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PUBLIC OPINION REPORT
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RECENT SHIFTS IN IRAQI PUBLIC OPINION**

BACKGROUND

This memo is not based on a particular focus group, rather it is based on impressions of IRI staff Steven Moore and Lazar Antonic after two focus groups on April 7 in Baghdad, one focus group in Sadr City on April 7, conversations with some 35 Iraqi staff of IRI, about twenty student leaders and numerous ordinary Iraqis. It also draws on numerous IRI focus groups from the past several weeks.

It should be noted that while the following findings are based on numerous interviews and focus groups, this is qualitative information, and cannot necessarily be extrapolated to the population at large. Also, public opinion in times of crisis can swing wildly over short periods of time. Many of these observations could be short term, and many could be influenced by actions on the part of the Coalition.

OBSERVATIONS

Stopping the Violence

Most people say that there are two ways out of the violence:

- The Coalition to concede to Moqtad al-Sadr's demands or
- Ayatollah Sistani appeals for calm

Virtually nobody has heard Sistani's appeals for calm.

Shift in Public Opinion

If this were a political campaign, we would be losing our base. **Even IRI staff members, who have been risking their lives to help build democracy in this country for months, are saying that the current situation gives them little hope for democracy in Iraq.**

Iraqis tell IRI that ethereal concepts of democracy are no longer appealing to them. They associate democracy with security and economic prosperity, and currently they see neither.

The response in Fallujah is seen as disproportionate to the killing of the four contractors. Even the most reasonable and pro-democracy Iraqis see reports of hundreds of civilian casualties and the bombing of a mosque as reason to **doubt the sincerity of the Coalition and its ability to deliver democracy to Iraq.**

Al-Sadr's Support

Sadr City residents say that al-Sadr's support is primarily economically driven, rather than ideologically driven.

However, many ordinary Iraqis see al-Sadr as a **hero standing up to the occupying forces that have failed to deliver on promises, and see his demands as legitimate.** Student leaders say that as many as **70% of Baghdad university students agree with al-Sadr.**

TAL

One staff member saw the TAL ads on Arabiya with his family. The image of the boy with the stick came just after news of Iraqi civilians being killed. He said it felt like the TAL was for another Iraq – this is probably accurate, as the ads tested very positively in public opinion environment of two weeks ago.

Student leaders point out that one of the main points of the TAL is **freedom of media and freedom of expression, yet they say the Coalition Forces have shut down a newspaper and have shot protesters.**

Additionally, IRI's focus groups over the last several weeks have seen the TAL increasingly, and perhaps at this point immutably, defined as a pro-Kurdish, anti-Shi'ia document. Out of perhaps 70 focus group participants over the last several weeks, about half had seen Sistani's commentary on the TAL, while only a few had seen the document distributed by the Coalition. Very few had seen anything on Iraqiya about the TAL.

This is not to say the TAL should be abandoned, but the environment for promoting the TAL has shifted. **The Iraqis who were once passively negative about democracy are now in the streets, and the Iraqis who were once patient about the prospects of democracy have lapsed into (hopefully short term) apathy about democracy due to lack of tangible deliverables.**

June 30th

Iraqis have low expectations for any substantial changes on June 30th.

However, many Iraqis do expect that CF will pull back to bases outside of Iraq's major cities. **The presence of CF on the streets of Baghdad and other major cities on July 1 may be an opportunity for further turmoil.**

Governing Council

Although Abdel-Aziz al-Hakim and Ibrahim al-Jaafari are well thought of in Sadr City, both focus group participants and Sadr City residents **noted their absence from any role in this crisis.**

More educated and less generous Iraqis have said that if there was any doubt before as to the uselessness of the Governing Council, it has been confirmed by this crisis. They say that if Shi'ia members of the GC really represented Shi'ia, they would call for calm.

Jobs

The lack of jobs in Baghdad, particularly in Sadr City, has been the drumbeat in every conversation of the last week. If the young men of Sadr City had jobs, they would not be following Moqtad al-Sadr. Lack of employment opportunities provided the fertile ground for al-Sadr to command the Mehdi Army.

One Sadr City resident who is a translator for the Coalition Forces noted that Sadr City was at its most peaceful since the fall of the regime when USAID sponsored a cleanup effort in Sadr City.

Reconstruction

Several Iraqis point out that Baghdad looks much the same as it did a year ago. The roads of Sadr City remain unpaved and the schools still float on sewage. The only cranes on the Baghdad skyline are from Saddam's construction projects.

Student leaders note that Saddam rebuilt Baghdad three months after the 1991 Gulf War, while the Coalition has done very little in a year.

Iraqis are seeing little tangible benefit to the occupation, and are currently experiencing tremendous negatives. This is causing them to lose hope for democracy.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Following are some short term actions that could help restore hope for democracy among Iraqis.

- Most Sadr City residents cannot afford satellite TV, and watch Iraqiya. Take quotes from Sistani's appeal for calm and run them as a constant ticker across the bottom of the screen.
- As soon as possible, begin a short-term Works Progress Administration type program in Sadr City. Hire Iraqis to build roads and infrastructure. This will likely lessen al-Sadr's influence in Sadr City.
- Vet Iraqi contractors and follow up on the work being done. Sadr City residents say that in the past year, the same corrupt local leaders from the previous regime have used what money has come into Sadr City for patronage, or have not done the work at all.
- Put a robust communications program behind the projects, so Iraqis can see progress. Open each block of road. Keep count of each milestone of jobs created. Compare the current economic situation to that under Saddam

Use Iraqiya to do this. Previous focus groups have shown that Iraqis are accustomed to large amounts of information about their government, and feel like something is being hidden from them when they see 3 minute news packages about the future of their country.

- While IRI does not possess the expertise to make security recommendations, Sadr City and Shulla residents say that the area is more calm when Coalition Forces are not present. They recommend using Iraqi forces to keep order with Coalition Forces as a backup.
- Improve food rations. Many Iraqis IRI spoke with said that their food rations are frequently of low quality and expired. They said Saddam gave favored people quality food rations, and those not in favor (Shi'ia in Sadr City and Shulla, for instance) the same low-quality rations they are receiving now.