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IRAQ: RECONCILIATION

SUMMARY AND ACTION PLAN

1. Genuine reconciliation between Iraq's major communities is fundamental to the country's viability. The need for it is now acute. If significant, demonstrable progress has not been made in Iraq by September, the US Administration will find it hard to sustain support in Congress.
2. In the short term, we should use the PM's visits to Washington and Iraq:
 - A. To firm up this week's agreement to form an executive council of the **PM and Presidency** which will provide cross-sectarian oversight of government policy. We should aim for a meeting of the PM with this Group of Four during his visit, and a joint press conference giving a clear message to Iraqis and the region that something significant has changed in the way the GoI conducts business.
 - B. **Amnesties and Detainees** are key elements of any reconciliation package. Detainees will have to be tackled earlier, because of the practical problems they present. The idea of an amnesty can be floated as part of a longer-term perspective. As a first step, we should seek US (MNF-I and Washington), and then Iraqi in-principle buy-in.
 - C. To secure more explicit support for reconciliation from Iraqi **religious leaders**, through a meeting with the Prime Minister during his visit, building on a number of similar efforts in this vein.
4. Between now and 1 September, we and the US need to press the Iraqis:
 - D. to tackle **de-Baathification** either through passing a law or through practical action to mitigate its effects;
 - E. to pass of a package of legislation on **Hydrocarbons**;
 - F. to keep the Constitutional Review Committee open; and
 - G. to agree on a **date and improved system for provincial elections**.
5. We should also:

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- H. ensure local Coalition (civilian and military) efforts on reconciliation are integrated with the PMO and other Iraqi stakeholders, including Adel Abdul Mehdi's Political Committee; and
- I. push Iraq's **Neighbours** to support, not undermine Maliki's Government.
- 5. In all this we need to focus on securing outcomes which genuinely advance reconciliation. We must not repeat past mistakes of promoting outcomes in haste which actually undermine our objectives.

THE CHALLENGE

- 4. Iraq is in the grip of an increasingly bitter Sunni/Shia sectarian divide, reflected across the region. The December 2005 elections saw Iraqis vote directly along sectarian and ethnic lines – producing a Parliament and a Government dominated by religious rather than secular parties, and sectarian rather than unifying politicians. The sharp rise in sectarian violence in 2006 has hardened such attitudes.
- 5. Reconciliation between Iraq's major communities is critical. But Iraq lacks any tradition of power sharing or properly representative Government to fall back on. The current effort to establish a political system in which power is equitably shared among all Iraq's confessional and ethnic groups is unique in Iraq's history. It can work only if the leaders of all Iraq's main communities believe that it is in their best interests wholeheartedly to engage in it. That is not yet the case.
- 6. The changed **US Political context** has introduced additional time pressures. Petraeus and Crocker are due to testify to Congress in early September, promising an honest assessment of progress and the prospects in Iraq.

Shia attitudes to reconciliation

- 7. The overriding objective of the Shia political class is to secure and entrench the political dominance of Iraq to which they believe their majority status entitles them. They see politics as a zero-sum game in which their interests are pitted against the Sunnis'. They believe their hold on power is under serious threat from Baathists & 'Takfiris', as well as by the Arab countries and even by Coalition partners.

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8.

But his views and those of his Dawa circle are representative of mainstream Iraqi Shia Islamism. There is little support for reconciliation from SCIRI or the Sadrists. There is no reason to believe any plausible (i.e. Shia Islamist) alternative PM would take a very different approach.

is this really correct?

Sunni Arab attitudes

9. Our long-standing efforts to win over Iraq's Sunni Arabs to the political process have not led to any significant reduction in the violence. Why?

- A small but significant minority has no interest in reconciliation. Many Sunni Arab representatives – particularly senior Baathists - remain unreconciled to their loss of political dominance.
- Many Sunni Arabs see the Maliki Government as a Shia sectarian body, which uses the instruments of the state to oppress them.
- Important sections of the Sunni Arab community are not represented by the Sunnis now in Government.
- Sunnis who are in Government feel vulnerable and excluded from decision-making.

Election to Parliament and appointments in government have not delivered the benefits Sunni Arabs had hoped for.

Kurdish attitudes

10. The Kurds occupy a crucial balance between the Arab political blocs. Their approach to contentious issues, such as the future status of Kirkuk, the oil law and federalism could contribute to reconciliation or exacerbate tensions. Right now, it is doing the latter.

AIMS & STRATEGY

11. There is an urgent need to build mutual confidence and trust. Sunni Arabs need evidence that dialogue and engagement can deliver their political objectives more effectively than violence. And the Shia need to be convinced that they will benefit from governing in a more inclusive way, and pursuing reconciliation more wholeheartedly.

