An Action Plan for Iraq:

The Perspective of Iraqi Civil Society

An Interpretative Report by

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The views in this paper are not necessarily those of the Civility Programme at the Foreign Policy Centre.

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About the Civility Programme

The Civility Programme at the Foreign Policy Centre facilitates dialogue and generates strategies for civil society development and reform in the Middle East. Our starting point is a conviction that the case – economic, political and social – for Middle East reform has been made, but the question of *how* to realise such an aim now requires far more systematic attention. Civility seeks to analyse the nature of civil society and develop realistic policy proposals through engagement with policymakers, journalists, academics, business leaders and representatives of civil society in the region. By doing so, Civility aims to ensure that the foreign policies of Western states are strengthened by deeper understanding of regional realities.

The Civility Programme has three core activities:

- Generating policy through a broad consultative network of key figures, especially in the Middle east, supported by cutting-edge research
- Promoting policy coordination among donors, especially in Europe
- Advocacy and monitoring of implementation.

Civility was formally launched at a high-level conference in London on 1 March 2004 by the Foreign Secretary, Jack Straw. Speakers at this event included Marc Otte, Emma Bonino MEP, Edward Macmillan-Scott MEP, Fred Halliday, Rosemary Hollis, Gilles Kepel and senior representatives from several European foreign ministries. The Advisory Board of Civility includes Benjamin Barber, renowned political theorist and former advisor to President Clinton; Fareed Zakaria, editor of *Newsweek International* and widely acclaimed author on democratisation; and Larry Diamond.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In October 2004, the Civility Programme at the Foreign Policy Centre held a three day retreat at Ditchley Park to elucidate the views of selected Iraqi civil society representatives on the re-establishment of security, rule of law and institutional reform. Participants also addressed ways of bolstering the democratic process in Iraq. People from all regions of Iraq took part. Participants reflected a variety of professions or community interests.

Participants diagnosed the challenges facing Iraq in matters of security, ethnic rivalry, governance and the implications of cultural traditions and values. On the penultimate day, participants identified practical steps to deal with these issues both for the Iraqi authorities and for the international donor community. On the last day, participants delivered these recommendations to representatives of selected donor governments and the interim Iraqi government.

The Retreat concluded with broad agreement that a viable democracy is the desired outcome for Iraq. Five major themes were identified as most salient to assisting the development of the democratic process in Iraq. These are:

- Promoting awareness of democratic reform and political processes
- Assistance to and development of Iraqi media
- Effective provision of services and the need for urgent reconstruction of state infrastructure
- A desire for a much greater European Union involvement in Iraq
- Increased security and justice in Iraqi towns and cities.

The report contains 24 recommendations for action under these five headings.

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Introduction

A three day retreat was held in October 2004 at Ditchley Park by the Civility Programme at the Foreign Policy Centre for representatives of civil society groups in Iraq. Representatives of fifteen civil society organisations from across the country took part. Participants included journalists, judges, lawyers, human rights activists, leaders of women's groups and children's homes, university professors and directors of Iraqi think tanks. The retreat also brought Iraqi civil society organisations together with representatives of the international donor community in an attempt to bridge the knowledge gap on the latter's contribution to reconstruction and democracy-building initiatives in Iraq. The retreat delivered a unique opportunity to international donors to hear first hand the views and perspectives of Iraqis living the current conditions of post war insecurity and economic as well as social hardship. Taking advantage of the delegates' expertise, participants collectively diagnosed the challenges and identified twenty four practical steps to deal with these issues.

This report provides a summary of the Retreat discussions and provides some comment on the claims and concerns of the participants. It endeavours to examine the broader social environment, which is vital to understanding what stands in the way between Iraqis and democracy, and most importantly what can be done to overcome such challenges. These challenges lie in Iraq's political culture, its divisions along ethnic, sectarian, tribal and religious lines, the current security situation, the lack of basic services and infrastructures, economic hardship, the relative lack of law and justice, the need for a free Iraqi media and foreign involvement in Iraqi affairs.

The Retreat was conducted under the Chatham House rule.

The paper is divided into five sections, according to the five major themes identified during the Retreat:

- Promoting awareness of democratic reform and political processes
- Development of the Iraqi media
- Effective provision of services and rapid reconstruction of infrastructure
- Greater European Union and international involvement in Iraq
- Increased security and justice.

Each section concludes with practical policy recommendations suggested by the participants. These were previous published just one month after the Retreat and circulated widely.[1]

The paper concludes that democratic elections and the reform of political processes are crucial in giving all Iraqis a voice and overcoming the alienation between the government and the people. The high voter turnout on 30 January 2005 demonstrated that Iraqis are on their way to doing so. As Thomas L. Friedman notes, this election has made crystal clear that Iraqis are the authentic carriers of their national aspirations and while they do want an end to the US presence in Iraq, they want that end to happen in an orderly manner and in tandem with an Iraqi constitutional process.[2]

Even though the elections can be considered a success, the path to stabilisation and democratisation still faces numerous challenges. For the long-term development of Iraq, it is vital that Iraqi civil society representatives and the international donor community bridge their

[1] See the Policy Brief from the Civility Programme at the Foreign Policy Centre, 'Iraqi Civil Society Speaks: 24 Steps to Strengthening Security and Democracy', 10 December 2004, http://fpc.org.uk/fsblob/349.pdf.
[2] , Thomas L Friedman, 'A day to remember', *New York Times* , 3 February 2005.

mutual knowledge gaps. Communication between them needs to be more transparent, based on a genuine partnership with the ultimate goal of improving the living conditions of the ordinary Iraqi. Finding the precarious balance between security and freedom and ameliorating Iraqis' living conditions at the same time are paramount in order to convince people of the benefits of the country's political opening.

