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BAGHDAD 00128

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CHARGE: PROG

APPROVED: GOVERNANCE/MOSULLIVA
DRAFTED: RJONES
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TO RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC 0255
RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 0263
RHEHNSC/WHITE HOUSE NSC WASHDC 0248
INFO RUEHC/IRAQC COLLECTIVE
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MAR 24 2004

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~~CLASSIFIED BY 12900 DECL 09/29/11~~

TAGS: PREL, PGOV, IZ
SUBJECT: CPA 797: Combating the Anti-TAL Campaign

~~CLASSIFIED BY EXECUTIVE SECRETARY JESSICA LEGRO FOR REASONS 1.1 (B AND D)~~

1. (S) Summary. A campaign against the TAL is underway in Iraq, particularly in the southern areas. Fueled by religious Shi'a elements, efforts to discredit the TAL are gaining momentum. CPA is taking immediate and exerted efforts to counter this campaign and educate the Iraqi people about the benefits of the TAL and how it is their surest path to elections and democracy. This cable provides some analysis of the rejectionist movement and lays out a public and political strategy for countering it. End Summary.

Orchestrated Opposition to the TAL

2. (S) CPA has growing evidence of a mounting campaign against the TAL. Opposition to key provisions of the TAL by Sistani and other Shi'a were apparent when a group of five Shi'a members forced the delay of the signing of the TAL in order to consult more intensively in Najaf. At the time, GC members Chalabi, Mowaffak, Bahr Al-Uloom, Hakim,

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BAGHDAD 00128

and Ja'afari claimed the only problem was with article 61(C), that dealing with constitutional ratification. However, as the reservations published by the "'Shi'a caucus" made clear, some opposition was more fundamental. Critics questioned how an unelected body could place constraints on the conduct of an elected one. Original private concerns about giving a veto over the constitution to the Kurds were replaced with complaints that the constitutional ratification procedures would result in an endless cycle of a failed referendum, dissolved assembly, new elections, and renewed drafting.

(b)(1)

4. (S) A recent pamphlet in the mosques objects to the TAL on the grounds that the interim (unelected) government has too much power; the TAL divides Iraq and establishes sectarianism; the role of Islam is too qualified; the three person presidency council will paralyze action and serve as a justification for continued U.S. meddling; and the interim government could conclude an agreement to have international forces stay in Iraq for decades. CPA has not yet confirmed the origins of the pamphlet, but it is rumored to be distributed by Sistani's representatives in the provinces. Regardless of Sistani's connections with this particular pamphlet, other sources confirm Sistani espouses these views. He is reportedly despondent about the TAL and has decided to disengage from political discussions with the United Nations on the interim government unless the body disavows the TAL. (b)(1)

(b)(1)

5. (S) As Sistani's opposition to the TAL has broadened and become more adamant, we hear increasing reports of churning efforts - particularly in the south - to discredit the TAL. In addition to the pamphlet mentioned above (which has been spotted from Al Amarah to Baghdad), there is talk of petitions and demonstrations against the TAL. Distortions and misinterpretations of the TAL have been

discussed in mosques.

(b)(1)



Our TAL Counteroffensive

7. ~~(S)~~ Despite the gathering storm, CPA believes that the Coalition is reasonably well-positioned to head off the campaign or at least minimize the damage that it does to the TAL and Coalition and Iraqi interests. The TAL is an extraordinary document, with many articles that will have great and inherent appeal to Iraqis. Many of focus groups and informal discussions nationwide tell us that Iraqis are seizing on the document, asking questions and expressing their interest in it and concerns over it. The TAL has been particularly well-received in the north, where Kurdish leaders have trumpeted the achievements of the TAL for the Kurdish people and played down the areas in which the Kurds compromised.

