Optima while in office or involvement in any decisions that might affect the business of the organisation. He said that once or twice a year as DSAME in support of British trade interests overseas, he would meet the Chairman to give him an official perspective on the Middle East region. DSAME is part funded by the Department for International Trade Defence and Security Organisation (which helps UK companies increase security exports) and providing such analysis was part of his role.

Air Chief Marshal Sir Stuart Peach (Chief of the Defence Staff) has commented on the appointment as follows:

"Optima Group is a small UK company that excels in Explosive Threat Mitigation. It is the principle UN contractor conducting such activity in Iraq. Its services, drawing on the highest standards of UK explosive threat mitigation experience, applied in the Middle East, will contribute to regional stability."

Gen Beckett's advice to the Board, based primarily on contacts he will maintain in the region, by dint of being the Executive Director IISS-Middle East, may assist Optima with securing business that will be good for the UK and the region."

The MOD Business Appointments Panel made the following observations:

- Although he has had some routine official contact with his proposed employer during his most recent role he has not been involved in contracting with them so the risk of perception of reward is low.
- He has not had recent access to commercially sensitive information on competitors of his proposed employer.
- The lobbying ban and other behavioural restrictions will provide safeguard against his new employer using him to gain an unfair advantage in winning business from the MOD.
- The department has had a recent contract with Optima Defence and Security Group Ltd for specialist bomb disposal activity; but is not currently under contract. This had a value of approximately £4m.

The Panel recommended a number of behavioural conditions on this appointment to appropriately constrain his activities in his new role, which are incorporated into the conditions set out below.

The Committee's consideration

The Committee recognised that as Optima operates in the defence sector and Lt Gen Beckett held a senior role in the MOD, this has the potential to significantly increase the risks presented under the Government's Business Appointment Rules.

The Committee assessed that the potential for this appointment to be seen as a reward for decisions made in post is low given confirmation from the MOD that he was not involved in contractual dealings with Optima. Instead, the greater risk in this case is whether the appointment could offer insights and connections unique to Lt Gen Beckett's time in office that might give Optima an unfair advantage.

In view of the customer identification aspect of his proposed role and Lt Gen Beckett's location in the Middle East, there is a risk that Optima could benefit from relationships in other Governments or organisations that were developed during his time in Crown service. To mitigate this risk the Committee has recommended a condition that will preclude him from lobbying such contacts developed in the course of his official role as DSAME.

The possibility of Optima benefiting from Lt Gen Beckett's contacts in the UK Government is reduced by the extended lobbying ban recommended below and the condition precluding him from advising on the terms of a bid or contract relating to the MOD. The Committee noted that while there are no current contracts between Optima and MOD, the prior contractual arrangement and potential for a future relationship is a relevant factor when considering the perception of this appointment.

The Committee noted that Lt Gen Beckett has not had recent access to commercially sensitive information on competitors of his proposed employer. Any residual risk in this respect is mitigated by

the condition set out below precluding him from making use of any such information that he had access to benefit him or his employer.

The Committee has carefully considered the particular issues presented by the case and has determined that it would be appropriate for there to be a significant gap between Lt Gen Beckett's last day in post and taking up this role. The Committee has therefore recommended a six-month waiting period from his last day in post, which, in combination with the conditions set out below, mitigates the risks presented by the appointment.

The Secretary of State for Defence accepted the Committee's advice that the appointment be subject to the following conditions:

- a six-month waiting period from Lt Gen Beckett's last day in post (ie until 5 July);
- he should not draw on (disclose or use for the benefit of himself or the organisations to which this advice refers) any privileged information available to him from his time in Crown service;
- for two years from his last day in Crown service, he should not provide advice to any company or organisation on the terms of, or with regard to the subject matter of, a bid or contract relating directly to the work of the MOD or its trading funds;
- for two years from his last day in Crown service, he should not become personally involved in lobbying the UK Government on behalf of Optima Defence and Security Group Ltd or its subsidiaries, partners or clients; nor should he make use, directly or indirectly, of his Government and/or Crown service contacts to influence policy or secure funding or business on their behalf; and
- for two years from his last day in Crown service, he should not become personally involved in lobbying contacts developed during Crown service in other Governments or organisations, for the purpose of securing business for Optima Defence and Security Group Ltd or its subsidiaries, partners or clients.

By 'privileged information' we mean official information to which a Minister or Crown servant has had access as a consequence of his or her office or employment and which has not been made publicly available. Applicants are also reminded that they may be subject to other duties of confidentiality, whether under the Official Secrets Act or otherwise.

The Business Appointment Rules explain that the restriction on lobbying means that the former Crown servant/Minister "*should not engage in communication with Government (Ministers, civil servants, including special advisers, and other relevant officials/public office holders) – wherever it takes place - with a view to influencing a Government decision, policy or contract award/grant in relation to their own interests or the interests of the organisation by which they are employed, or to whom they are contracted or with which they hold office.*"

I should be grateful if you would ensure that we are informed as soon as Lt Gen Beckett takes up this position, or if it is announced that he will do so (I enclose a form for this purpose). We shall otherwise not be able to deal with any enquiries, since we do not release information about appointments that have not been taken up or announced, and this could lead to a false assumption being made about whether he had complied with the Rules.

I should also be grateful if you would ask that Lt Gen Beckett informs us if he proposes to extend or otherwise change the nature of his role as, depending on the circumstances, it may be necessary for him to make a fresh application.

Once the appointment has been publicly announced or taken up, we will publish this letter on the Committee's website and include the main details of the application, together with the Advisory Committee's advice, in the regularly updated consolidated list on our website and in the next annual report.

Yours sincerely

Nicola Richardson
Committee Secretariat