Promoting Awareness of Democratic Reform and Political Processes

The most pressing issue in Iraq has been the outcome of the elections on 30 January 2005. Besides the overall poor security situation, subsequent election processes, like that one, will face several challenges. These challenges lie in Iraq's political culture and divisions along ethnic, sectarian, tribal and religious lines. Among the Retreat participants, opinions varied regarding the actual 'readiness' of the Iraqi people to take on democracy. Regardless of differing opinions and challenges, it was concluded that elections should take place under any circumstances. Since the current government lacks legitimacy, it was put forward that it is better to have imperfect elections than no elections. Meanwhile, major efforts need to be poured into promoting awareness of the election and the political processes.

Participants were concerned that people were not informed enough about the election process. As one participant said: 'People are not aware or enlightened about democracy. There are no civil institutions. There is no awareness about elections for the Iraqi people. After 35 years of Saddam's rule, people cannot really master politics'. Toby Dodge, a renowned analyst of Iraq, made a similar point about the relative under-development of civil society and participatory politics:

> Before the liberation of Baghdad it was impossible to talk about civil society in Iraq…autonomous collective societal structures beyond the control of

> the Ba´athist state did not survive. In their place society came to be dominated by aspects of the shadow state, flexible networks of patronage and violence that used to reshape Iraqi society in the image of Saddam Hussein and his regime.[3]

Furthermore, Dodge highlights the difficulties of engaging the Iraqi population in a political process. He argues that the liberation has certainly led to political mobilisation, yet with no indigenous civil society this process is tentative, unstable and highly fractured. In June 2004, Oxford Research International interviewed 2912 people across Iraq. Some of their answers expose the difficulties civil society faces and the lack of trust in government. When asked 'which national leader in Iraq, if any, do you trust most', 34 per cent answered 'none'. In response to the question 'which political party would you vote for in a national election', 41.5 per cent did not know and 23.8 per cent refused to answer.[4]

As Riyadh Hadi, Dean of the College for Political Science, Baghdad University, has suggested, another challenge is posed by the fact that 'fears are endemic in all parts of society. These fears need to be eliminated, and there needs to be a guarantee that there will be respect for the rights of all minorities, irrespective of who is elected'. According to a Western diplomat based in Baghdad, there is a widespread fear that if the Sunnis participate in the elections and lose, then they will denounce the outcome as illegitimate. He argued that these fears articulate themselves in various Sunni claims 'that the elections are unfair, that the security situation does not permit elections and that they are not going to participate'. In contrast, the political realisation amongst the Shi'a that, as a majority, all they have to do is to vote in order to be in power seems prevalent. As the Retreat participants highlighted, concerns about the respect of minority rights are common – any basic level of trust and confidence in inter-ethnic power-sharing has not been consolidated.

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[3] Testimony of Dr Toby Dodge, Committee on Foreign Relations, 20 April 2004, Committee's hearing on 'The Iraq Transition: Civil War or Civil Society?'.
[4] Department of Sociology, University of Oxford, June 2004.

Because of the Iraqis' 'estrangement' from politics, participants argued, it is vital to educate people about the electoral process and party politics to enable widespread participation and mobilisation. There is an urgent need for a massive information and mobilisation campaign, with input from Iraqi civil society and the international community. In addition, people need to be assured that the elections will be comprehensive, free and that security will not be a problem. Participants said that the current security situation would certainly prevent many people from voting in the January 2005 elections. Moreover, 83 per cent of the people interviewed by the Oxford Research International poll stated that national elections should take place after public security is restored. Establishing security, guaranteeing minority rights and educating people about democracy and the electoral process was thus regarded as fundamental for the legitimacy of the election's outcome.

Iraq's neighbouring countries represent another challenge to Iraq's security and Iraqis' acceptance of the election. As one participant argued, there is the perception that Iraq's neighbours were doing what they could to scupper the election process, since they are themselves not democratic. This is a central issue because of allegations that Syria and Iran, among other neighbours, are allowing arms, cash, and fighters to stream into Iraq to aid insurgents.[5] The democratic undertakings in Iraq also trouble Iran, Syria and Turkey because they fear Iraq's disintegration and the possible emergence of an independent Kurdistan, an eventuality they believe would have grave implications for their territorial integrity. But one Kurdish participant argued that, in her opinion, this fear was groundless as the Kurds are interested in unity of the people of Iraq and the territorial integrity of Iraq.

A further issue raised was the lack of coordination among civil society groups in Iraq and Western donors attempting to create awareness of the elections. For instance, participants were not aware of British Government funded election advertising. Overall, advertisement and election awareness campaigns were seen as insufficient and not adequately visible. Dr. Laith Kubba, Senior

[5] Esther Pan, 'Iraq: The Egypt Conference', Council on Foreign Relations, 2004.

Programme Officer for Middle East and North Africa, National Endowment for Democracy, argued that it was not a question of Iraq's civil society's potential, nor of the need for NGOs to play a role in elections. Instead, he claimed that the NGO sector was inadequately prepared to absorb the funds that are available. The key issue was thus the coordination of initiatives and the efficient and fair distribution of funds.

