



COALITION PROVISIONAL AUTHORITY
BAGHDAD

ACTION MEMO

040220-02
LPB HAS SEEN Rob

Let's have a meeting w/ Dan, Dan to discuss info. 20 February 2004 2/20

FOR: THE ADMINISTRATOR
FROM: Don Hamilton *[Signature]*
SUBJECT: Recommendations from Focus Group Report on Your Press Conference

Steve Moore of IRI suggested we do a focus group on your press conference and the polling group eagerly accepted. A previously scheduled focus group from here in Baghdad was rescheduled and watched your press conference live.

As usual, Steve's report is on the mark. His findings and recommendations track with what we know through intuition and observation—good actions impress more than great words; physical evidence of progress counts; getting out among the people makes the leader seem in touch with people's needs.

This report further bolsters polling indications that Iraqis are reluctant to believe that Iraqis, or even other Arabs, are responsible for grotesque acts like major car bombings.

RECOMMENDATION: Per Steve's recommendation, make more contact with ordinary Iraqis. Always operating within security requirements, open more bridges and kiss more babies. Whatever increases your acceptance and popularity strengthens your position as a negotiator in the final 132 days.

Approve: _____ Disapprove: _____ Approve with modification: _____

ATTACHMENTS: IRI Focus Group Report

UNCLASSIFIED



IRI Focus Group Report – Baghdad February 19 Ambassador Bremer's Press Conference

RECOMMENDATIONS

- In general, Amb. Bremer should behave more like a president – show strength, deliver on promises, increase communication with the Iraqi people.
- Amb. Bremer should be seen more frequently among ordinary Iraqis. Our groups have a basic level of confidence in Amb. Bremer that would be increased by showing concern for issues affecting the average Iraqi.
- Possibilities include:
 - Visits to Iraqi schools
 - Visits to Iraqi homes and businesses
 - Bringing Iraqis to a neutral appearing area in the Green Zone to meet with Amb. Bremer

All these should be covered by Iraqi media, even if only Iraqiya.

- Pick a problem and solve it. If Amb. Bremer were to be shown listening to the concerns of ordinary Iraqis, picking one of their problems to solve, then solve it within a certain time frame, it would greatly increase his credibility. Healing the physical scars of the war would be a good start. Our groups cited new construction as a leading indicator of CPA action.
- Further test the perception of the Al-Qaeda presence in Iraq. Referring to car bombers as foreign terrorists may be superior phraseology to referencing Al-Qaeda. Further testing of this perception is required.
- Change translators. This translator spoke in a heavy Egyptian accent, he spoke too quickly and in a monotone voice.

FINDINGS

The Speech

Our groups liked the content of the speech very well. They felt that the length of time was right, and specifically said that Amb. Bremer hit all the points important to the Iraqi people, leaving out none.

That being said, they felt that it was just a speech, and were desirous of action. However, they also said that the speech gave them hope.

While the group described the speech as straight forward and direct, they felt that Amb. Bremer was indirect and vague in his answers to reporters' questions.

The point they found most believable was that the American forces would stay in Iraq. The point they found least believable was that the CPA would transfer power to Iraqis without interference.

Talking about the suffering of the Iraqi people should be in his next speech, because the Iraqi police are dying to protect Iraqis as well as CF.

Ambassador Bremer

Our group spoke very positively of Amb. Bremer. They felt that he was someone that they could trust who was working in the interests of Iraqis. However, they felt that he takes bad counsel – primarily from the IGC. They feel like he surrounds himself with Iraqi elites that are not working in their interests.

They also described Amb. Bremer as a tool of US foreign policy. Some felt that he runs the CPA like a dynamo. Others felt that Amb. Bremer is a puppet for Washington.

The group said Bremer needs to be seen solving problems. If he were to go into Iraqi houses and listen to the problem of Iraqis, then be seen actively solving the problem, it would increase his credibility.

✓ However, this is similar to tactics Saddam would use. There is a fine line between a very effective communications strategy and a PR disaster. This needs to be further focused.

Iraqi women find Amb. Bremer attractive. They see him as tough but kind, and think that he has a calming voice and seems nice.

What Would be Indicators of Success?

This group felt that more construction in Iraq would be an indication of progress. They cited the example of a bridge in Nasiriyah that was blown up in the war. When the CF needed a bridge, it was built in 14 days. After 9 months of occupation, much of Iraq still lies in ruin.

However, because the CPA is an occupying force, there is little or nothing it can do to stem the complaints of the Iraqi people. One man said specifically that even if the CPA did everything he wanted, he would still complain because the CPA is an occupying force.

As with previous groups, both groups wanted the CF to leave, but not before they can secure peace and stability in Iraq.

Zarqawi/Al-Qaeda

People are unsure whether to believe that Zarqawi even exists. Many thought that he is a tool of the Americans, and that Americans are manipulating Saudis, Iranians and Syrians to bomb Iraqi police stations and other installations, much in the way they perceive that Al-Qaeda was created in Afghanistan in the eighties.

Relative lack of US casualties from these bombings is an indicator of proof for this theory.

If he does exist, they say he should be arrested and punished. There is no sympathy for Zarqawi or people like him in this evening's groups. They relate him to a well-known serial killer from the seventies, Abu Tobar.

While our group said they were much too smart and sophisticated to believe in Zarqawi or the presence of Al-Qaeda in Iraq, they said that simpler people would be swayed by the Zarqawi section of the speech. *NOTE: Asking what other people think is a technique used in qualitative research to determine what the participants themselves actually think but are unwilling to say publicly.*

The porous nature of Iraqi borders is seen to be the main contributing factor to the bombings.

When asked if the Zarqawi information changed their opinion about whether the CF should stay in Iraq, they said they feel that there is no connection. They feel that there is no reason for the CPA to manufacture stories about Al-Qaeda if they want to stay in Iraq. They can just say that they want to stay.

Some in the group feel that the Al-Qaeda stories are meant to distract from CPA's failure to deal with other pressing problems.

The groups felt the Iraqi police can handle the security situation with the assistance of the CF. They feel that if Iraq has well-equipped and well-trained police, there will be no Al-Qaeda problem in Iraq.

Similarly, they feel that if CPA solves the economic problems – primarily unemployment – then there will not be any bombings.

Five Points for Governance

This group believes that increasing the number of the people in power will be better in order for all of Iraq's ethnic groups and religious groups to be represented. Previous focus groups have shown that Iraqis want one president.

All hope that the transitional government will be bound by a Transitional Administrative Law that protects individual rights will be true, but are not sure. Some want a referendum on the transitional law.

All believed that Iraqis would enjoy basic freedoms under the TAL, simply by virtue of the fact that the focus group could not have happened under Saddam's regime.

The group was not willing to believe that law would be applied equally. They say that the previous regime had well-written laws that were not applied well.

✓ || All participants felt sure that Iraq would be united, even to the point of saying that Iraq would be a model for other Arab nations, but our moderators felt that it was more of a hope than surety.