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IRAQI NATIONAL POLITICS

BOTTOM LINE

- On Sunday, 1 June 2003, Coalition Provisional Authority Amb Bremer met with leading Iraqi political figures – the “G7” – to describe to them the way forward in the national political process and to ask for their input. The total envisaged time frame is short – six weeks – and the process will place significant demands on V Corps/CJTF. One critical issue is the incorporation of internal Iraqis into the process – OCPA recognizes that this is important but is not sure how to go about it.
- V Corps/ CJTF can facilitate the process by helping OCPA understand the local and regional political processes that have already been facilitated, and by making it very easy for OCPA to incorporate others. This contribution on our part is both objectively and instrumentally wise: As it stands, the process is lopsided in favor of the “usual suspect” oppositionists. If this imbalance is not corrected, the entire process may not be perceived as legitimate by the Iraqi people, serious rifts and security issues may arise, and the length of the required Coalition commitment in Iraq may extend indefinitely.

MEETING PARTICIPATION

- The two-hour meeting on Sunday, 1 June, was hosted by Amb Bremer. He was joined by UK Special Envoy of the Prime Minister, Amb John Sawers, whom Amb Bremer presents as his equal counterpart – though he always speaks second. They were joined at the table by Amb Ryan Crocker and DAS Scott Carpenter, from OCPA, and by Station Chief Charlie. Participating OCPA support staff came primarily from State and also from OSD.
- The invitees were the seven leading Iraqi political groups – the “G7” – which include the INC; INA; PUK; KDP; SCIRI; Da’wa; and National Democrats. Of these, the first five are long-term co-collaborators with one another, in the context of a series of Iraqi opposition political meetings. At the December 2002 London Opposition Conference, which had hundreds of participants, these five, together with the Constitutional Monarchists, formed the “Group of 6” that succeeded in monopolizing nominations of 65 persons to a steering committee to carry on the Conference’s work. Da’wa is a Shi’a group that splintered from SCIRI some years ago. The National Democrats have a long history in Iraq – the father of the leader was a noted political figure – whose “value added” to the group is their Sunni Muslim majority.
- Each group had two seats at the table. The INA, PUK, KDP, Da’wa and National Democrats all sent their top leaders – Alawi, Talabani, Barzani, Jaafari, and Chaderji. Chalabi and Abdul Aziz Hakim did not attend but were represented by articulate spokesmen.

PURPOSE

- Amb Bremer convened the meeting in order to describe to the Seven the OCPA plan for the political way forward, and to ask for their views and input.
- He last convened them two weeks earlier, also in Baghdad. At that time, he informed them that as the Coalition Provisional Authority, he would now be leading the political process. He stated that one notion – establishing a provisional government very soon – which had been put forward in the context of earlier negotiations, would not be implemented. This announcement was not popular –

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many of the Seven subsequently made critical public comments, and both Talabani and Barzani returned to the north for consultations with their constituents.

POLITICAL WAY FORWARD

Here is the political way forward, as outlined by Amb Bremer:

- An Interim Authority will be established within the next five to six weeks. The term "IA" is drawn from the language of the latest UN SCR.
- During these weeks, the OCPA welcomes ideas, and will consult broadly with Iraqis about the way forward.
- The IA will include a "Political Council", which will consist of some 25 to 30 Iraqis.
- The PC will be appointed by Amb Bremer.
- The PC will certainly include the Seven – Amb Bremer did not say as much, but he slipped several times and said "you" when he meant "Political Council". He did add later that he does see the PC "as a place for the big players". There is no doubt.
- The PC should be representative, but should not be composed based on any kind of quotas, "not two of these, one of those, four over here..." All participants should accept the principles of both the London Declaration (from the December 2002 Opposition Conference) and the Nasariyah Statement (from 15 April 2003).
- The "PC" will be the "public face" of the Interim Administration and the Iraqi people, and will serve as the key link with the Coalition and the world at large.
- One job of the PC will be to nominate candidates for the posts of "Chief Advisor" to each Ministry. These Iraqi Chief Advisors will work alongside the Coalition's Senior Advisors, and will help to get the Ministries working at full capacity. The Chief Advisors are not, themselves, members of the PC. Their responsibilities will grow as the Ministries become increasingly capable. Later, the PC will be asked to nominate "interim Ministers", who will serve until a new, elected Government of Iraq appoints permanent Ministers. These interim Ministers may or may not be the same persons as the Chief Advisors. The PC will help to supervise the work of the Chief Advisors, possibly through regular reviews in which the Chief Advisors appear before the PC to explain their work.
- Ambassador Bremer will meet regularly, perhaps on a weekly basis, with the PC.
- Another job of the PC – "even more important" – will be to take up practical work on long-term issues, including educational reform, promoting business development, de-Ba'athification, electoral laws and procedures, and others. To do this, the PC may establish Committees to work full-time on each issue. Regardless of the structure, for each issue, there will need to be broad dialogue with the Iraqi people.
- The OCPA will consult with the PC before undertaking any "major initiatives".
- The PC will have at its disposal a "modest discretionary fund" for use on recovery projects. (That is, the PC will not control anything like a state budget, and opportunities for offering patronage are likely to be limited.)
- The members of the PC, the Chief Advisors and the Interim Ministers will all be full-time, salaried positions. The PC will work out of the building now known as the Iraq Forum – and formerly as the Baghdad Convention Center.
- The members of the PC will be appointed by the CPA.
- Their membership is "personal" – while they may belong to political parties, they will sit on the PC in their personal, not party, capacities.