Regardless of the concerns mentioned above, participants agreed that if the 30 January elections were postponed, the population would lose trust in the promises made by the Coalition. As one participant said: 'we know we have to live together, we have to compromise. People are not used to compromising in Iraq. Democracy helps our development of becoming a more modern society'. Furthermore, Iraqis need to become more involved in politics, as Dodge highlights:

> many Iraqis, aware of the increasing unpopularity of the US presence in their country, and believing it to be temporary, are still sitting on their hands, eschewing involvement in government institutions, political and administrative, until the situation becomes clearer and the risks of political involvement fewer.[6]

On the other hand, more trust needs to be placed in the democratic process and the ability of the population to embrace it. As one participant said, the 'current crisis has rendered people eager to have a say in present issues'. There needs to be faith in an Iraqi culture keen to embrace democracy. According to the Oxford Research International poll, 86 per cent of Iraqis think that the situation in Iraq is likely to improve after 30 January 2005.[7] Furthermore, with 60-70 per cent voter turn out, the Iraqis have clearly shown that they are ready to embrace democracy. The elections have to be but one early step in the structured political mobilisation of the population and tie Iraqis in a transparent way to

[6] Dodge Testimony.
[7] Department of Sociology, University of Oxford, June 2004.

political parties that are obliged to be responsive to Iraqi public opinion.

Retreat participants made the following recommendations to Western policy wanting to assist Iraq's democratisation process:

1. Sponsorship of election-related content on TV and radio and in print media: programme production and funding by INGOs.

There was general consensus in calling for the mobilisation of Iraqi media to support the election process. The media should be better equipped, through either domestic or international support, to promote greater awareness of the election process and address issues of representation and participation in the rural areas of Iraq including smaller towns.

2. Greater involvement of the Ministry of Education in encouraging schools to engage in voter education.

Delegates noted that although there are a number of initiatives set up with a view to educating the population about elections, more needed to be done quickly to address the issue of the widespread ignorance about elections and the democratic process.

3. Workshop promotion by INGOs in collaboration with local NGO networks.

There was a call for greater involvement by Iraqi civil society groups in the electoral process, in particular, and reconstruction in general. Noting the relative inexperience and lack of expertise of local NGOs, the delegates proposed partnerships and joint projects with seasoned and expert international NGOs on a number of issues such as election monitoring, fostering a culture of democracy, and peaceful cohabitation between differing ethnic groups in Iraq.

4. Publications to be formulated by INGOs (expertise and funding) and widely distributed through NGO networks and government.

Sharing of expertise and knowledge can be enhanced through the dissemination of international publications to local NGO networks and appropriate Iraqi government departments.

5. Higher profile for Electoral Commission to support and identify legitimate NGOs.

Utilising the Electoral Commission to identify non-partisan NGOs who could work collaboratively with international NGOs to advance education and awareness of the electoral process. This would help to ensure that the international NGO effort was harnessed to the greatest extent possible.

6. Creative solutions to rural issues of illiteracy and lack of access to media.

A recurring concern among delegates was the preparation work being carried out in the rural areas of Iraq for the 30 January election. Access to press and media in these areas was very limited. There are high levels of illiteracy in certain rural areas, thereby limiting local populations' awareness of election related issues such as the quota system, the number of candidates running, and campaign issues. Creative solutions needed to be found to overcome these difficulties in spreading awareness of the elections and election-related issues in such areas.

Development of the Media

Iraq suffered decades of brutal suppression of opinion and submission to the regime. The Iraqi state is currently moving towards democracy, participatory politics and freedom of opinion. The intended result is a political culture based on negotiation and compromise. In order to create such an environment, it is essential to have a professional and independent media to convey reliable facts,

support responsible debate and represent the diversity of communities and views within Iraq.

Iraqis are confronting the task of creating an independent media with considerable energy, but face serious challenges.[8] As Abdulzahra Abdulsahib of *Al-Mada* and Sahar Muhammad of the daily *Al-Sabah* point out, Iraqi journalists constrained by the lack of security and legal guarantees face serious issues in terms of security and freedom of the press.[9] These circumstances prevent them from delivering what was urgently needed – unbiased, factual information – to make democracy, transparency and accountability work. The environment does not allow for complete press freedom as the state was not able to give even minimal protection to those who express their opinions freely. Iraqi journalists have been attacked for publishing unfavourable facts about individuals or armed groups. 'We face different dangers now and there is no law to protect journalists in Iraq', says Hussein Muhammad Ajeel, the head of investigative reporting at *Al Madi*. 'There are threats from three sides: the Americans might shoot you if they're ambushed; the Iraqi security forces might stop you or beat you if they suspect you're with the resistance; and the resistance might kill you if they think you're a spy'.[10] As Sahar Muhammad of the daily *Al-Sabah*, explains: journalists also faced the same lack of independence as under the previous Iraqi regime. The interim government had, for instance, attempted to secure *Al-Sabah*, a popular daily with a circulation of 60,000, as its mouthpiece. Besides the lack of independence, journalists confronted further problems as there were still no laws protecting the press of freedom and the rights of journalists. In sum, as Sahar Muhammad of the daily *Al-Sabah* states, 'the conditions we are working under today, have not improved'.[11]

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[8] For more information see 'A new voice in the Middle East, a provisional Needs Assessment for the Iraqi Media', undertaken by the Baltic Media Centre (BMC), Index on Censorship and the Institute for War and Peace Reporting (IWPR), International Media Support, Denmark, UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the Dutch government and the Open Society Institute.

[9] Musharbash, Yassin, *Der Spiegel*, 18. December 2004.

[10] *Arab Reform Bulletin*, December 2004, Volume 2, Issue 11.