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12. For the most part, our effort will necessarily be about leveraging Iraqi action – including by being much more explicit in threatening to withdraw our support if this is not forthcoming. But we will also be directly engaged, through the work of MNF-I, in negotiating directly with those insurgent groups ready to talk. It will also mean continued efforts to engage other extremists – Shia and Sunni – who are willing to talk to us, and to draw them into the political process.

13. We recommend that our detailed aims and objectives should be:

A. More inclusive Government

14. The key immediate objective here is to secure:

- Regular meetings of the **PM with the 3-man Presidency Council**. Since the sobering messages he received at Sharm el-Sheikh, We should capitalise rapidly on his agreement that the PM plus Presidency Council should become the key decision-making body in Government. We should press for a **meeting and joint press conference of this quartet with the Prime Minister** on his forthcoming visit – getting across a clear message to Iraqis and to the region that something significant has changed;

25. We should also work to promote:

- evolution of an effective core Cabinet;
- making the Council of Representatives more effective and efficient at holding government to account and promoting non-sectarianism;
- identifying Sunnis who can work with the UIA, and pressing the Shia to work with them; and
- keep encouraging the Kurds to see their interest, and play their role in national politics and reconciliation.

B. Widening political representation and participation

26. The most important single objective here is:

- Iraqi agreement on a firm date later in 2007 for **provincial elections**, conducted on an open list system which would bring in more independents (closed lists – the present system – deliver large

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representation for large parties). Longer-term electoral reform is also important, particularly before the next national elections.

27. This should deliver more representative local government, especially in Sunni areas where large number boycotted the last round of provincial elections. There are some significant practical issues to resolve, and we want to get the UN in the lead.
28. We should also push for the establishment of Iraq's second chamber (the Federation Council), which is central to refashioning the relationship between central government and the regions, to increasing participation in the political process and to (a limited form of) constituency based representation in central government.

C) Progress on the fundamental issues

15. We need to urge the Iraqis to take advantage of the political breathing space offered by Fardh Al Qanoon to make progress on issues which will make a real difference to the prospects for reconciliation. But we need to avoid past mistakes, and focus on the quality of outcomes, not just on ticking boxes. Forcing these issues to inadequate solutions in haste will worsen sectarian divisions.

16. By September, we need real progress on two key issues:

(i) De-Baathification

De-Baathification is a major inhibitor of reconciliation and grievance for Sunni Arabs. The US and we have worked to promote a substantive discussion between the political parties on reforming the process. The aim is to reduce the numbers excluded from public life and thus reduce alienation and motives for violence.

An over-eager push by Khalilzad in his last hours in Iraq resulted in an unsatisfactory draft law being announced by Maliki and Talabani. We are now working with the US to get an improved draft law agreed by the Presidency Council and presented to the Parliament in the near future. The Defence Secretary pressed this on his recent visit. We are also working with the US on measures that would mitigate the effects of de-Baathification (such as the reinstatement of pensions) in the absence of legislation.

(ii) Hydrocarbons legislation

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Getting this and the associated law on revenue sharing right could provide a major boost to national unity and reconciliation. Our aim remains a law which delivers this, as well as a transparent framework for managing the industry and allowing international investment.

The Cabinet has now reached agreement on the draft new law. But this has been not yet been formally tabled for debate in Parliament. The Kurds appear to be the main obstacle to progress.

17. The **Constitutional Review** process provides a way of pulling all the threads of national reconciliation together. Progress so far has been slow. But it has fostered national reconciliation among the participants. The key will be to keep the process open beyond the expiry of the 15 May deadline (the Committee is devising a way of doing this), so the Committee can continue its work. The ultimate test will be whether political leaders will sign up to the deals struck by the CRC – particularly on federalism, Kirkuk etc.

D. Changing the Regional Context

18. In parallel, we need to work to change the **regional context**. The attitudes and activities of Iraq's Sunni Arab neighbours also constitute a significant obstacle to reconciliation. Maliki and the Shia political class feel surrounded by hostile Sunni neighbours,

19.

20. We recommend renewed efforts to secure a change of attitude by key Sunni Arab neighbours:

- The Foreign Secretary and other Ministers could build on their work with regional leaders in Sharm, and senior UK officials might pay further visits to relevant capitals to lobby in detail.
- The Prime Minister might give an interview to Al-Jazeera or another pan-Arab media outlet stressing the importance of reconciliation, and full support to Iraq's Government of National Unity.

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- We should keep pressing Maliki to appoint a Sunni Arab as his special envoy to the Sunni neighbours.

