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To: USAID

From: Dr. James Mayfield, RTI

Subj: Preliminary Report: Comments and additions to focus group report

Dr. James B. Mayfield, staff member of RTI, is the project manager for this initiative. Mr Steve Moore of IRI, is playing a significant role in ensuring that moderators were recruited and trained, that the necessary equipment was available, and that Iraqis from different parts of Iraq (North, Central and South) were available to help in the translating of the tapes generated by the focus groups.

In each city, LGP staff used local Iraqi recruiters to recruit 24 men and 24 women, with the following characteristics:

- a. Age: 3 men and 3 women in their twenties, 3 men and 3 women in their thirties, the same in their forties, fifties, and 60 and above.
- b. Education: 3 men and 3 women with no education, 3 men and 3 women with only a grade school education, same in high school, college and post graduate (lawyer, doctors, etc.)
- c. If possible, 4-5 of the men should be unemployed, seeking work and 4-5 of the women should be unemployed seeking work, or their husbands are unemployed, seeking work.

The recruiters were instructed to look for people who have opinions and are willing to share their opinions. Obviously a cross section of people, with difference kinds of opinions, both pro and con attitudes towards Americans being in Iraq was required. We do not want to give them too much information about the nature of the research, so they were simply told that this research is being done by a research group in Baghdad, and that the purpose was to determine Iraqi attitudes and opinions concerning the Americans being in Iraq. As an incentive, all selected participants were told that they would receive 20,000 Dinars if they showed up on the day of the focus group. If the person agreed to come, then we obtained their telephone number or some way to contact them. Women are expected to arrive at 8:30am and men are expected to arrive at noon. None of the people recruited were to be from the same family and if possible none of them should know each other personally.

It was important that this recruitment process not be conducted by any Expats (RTI/CPA), only Iraqis were to be used in recruiting and screening the participants. Every effort was made to ensure that Non Iraqis were not present or visible. Every effort possible was made to ensure that this research effort was not seen as a RTI/CPA sponsored research project. Some of course may guess or suspect

that it is RTI/CPA sponsored, but every effort was made to ensure that it would not be obvious to the participants.

During our first effort in Basrah, while all the above guidelines were followed, we failed to anticipate that RTI security people would want to be checking for potential dangers, thus becoming visible to some of the participants in Basrah. Once this was observed, changes were negotiated and in all later focus groups, no expat staff were visible.

During the course of the focus groups, tea and coffee and some sweets were offered to the participants. Pencils and pads were made available for each of the participants.

Assumptions

First, the key purpose of a focus group is not to determine what percentage of the group has one opinion or another, (which would be the purpose of a typical survey), but rather to determine the various dimensions of an opinion that different types of people might have, that hopefully will provide a richer more profound assessment of the opinions that Iraqis might have about the CPA Announcement of 15 November 2003.

Second, a focus group also allows people to reflect with the focus group moderator why they have the opinion that they have and to outline the "logic" being used as participants reflect on their own individual opinions.

Third, standard focus group procedures were used. Moderators were Iraqi citizens and were instructed on the processes of introduction, warm ups, getting acquainted, and trust building techniques. Special skills needed include the ability to listen, to stimulate discussion from all participants, ability bring out opinions from the quiet members, seeking further clarification on comments made, probing into deeper opinions and concerns, etc.

Fourth, a detailed set of instructions were developed for the moderators, ensuring their understanding of the purpose, the methods, the areas of research, and sub questions to be used. During the course of the actual focus group, moderators were instructed to stop the focus group every 20-30 minutes, to speak directly with the focus group team in the other room, concerning additional questions to be asked, points of clarification needed, or other things that needed to be covered.

Fifth, each evening, the focus group team sought to review the tapes, developing a preliminary summary of the focus groups, with the understanding that at some future date, a much more detailed assessment of the tapes would be made, in order to develop a more comprehensive outline of the opinions communicated and some determination of their background, (age and education differences). At some future time, specific observations concerning some of the sub groups, (uneducated versus highly educated, younger people versus older, employed versus unemployed, etc), may be attempted, including lessons learned that were counter intuitive or unexpected, new questions that might need to be asked in later focus groups, etc. This kind of in-depth analysis will need much more time than was available at the time these early focus groups were completed.