[11] Musharbash, Yassin, *Der Spiegel*, 18. December 2004.

Another channel of information, which is highly popular amongst Iraqis, is television. However, participants criticised that there is no real Iraqi channel managed by indigenous Iraqis. The most famous TV channel, al-Iraqiya belongs to a Lebanese company and is situated inside the green zone in the centre of Baghdad.[12] The fact that its employees are mainly Lebanese has provoked frustration among Iraqis who see the Lebanese staff as outsiders lacking appropriate insight into the issues of Iraq.[13] Furthermore, U.S. funding for Arab media is overwhelmingly directed to American-created Arabic language news networks.[14] According to an Oxford Research International poll, 81.2 per cent of the Iraqis learn about politics through TV.[15] Television is thus a useful medium to educate people about the electoral process. In this light, establishing a truly Iraqi owned broadcasting station would contribute much needed credibility.

Retreat participants agreed two recommendations for Western policy makers wanting to promote freedom of the press in Iraq.

7. Medium term establishment of an independent state broadcaster (BBC-style charter).

Participants expressed frustration at the missed opportunity resulting from the lack of an independent Iraqi media to support the election process. They felt that Arab satellite channels such as Al Arabiya are biased in their reporting of events in Iraq. Furthermore, the current Iraqi broadcaster, Al Iraqiya, set up and supported by the Coalition forces, has little legitimacy and is unpopular with Iraqis. Demand was expressed for a state broadcaster that provided independent, non-partisan coverage, with a charter much like that of the BBC. It was suggested that the independent state broadcaster should reflect the demands of Iraqis and provide public service broadcasting.

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[12] According to a Western official in Baghdad, this contract is about to be renegotiated.
[13] Arab Reform Bulletin, December 2004, Volume 2, Issue 11.
[14] Ibid.
[15] Department of Sociology, University of Oxford, June 2004.

8. Need for independent media oversight commission.

The Transitional Administrative Law under section 66 provided for an independent oversight committee but participants felt that it was an ineffective and powerless body which was failing to perform basic functions. Many participants were not even aware that such a body existed, a fact underlining the need for a stronger media regulatory body.

Provision of Services and Infrastructure

One of the key tasks of the Iraqi government is to provide basic services and infrastructure to the population. The major obstacle to delivering these services is the poor security situation, caused by insurgent and criminal activity. For example, damaged or destroyed pipelines, a lack of security on the country's roads and failure to contract imports to reliable suppliers has deepened fuel shortages.[16] Public confidence in the government may further deteriorate significantly if it is not able to supply the population with basic services. Serious shortages of oil, water and electricity have been reported in various areas of Iraq. In Baghdad for instance, fuel distribution problems have led to long queues at petrol stations, while electrical power remained sporadic.[17] In addition, according to a Western official in Baghdad, the Iraqi postal service is not working and both local telephones and cell phones did not reach the whole country. Poor communication and lack of basic infrastructure are not conducive to business and unless these problems, amongst others, are solved, investment in Iraq will remain limited. On the positive side, Iraqis seem to embrace modern technology quite swiftly, as Internet cafes seem to be mushrooming and the Internet is increasingly perceived as the most reliable means of communication.

Participants were also concerned about the way contracts for rebuilding and infrastructure were being distributed. They claimed

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[16] Luke Baker, 'Anger mounts as Iraq suffers power and fuel crunch', Reuters, 8 December 2004.
[17] Al-Jazeera, 11 December 2004.

that it should be the Iraqi government rather than the occupation forces allocating these contracts. As unemployment is very high, more Iraqis should be employed to rebuild their country and contracts should be granted to Iraqi companies. The Retreat participants highlighted that the interim government had not worked within the laws determining the terms of contracts between governments and companies. In addition, they also suggested that malpractice should be addressed by channelling all contracts through specific and accountable official channels. They also stressed that funds for infrastructure projects should be dispersed more rapidly as investment in some areas is urgently needed. Moreover, assistance should be targeted and should not be limited to simply financial support but also include equipment and expertise. Because of the EU's expertise in institution building, participants also suggested greater EU involvement in building institutional capacities.

Improving the economy and reducing unemployment are essential in normalising day-to-day affairs in Iraq. Former socialist policies stand in stark contrast to the current economic liberalisation. As Dodge notes, after 1990-91, over 60 per cent of the Iraqi population depended on the government rationing system providing food.[18] Currently, Iraqis are faced with an abruptly liberalised economy. For example, all tariffs, customs duties, import taxes, licensing fees and similar surcharges for good entering or leaving Iraq are suspended, and this has led to an influx of cheap foreign consumer goods.[19] This led to conditions which Antonia Juhasz, a project director at the International Forum on Globalization, describes as affecting Iraqis by 'devastating local producers and sellers who were thoroughly unprepared to meet the challenge of their mammoth global competitors'.[20]

Committed funds need to be disbursed and devoted to finding a balance between previous command economy policies and sudden

[18] Dodge Testimony.
[19] 'Unemployment caused by insecurity and vice-versa' in IRINnews.org, 29 November 2004.
[20] Juhasz, Antonia, 'The Economic Colonization of Iraq: Illegal and Immoral', International Forum on Globalization, Testimony to the World Tribunal on Iraq, 8 May 2004.

economic liberalisation[21] in order to revive the economy and reduce the prospect of people resorting to criminal activities in order to make a living. Many also find that the only jobs available at the moment are in government ministries, in the country's state-run oil industry or the new Iraqi army. To ease the situation, the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs is establishing job centres, providing people with additional skills and helping them to find jobs. Various other agencies, such as USAID, are also pouring considerable resources into creating jobs. However, as with the provision of basic services, the state of the economy is closely tied to security. A stable environment for investment needs to be established before participants' requests for greater EU private sector involvement in reconstruction will be realisable.

