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COALITION PROVISIONAL AUTHORITY  
BAGHDAD

LPB HAS SEEN

INFO MEMO

DATE 18 February 2004

*Turn into a cable*

FOR: THE ADMINISTRATOR  
FROM: Don Hamilton *[Signature]*  
SUBJECT: Yesterday's Focus Group

This focus group report tracks with polling data we have seen before. I find it entirely credible.

I have highlighted IRI's already compact analysis and add but a single comment:

Iraqis do not want to believe Iraqis are responsible for suicide bombings and attacks that kill large numbers of Iraqis. This makes them eager for further evidence on al-Qaida and opens the door for their dark fantasies about the Mossad and Coalition responsibility.

ATTACHMENTS: NONE

COORDINATION: NONE; Gene Bigler, Brian McCormack, Judy Van Rest, Scott Carpenter and Michael Pierson have copies of the focus group report.



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## **IRI Focus Group Report – Baghdad February 17 Delaying Elections, Interim Government, Bombings & Inflation**

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Publicize Al-Qaeda links to recent bombings. Iraqis are willing to believe that Al-Qaeda and other Arab forces are behind the recent bombings, but require more proof, and specifically ask that the CPA publicize more evidence of links to Al-Qaeda and showcase more Al-Qaeda suspects. Perhaps they are expecting the level of publicity associated with criminals from the former regime.
- Conduct additional research on transitional government options. This group definitely advocated the status quo for a transitional governing body, but this could change radically by region or demographic group.
- Be ready to start a communications campaign around delaying the elections. Security problems and lack of education of Iraqis on democracy are two top themes.
- Further train and empower Iraqi police. These groups continue this theme that we have been hearing since December.

### **CONCLUSIONS**

NOTE: This group is Baghdadi (more sophisticated), more educated and more affluent than Iraqis as a whole. IRI believes that their responses skew more moderate than in the population at large.

#### ***United Nations***

The United Nations had a bad image within the groups prior to the UN election observation mission because of UN inaction in stopping the war and bad experiences from the sanction regime.

The observation mission was seen by the groups as further evidence of UN inaction and impotence. The group expected the UN to be more outspoken during this mission.

In general, the groups felt that there is a lot of talk about elections, but no action.

The UN is seen as being subservient to the CPA. The organization is seen as fair and impartial in terms of elections, but is seen as having no power.

If the UN says that elections should be postponed for at least a year, the groups mostly felt that the Iraqi people would be OK with this. Women were united in this opinion, while a few men said they would wait to hear from Sistani on any UN decision. A couple of men said they would consult their sheikh.

#### ***Elections – Should They Be Held Soon?***

Overall, the groups favored stability over elections.

The groups said unprompted that holding elections too soon might result in chaos and civil war.

Waiting for a year for elections was not a problem within this group, and waiting for two years was seen as OK if it meant stability and an increase in the security situation.

#### ***Who Should Govern Iraq in the Interim?***

In general, the groups were not necessarily interested in increased representation, because as representation increases, the benefits will be divided. They see a smaller ruling body as providing more stability. They frequently say that they want a leader who will represent all of Iraq.

#### ***IGC/CPA***

The most frequently agreed upon governing entity was the current one – CPA and the IGC. However, everybody in the groups wanted one president rather than a monthly president.

People felt that neither the CPA nor the Governing Council should be dissolved. This can be interpreted as a “The devil you know...” attitude.

There was some support for shrinking the IGC. “What country is governed by 25 people?” was the response of one woman participant.

#### ***Group appointed by the UN***

This option received virtually no support, as it is seen to be redundant of the IGC.

#### ***A caucus or shura type process***

This is a polarizing option. Half the men felt that a group of notables choosing an interim leader would be a good option, while half felt that unaccountable people speaking on behalf of thousands would take Iraq back 200 years. The women did not favor the option.

#### ***Who should be president?***

Talabani was the most frequently mentioned suitable interim president, largely on the strength of his month as president. Specifically, people liked it that he established the Iraqi police during his tenure.

The women were united in their choice of Talabani. Jafarri was the second most popular choice.

***Should the CPA leave?***

The groups both agreed that if the CPA leaves, chaos will ensue. Specifically, people fear party militias attempting a power grab, and feel that the IGC would not have an army to keep order.

This group felt that it is less important for elected Iraqis to rule Iraq than it is to have stability in Iraq. This group would accept – even desire – further CPA rule, but admitted they would complain about it.

The men's group was pessimistic enough to say that it didn't matter who ruled Iraq in the interim because they would be a tool of the CPA anyway.

***What is the Most Compelling Argument for Delaying Elections?***

The risk of death or injury during the election process was virtually unanimous as the most compelling reason to delay elections. The need to educate the Iraqi people as to what democracy means and how to participate in an election is a strong second.

The groups were also very concerned that foreigners, particularly Iranians, would come in and vote in the elections. There was also concern about people who have not lived in Iraq for a long time voting.

Also, people agreed with the statement "Iraq has waited 35 years for democracy, and waiting another year for good elections won't make a big difference."

***Who are the Bombers?***

About half the women thought that Mossad or the CF are responsible for the bombings in Iraq. The other half thought that Syrians, Yemenis or Al-Qaeda is responsible. Men felt that one way or another, the CF were responsible.

Both groups felt that if Al-Qaeda is responsible, the CF would have better publicized suspects apprehended and evidence in that regard. Perhaps this is due expectations created by the degree to which Saddam's cronies pursuit and apprehension have been publicized.

***Are the Bombings Helping Iraq?***

When presented with the option of bombings being necessary to restore Iraq's dignity vs. bombings impeding Iraq's progress, the groups were unanimous on the latter.

***How are the Attacks Changing Your Opinion of Iraqi Security?***

The groups felt that Iraq's security forces should still assume more of a role in protecting Iraq, but the CF should better arm, equip and train them. Additionally, the CF should support Iraq's security forces in their efforts.

***Salaries and Prices***

Prices are increasing for fresh vegetables and meat. Oddly enough, prices are decreasing for bananas.

Salaries are seen to be increasing for government employees, while employees of a bank say their salaries have not increased much. The Ministry of Oil has the highest increase in salaries among the ministries.

Prices and salaries seem to be keeping pace with each other. The biggest economic concern among the group was the part-time nature of the work in which they are engaging.