Six, what follows in this preliminary report is merely a summary of the obvious and what appears to be the most important information gleaned for our initial observations of the focus groups process, including a quick review of the tapes conducted at the end of the day. We hope this information will prove to be useful and appropriate to CPA.

Key Findings

1. What are people's feelings about the Announcement of November 15, 2003.

In all three areas (Basrah, Najaf, and Hillah), the overwhelming majority of the participants had heard about the Announcement. Both men and women had heard about the Announcement mostly through radio and television. Two women in Najaf said they had heard about it through communications with Hawza.

In Basrah, both men and women said it was a good thing. Interestingly, several women and one man indicated that they believed it would happen, because the Coalition Provisional Authority had promised there would be higher salaries, and they had kept their word. One of them even said, "We trust the Americans, when they promise something, we know it will happen."

In Najaf, nearly all the participants agreed that the announcement would be good for security. One woman said, "We must get rid of the Baathists first before there will be stability." Another woman stated if this announcement brings an end to the occupation, it will be a good thing. After they were invited to read the announcement, one male said, "I feel really happy when I read it, because it will end the occupation." Another man said, "It will be good for security, security will be better after June 2004." One woman said, somewhat skeptically, "Of course I will be happy, if it really happens!" One older man was very skeptical, saying: "I do not believe it is true."

The moderator then asked the whole group whether they think it will happen as the announcement says. Most of the male participants were observed to indicate either verbally or with a nod that they believed it would be fulfilled as stated. Again while most of female participants, at least 7 of the 11, vocally acknowledged they thought it would happen. One woman stated that we will need the Americans for at least two years for security, and then added, "even if we have our own government, I think the CPA should still stay 2-3 to ensure peace and stability in Iraq."

There was a vocal minority who were skeptical. One younger woman said, "I don't believe it, they have promised things before that did not happen." One very vocal woman stated, "CPA has to leave now, they cannot even control our borders, and terrorist are crossing in from Iran and Saudi Arabia, and the CPA does not seem to care." Note how this sentiment of not trusting the CPA in Najaf, is quite different from the more trusting sentiments articulated in Basrah. One man made this comment, "It is about time CPA did something for the people, and this looks like something that will help us." One woman rather poetically, stated that "CPA has come a land far away, they have saved us from Saddam, have worked hard for us, and

they will do what they say they will do!" Another woman expressed her positive feelings about the announcement, stating, "Everything has to come to an end, so I believe that they will leave, if not today, then probably tomorrow."

In Hillah, again the positive sentiments were especially evident among both men and women. One man stated he knew that "most Iraqis are very pleased with this announcement." Another man argued that the "Americans should stay until stability is truly established." Others expressed the concern that the Americans might leave too soon. This sentiment was very noticeable in Hillah, much less in Najaf and Basrah. One woman was a bit skeptical that the CPA would leave that easily, wondering out loud "what do they want?" When the moderator asked for clarification, she was hesitant to respond. While the vast majority of both men and women expressed the feeling that the Americans in Hillah were not occupiers, but were liberators, it was clear from one man that "they are liberators if they don't stay too long." Another woman admitted "Yes, we do like them, but some of the soldiers sometimes act like occupiers." When asked why they like the Americans being in Iraq, one older woman, very emotionally stated, "Now my sons do not have to go to war for Saddam." Another woman, added, "None of my children are now at the front."

2. Which Group should play the dominant role in setting up and controlling the Caucus process that will select the new Transitional National Assembly?

In Basrah, there was a strong sentiment that the new government must be independent of any one religious or tribal group. One man indicated that, "Neither the Sunni nor the Shia leaders should be allowed to control this process." Interestingly, one man (who claimed he had been imprisoned by Saddam) suggested that while no high ranking Baathist should be allowed to participate, he still argued "some of the Baathists were honest people, were not guilty of any crime." Another man argued, "The Caucus must be totally honest and completely independent of any political parties."

When asked if the process outlined in the announcement for elections was too long or too short, the majority of both male and females felt it was not too long. One woman argued that "No the process is not too long, we must have two years to improve security first before we have elections." One man wondered about the many people who claim to be Iraqis and have IDs saying they are Iraqis when in fact they are not, they are Iranian who are coming in illegally." His point was to suggest that Iraq needs time to prepare themselves for elections; all these problems need to be resolved before elections can be held.