Lastly, it needs to be emphasised that the institutions the current government inherited in April 2003 were weakened by sanctions, war and looting in the aftermath of the liberation, and were on the verge of collapse. In addition, Saddam Hussein's government was notoriously corrupt, inefficient and over-manned.[22] Therefore, the current government is facing a very difficult task in rebuilding these institutions from the ground up. Furthermore, the previous Iraqi regime never had to raise large amounts of tax from the population. Decades of autocratic government have made people suspicious of the state and a culture of 'rights and duties' towards the state still has to evolve. Iraqi civil society can play a great role in emphasising citizen's rights and duties and thus fostering people's 'Iraqiness'. For Iraq's citizens to gain a sense of what they can expect from the state and what they need to give in return, they will need to see significant institutional development and all indications are that this will be slow.

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[21] However, it seems as if not all orders on the liberalisation have been followed through, in other words that current Iraqi policy makers have realised the difficulty of this economic liberalising mission. Unemployment rates are around 60 per cent, even the most neo-liberal amongst the current policy makers in Baghdad would not want to throw more people out of work. Therefore, previous government industries have not yet been privatised as planned and the government still subsidises many work areas.

[22] Giacomo Luciani, Felix Neugart, and Toby Dodge, (2004) 'Der Irak auf dem Weg in die Souveränität, Handlungsoptionen für die Europäsche Union', Centre for Applied Political Science.

Retreat participants agreed four recommendations:

9. Central and accountable organisation to oversee investment in infrastructure.

Participants expressed a strong desire for the process of awarding contracts in the reconstruction of infrastructure to be fair and free from corruption. A proposal was made for institutions of greater transparency and accountability through which funds could be administered in a manner that is widely regarded as untainted. It was felt that creating a specific and accountable channel through which funds could be administered would go someway towards reducing corruption.

10. Rapid dispersal of committed funds.

Participants demanded the more rapid dispersal of funds committed funds by the international community. It was thought that if Iraqis could see an improvement in their environment and surroundings, there would be a greater chance that the resentment felt and support given to insurgents fighting against the occupation would decline.

11. Reconstruction contracts to Iraqi companies.

It was felt that more should be done to involve Iraqi companies in the reconstruction of their own country, giving Iraqis a sense of ownership and control over the reconstruction and development of Iraq.

12. More participation by EU companies.

Participants urged greater EU involvement in building institutional capacity and training of personnel in the reconstruction effort. In addition, participants called for greater inclusion of and participation by European companies in the granting of reconstruction contracts. This proposal was part of a broader theme of the necessity of making the entire process of reconstruction more legitimate and diverse.

Greater EU and International Involvement in Iraq

The participants called for a greater internationalisation of the Iraqi issue, including the internationalisation of the armed forces and the political process. They stressed that the reliance on the US/UK-led coalition was unacceptable and that they wished for greater participation of other countries. It was also emphasised that all European countries including France and Germany should be involved in the political process of Iraq. The best way to reduce Iraqi alienation and mistrust towards US forces and the interim government would thus be to diminish the visibility of American forces and the US profile.

The discussions highlighted several areas in which EU expertise and experience could make a valuable contribution. Because of the EU's perceived 'cultural sensitivity', and its strong track record of cooperation with local groups, Iraqis would possibly trust the EU to have an increased role in security. Furthermore, they stressed the need for the EU's expertise in institution-building and increased economic involvement. The EU and the OSCE should also participate actively and visibly in the elections, adding to their legitimacy both inside and outside Iraq.

In addition, a major problem exists in the evaluation and attribution of funds to the emerging NGOs in Iraq. The EU's expertise in managing civil affairs could help Iraqis to elaborate certain standards and rules for Iraqi NGOs. As the latter currently have trouble accepting money from the US, funding should come from less controversial places, such as the EU, the World Bank, the UN and the OSCE.

Participants also suggested that the EU or wider international forums could help to secure declarations of support from the neighbouring countries for the democratic process. The EU could play a useful role in establishing more regional forums, such as the recent 1st Gulf Dialogue, organised by the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) and hosted by the Bahraini government. Uniquely, this

brought together ministers of Defence, the Interior and Foreign Affairs from Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Yemen, Iran, Iraq, in addition to British, French, American and Australian officials.

Iraqi participants proposed the following recommendations for internationalising Iraq's political process:

13. Higher EU profile in Iraq.

Greater EU involvement in the political, economic and humanitarian efforts underway in Iraq was a recurrent and popular theme. Most delegates expressed fears of regional meddling in Iraq's internal affairs; a higher EU profile and more intensive EU engagement would help avoid this.

14. Avoid use of Iraq issue as a pawn in any US-EU political game.

This point was strongly made by all the participants, who were acutely aware of the political differences between the US and EU on the intervention in Iraq and its aftermath. They urged that the US and EU should now seek to put their differences aside and come together in assisting the Iraqi people and the new government to ensure the success of democracy in Iraq. Delegates expressed concern over the harmful implications of continuing divisions over Iraq on issues of security, reconstruction and political development.

15. More EU investment in Iraq.

The economic role that the EU could play in Iraq and its related benefits were emphasised by participants. They expressed a desire for a closer economic relationship based on mutual benefits and partnership.