8. ~~(S)~~ We must, however, take the challenge to the TAL with the greatest seriousness. Abandonment of the TAL - or even large-scale public opposition that persists into the post-June 30 transitional period - would have disastrous consequences for the Coalition's political objectives. The fight over the TAL has enormous strategic implications for the future of democracy in Iraq, and our counteroffensive should be formulated in light of our larger political strategy. Our counteroffensive should be waged aggressively, using all the considerable resources at our disposal. ~~(S)~~

(b)(1)



9. CPA's strategy for defending the TAL includes an approach to four main actors or groups of actors - the Iraqi public at large, Ayatollah Sistani, the Shi'a political leaders within the GC, and Iraqi political figures outside the GC. Additionally, it considers the right approach to take with regard to the TAL Annex, which is set to be discussed and negotiated over the next few months. Each element of this strategy is considered below.

TAL Defense Strategy

10. TAL Outreach Plan. CPA has devised a civic education campaign on the TAL that includes extensive materials, media activities, focus groups, and larger town hall meetings. This outreach plan focuses heavily on using television - through short commercials and multiple programs - to get out the pro-TAL message. While this campaign is essential, CPA plans to be even more aggressive in our efforts. CPA will make concerted efforts to target elite audiences and engage more thoroughly and directly on the specific issues on which the TAL is being attacked. In particular, CPA will take the following steps:

-- Rebuttal Pamphlets. CPA will supplement its current efforts to explain the TAL by issuing "rebuttal pamphlets" specifically geared to address the charges made against the TAL by its critics. These pamphlets need not be detailed, but will focus on the big picture (how the TAL is the quickest and smoothest path to a democratic Iraq) and the two major criticisms described above. We intend to distribute _ millions of the pamphlets throughout the country.

-- Using GC Members. CPA will intensify its efforts to use members of the Council to promote the TAL; they are the creators and owners of the document. We will focus on leveraging media coverage of GC members defending the TAL in the provinces. CPA will seek to organize "TAL Tours," in which GC members would travel to several major cities within multiple governorates over several days to give speeches, meet with local leaders and press. (b)(1)

(b)(1)

(b)(1) Ambassador Bremer will focus on securing GC member involvement in promoting the TAL at his weekly GC consultations on March 24.

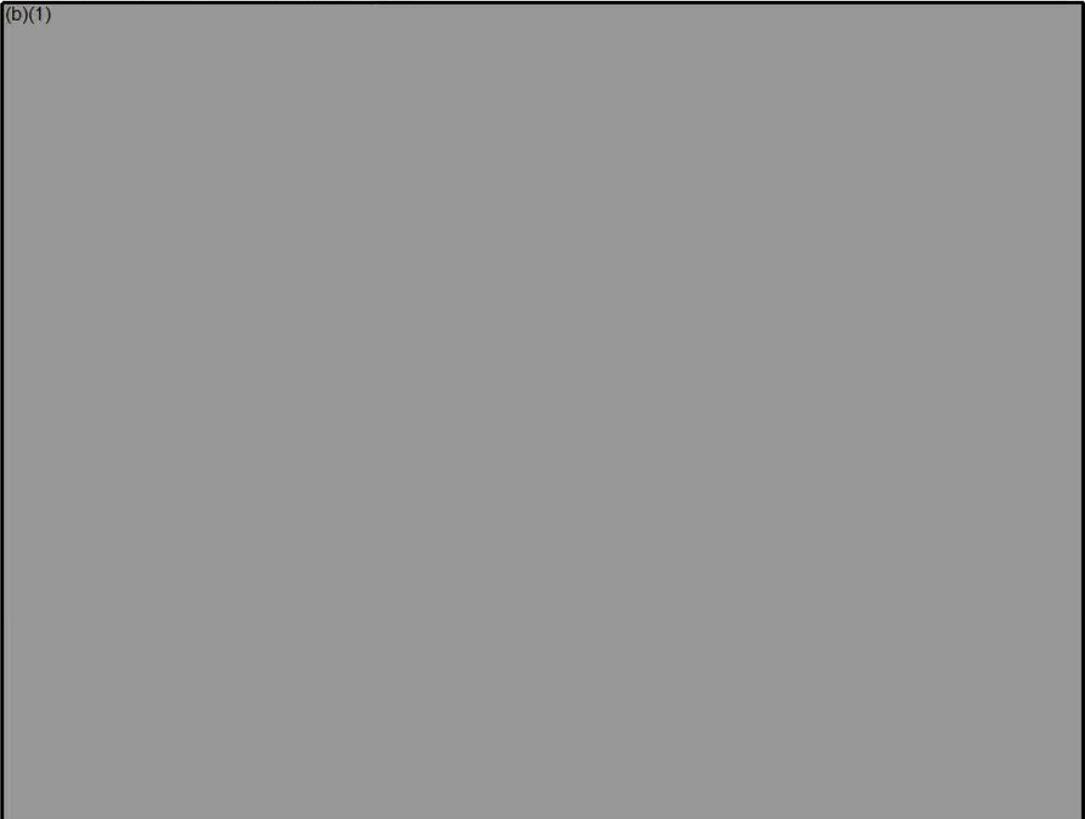
-- Aggressive use of Ambassador Bremer. There is broad agreement that Iraqis should be the ones promoting the TAL.

