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What would an Iraqi Bonn process look like?

Objectives

1. To legitimise the international community's role in a post-Saddam Iraq.
2. To bring together a representative groups of Iraqis to benefit from their technical and other expertise and to foster a sense of national identity.
3. To provide clear guidelines determining the principles of the handover to an Iraqi administration.

Background

4. The Bonn process leading from the Bonn conference to the Loya Jirga in Kabul was an important mechanism for creating and bestowing legitimacy on the new regime in Afghanistan. It struck a balance between the wishes and the influence of the international community and representation of the Afghan people.
5. Two important factors behind the process were the involvement of the UN and Lakhdar Brahimi before 11 September 2001 and the indigenous tradition of the loya jirga process. Iraq has neither, but the idea of bringing together as soon as possible in a post-Saddam situation a group representing Iraq's ethnic and religious mix and various strands of society has a large appeal. It would be a persuasive counter-weight to anxieties in Iraq itself, the wider region and elsewhere of 'neo-colonial' taken by the US or the international community.
6. The first pre-requisite of setting up such a meeting would be the appointment of a UN Special Representative and team responsible for picking the Iraqis that would be involved in a Bonn conference-style meeting. No single country or group of countries, whether it be Arab or from the coalition, would be seen as neutral enough to make such a choice.
7. To minimise accusations of outside interference, the meeting should be held in Iraq or failing that in a non-neighbour Arab country or a neutral international venue. International observers would be allowed, such as the Arab League, NAM, OIC, European Commission (as a major donor towards Iraq's reconstruction effort) etc. Important consideration would have to be given to the anxieties of Iraq's neighbours and their desire to be represented, but also to their propensity to interfere in Iraq's internal affairs.

Who would go?

8. Numbers invited to an initial conference should be tightly managed. However, those invited should include:
 - i. From amongst the current 'regime' (used in the widest sense of the word), **technocrats, senior bureaucracy, army and intelligence Generals** (not those seen as part of Saddam's current core) and others;
 - ii. **Genuine tribal leadership and Iraq' religious leadership** (not forgetting religious leaders of the minority communities);
 - iii. **The main Kurdish leaders including Kurdish Islamists.** The experience that the Kurds have had in setting up independent media, trade unions, NGOs etc. would be useful benchmark. However, need to ensure that the Kurds relative

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freedom of expression for over a decade doesn't mean that they dominate this gathering;

- iv. **Groups from the diaspora.** Not just groups in the west, but also from neighbouring countries too. Not just professional opposition but technocrats, academics etc. Over 10% of Iraq's population is living abroad and this includes many professionals and entrepreneurs;
- v. Important to include **exile religious leaders** who have started to set up foundations, mosques, schools and other charitable work that could provide a link between Muslim and other communities and Iraq.
9. However, there should be a conscious decision that those not currently in Iraq should form a distinct minority of those invited. Perhaps a compromise solution would be to allow exile opposition groups to help nominate individuals from within Iraq. This would also make clear which groups did and which did not have support within Iraq.
10. It will also be important not to force Iraqis to define themselves in terms of ethnicity, sectarian divisions, tribal affiliations etc. Reinforcing such labelling is one of the reasons behind the splits in the Iraqi exile opposition and could exacerbate tensions within Iraq. The emphasis must be on a consensus amongst those best able to work for Iraq's reconstruction, not filling a quota system and strengthening causes of division.

What should they decide?

11. As with Afghanistan, those invited will be likely to be more focussed on personalities and "who gets what" rather than the details of their roles and how they will fit in with the interim administration.
12. If convened in the immediate post-Saddam aftermath before the exact dynamics of power had settled, a **leadership triumvirate** (1 Sunni, 1 Shi'ite, 1 Kurd) responsible both as head of state and to represent Iraq internationally should be elected. The issue of whether Iraq should have a Shi'ite Head of State (because the Shi'a are a majority in Iraq) or a Sunni Head of State (because the Sunni have traditionally held the positions of power) should be deferred until Iraqis were more confident that institutions were strong enough to represent all their interests regardless of confession.
13. The conference should pick a team that would have individuals working alongside the interim administration at each Ministry and area of responsibility. Their role would initially be one of shadowing the administration as it developed the structures to hand over to the Iraqis themselves.
14. The conference should approve a mechanism for appointing an **Assembly of Experts**. This should have responsibility for drafting a new draft constitution and arrangements for local and national elections. This Assembly should also have the scope to form sub-groups and to call on Iraqi and international expertise in areas such as reform of the judiciary, working with the international community on security sector reform etc. In an effort to show greater consultation, the Assembly should be ready to hold pared-down meetings throughout Iraq to take on board the priorities and concerns of those outside the capital.

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