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Iraqi Civil Society Speaks:

24 Steps to Strengthening Security and Democracy

Summary: At a three day retreat in Ditchley Park in mid October, Iraqi civil society representatives arrived at a set of recommendations on the re-establishment of security and rule of law, and on further institutional reform. In doing so, participants also discussed the implication of these for bolstering the democratic process in Iraq. Representatives of fifteen civil society organisations from across the country took part. Participants included journalists, judges, lawyers, human rights activists, leaders of women's groups and children's homes, university professors, and directors of Iraqi think tanks.

Five major themes were identified as most salient for assisting the development of the democratic process in Iraq. These were:

- Promoting awareness of the upcoming elections
- Assistance to and development of Iraqi media
- Effective provision of services and rapid reconstruction of infrastructure
- Greater European Union involvement in Iraq
- Increased security and justice in Iraqi towns and cities.

These themes were then elaborated as specific recommendations to representatives of the Iraqi, British, American and European governments. This policy brief sets out those recommendations in summary form.

There appeared to be serious gaps in knowledge among Iraqi civil society representatives of the reconstruction and democracy building initiatives of the international community in Iraq. There was general consensus among the representatives of civil society groups that there needs to be a framework of communication between them and the international community. The Conference concluded with broad agreement that a viable democracy is the desired outcome for Iraq.

A Policy Brief from the Civility Programme at the Foreign Policy Centre provides commentary and practical policy recommendations on international support for political reform in the Middle East. The views are not necessarily those of Civility or the Foreign Policy Centre. The authors of this Policy Brief are Nader Alaghband, Huda Jawad, Rouzbeh Pirouz (Chair of Civility) and Marcus Gerhardt (Co-Chair of Civility).

24 STEPS TO STRENGTHENING SECURITY AND DEMOCRACY

Promoting Awareness of Elections

1. *Sponsorship of election-related content on TV and radio and in print media: programme production and funding by INGOs.*

There was general consensus in calling for the mobilisation of Iraqi media to support the election process. The media should be better equipped, through either domestic or international support, to promote greater awareness of the election process and address issues of representation and participation in the rural areas of Iraq including smaller towns.

2. *Greater involvement of the Ministry of Education in encouraging schools to engage in voter education.*

Delegates noted that although there are a number of initiatives set up with a view to educating the population about elections, it was felt that more needs to be done quickly to address the issue of the widespread ignorance about elections and the democratic process.

3. *Workshop promotion by INGOs in collaboration with local NGO networks.*

There was a call for greater involvement by Iraqi civil society groups in the electoral process in particular and reconstruction in general. Noting the relative inexperience and lack of expertise of local NGOs, the delegates proposed partnerships and joint projects with seasoned and expert international NGOs on a number of issues such as election monitoring, fostering a culture of democracy, and peaceful cohabitation between differing ethnic groups in Iraq.

4. *Publications to be formulated by INGOs (expertise and funding) and widely distributed through NGO networks and government.*

Sharing of expertise and knowledge can be enhanced through the dissemination of international publications to local NGO networks and appropriate Iraqi government departments.

5. *Higher profile for Electoral Commission to support and identify legitimate NGOs.*

Utilising the Electoral Commission to identify non-partisan NGOs who could work collaboratively with international NGOs to advance education and awareness of the

electoral process. This will help to ensure that the international NGO effort is harnessed to the greatest extent possible.

6. *Creative solutions to rural issues of illiteracy and lack of access to media.*

A recurring concern among delegates was the preparation work being carried out in the rural areas of Iraq for the upcoming election. Access to press and media in these areas is very limited. There are high levels of illiteracy in certain rural areas, thereby limiting local populations' awareness of election related issues such as the quota system, the number of candidates running, and campaign issues. Creative solutions need to be found to overcome these difficulties in spreading awareness of the elections and election-related issues in such areas.

Development of the Media

7. *Medium term establishment of an independent state broadcaster (BBC-style charter)*

Delegates expressed frustration at the missed opportunity resulting from the lack of an independent Iraqi media to support the election process. Delegates felt that Arab satellite channels such as Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya are biased in their reporting of events in Iraq. Furthermore, the current Iraqi broadcaster, Al Iraqiya, set up and supported by the Coalition forces, has little legitimacy and is unpopular with Iraqis. Demand was expressed for a state broadcaster that provided independent, non-partisan coverage, with a charter much like that of the BBC. It was stated that the independent state broadcaster should reflect the demands of Iraqis and provide public service broadcasting.

8. *Need for independent media oversight commission*

The Transitional Administrative Law under section 66 provides for an independent oversight committee but participants felt that it is an ineffective and powerless body which is failing to perform basic functions. Many participants were not even aware that such a body existed which accentuated the demand for a stronger media regulatory body.

Provision of Services and Infrastructure

9. *Central and accountable organisation to oversee investment in infrastructure*

Iraqi delegates expressed a strong desire for the process of awarding contracts in the reconstruction of infrastructure to be fair and free from corruption. A proposal was made for institutions of greater transparency and accountability through which funds can be administered in a manner that is widely regarded as untainted. It was

felt that creating a specific and accountable channel through which funds can be administered could go some way towards counteracting this and other forms of corruption.

10. Rapid dispersal of committed funds

Delegates demanded the more rapid dispersal of committed funds by the international community. It is thought that if Iraqis see an improvement in their environment and surroundings, there is a greater chance that the resentment felt and support given to insurgents fighting against the occupation will decline.

