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COALITION PROVISIONAL AUTHORITY
BAGHDAD

LPB HAS SEEN

INFO MEMO

March 9, 2004

FOR: THE ADMINISTRATOR

FROM: Don Hamilton 

SUBJECT: Focus Group Report Highlights- Baghdad 4 March

Key themes and conclusions:

- The group, like others, is reluctant to concede that Iraqis are involved in killing other Iraqis.
- Similarly, they are suspicious of our explanations: Some are shy about naming Al Qaida, but use "Yemenis, Saudis and Syrians" as a substitute. They note that the Zarqawi letter could easily have been forged. They want more proof to back up our assertions.
- They suggest searching all cars, curfew, a revitalized *mukhabarat*, and searching of entire districts (while treating people respectfully) as security measures.
- These groups (as distinct from the Samarra groups) do not believe the bombings will prevent progress.
- As is reflected in polls, and other focus groups they say they want more information on the political process, including the TAL.
- Suspicions of Al Arabiyah and Al Jazeera grow while noting improvements at Al Iraqiyah.
- Tendency toward a completely Islamic Iraq is dampened when counterpoised with the need for unity.
- Federalism is disliked when viewed as something benefiting only Kurds. When recast in non-ethnic terms it is better received.
- This group was the first to criticize Sistani. They understood that Sistani did not want CFs in the area and believe this obliged him to arrange for better security.
- Ahmed Kazem Ibrahim emerged spontaneously as more effective than the Minister of the Interior.
- Support for 25% women in the Assembly was split by gender.

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**INTERNATIONAL REPUBLICAN INSTITUTE
PUBLIC OPINION REPORT
MARCH 4, 2004
ASHURA BOMBINGS, ZARKOWI,
PERCEPTION OF T.A.L. & SISTANI CRITICISMS**

BACKGROUND

Women's group:

All but one were housewives, with a fairly even distribution of education, skewing somewhat educated, but not dramatically so. Three of them worked currently or formerly outside the home. Three wore headscarves. Our moderators thought that the distribution between Shi'ia and Sunni was 5/4.

Men's group:

Two were uneducated, two had a secondary school education and six were university educated. Our moderators thought the group to be 6/4 Shi'ite.

The groups were conducted at the Al-Karma Hotel in Baghdad on March 4, 2004.

CONCLUSIONS

- Opinion in our groups was divided and malleable on the subject of who might be responsible for the bombings.
- Zarkowi is seen as a U.S. creation. While the groups were desperate to believe Iraqis were not responsible for the bombings, they felt the Al-Qaeda connection lacked evidence.
- *This was the first group in which IRI has heard criticism of Sistani.* The group was mildly critical of Sistani's lack of security preparations in Kerbala for *Ashura*.
- Both groups recommended a variety of extreme measures to stop the bombings including random searching of cars and homes and reinstatement of the *mukhabarat* and the curfew.
- Vice-Minister of Internal Affairs Ahmed Kazem Ibrahim emerged spontaneously in the men's group as someone respected by all segments of Iraqi society, and capable in handling security problems.
- Al-Iraqiya is seen as improving and Al-Hoorra is watched by many Iraqis.
- The first reaction of both groups to the TAL was that they didn't have enough information. This is a consistent theme throughout IRI focus groups, regardless of date, demographics or location.
- A tension emerged in the men's group between the need for a completely Islamic Iraq and a unified Iraq that is partially governed by Islamic law – a unified Iraq won out.

- Federalism was initially seen as divisive in the groups, but when a non-ethnic basis for federalism is introduced, it eases fears.

DETAILED FINDINGS

Ashura Bombings

- Public opinion was divided in terms of naming which group or groups might have been responsible for the bombing.
- When asked who their neighbors thought did the bombings, Iranians were more likely to be named by Sunnis, Wahabbis were singled out by some Shi'ia and both groups mentioned Americans and Israelis as possible culprits.
- Participants were very interested in believing that these bombs are caused by external forces. They don't want to believe that Iraqis are killing Iraqis.
- Reasons for suspecting American involvement include lack of U.S. casualties, interest by Americans in creating a need for U.S. troops, and interest by Americans in postponing the elections so the U.S. can loot Iraqi oil.
- The group was unequivocal in their opinion that these bombings do nothing to forward Iraq's progress, or restore dignity to the country – a marked difference from the February 14 Samarra groups. Likely this is more due to geographic and demographic differences rather than a change in public opinion.

