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SENIOR EXECUTIVE INTELLIGENCE BRIEF
3 January 2003
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Iraq: Opposition Shows Unity, Rifts [redacted]

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The Iraqi opposition groups that met last month in London called for a democratic and federal Iraq, formed an advisory committee of 65 members, and closed ranks against a US-imposed post-Saddam political solution, but they remain significantly at odds with each other. The creation of the committee in particular brought out differences among Iraqi Shia groups as the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI) clashed with rivals and was itself torn by dissension, while Sunni Muslims complained that the role of the Shias and the Kurds was overemphasized,

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This divisiveness stems in large part from deeply rooted ethnic and sectarian suspicions. Iraqi Sunni Arabs, for example, generally question the Kurds' commitment to Iraq's territorial integrity and distrust the Shia parties' close ties to Iran. Shias, who number more than 60 percent of the Iraqi population of 24 million, frequently have complained of underrepresentation in opposition groups.

- The opposition also is split by personal rivalries such as that between KDP leader Barzani and PUK leader Talabani and by resistance to the leadership of such figures as de facto INC leader Chalabi, who is frequently accused of autocratic tactics and corruption.

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The factions recognize they need greater credibility. They publicly have expressed concern that Washington, not Iraq, will decide who after Saddam governs the country and how, and they remain uncertain of their role. The conference could have done little without high-level US input; interpersonal and organizational problems persist, and many oppositionists worry the US presence will make it difficult for them to gain traction with the Iraqi public.

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The committee will face battles for representation next month when it picks transitional leaders

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at its first meeting, in Kurdish-controlled northern Iraq. The fight might be less fierce if it had in hand an explicit US commitment to a federalist Iraq with power sharing among ethnic factions.

-- The London conference ended the INC's role as an umbrella, and de facto leader Chalabi now may cooperate to make the Group of Six a success or work to undermine it. [redacted]

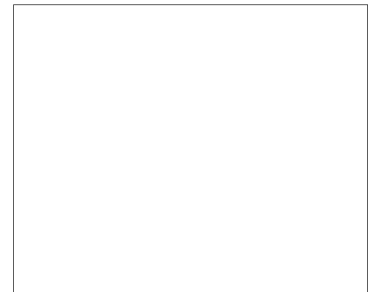
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SCIRI's consultations with Tehran before and during the conference show Iran's influence over it, [redacted] The group can be constructive only if it asserts some independence, but it may need a strong message from Washington as an incentive to pursue this. [redacted]

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