16. Greater EU involvement in Iraqi elections (through monitors and observers).

One of the most immediate initiatives the EU could take in Iraq was its widely requested participation as monitors and observers in the upcoming elections. Not only would EU expertise assist in carrying out a more successful election process, but the presence of EU monitors and observers would contribute critical legitimacy to the elections and even encourage greater voter turn-out.

Increased Security and Justice

As discussed in previous sections with regards to democracy and economics, the lack of security creates major challenges. Whilst restoring security is an imperative, it is vital not to overstep human rights boundaries and return to former repressive methods. Undoubtedly, the Abu Ghraib prison scandal has caused considerable damage. As a recent publication by Human Rights Watch[23] illustrates, far less attention has been paid to the treatment of persons in the custody of Iraqi authorities. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) found that Iraqi authorities had 'allegedly whipped persons deprived of their liberty with cables on the back, kicked them in the lower parts of the body, including in the testicles, handcuffed and left them hanging from the iron bars of the cell windows or doors in painful positions for several hours at a time, and burned them with cigarettes'. The Iraqi Interim Government, led by Prime Minister Ayad Allawi, allegedly representing a clear cut break with the past of violence and abuses of the Saddam Hussein government, appears to be actively taking part, or is at least complicit, in these grave violations of fundamental human rights.[24] Although the security situation is to say the least unstable, human rights standards have to be respected. Finding the precarious balance between security and freedom is the key challenge that needs to be overcome in order to convince people of the benefits of

[23] Human Rights Watch, 'The New Iraq? Torture and ill-treatment of detainees in Iraqi custody'.
[24] Ibid.

democracy and good governance. On a more practical basis, several security issues need to be tackled. These include the turning in of weapons, border control and preventing the infiltration of foreign 'terrorist' nationals.

Participants stressed that initiatives for 'turning in' weapons would make a huge improvement to security and that the disarmament of the Al-Mahdi Army in Sadr City could serve as a positive example. There, on 11 October 2004, residents began to turn in weapons. Heaps of AK-47 assault rifles, rocket-propelled grenade launchers, mortars and other weapons were surrendered for cash as the first step in a process that U.S. and Iraqi officials hoped would lead to a permanent end to fighting in the insurgent-controlled slum.[25]

But although insurgency in this area vanished from the news, it does not necessarily make it a success story. The enormous amounts of cash collected might allow insurgents to buy even better weapons, which are widely available. 'It's extremely unlikely that al-Sadr's fighters will surrender all their medium and heavy weapons, and, given the widespread availability of military equipment in Iraq, they will be able to easily replace anything they give up, especially as they are receiving money in exchange for weapons,' said for example Jeremy Binnie, Middle East editor for Jane's Sentinel Security Assessments in London. 'The Mahdi Army's disarmament is something of a mirage'.[26] The current relative quietness might also be attributed to the political realisation that, as a majority, all the Shi'a have to do is to vote in order to be in power. Any form of disarmament needs to be undertaken in a culturally sensitive way that does not violate the private sphere and does not lead to further resentment. 'Cash for guns' is a promising initiative, but it does not tackle the underlying problems that lead Iraqis to use their weapons.

The participants also emphasised that understanding regional politics is imperative to building its future. Iraq is, in many ways,

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[25] Steve Fainaru and Khalid Saffar, 'Disarmament Process Starts In Sadr City, Albeit Slowly', *Washington Post*, 12 October 2004.

[26] Hendawi, Hamza 'Disarmament is 'mirage'. The cash-for-weapons program is putting money in insurgents' hands for more armaments, some say', Associated Press, 13 October 2004.

dependent on its neighbours and is vulnerable because of its aboveground pipelines and reliance on shared rivers such as the Tigris and the Euphrates. Understanding the regional dynamics, common resentment and unresolved border issues of Iraq's past conflicts with its neighbours is vital for a comprehensive security strategy in the region. Including Iraq's neighbours in shaping its future is essential since they are the main actors it will deal with regarding trade and regional security. In some areas, the role of Iraq's neighbours and regional partners should be enhanced, especially with regard to economic development and regional border problems. At the same time, the participants stated that pernicious political views must be prevented from overly influencing the development of new political structures inside of Iraq. Most of Iraq's neighbours view the development of a pro-Western democracy in Iraq with great suspicion. Nonetheless, a way has to be found to integrate Iraq's development into the region.

Many Iraqis also articulated concerns about foreign influence and foreign terrorists permeating their borders. Iraq's neighbours are accused of meddling in Iraqi affairs[27] in order to prevent Iraq from becoming a success story. Moreover, they are highly sensitive about Iraq becoming a platform for alleged future US invasions against their own countries. Tighter border controls and the restriction of people moving inside Iraq are certainly needed. The EU and international security organisations, such as NATO, currently establishing their first Training Implementation Mission in Iraq, could certainly assist Iraq with their expertise on border control. On the other hand, the influx of foreign terrorists should not be over-emphasised as many Iraqis might not want to acknowledge that their own people could cause so much harm to their country. According to various analysts, the efficiency, the accurate organisation and the regularity of these attacks expose a high degree of indigenous Iraqi involvement.[28]

Another concern discussed was the issue of religion. One participant suggested paying increased attention to the role of religious leaders

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[27] Edward Wong, 'Iraqi Foreign Minister, Restoring Ties With World, Urges 'Mutual Respect' , *The New York Times*, 12 July 2004.
[28] See Luciani, Neugart and Dodge (2004).

