

A Message For Iraq

If you are safe, I am safe

ONLY pan-communal security can provide real security for Iraqi civilians and the stability needed for the proper governance and development of Iraq. The creation of a policy that can deliver this security requires not only reform of prisons, the judiciary, and police but also an idea that sums up this truth — *If you are safe, I am safe* — and which can be communicated to all Iraqis.

In conflicts in which ideas play a prominent part, and in which ideas drive many of the destabilising actors, it is necessary to respond with ideas. '*If you are safe, I am safe*' is such an idea. Its merit is that it contains within it the essential truth — that real security is based on mutual safety, and not through isolation from or destruction of the other community: neither of which are realisable, or desirable.

This idea is widely recognised as expressing truth. Its value, at this point, is as a rallying idea for the main body of Iraq and as a programme of government and civil action and behaviour. This idea also expresses the guideline for policy in the security sector and associated policies.

It is an idea, not a slogan; it has to be expressed and discussed as an idea both in 'media' — through chat shows, T-shirts, bill boards, blogs, social networks — and in public acts such as the demolition of Abu Ghraib and its conversion into a memorial for all Iraqis who have suffered wrongful imprisonment, oppressive treatment, abuse or death.

Not only that, it needs to be expressed through policy change in key areas of the security sector. This could include appropriate prisoner releases, marked by generous recompense and honour for those wrongfully imprisoned, and co-ordinated with tribes and other public/civil groups. It would include reform of police methods and ethics as well as improvements in counterinsurgency tactics and skills in order to provide intelligence-led policing that is more effective than the approach currently operating. These reforms, together with improvements in accountability and the representativeness of police personnel, can make great strides towards winning the popular legitimacy and support from all Iraq's communities which is essential for the effectiveness of law enforcement.

'*If you are safe, I am safe*', provides not just a catch-phrase for a set of policies, but a means of making them coherent; it is a goal which policies must serve and thus it can provide the measurement for policy reform, design and effectiveness.

The key to this message is that it is both obviously true (and also catchy) and that the message is married to a range of policies that are effective: some policies will demonstrate that the message is not just a slogan but represents the heart of the Iraq government's policy, while some policies will facilitate the delivery of security on the ground, the success of which is entirely dependent on the co-operation of Iraqi civilians.

The authenticity of this message is essential — the slightest hint that it is a subterfuge will be picked up immediately and it will be rejected by the core groups that must be won over. Everyone has to know that there is a new deal in town and that the government is going to stick to it.

Confident espousal of this message, aligned with well-thought-out policy measures that express and deliver it, can turn the downward spiral of recent months into a new consensus that can provide Iraq with the security and stability that it has not known for over a decade. The government is not the only player in town — all Iraqis need to play a role: '*If you are safe, I am safe*' is an enabler to help them do so too.