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THE MARMARA DECLARATION IRAQ AND ITS NEIGHBORS DIALOGUE

Against the backdrop of intensified regional diplomacy, a high-level group of foreign policy and national security figures from Iraq and its six neighbors (Iran, Jordan, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Syria and Turkey) engaged in a wide-ranging, constructive, non-official dialogue on ways to stabilize Iraq and improve regional security. The meeting was convened in Istanbul 21-23 March 2007 by the United States Institute of Peace (USIP) and the Center for Eurasian Strategic Studies (ASAM).

In an effort to inform and shape the emerging regional diplomatic initiative for Iraq, participants agreed on a common set of objectives, priorities and modalities. Iraqis and their neighbors emphasized their strong support for intensified regional diplomacy, and expressed their commitment to the success of this new diplomatic endeavor. They agreed on the following:

OBJECTIVES

Stability -- Iraqis and their neighbors share a common purpose: to bring peace and stability to Iraq, freeing Iraqis from the threats of terrorism and sectarian strife and enabling Iraq to emerge from its national crisis as soon as possible.

A United Iraq – The building blocks of a united Iraq are territorial integrity, sovereignty, and equitable distribution of revenues from natural resources.

Democracy and Effective Governance – Upholding the principles of participatory and inclusive governance is vital to protecting and nurturing the effectiveness and accountability of Iraq's new political institutions.

National Reconciliation and Regional Security – The key to achieving Iraqi national reconciliation is a political process that transcends sectarianism and the politics of identity. Progress toward this goal rests on establishing the rule of law and protecting human rights, including those of all minorities. Iraq's neighbors acknowledge their shared responsibility to support Iraqi reconciliation, a common objective that is inextricably linked to protecting their own national security interests.

PRIORITIES

Results will be the measure of a successful regional diplomatic initiative for Iraq. Participants identified priorities to guide the actions of Iraq, its neighbors and the U.S.

Promoting Iraqi and Regional Security

- Neighbors should refrain from funding, equipping and otherwise supporting sectarian forces.
- Iraq should aim to put an end to the presence and activities of all organizations that pose threats to its neighbors.
- Integrate interior and defense ministers regularly into the expanded neighbors' forum established this spring. These officials should meet frequently, establish direct communications and coordinated action, and be integrated into the emerging diplomatic process.
- Explore the possibility of reviving existing bilateral and regional security agreements and renewing their terms.
- Increase technical assistance and financial support to Iraq and the neighbors to improve border security and intelligence exchange, building on UN efforts.
- Intensify efforts to improve Iraq's capacity to develop and export oil and gas.

Stopping Incitement to Violence and Ending Support for the Insurgency

- Political and civil society leaders in the region should make countering incitement a top priority, including through legislation. They should coordinate anti-incitement messages, including speaking from joint platforms.
- Promote intensified and regular exchanges among media, religious and civil society leaders.
- Religious dialogue, convened under the auspices of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, should generate edicts against violence, encourage religious tolerance, and counteract sectarianism and extremism.
- Establish impartial mechanisms – both governmental and nongovernmental—to monitor incitement. Reports should be made public in order to motivate governments to take remedial action.
- Tighten regulation of money transfers from neighboring states and other parties, and increase enforcement of existing rules.

Refugees and Displaced People

- Organize, with cooperation of the UN and other organizations, regional efforts to protect and assist refugees and displaced people, respecting international norms.
- Explore contingency plans for dealing with potential refugee surges.
- Raise temporary labor quotas in the region. Assistance programs should be developed to help individual refugees and also to assist governments hosting large refugee communities.

- Basic services and education should be made available to Iraqi refugees in countries where they are denied such opportunities.
- Facilitate return of refugees and displaced people to their homes.

Iraqi Political Reconciliation

- All Iraq's neighbors, especially Saudi Arabia and Iran, have opportunities to contribute to improved relations among groups in Iraq. They should coordinate their efforts, in consultation with the Iraqi government.
- Ending violence by militia and insurgent groups is vital. Once this is done, disarmament, demobilization and reintegration—possibly through an expanded amnesty— are the next steps.
- Constitutional amendments may contribute to political reconciliation. Creation of an "upper house" in the parliament could be important in this respect.
- Iraq's armed forces need to be nationally representative. Iraq's police should be credible to its citizens and representative of the communities they serve.
- A timetable should be established for the Government of Iraq to take full authority and responsibility, including for security throughout the country.
- The Kirkuk issue needs to be defused, either through a properly adopted amendment or a technical delay in holding the constitutionally mandated referendum.
- Reform of de-Ba'athification laws and practices is essential to national reconciliation, as well as to gaining political support from Sunni Arab states, which should encourage Sunni political participation.

Strengthen Governance

- Iraqi election laws should be amended to make officials more accountable to local constituents rather than to national parties, with district or governorate representatives chosen in open-list elections.
- The international community should support Iraq in building and training a robust, professional civil service, especially in the security sector.
- Reform corruption laws to create strong disincentives against graft. These laws should be consistently enforced and supported by the international community.

Iraq's and the Neighbors' Expectations of the U.S.

- The U.S. has a particular obligation to demonstrate its commitment to a regionally supported peace process for Iraq. It should improve its relations with Syria and Iran, especially as they concern Iraq. These states should reciprocate in a constructive manner.

- The U.S. should commit to a comprehensive strategy for a responsible withdrawal consistent with Iraq's security and stability, based on milestones and a general time horizon.
- The U.S. should reiterate that it seeks no permanent military bases in Iraq and will not maintain military forces in Iraq unless requested by the Iraqi government.

PROCESS AND MODALITIES

Although concrete results will ultimately determine the success or failure of regional diplomacy, the structure of the process and the framework for engagement are critically important.

- A regional diplomatic initiative for Iraq cannot be divorced from the broader regional environment. Progress on other regional problems requiring U.S. engagement would have a positive impact.
- A successful diplomatic process combines bilateral, regional and international engagement. These are complementary and should be pursued as part of an integrated approach coordinated by a Contact Group with the engagement of the permanent five members of the UN Security Council.
- In addition to the Iraq Compact, which is focused on economic assistance and reform, a broad international conference is urgently needed to reinforce Iraq's political process, including the Iraqi government's benchmarks and timetable.
- One or more new UN Security Council resolutions may be required to ensure implementation of measures cited above.
- Informal, non-official dialogue needs to be pursued and supported in parallel with official-level negotiations. Such Track II initiatives are essential for floating new ideas, overcoming misconceptions and building professional ties among Iraq's political elite and their regional counterparts.
- Greater engagement by regional and international parties must not detract, inhibit or undermine any of the neighbors' bilateral relationships with Iraq. All parties need to have a positive stake in the process and have confidence in it.

Istanbul, 23 March 2007