Zarkowi

- Despite the mention of American responsibility, when pressed, many group members didn't necessarily feel that the Americans were the group most likely directly responsible for the bombings. However, they did feel that the Coalition is manufacturing Zarkowi in order to create a "bad guy."
- People would be more willing to believe an Al-Qaeda connection if they had more proof. They cite no publicizing Al-Qaeda arrests on television and the ease with which a letter from Zarkowi to Al-Qaeda could be faked as reasons disbelieve the Al-Qaeda connection.
- The majority of the participants felt that Arabs from neighboring countries were involved. Some participants specifically named Al-Qaeda, while others were reluctant to do so, but named Yemenis, Syrians and Saudis as possible culprits – essentially Al-Qaeda.
- People are adamant that the bombers are not Iraqis. They desperately want to believe that Iraqis are not killing Iraqis.

Sistani & the Bombings

- Both groups thought that Sistani should have been better prepared with security for the bombings. They noted that the crowds were easy to predict, and Sistani could have organized the militias better to protect the pilgrims.
- When given a copy of Sistani's remarks, both groups liked the speech. However, both groups also thought it was odd that he should criticize the CF, as they believed that Sistani had ordered the CF out of the city on the holy day.
- While the criticism was not severe, this is the first time IRI has heard criticism of Sistani in any of its roughly 50 groups in Iraq. This from a group predominantly Shi'ia.

How to Stop the Bombings

- Baghdadis in our group felt that they had a role to play in stopping the bombings. Specifically, they said Iraqis should report strange actions to the police, and even suggested religious leaders encouraging Iraqis to cooperate with police to stop the bombings. This is a marked divergence from the February 14 Samarra groups.
- That being said, the groups always said "cooperate with Iraqi police" rather than "cooperate with the CF."
- Insecurity was such a problem with the group that group members suggested extreme measures to combat security.
- Both men and women wanted the old, more experienced Iraqi police force back, regardless of whether or not they were Baathists. One man said that more informers were needed and another suggested searching every car entering Baghdad. A woman suggested bringing back the *mukhabarat* while another woman noted that Saddam could have stopped the bombings.
- A policeman in the men's group related how the former regime would seal off entire (bad) neighborhoods and search every house with local leaders present at the searches as witnesses. The policeman noted that the former police treated Iraqis with respect during these searches. The men's group all smiled and nodded.
- The men's group suggested that bringing back the curfew might foil bombers, since the bombs all explode early in the morning. Midnight to 5am was suggested.

Ahmed Kazem Ibrahim

- Ancillary to the discussion but quite interesting was the perception that the vice-minister of Internal Affairs is much more capable of handling security issues than the minister.
- The men's group felt that security improved when Ahmed Kazem Ibrahim joined the ministry. Police love and respect him, as do tribal leaders and religious leaders. Sistani and Muqtada al-Sadr were mentioned specifically as leaders who approve of Ibrahim.
- Part of the source of Ibrahim's appeal is his visibility on security issues, as opposed to the minister.

Press Conference

- When asked about the press conference following the bombings, the women said that they could not watch it because it was scheduled during an electrical blackout.
- About half the men said that the press conference was all about Zarkawi, and that promises to capture him were empty promises and U.S. propaganda.
- When the remarks of Ambassador Bremer and Mowaffaq al-Rubaie were distributed, the group thought both were good speeches, but that they were just words.

Perceptions of Iraqi and Arabic TV

- Another ancillary conversation highlighted increasing dislike of al-Jazeera and al-Arabiya. Confidence in those channels among the male group was low.
- Al-Iraqiya is seen to be improving, and was seen as the only channel that gives the truth about the situation in Iraq.
- A group of half a dozen IRI moderators from diverse backgrounds said that al-Hoorah is well-liked among their family and neighbors and frequently watched, although they didn't like Lebanese talking about Iraq's situation.

Transitional Administrative Law

- The first reaction of both groups was that they didn't have enough information about the TAL. This is a consistent theme throughout IRI focus groups, regardless of date, demographics or location.
- Those that knew about it primarily got their information from Iraqi TV.

Federalism

- Without any knowledge of federalism, both groups thought it was the first step in dividing Iraq.
- After the difference between federalism based on ethnicity and federalism based on governorate divisions was explained, the group was less apprehensive.

January Elections

- The men were quite circumspect about January elections, citing concern about the ability of the ration cards to accurately count all Iraqis and the need to get the right person in power. Women were unified in their desire for elections as soon as possible.

Islamic Identity of Iraq

- Women focused on the mention of Islam without the distinction between Sunni and Shi'ia, and appreciated the lack of distinction.
- Men were worried that since Islam is only one source of law in the new Iraq, some laws might contradict Islam. When one member of the group explained that Iraq needed laws that respected minority traditions – marriage for Christians and other sects – and this calmed the group down.
- The tension on this subject is between an Iraq that is Islamic enough, and an Iraq that is unified. In the men's group, the need for a unified Iraq trumped the need for a completely Islamic Iraq.

25% Women in the Transitional Assembly

- The women's group thought 25% was the minimum number of seats that women should have.
- A little less than half the men's group thought that 25% was too much, since women had no experience in governing. A little more than half thought that if the women were qualified to lead, they should have the seats.