in encouraging popular participation in Iraqi politics. On the other hand, participants criticised the improper use of Islam for political ends, a problem throughout the region. Another participant proposed that 'Preachers should be licensed by the Ministry of Religious Affairs'. He argued 'They do not welcome cultural change because everything foreign is unwelcome. We are so grateful to our liberators. I think that in our country and in others, this Friday sermon has to be changed to something that means peace and worship. They use verses from the Koran to justify violence and resistance'. Religious institutions in numerous Arab countries are traditionally the only forum in which to express political discontent. It could be reasoned that radical Islam seems so appealing to Iraqis faced with a 'vacuum of identification'. Socialism has failed, Arab nationalism has failed, and so the Iraqi predicament might be understood as an attempt to look towards religion, a tradition that once had supplied order and meaning. In sum, opinions are divided between those calling for a secular democracy and those who believe religion should play a formal role in Iraqi politics. At any rate, religious leaders can clearly not be ignored and need to be involved in the political process. Even though one of the benefits of 'liberation' is the freedom of speech, participants proposed that the freedom of preachers to foster hate and violence needs to be reduced in a subtle, but consistent way.

According to the majority of the participants, ethnicity does not have to be the major issue that it has so obviously become. Western media have certainly worsened matters, presenting Iraq mainly in terms of ethnic divisions. As one of the participants argued, 'The Coalition's distinction between the various ethnic groups denied the Iraqis of a coherent national identity'. Dr Toby Dodge adds 'the current government system, based on sect and ethnicity undermines the hope of forging a common Iraqi citizenship...this puts Iraq well on the road to Lebanonisation'.[29] Without doubt, the former Saddam regime repressed religion and minorities, attempting to force unification of Iraqis along the principles of secularism, socialism, and pan-Arab unionism. Secularism has left its marks, and many Iraqis see themselves as Iraqi first, then Sunni, Christian, Shi'a, Kurdish, Tikriti and so on. In addition, flexible networks of patronage (other

[29] Dodge Testimony.

than based on religion or ethnicity), which emerged during Saddam's regime, also constitute a part of Iraqi society.[30] According to William Pfaff, Iraqis do perceive themselves as primarily Iraqi as a consequence of Iraqi nationalism which has re-affirmed itself throughout history. He suggests that Iraq's 20th century resistance to foreign threats has typically been national in character, not separatist, beginning with the revolts against British occupation in the 1920s and continuing with Sunnis and Shi'a fighting together against Shi'a Iran from 1980 to 1988.[31] Today, Iraqi nationalism is fuelled by the American occupation. The potential for Iraqi nationalism and inter-ethnic power-sharing on the basis of a common Iraqi identity should thus not be overlooked. Nevertheless, the provision of minority rights remains a major concern and civil society needs to promote dialogue between various groups. Other structured and organised forums for addressing political discontent and proposals for reforms and expectations need to develop, which could unite people along common interests and not along ethnic or religious lines.

'Justice' was an issue close to the heart of the Iraqi participants. They indicated that Iraqis feel that injustices are being perpetrated against them for which the Coalition is not taking responsibility. The Oxford Research international poll showed that only 31.8 per cent of the those Iraqis questioned believed that people in the US military and politicians would be punished for the human rights abuses in the Abu Ghraib prison, whereas 52.6 per cent thought that there would no punishment or that only low ranking soldiers would be punished. One participant also criticised the status of the current law, 'It appears that currently in Iraq the innocent is guilty until he is proven innocent'.[32]

The Iraqi representatives argued that foreigners seem to have a different legal status, which leads to resentment. However, Iraq's legal system is undergoing a difficult transitional period and only the

[30] See Charles Tripp, 'After Saddam', *Survival*, Vol. 44, No. 4, Winter 2002-2003.
[31] William Pfaff, 'Iraqi nationalism as exit strategy', *International Herald Tribune*, 5 May 2004.
[32] Department of Sociology, University of Oxford, June 2004.

new government, elected in January 2005, can draw up a definite constitution. Meanwhile, recently started trials against former Baath regime members, such as Saddam's Cousin, Ali Hassan Al-Madschid, also known as 'Chemical Ali', or former Minister of Defense Sultan Haschem Ahmed and their human rights abuses should satisfy at least partially Iraqi demands for justice.

As the participants agreed, the 'US is part of the problem and also part of the solution'. They argued for an increased internationalisation of Iraq's political process and a reduced visibility of US forces. The Iraqi participants suggested that the Americans in particular should not be frightened of the Iraqis and have more trust in their ability to rebuild their country. It was said that in the beginning of the liberation/occupation, Americans were not frightened of Iraqis. But with increased American casualties and constant threats of terrorist attacks, US soldiers now look at every Iraqi as if they are a potential enemy. Although some wish for US troops to withdraw altogether, they are likely to stay after the election and then slowly phase out. Regardless of whether this is wishful or required, the US is also very likely to keep at least for the next 1-2 years a permanent presence in Iraq. Furthermore, NATO has started to supply training troops in Iraq and may increase its commitment. Foreign forces will be a reality in the life of Iraqis for some time to come. Therefore a framework for cooperation has to be found to overcome misunderstanding and recognize cultural sensitivities on both sides. This is how Western policy makers can help to create a more secure environment:

17. Greater emphasis on replacing Coalition forces with Iraqi forces in major cities at the earliest possible time.

One means of decreasing the violence in Iraqi cities, delegates felt, is the withdrawal of Coalition forces from major cities and their replacement with an Iraqi army. This was viewed as an important step to lessening the sense of occupation and humiliation currently experienced.

18. Greater emphasis on political dialogue over violence as a means of addressing security issues in Coalition dealings with hot zones.