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- Members of the PC will indeed be eligible to run in the first round of elections based on the new Constitution. (Previous leading draft US policies stressed that this option should be ruled out, so that only true "civil servants", without political aspirations, would step forward to fill the interim posts.)
- The second major body of the Interim Administration is the Constitutional Convention. This body will have a total of about 125 to 150 members. This body may create subcommittees for specific purposes, for example, a drafting committee, a secretariat, a "public affairs" committee to gauge public opinion on key constitutional issues.
- The Convention should include lawyers, certainly, but also other professionals. There should also be some regional representation from around the country.
- Probably, the Convention, after naming the subcommittees, would adjourn and let the subcommittees work, until a draft Constitution is completed.
- This constitutional process should be carried out "as quickly as reasonable", in order to produce a good product. It is important that the constitution be created and accepted by the Iraqi people, not imposed.
- A third body that needs to be created is the De-Ba'athification Council, based on the plan announced by Amb Bremer one week ago. Suggestions about membership – there should be some 15 to 20 members – are welcome.
- The next step will be a meeting, to be held in Baghdad on Friday, 6 June, to discuss ideas about the plan Amb Bremer just presented. Participants will include the Seven, and the format will be broadened to include others also – possibly twice the total number of participants. The Seven are encouraged to provide both names and ideas concerning the proposed framework, within the next couple days. Those who participate in the 6 June meeting are not necessarily guaranteed any role in the future interim political structures.

DISCUSSION

- The initial presentations, relatively brief, were followed by about an hour of discussion. Understandably, there was consternation among some of the long-term participants – the KDP and SCIRI in particular – who noted that a totally new set of ideas had been throw at them, and they would require some time to consider. Most did not appear prepared to comment on the political plan, since they had just heard it for the first time. It was clear that most groups looked forward to sharing their ideas one-on-one with OCPA in the next day or two.
- Much of the discussion focused instead on economic issues. Ambassador Bremer noted that the OCPA is looking into the question of Iraqi debt, gathering more information about its scope. OCPA is also exploring avenues of economic transformation, including majority foreign ownership investment plans, and privatization. (There do not yet appear to be any definite plans, but these ideas indicate a line of thinking, as well as a line of politics.)
- Amb Bremer noted that the OCPA plans to announce a "customs/ tariff holiday", together with a policy temporarily prohibiting the export of vital goods, for example foodstuffs brought in by WFP and female livestock.
- Concerning currency, Amb Bremer noted that the dollarization of an essentially closed economy is already having negative consequences. He asked participants which is better, or worse: the continued use of the "Saddam head" currency (which in itself is problematic because we still do not know what quantities are available); or a dollar economy...?
- Asked about the relationship of this national political process to regional elections that have already been held, Amb Bremer noted that we have indeed seen a number of these, and that some have gone well and others not so well. He commented that these are "essentially advisory bodies to the CPA".

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EVALUATION

- As outlined by Ambassador Bremer, this latest plan echoes, in new language, the same basic theme of its predecessors: the leading "usual suspects" will effectively be anointed, but surrounded by a framework of others designed to give the whole thing some legitimacy. The key body is the Political Council, where the Seven, and also some of their nominees, will sit.
- The danger – and this is not new – is twofold: 1) A body that looks like "Chalabi and friends" is not likely to be accepted by the Iraqi people, who might be disaffected enough to organize in protest. 2) Since the CPA will appoint the members of the PC, the CPA is likely to be held accountable by the Iraqi people for this decision.
- The best way to give the PC – and the Interim Administration more broadly – real authority, is to include internal Iraqis and provide them with enough support so that they can make real, substantive contributions.
- So far, OCPA has only very loose ideas about how to incorporate internal Iraqis. OCPA knows that it needs more information about politics in the regions, and that it needs our recommendations. The current leading OCPA idea is that, in order to select people to be appointed to the Political Council and other bodies, members of the OCPA leadership should travel to the various regions of Iraq and conduct interviews with our nominees and others. We should expect that OCPA will ask us to help by organizing trips, arranging meetings, and providing lists of names, bios and photographs beforehand.
- This plan may make sense for the purpose of selecting nominees to be part of the IA. What it misses, however, is the second purpose, of including internal Iraqis in the current series of consultations about the political process.
- One practical point: The loud roar of two circling Apaches overhead, throughout the talks, may well have given participants an added sense of security, and miscreants a disincentive to behave improperly. It also made it nearly impossible to hear anyone who did not shout. Perhaps a slightly different balance can be struck, on a future occasion.

PRACTICAL WAY FORWARD

- It is in our interests to help OCPA elaborate and carry out a plan for the inclusion of internal Iraqis in the national political process.
- It should be our goal to help OCPA select some internal Iraqis, this week, to participate in OCPA's preliminary consultations about the rules of the new political game.
- We should focus first on those regions in which substantial political work has already been done – like Mosul and Kirkuk. In areas with far less coherent political processes, like Al Anbar and Diyala, there are good arguments in favor of first carrying out "selection" processes before volunteering nominees to OCPA.

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- The OCPA "political people" have preliminarily agreed that the best plan is for a group of Amb Bremer's top political advisors to travel to Kirkuk and/or Mosul this week, to talk with Iraqis whom we nominate.
- In order to make sure the visit does not look like a set of interviews, OCPA should state that, as it develops ideas for the national political process, it wants to consult with those who have participated so far in constructive selections. Ideally, the visits should indeed include talks with the full Councils, or the full leadership, as a kind of top cover for the additional goal.
- At the same time, the visits should include interviews, with Council members and others. In Mosul, for example, the 101st has mentioned tribal sheikhs and intellectuals who might make fine Iraqi civil servants at the national level.
- Finally, if OCPA does intend to invite some of these new contacts to Baghdad, we must be prepared to do preparatory work with those selected, familiarizing them with both the Agenda for Friday, and the history of these "Iraqi leader" meetings.

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