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cc: PS Mr O'Brien

Ian Tunnicliffe, MOD

BRIEFING FOR IRAQI OPPOSITION: 21 MARCH

1. You and Ian Tunnicliffe (MOD), supported by other FCO and MOD officials, briefed a group of representatives of Iraqi opposition organisations this afternoon on planning for the future of Iraq and the current media campaign inside Iraq. We sought their views on (a) post conflict planning and (b) messages to convey during conflict. Attendance list attached.

Political points raised by opposition

- UK could be more open now that policy explicitly includes regime change;
- noted expectation that administration would be left largely in place, but warned that in some fields it was extensively politicised;
- it is essential to give an interim administration an Iraqi flavour at the earliest opportunity;
- concern about involvement of surrounding states, especially Turkey in the north;
- strong concern that a process that depended on UN control or approval would take too long;
- the UK has an essential role to play in shaping US planning.

Media

- essential that media aspect is handled; otherwise information/rumour flows uncontrolled through the "bush telegraph";
- Kurdish movements with independent radio stations can relay/rebroadcast UK messages;
- we should address messages more specifically to southern tribes [comment: drawing in Gerard Russell's IMU network?]

Messages to get across

- we come to liberate, not to occupy;
- encourage UK politicians and media not to refer to Iraq as "enemy territory". Iraq and its people are not the enemy;
- war is not about oil;
- civilians and holy places will be respected/protected;
- demining will be a priority;
- the environment will be protected/restored (including marshes in the south);
- Iraq's debt burden will be renegotiated;

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- military occupation will be brief;
- emphasise careful targeting and minimum civilian casualties (point to experience so far);
- we are aware of humanitarian concerns (food, water) and will deal with them.

Methods

- get deserters to speak to their comrades over the radio;
- when Basra is liberated, make sure that the rest of Iraq, and surrounding countries, can see it;

Humanitarian issues

- local (Iraqi) NGOs are not being supported by DfID, who say that UN is leading on humanitarian support; but UN has left and handed keys to supplies over to local NGOs. Kurdistan Children's Fund is responsible for 12,000 children in orphanages etc. (Separately Mines Advisory Group have just written to the Secretary of State to express some concerns about humanitarian funding, and SCF have also approached).

2. A number of participants expressed readiness to help with broadcasting messages. We undertook to keep them informed about messages being put out, and also asked them to monitor broadcasts (through a web site that we will notify them of).

Research Analysts

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