Only 3-4 participants out of the twenty men and women voiced the demand that direct elections be held before June 2003. The vast majority stated that they did not want direct elections in June 2003, "that was much too soon." When asked if the US or some other country or agency should monitor the election in March 2005, roughly 40 percent of the men thought the US should monitor the elections, even a smaller percentage of the women in Basrah wanted the US. Probably six out of ten men and 7 out of 10 women wanted either the UN or a European country. One male teacher said he did not favor the UN because they had certified one of the Saddam Hussein elections as valid. There were two out of the total group of twenty who thought

clerics should select our form of government. They were clearly in a minority in Basrah. Yet one woman stated: "The force of the Howzah should not be underestimated in Basrah."

In Najaf, participants are much more willing to see clerics play a role in the caucus. Several participants mentioned the name of Abdul Azziz al-Hakim and Ali al-Sistani as leaders they trusted and had confidence in. While those in Basrah were more apt to want non-religious leaders to play the dominant role, in Najaf, the mood was very different. Sistani is seen as a great leader. One man said, "He wants only the good of the people." Another expressed his praise for him stating, "He works very hard for the Iraqi people and we trust him." One younger woman stated that she would follow her own mind, not someone else, in deciding if the announcement was good or not. Yet for the vast majority, they clearly were waiting for Sistani to tell them whether this announcement was a good thing. Following this logic, it is not surprising that direct elections as soon as possible is the preferred route to follow by both men and women. One very shy woman who had said very little, was pushed to share her opinion, she suddenly blurted out, "Just go and hang all the Baathists."

In Hillah, most participants do not want clerics involved in the establishment of government. One man stated, "No authority should be given to clerics." Another younger man said: "I want my country to be Islamic, with an Islamic leader, but not like in Iran. Among men, 7 out of 10 stated strongly that clerics should not play any role at all. Most participants were equally opposed to allowing tribal leaders to play a dominant role.

Security

Both male and female focus group participants in Basrah saw the Coalition Forces (CF) as an essential component to restoring security. Joint Iraqi Police Forces (IPF) and CF patrols were much more highly thought of than either force acting alone to increase security. We heard numerous anecdotes of Iraqi police being unable to perform their duties because of threats by gangs and tribal militias. One person relayed the story of being at a checkpoint watching the car in front of him being searched, and seeing the IPF officer finding a weapon. The participant heard the car owner say to the police officer, in a very threatening way, "I know where your family lives." The IPF officer quickly put the gun back where he found it and let him go.

One young man complained that the Iraqi police are only issued ten bullets. He said "What can they do to protect the ordinary citizen, with such little ammunition." A common sentiment expressed by people from different backgrounds is expressed in this older women's comment: "We were promised liberation and reconstruction, but all we got was looting, bad services, and insecurity."

People in Basrah see the IPF as able to deal well with the Iraqis much better than the CF, but the CF is essential to providing them the muscle (both in terms of arms and authority) to do their job. The notion of joint patrols was clearly the favored response.

In Basrah the major source of insecurity is coming from gangs of criminals, extreme religious militias, and tribal militias. One educated male participant lamented the lack of CF effort in challenging and arresting such illegal armed groups, indicating that

Basrah is becoming a dangerous city and the CF does not seem to care. Another younger woman participant also complained that the universities are becoming controlled by Islamic militias and the CF does not seem to care about how women are being treated by these Islamic groups.

According to a recent poll by the Independent Institute for Administration and Civil Society Studies, about a third of people in Basrah see attacks on CF as useful, although to what end is not clear. Not surprisingly, nobody in these focus groups would admit to having that opinion. Most participants, both men and women, blamed this anti CF feeling on Islamic militias, and believe that these extremists will be the major threat to security replacing Saddam in this part of Iraq.

Participants in both Najaf and Hillah, also see the major problem in their areas, in terms of insecurity and violence. One woman in Najaf noted that, "Saddam had put fear into every family in this area, and yet we still suffer from fear." A man in Najaf admitted that, "things were now better than before, but to be honest, we expected more from the Americans, we expected better services. Still we lack services and our streets are not as safe as they should be."

When asked if Saddam's forces are still strong enough to come back to power, one woman stated, "Yes, they do have the power and they are not working alone, they are working with terrorists from other countries." The women of Hillah were especially frustrated with the unemployment, which they stated was the major cause of instability and violence in Hillah.