E. A more strategic approach to Reconciliation

21. Finally, we can help encourage a much more strategic approach to the process of reconciliation on the part of the Iraqi Government, and clearer co-ordination of effort with MNF-I and the US and UK.

Iraqi activity

22. At present, there are three main bodies involved on the Iraqi side – the Prime Minister's Office (PMO – where Mohammed Salman is now the key figure), the Ministry of National Dialogue, and the Higher Committee for National Reconciliation.
23. There are three main tracks of Iraqi activity. First, the formal series of conferences organised by the Ministry of National Dialogue, which have achieved little. Secondly, the direct engagement by the PMO, Thirdly, there is the Political Committee chaired by Adel Abdul Mehdi on which all main groups are represented at a senior level (including Zebari, Boulani, Abdul Qader and the PMO) – although its role could be developed.

MNF & US/UK activity

24. On the MNF side, SBMR-I is working with Sunni insurgent groups in Anbar, with some recent success in turning tribes and others against AQ-I. As well as work against AQ, issues under discussion include local agreements, ceasefires (against GoI/ISF and MNF forces) and heavy weapons amnesties. This work is focussed on tactical security gains to be made from engaging extremist/violent groups.
25. Generals Petraeus and Odierno agree on the need to set this work in a broader political context (eg extracting from the Sunni groups engaged in this process statements supporting the political process and recognising the supporting role played by the Sunnis in a majority-Shia government).
26. Petraeus has given added impetus to this work, and seen it expanded to encompass dialogue with Sadrist groups. MNF's Force Joint Reconciliation Support Cell, has now been beefed up, with UK input in the form of a team of military officers to support SBMR-I. We are working urgently to get an experienced Arabic-speaking political adviser to enhance the team.

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27. In parallel with the MNF efforts, UK OGDs have been working to facilitate dialogue between the Iraqi Government and Baathist and other Sunni rejectionist groups. Maliki has approved this. We should keep trying e.g. with the Muslim Ulema Council (MUC). But this needs to be handled sensitively, or risk alienating the UIA.

UK support to the Prime Minister's Office

28. DFID have funded [redacted], a reconciliation adviser, to prescribe to the Iraqi Government a reconciliation strategy. [redacted] has presented his report to the PMO, where Mohammed Salman has welcomed it. Salman plans to use [redacted]'s recommendations as the basis for a meeting of the three key Iraqi bodies involved. One of [redacted]'s recommendations is that a dedicated reconciliation secretariat be established within the PMO's Follow Up Unit to manage this work. [redacted] due back in Baghdad in late May.
29. Better management of the disparate strands of Iraqi Government, MNF and other activity on reconciliation could make a real difference. For our part, we need to ensure that MNF-I's work and that of other parts of the US and UK systems is properly planned and co-ordinated, with much better information sharing. HMA Baghdad is seeking to persuade the US Ambassador and the senior MNF Generals to meet regularly to oversee and co-ordinate the reconciliation agenda.

Amnesties & the Detainee problem

30. One area in which there is pressing need for action, and a major opportunity to build confidence in the Sunni Arab community is on **Detainee releases**. We need urgent action because MNF (and Iraqi) detention facilities are bursting with those picked up through FAQ. MNF's approach, of releasing relatively small numbers with no strings attached and in no structured way is failing either to address the capacity problem, or to generate any political benefits.
31. MNF are open to our suggestion that we approach this issue in a more structured and political way – drawing on our own experience in Northern Ireland and from peace processes elsewhere. This could involve offering **amnesties**, either to individuals or to whole armed groups, in return for specific commitments. But they remain to be persuaded – not only in terms of their military strategy here, but that now is the time to persuade Congress that Iraqis with US blood on their hands could be released.

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32. This is an idea we rapidly need to develop further. But if we could in the coming week secure in principle US political buy-in, and Iraqi support, that could give us a meaningful basis to take this forward. One idea might be to persuade the Iraqis to accept an **International Commission** of advisers drawn from non-Coalition states (eg South Africa) to help develop the idea in an Iraqi context.

Risks

33. There are dangers for us in pressing all this on Maliki and the Shia establishment. British and American efforts to promote Sunni participation in Government have already aroused deep suspicions about our motives among the Shia, especially with Maliki

Iraq Policy Unit, FCO

11 May 2007

*This is a But the
much better paper. element remains.
key missile
Neither the process nor the
constitutional item of attainment/goal of
reconciliation are achievable unless
set out in a proper agreement - Iraqi Govt,
to which even one - US, UK, AN
Iraqi faction, clerics, US, UK, AN
& Arabs - open up.*

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