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(Assyrian Democratic Party) and Ibrahim al Jaafari (al Da'awa). We are lining up contacts with Allawi (INA), Pachachi, Chadirchi, the Iraq Communist Party, the Iraqi Islamic Party (Sunni Islamists) and no doubt others in the coming days. This telegram offers an overview: Hetherington is giving more details to IPU.

3. Each meeting has covered the practical problems in reconstruction (which has informed my report - not to all - on what is going wrong here); and the political process we envisage. I have set out our objective - an inclusive process leading to a National Conference in the next month which would set up a credible, broad-based authority able to take on responsibility progressively.

4. Our message about including all main strands of opinion is already being acted upon. On 9 May, the Leadership Group of five (KDP, PUK, INC, INA, SCIRI) were joined by the traditional Shia Islamist Party, al Da'awa, and the old (Sunni) Arab Nationalists represented by Chadirchi. The elderly Sunni, Pachachi, and the Iraqi Communists had said they would not join the leadership group on the grounds that it was a US creation, but were prepared to be part of a preparatory committee for a national conference. By 10 May, Pachachi had considered further and said he'd now like to join the leadership group: a decision is now being made. Other smaller parties are also bidding to climb on board though, rightly, the smaller ones are being politely turned away.

5. A Joint Secretariat of the Leadership Group has been set up and is beginning work on how to set up a National Conference. Their thinking is close to ours on the mix of externals and internals, the need for regional representation based on population, inclusion of minorities and professional groups and the importance of securing women's participation (a point I have pressed hard with them all, and raised the idea of a prior women's conference). They want to work with the coalition, and we and the US team on this issue (Crocker, Carpenter and Di Rita - Khalilzad has been dropped) have very similar ideas. Bremer's views are not yet known, and his advance team are suggesting he might want to slow things down. I don't think that would be wise - we need to take the tide at the flood - but I will talk it through with him.

6. The party leaders themselves are pressing for responsibility and the powers that go with it as soon as possible. They want the Transitional Government they think Khalilzad promised them, in part because they believe they would do a much better job than the coalition in putting Iraq back on its feet. They are united in criticising the performance of ORHA and the US military, on both security and reconstruction. We will need to lower their ambitions to get their acceptance of a more modest Interim Authority.

7. Some specific observations:

- Barzani and Talabani are both as pleased as punch to be in Baghdad and to the fore in the process. They are co-operating well with one another, but wary of who might gain more. Both want a single Kurdish entity within a Federated Iraq. Talabani proposed Barzani should be the first head of the Interim Authority (no doubt with an eye to leaving Kurdistan under PUK sway). Talabani is also actively looking for other left of centre allies and is developing a pragmatic and friendly relationship with Chalabi.

- there seems to be some Arab resentment of the prominent Kurdish role,

The KDP/PUK idea to bring Peshmerga to Baghdad to help with security would not be widely welcomed.

- Shia/Sunni tensions have been remarkably low.

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- The Shia are divided many way. Among the Islamists, SCIRI seem to be struggling a bit, despite Mohamed Bakr al Hakim's high profile return; and the more popular al Da'awa is itself divided. I also find it hard to believe that al-Ja'afari, the "spokesman" for Al-Da'awa, will be able to marshal the potential support for his party in the country - he is just too sensible and moderate. So the grass roots Islamist vote is still up for grabs. The most worrying group is that around Muqtada al Sadr, and it is hard to gauge their support.

- Among secular Shia, Chalabi is doing better than Allawi: his strong message on de-Ba'athification strikes a chord (and will become even more potent if we don't deal with re-emerging Ba'athists). He is finding some support among tribal leaders and middle class professionals (Sunni and Shia) but all this from a low base and accompanied by a good deal of suspicion. I am seeing Allawi later today, but no-one identifies him as a major player.

- The Sunni Arabs are still sorting themselves out. The emergence of the two old nationalists, Chadirchi and Pachachi, suggests that they will be figure-heads at first and that Sunni politics may not take shape for some months. The shadow of the Ba'ath still hangs over them. So far the Iraq Islamic Party (Iraq's Muslim Brotherhood) have yet to be really prominent either.

COMMENT

8. The question mark over all this is the extent to which any political leader outside the Shia Islamists is engaging with ordinary Iraqis. Participatory politics has not exactly been a feature of Iraq of late, and grievances and concerns are not yet being channelled into the political parties. There could still be surprises on the streets and new forces emerging, especially if normal life fails to return soon. There remains a good deal to play for.

SAWERS

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IRAQ/KUWAIT	13
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PROTOCOL D//PALACE	0
ADVANCE	2
.IRAQ/KUWAIT	0
PS	2
ADDITIONAL	1
.IRAQ/KUWAIT	0
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ATT GEN//C ADAMS	1
BANKE	0
BTI1	0
BTI2	0
CAOFF1	0
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