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CONCEPT PAPER

AMBASSADOR BREMER MEETING WITH STUDENT AND YOUTH

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CONCEPT

IRI was asked to propose a concept for Ambassador Bremer to be taped speaking to a group of 10-15 university students or recent graduates asking him unscripted, difficult questions for a program to be aired on Al-Iraqiya.

IRI suggests that, barring the existence of a secure, neutral site, the meeting take place in the Al-Rasheed or the Convention Center, with IRI choosing the participants. The participants will be "auditioned" in IRI focus groups, with IRI choosing the most opinionated and articulate focus group participants. The group chosen will then be asked to participate in a TV program, meeting with an official from the CPA talking about the new Iraq. After half an hour with a moderator getting them warmed up to ask tough questions, the Administrator will enter.

IRI recommends this be done live to tape with minimal, if any, editing. Showing the students actually drilling the Administrator with tough questions, complete with any mistakes by the Administrator, will benefit both the perception of the Administrator as a "straight shooter" and the perception of students as agents of change.

VALIDITY OF CONCEPT

This concept tests very well in a Baghdad focus group on March 4. While the participants said this would not be a substitute for action on the part of the Administrator, they liked the idea. Women in particular liked the idea, saying that young people, as the hope for Iraq's future, should be the ones asking the questions. Men were more cynical, pointing out that American politicians are highly skilled at answering difficult questions.

Interestingly, almost all participants expressed concern for the security of both Ambassador Bremer and the participants.

Also, IRI coincidentally had a meeting with about 30 student leaders on March 4. IRI staff asked the question of the group "If Ambassador Bremer walked through that door, what would you ask him?" Initially, the group was polite, but after prodding by IRI staff, they began to ask very tough (if predictable) questions.

- What is the real motive of the Americans to be here in Iraq?
- When is Iraq going to have real democracy?
- Why is it so difficult to get the electricity working again?
- When can my sister go out at night without being afraid?

CHALLENGES

This project is not without complexities. In planning, numerous questions arise:

- How are the Iraqi participants chosen?
- How do we assure that the people in the meeting are sufficiently articulate and are strong enough in personality to ask the Administrator difficult questions?
- How do we handle security concerns? Specifically, do we tell the participants in advance they will be speaking with Ambassador Bremer?
- If the answer is no, how do we prime the group for Ambassador Bremer's entrance?
- How do we make sure that the group is comfortable with TV cameras, in addition to the nervousness that may be associated with speaking to Ambassador Bremer?
- Logistically, how do we arrange cameras for the meeting?
- Will there be repercussions – social or physical – to the students for “cooperating” with the Coalition?

SOLUTIONS

How are the Iraqi participants chosen?

How do we assure that the people in the meeting are sufficiently articulate and are strong enough in personality to ask the Administrator difficult questions?

IRI suggests holding a series of focus groups for youth and university students, and in fact will be conducting these groups in any event in the coming weeks. In these groups, IRI will ask questions about the future of Iraq. In addition to the normal reason for a focus group – getting information – IRI will use these groups as an audition for the meeting with Ambassador Bremer. Every group has people who are highly opinionated and try to dominate the conversation. IRI will select the most opinionated and articulate focus group participants for the meeting with Bremer.

How do we handle security concerns? Specifically, do we tell the participants in advance they will be speaking with Ambassador Bremer?

Ideally, the meeting would be conducted in a neutral setting, such as a university classroom or an ordinary school. Likely, security concerns eliminate this option. Therefore, the options are limited to the Green Zone. If a school or other neutral building exists in the Green Zone, that would be the best option. If not, the Al-Rasheed or the Convention Center would be the best remaining options.

IRI recommends not alerting the students to the Bremer meeting in advance, but describing it as a meeting with a top CPA official.

If the answer is no, how do we prime the group for Ambassador Bremer's entrance?

In the March 4 meeting with student leaders, IRI staff found that it may actually be more advantageous for the group's performance not to tell them ahead of time they will be meeting with Bremer.

IRI staff laid out a scenario where student leaders were able to ask Ambassador Bremer one question or tell him one thing. The comments began in a polite fashion, but IRI staff chided the group for being too polite, thus prompting a series of honest and probing questions. Once the group learned that there was no penalty for voicing their true opinions, they were very animated.

IRI suggests spending half an hour with the students answering a moderator's questions prior to the Administrator's arrival. In this way, we could get the students in the appropriate frame of mind for the Administrator, and minimize the risk of "stage fright."

*How do we make sure that the group is comfortable with TV cameras, in addition to the nervousness that may be associated with speaking to Ambassador Bremer?
Logistically, how do we arrange cameras for the meeting?*

IRI has a proposal for this, but would look to Mr. Dorrance for additional ideas in this area.

IRI proposes to tell the students that they are going to be on TV to talk about the new Iraq with an official from CPA, thus priming them for the idea of being on TV and making them comfortable with TV cameras in the room.

Will there be repercussions – social or physical – to the students for "cooperating" with the Coalition?

IRI focus groups have revealed that those Iraqis cooperating with the Coalition risk being ostracized socially or harmed physically for doing so. IRI asked its focus group whether the youth and students participating in this endeavor would be seen as traitors for cooperating with the Coalition or as heroes for asking the Administrator tough questions. They were unanimous in the latter assessment.