

Exhibit 23

ACTION NEA-00

INFO LOG-00 AGRE-00 AID-00 CIAE-00 INL-00 PERC-00 PDI-00
DS-00 EB-00 EUR-00 E-00 VCI-00 H-00 TEDE-00
INR-00 IO-00 L-00 MOFM-00 MOF-00 M-00 VCIE-00
DCP-00 NSAE-00 ISN-00 OIG-00 OMB-00 NIMA-00 PA-00
PM-00 P-00 SCT-00 ISNE-00 D-00 DOHS-00 FMPC-00
SP-00 IRM-00 NCTC-00 BBG-00 R-00 IIP-00 SCRS-00
PMB-00 DSCC-00 PRM-00 DRL-00 G-00 SAS-00 FA-00
DHSE-00 SWCI-00 /000W

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**RELEASE IN PART
1.4(B),B1,1.4(D)**

P 121258Z DEC 06
FM AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8439
SECDEF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
INFO IRAQ COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
WHITE HOUSE SITUATION ROOM WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
WHITE HOUSE WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY

~~SECRET~~ BAGHDAD 004527

**Classified by Director A/GIS/IPS, DoS on 11/21/2018 ~ Class: CONFIDENTIAL ~
Reason: 1.4(B), 1.4(D) ~ Declassify on: 12/11/2031**

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/11/2016
TAGS: PGOV, PREL, IZ
SUBJECT: IRAQI MODERATE FRONT ORGANIZERS CONCERNED ABOUT
MEDIA ATTENTION, LACK OF PROGRESS

Classified By: Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

1. (S) Summary: In the latest meeting of political leaders quietly organizing a moderate front, Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki made clear his desire to keep their effort out of the media and expressed frustration at the front's lack of progress thus far. Usual participant Sunni VP Tariq al-Hashimi was not present due to his trip to the US.

1.4(B)
1.4(D)
B1

Participants called for quickly taking the initiative and agreed on the need to unify their positions and talk to their own coalitions before going public with their plans. KRG President Massoud Barzani advocated the use of force against extremists. Participants also discussed the recently released Iraq Study Group report. Those present also included the Ambassador, President Talabani, DPM Salih, VP Abdul Mehdi, and former DPM Shaways. End Summary.

Moderate Front Not Ready for the Media

REVIEW AUTHORITY: Sharon Ahmad, Senior Reviewer

2. (S) PM Maliki began the December 9 meeting by expressing frustration over a press report stating the PM had authorized the formation of a national front. He said the organizers of the front should work without a public show or statements to

the media. Maliki also expressed concern that it was becoming increasingly difficult to find common ground within the Shia coalition (UIC), but that the UIC could not be blamed for everything. He added that the planners of the front were all "under the stick" now, all responsible, all partners. This was not the way the coalition should be brought together, he said.

Talabani responded that the moderate front had not even been established yet but it was already being criticized. He asked if there were no longer agreement on forming the front. Maliki reiterated his concern about rumors and innuendo, but he believed that their common effort had not yet slipped into the danger zone.

3. (S) Talabani asked what the IIP really wanted. He said the moderate front was the four present plus Hashimi (PM/Da'wa, KDP, PUK, SCIRI, and IIP) but now the IIP was shaky. It would be good if they could win over the IIP to the others' point of view.

Mahdi: "Meetings are not Enough"

4. (S) Mahdi said they had issues that could not be solved with just flashy meetings; the group should act quickly because it may not have the same strength tomorrow that it had today. Barzani expressed the view that forming the front was at least a positive action. Even if it turned out in the long-run to be a failed effort, it was better to try than not. Hesitation within the government was not acceptable. Abdul Mehdi reiterated that political groups close to the middle must take initiative instead of talking about divisions, coups, or conspiracies. They needed to keep coalitions of parties intact but still unite the moderates as a means for reining in the political fringes. Those present should focus on groups that support the government rather than groups that in his view were obstructing the government.

5. (S) Maliki stated the first step forward was to examine all political groups to establish what partners could and could not do and who should be invited to join. Any potential new partner would need to be willing to join the political process and sign an agreement to that effect, in accordance with the constitution. He said those present should have an open discussion with all groups and have a

1.4(B)
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B1

clear plan: no militias, no terrorism, no media statements. Groups and individuals that agreed would be welcome to join the front. Maliki thought two or three groups from the UIC would join, and Talabani believed they could get 12 members of Iraqiya. Talabani and Barzani said two members of Fadhilah told them they wanted to be part of the government

and inside the political process.

Take a United Voice to Each Front

6. (S) Talabani emphasized the need for the group to unite and speak with one voice. Maliki, Mahdi, and Talabani said each participant should take the moderate front idea to his coalition. Talabani suggested reporting back to the group in two days. He asked if all present were in agreement. There seemed to be consensus, but Maliki wanted to know how they would treat potential newcomers to their front. He said they could not restrict themselves by trying to build a broad front -- they would be right back where they had started during government formation. Talabani and Shaways agreed on the need for a kitchen cabinet for the front, which Talabani suggested should be called the "National Front."

7. (S) Maliki asked for agreement on the group's solution to each problem. Barzani replied that many problems could be solved through a strong cabinet with strong ministers. CoR members should be pressured to attend the CoR. Moreover, the moderate front must deal with militarized groups -- "We either hit them or surrender the government to them."

The participants agreed on the need to take the initiative and prevent extremists from dictating to the GOI as well as the persistent lack of a quorum at CoR meetings. Barzani said he told the Kurdistan Alliance List (KAL) they should resign if they do not attend CoR sessions. Others echoed this sentiment.

Extremists Should be Dealt With by Force

8. (S) Barzani asserted that any politician who supported terrorists could not be considered a patriot, much less appointed as a government minister. He further dismissed any concept of treating terrorists as equal to moderates. Iraq's leaders should resort to the political process, not to arms. He called for crushing those who resort to violent means such as attacking police stations. He underscored that he was not just speaking of Al Qaeda, but also the militias. Barzani characterized the Ministry of Health, infiltrated by Sadrists, as the "Ministry of Weapons Transportation."

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ISG Report

9. (S) Barzani focused on the ISG report, bringing it up several times during the meeting. He noted that President Bush would announce a new strategy for Iraq on December 20 and that Baghdad should come up with its own initiative before that. It was better for Iraqis to do something than to have a solution imposed on them or to find themselves fighting an Arab coalition, he declared. Abdul Mehdi agreed, saying they needed to look at other options. The report provided suggested solutions and, while Iraq and the US would have differences of opinion about some parts, the two governments should focus on the things we could agree on. The PM said the report had positive and negatives that would get a lot of attention, but that Iraq should focus on the positives and work on them. For instance, he said, Iraq could initiate a stronger dialogue with its neighbors in the region.

10. (S) Salih emphasized that the report did not necessarily reflect President Bush's view, but it did represent the way institutions in the US were thinking. He said Iraq could not wait to change the thinking in the US. Abdul Mehdi said they should meet separately to discuss the report. Talabani agreed.
KHALILZAD

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