11. Reconstruction contracts to Iraqi companies

It was felt that more should be done to involve Iraqi companies in the reconstruction of their own country, giving Iraqis a sense of ownership and control over the reconstruction and development of Iraq.

12. More participation by EU companies. EU incentivisation required

Greater EU involvement in building institutional capacity and training of personnel in the reconstruction effort was strongly expressed. In addition, the delegates called for greater inclusion of and participation by European companies in the granting of reconstruction contracts. This proposal was part of a broader theme of the necessity of making the entire process of reconstruction more legitimate and diverse.

Greater EU Involvement in Iraq

13. Higher EU profile at upcoming Egypt conference

Greater EU involvement in the political, economic and humanitarian efforts underway in Iraq was a recurrent and popular theme. Most delegates expressed fears of regional meddling in Iraq's internal affairs. A higher EU profile in the upcoming international conference on Iraq to be held in Egypt was perceived as a good starting point for more intensive EU engagement.

14. Desire to avoid use of Iraq issue as pawn in US-EU political game

This point was strongly made by all the delegates, who were very aware of the political differences between the US and EU on the intervention in Iraq and its continuing aftermath. It was felt that the US and EU should now seek to put their differences aside and come together in assisting the Iraqi people and the new government to ensure the success of democracy in Iraq. Delegates expressed

concern that the continuation of divisions over Iraq has harmful implications for issues of security, reconstruction and political development.

15. More EU investment in Iraq

The economic role that the EU could play in Iraq and its related benefits was emphasised by delegates. They expressed a desire for a closer economic relationship based on mutual benefits and partnership.

16. EU involvement in elections should be increased (monitors/observers)

One of the most immediate initiatives the EU could take in Iraq was a widely requested participation as monitors and observers in the upcoming elections. It was felt that not only would EU expertise assist in carrying out a more successful election process, but the presence of EU monitors and observers would contribute critical legitimacy to the elections and may even encourage greater voter turn out.

Increased Security and Justice

17. Greater emphasis on replacing Coalition forces with Iraqi forces in major cities at the earliest possible time.

One means of decreasing the violence in Iraqi cities, delegates felt, was the withdrawal of Coalition forces from major cities and their replacement with the Iraqi army. This was viewed as an important step to lessening the sense of occupation and humiliation currently experienced.

18. Greater emphasis on political dialogue over violence as a means of addressing security issues in Coalition dealings with hot zones.

This point was repeatedly expressed as an alternative to the perceived disproportionate use of force by Coalition forces, in particular American troops. The example of Najaf was cited as illustration of the potential of political dialogue.

19. Framework to improve relations between communities. Use of senior Shi'a at front lines of negotiations. Engage with populations and civil society in insurgent areas.

Another strategy for improving security is to work on enhancing community relations between Coalition forces, the Iraqi government and the local communities in which the Coalition forces find themselves. Mobilising senior community and religious leaders, as well as closer cooperation between the armed forces and local NGOs, will probably lead to greater trust and sharing of intelligence.

20. *Urgent need for generation of plan to disarm the general population. Cash for guns.*

A specific suggestion for reducing the rampant proliferation of weapons in the populace was a program that would exchange cash for arms plus strict punitive measures for those who continued to possess weapons past a deadline. Some delegates indicated that this strategy had been successfully used in Iraqi cities historically.

21. *US should adopt softer policing methods eg. British approach in Basra*

The differences in approach between the American and British Forces was noted by many delegates who perceived a sense of greater calm and cooperation between the local population and the army in areas controlled by the British. The example of Basra was given where there has been a more community-based approach to policing with greater emphasis on dialogue, respect and cooperation than the harder and more defensive approach in American zones. Delegates felt that this 'harder' approach, utilising tanks, guns, hard-hats, etc, which often ignored local customs, was alienating people on a daily basis.

22. *Foreign nationals to come under auspices of Iraqi law: special Iraqi court with combined Iraqi and international judiciary for purpose of trying foreign nationals.*

Delegates informed the conference that one of the legacies of the Interim Governing Council was the placing of foreign nationals in Iraq under their own country's legal jurisdictions. Therefore, foreign nationals working in Iraq cannot be held accountable before Iraqi law and courts. It was suggested that this creates a sense of resentment and injustice particularly when foreign nationals are accused of offences against Iraqis and cannot be brought before the Iraqi judiciary as a result. There was a proposal that this law be amended to allow for special courts, combining Iraqi and international judges, to try foreigners accused of crimes committed in Iraq.

23. *All Iraqi prisoners to be placed under Iraqi control.*

A clear demand was expressed for all Iraqi prisoners to be placed under the jurisdiction of Iraqi law and authorities. Reference was made to the damaging impact of the explicit photographs of the atrocities committed by foreign troops against Iraqi prisoners in Abu Ghraib prison.

24. International community to avoid analysing issues in Iraq on the basis of ethnic divisions

Ethnic differences and rivalries were felt to have been exacerbated by the focus of the international community and the coalition forces on the possibility of divisions and civil unrest between Iraq's varied ethnic groups. Delegates expressed a desire for the international community to assist Iraqis in fostering a united national Iraqi identity through a reduced emphasis on ethnic classifications and the adoption of strategies less focused on ethnic, tribal, or other sectarian considerations.