This point was repeatedly expressed as an alternative to the perceived disproportionate use of force by Coalition forces, in particular American troops. The example of Najaf was cited as illustration of the potential of political dialogue.

19. Framework to improve relations between communities. Use of senior Shi'a at front lines of negotiations. Engage with populations and civil society in insurgent areas.

Another strategy for improving security is to work on enhancing community relations between Coalition forces, the Iraqi government and the local communities in which the Coalition forces find themselves. Mobilising senior community and religious leaders, as well as closer cooperation between the armed forces and local NGOs, will probably to lead to greater trust and sharing of intelligence.

20. Urgent need for a plan to disarm the general population. (Cash for guns).

A specific suggestion for reducing the rampant proliferation of weapons in the populace was a programme to exchange cash for arms plus strict punitive measures for those who continued to possess weapons past a deadline. Some delegates indicated that this strategy had been successfully used in Iraqi cities historically.

21. US should adopt softer policing methods eg. British approach in Basra.

The differences in approach between the American and British Forces were noted by many delegates who perceived a sense of greater calm and cooperation between the local population and the army in areas controlled by the British. They gave the example of Basra, where there has been a more community-based approach to policing with greater emphasis on dialogue, respect and cooperation

than the harder and more defensive approach in American zones. Delegates felt that this 'harder' approach, utilising tanks, guns, hard-hats, etc, which often ignored local customs, was alienating people on a daily basis.

22. Foreign nationals to come under auspices of Iraqi law: special Iraqi court with combined Iraqi and international judiciary for trying foreign nationals.

Delegates informed the conference that one of the legacies of the Interim Governing Council was the placing of foreign nationals in Iraq under their own country's legal jurisdictions. Therefore, foreign nationals working in Iraq cannot be held accountable before Iraqi law and courts. It was suggested that this creates a sense of resentment and injustice particularly when foreign nationals are accused of offences against Iraqis and cannot be brought before the Iraqi judiciary as a result. There was a proposal that this law be amended to allow for special courts, combining Iraqi and international judges, to try foreigners accused of crimes committed in Iraq.

23. All Iraqi prisoners to be placed under Iraqi control.

A clear demand was expressed for all Iraqi prisoners to be placed under the jurisdiction of Iraqi law and authorities. Reference was made to the damaging impact of the explicit photographs of the atrocities committed by foreign troops against Iraqi prisoners in Abu Ghraib prison.

24. International community to avoid analysing issues in Iraq on the basis of ethnic divisions.

Ethnic differences and rivalries were felt to have been exacerbated by the focus of the international community and the coalition forces on the possibility of divisions and civil unrest between Iraq's varied ethnic groups. Delegates expressed a desire for the international community to assist Iraqis in fostering a united national Iraqi identity through a reduced emphasis on ethnic classifications and the adoption of strategies less focused on ethnic, tribal, or other sectarian considerations.

Conclusion

This paper has shown that Iraq's path to stabilisation and political opening is ridden with challenges. While democracy has its own intrinsic value, providing better services is an absolute priority. Iraqis will not be convinced of the benefits of democracy if they are actually and practically worse off than before their 'liberation'. As long as their quality of life does not improve, little sympathy can be expected for the new government. An independent media is crucial for political development since it constitutes an important element in making democracy, transparency and accountability work. Internationalising the conflict whilst possibly increasing help from the EU and diminishing the visibility of US forces is vital in making Iraqis feel that their country is not under occupation. Understanding regional politics and improving the security and economic situation with the help of Iraq's neighbours is also crucial for the stabilisation of the country. Upholding human rights is another fundamental point if the Iraqi government wants to increase its credibility among the Iraqi people and truly demonstrate that it has broken with the country's past of brutal repression. Lastly, irrespective of whether there is a desire or need for this, foreign troops will remain for the next 1-2 years, if not longer, in Iraq. A framework for co-existence will have to be drawn up to accommodate Iraqi demands with foreign security concerns.

Among the participants, opinions varied regarding the readiness of Iraqi society to embrace its political opening. However, moving on from a past of repressive politics, there is only a way forward. Various factors indicate that Iraqi nationalism binds people together to achieve a common national goal: the stability and prosperity of Iraq. Decades of repression has undermined Iraqi political culture. For the evolution of a legitimate social contract between the state and its citizens, Iraqis need to gain a sense of what they can expect from the state and what they need to give in return. Iraqi civil society and its political culture need time and space to develop in order to effectively consolidate this social contract. The returned exiles, who have tried to take over party politics, have not managed to build up a popular base and do not relate to the population. Politics must become more indigenous; instead of waiting for the US to retreat or

for the situation to become clearer, Iraqis have to become more active in shaping their country's future.

Most importantly, the retreat made apparent that there are serious gaps in knowledge among the Iraqi civil society representatives of the International Community's reconstruction and democracy building initiatives in Iraq. Establishing a framework of communication between them and the international community seems thus essential for the aid available to reach the right people.

The Civility Programme at the Foreign Policy Centre has not only undertaken the mission of circulating the insights of this exchange to various government and NGO agencies, but will maintain contact with the group in order to build on the positive experience and follow up on whether the concerns expressed by the participants have been addressed. It is envisaged that an electronic forum for discussion and debate will be launched through which participants can continue to debate and analyse the most important issues that arise. The stability and increased prosperity of Iraq is the common goal of these participants including many other Iraqis and the West. This can only be achieved through a genuine partnership and the West's willingness to listen to local demands and understanding local structures and problems.

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