Transfer of Sovereignty Agreement

People in the groups supported the CPA/IGC agreement almost unanimously. Nearly every participant, men and women, had heard about the agreement. Only one older man had not heard of the agreement. While diverse opinions were not obtained, it was clear that the common sentiment articulated did reflect a view that the agreement was good, was needed, and would be helpful.

Again this is not a sample survey, so one cannot make any judgment about the percentage of people in Basrah who may be aware of the announcement. What is significant is the realization that of people in Basrah who have some knowledge of this announcement, there is some consensus that the agreement is a good thing.

When a specific question was asked: "If religious leaders were opposed to this agreement would that change you positive opinion of the announcement?" a clear majority of the male participants indicated they would still think it was a good idea.

One interesting event occurred during the male focus group in Basrah. When the focus group leader stepped out of the room for a minute to converse with the researchers, we were able to continue monitoring the conversations among the participants. There was one tribal sheikh in the group, who was observed instructing the participants about the importance of remaining true to Islam and that we should follow our religious leaders. When the moderator returned, he was surprised to find that nearly all the participants now wanted to change their opinion, indicating that if their religious leaders did not favor this announcement, they would agree with the religious leaders. This dramatic shift in opinion was a clear indication that they did

not want to be seen as against their religious leaders. Whether this shift in opinion was due to peer pressure, or the fear of being video-taped as being anti religious leader, or the persuasive arguments of the tribal leader is not clear. It does document the volatile nature of opinion in Iraq at the present time.

Clarity

The unclear parts of the CPA/IGC agreement involved the dissolution of the Iraqi Governing Council (IGC) and CPA in June 2004. One man questioned the sincerity of the CPA to just give up its power. A young female college student asked whether there would be any CP presence after June 2004. She was obviously concerned for security if the CP left too soon. Several people wondered "Where will they go?" There was a sense that perhaps the change would be in name only, suggesting a fair amount of skepticism that this will really happen. The other point of uncertainty brought up was whether this agreement includes the Kurdish north. For some reason, a number of people wondered why the Kurdish area is not mentioned specifically in the agreement. One man wondered if there is a special agreement between the Americans and the Kurds.

General Opinions Concerning the IGC

In general, the focus groups in Basrah were generous to the governing council, saying they would have been better if they had been given a chance to rule. This underlying positive sentiment was not shared by all the participants some arguing that they might have been more effective if the CPA had given them more power and authority. Jaaffri was the most widely supported IGC member in the Basrah groups. Mostly people attributed his popularity to the fact they had seen him on TV frequently. One man was very caustic in his comment that the IGC did not represent the Iraqi people and was merely a tool of the Americans. But his opinion was not verbalized by the others. Interestingly, it was noted that when asked which did they did trust the most, the IGC or the CPA, over two to one, participants were more apt to trust the CPA rather than the IGC.

Some of this ambivalence is better explained by the participants in Najaf and Hillah. In Najaf, both men and women were much less apt to have opinions, either positive or negative. One man suggested that too many of them were made up of Iraqis who had recently returned to Iraq and "had not suffered as the rest of us had". Another man (30s or 40s) calmly denied that the Governing Council cared about the Iraqi people, saying, "They really only care about themselves. They have no concern for our problems." Several of the less educated women indicated they did not know them. One participant who acknowledged that Abdul Aziz al-Hakim, is a good leader, stated, "We should give them a chance. Many people are impatient, but really, they never had any power and were prevented by the Americans from making good decisions."

In Hillah, most participants were not very favorable toward the Governing Council. One very educated man commented that these Governing Council members were, "only working for themselves and the parties they represent." Several were very negative toward these political parties. One woman said that parties do not work for Iraq, only for their own interests. One man also noted that many of these political

parties are infiltrated with former Baathists and would eventually bring the Baathists back to power.

Saddam's Capture

News of Saddam's capture was announced during the women's focus group in Basrah. The women were ecstatic. When asked for some more reflective comments, the comments of the group become more diverse and mixed, and some said they thought this would cause a decrease in attacks on CF. Others thought the humiliation of Saddam on TV is going to have a mixed impact - some found it cathartic, while some say it is humiliating for Iraqis and Arabs at large. The range of emotions displayed by Iraqis in reacting to this news makes for increased uncertainty in the near term.