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From: COMCEN Gateway 1a
Subject: I:DD:REST:NOSEC: IRAQ: DE-BA'ATHIFICATION:IRAQR/FCOLN
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WASHINGTON TELNO 655 TO FCO

FROM SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE FOR IRAQ

SUBJECT: NOSEC: IRAQ: DE-BA'ATHIFICATION

SUMMARY

1. Policy agreed on lines reported by Washington. Some concerns on the impact on reconstruction, and on how in practice this policy will be implemented. But Bremer decides tough initial policy with a provision for exemptions is needed, and that ridding Iraq of Ba'athism is a higher priority than the impact on the reconstruction so far achieved.

DETAIL

2. Bremer met with senior advisers today to decide whether changes were needed to the inter-agency agreed draft decree received from Washington. He laid down at the outset that disruption to setting up Iraqi ministries was not the prime concern. His instructions were to bear down heavily at first, and to allow exemptions as necessary.

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3. Debate focussed on:

- whether the top three levels of the Ba'ath party (5,000 plus people) or the top four (upwards of 30,000) should be banned from public sector employment, including teaching. I was one of several who warned of the danger of overkill and the difficulty of implementation. But the swing voice was Crocker (State) who argued that the recommended policy of covering all four levels was pitched right. Bremer agreed.

- whether it was practical to block any full party member from the top three tiers of government ministries. Garner argued that this would undo much of ORHA's work so far, but he found no support. It was agreed that the scope for exemptions should not be difficult to implement as we were talking of only a couple of hundred positions, and the number of exemptions we might want would be few.

4. Some tidying up is in hand to set out the purposes of the policy, to make the text factually correct and to remove unnecessary detail (in part to simplify implementation and leave more flexibility in the field). Bremer asked overnight for best estimate of the numbers involved (ie top four levels, and the total full party membership). Grateful for advice.

5. We expect the decree to be announced at the meeting with political leaders on 16 May, and published in the various party newspapers the following day. Meanwhile, implementation procedures are being drawn up in parallel.

COMMENT

6. This new policy is tougher than your advice preferred (FCO telno 2). But I advise against any action in Washington. The new policy is badly needed, and it corresponds with the preferences of all the members of the Leadership Group bar Allawi. Serious mistakes have been made by ORHA in the Health, Trade and Foreign Ministries and at Baghdad University, and at elections for a new Rector the Ba'athists were sufficiently organised to put forward their own candidate who found significant (but not majority) support.

7. There will be implications for us in Basrah as Sheikh Muzahim will be caught by this new policy.

Contact:

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