But this should not exclude the involvement of Ambassador Bremer in the campaign. As CPA regional and governorate coordinators have repeatedly stressed, Ambassador Bremer has a great deal of unspent political capital. It would be a good investment to use some of this capital by giving two or three major, detailed, serious speeches about the TAL; by increasing the attention Bremer gives the TAL in his interaction with the Iraqi print media; and by publicly and visibly associating himself with Iraqi leaders at the national and local level who are willing to promote the TAL. Ambassador Bremer had a successful town hall meeting in Najaf on March 23.

11. ~~(S)~~ CPA Contact with Sistani. CPA's message to Sistani will explain our perspective on the TAL and welcome his views on other upcoming political matters.

12. ~~(S)~~ The Shi'a Five. CPA will continue to engage with all of the key Shi'a members of the GC, and will make clear to all of them the importance of the TAL to the success of our common mission. (b)(1)

(b)(1)



(b)(1)

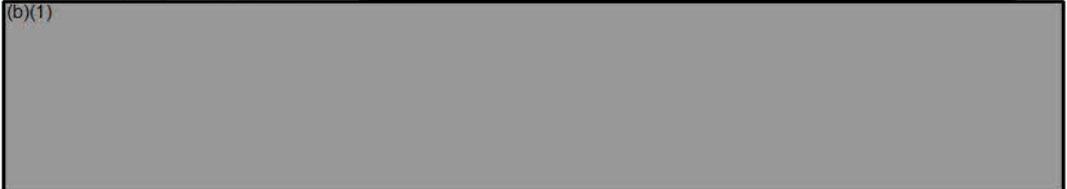
14. (2) Cultivate other Shi'a and Sunni leaders to support the TAL. CPA will, in conjunction with the United Nations, intensify our general political outreach efforts in the coming weeks. We will make particular efforts to incorporate the TAL into our engagements. CPA intends to launch political roundtables similar to the economic gatherings it held last fall. These groups will be established as part of our broader political efforts. CPA Baghdad offices and governorate coordinators - particularly in the South - will also closely monitor public statements of local political and religious figures. A special emphasis will be placed on Friday sermons, as these appear to be especially important in mobilizing mass Shi'a opinion. CPA Headquarters has asked for specific reporting on this and has required GC's to make concerted efforts to meet with all prominent political and (especially) religious figures in their areas to explain the TAL and rebut any mischaracterizations. CPA efforts to further understand and influence the dynamics in the regions continue with a special session bringing together all governorate coordinators to discuss the TAL on March 26.

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BAGHDAD 00128

15. (S) Approach to the Annex. CPA anticipates a serious effort by the Shi'a five to use the annex to the TAL to "correct" elements of the TAL. We will resist these efforts strongly and be united in our message that the annex is not a place for amendments to the agreed text signed on March 8. (b)(1)

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