

JIC Assessment: 27 February 2002

IRAQ: SADDAM UNDER THE SPOTLIGHT

Key Judgements

- I. Saddam fears a US military attack which would threaten his regime by bringing about the disintegration of his military and security apparatus. A force on the scale of Desert Storm (1991) would constitute such a threat. [The JIC judged that Saddam did not believe such an attack was inevitable.]
- II. Saddam continues to resist the enforcement of post-Gulf War UNSCRs on disarmament while encouraging sanctions erosion. His strategy is threatened by UK/US efforts to introduce the Goods Review List (GRL) and make Iraq accept weapons inspectors. Iraq sees the GRL as making sanctions indefinitely sustainable. But the greatest risk seen by Saddam is that non-compliance with the UN may be used to justify a full-scale US attack.
- III. In response, Saddam has begun a nominal re-engagement with the UN and a diplomatic charm offensive. So far he has offered nothing new. [Text redacted for national security purposes. The JIC judged that if the threat of large-scale military action was believed to be imminent, Saddam would permit the return of weapons inspectors.] If inspectors do return, Saddam will frustrate their efforts. He will continue to play for time.
- IV. Iraq continues to pursue its WMD programmes. Design work for missiles with ranges greater than the UN limit of 150km is underway; if it has not already done so, Iraq could produce significant quantities of biological warfare agents within days and chemical warfare agents within weeks of a decision to do so.
- V. The Special Republican Guard (SRG) remains closely tied to Saddam's regime and is likely to resist any attempt to overthrow him. The Republican Guard is also favoured and is relatively well equipped and trained; it would be relatively resilient under attack, but its loyalty in dire straits is more open to question than the SRG. Other elements of the Iraq military are more liable to crack if subjected to a strong attack.
- VI. Kurdish and Shia groups form the most significant opposition to Baghdad. However, the opposition is militarily weak and riven by factional differences. They will not act without visible and sustained US military support on the ground. A coup or military revolt is only a remote possibility.

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At the request of the JIC, we consider Saddam's threat perceptions and internal position: whether he is secure, what opposition he faces and what he is doing to try and avoid the internal and international threats he faces.

Background

1. Until September 11, Saddam was comfortable with Iraq's international position. UK/US efforts to introduce revised sanctions against Iraq in early July had been unsuccessful; Iraq's considerable economic leverage over Syria, Jordan and Turkey ensured its neighbours remained reluctant to support revised sanctions or allow closer monitoring of trade; and sanctions were eroding, with Iraq's illicit earnings set to exceed \$3 billion in 2001. Domestically, his position was secure.

2. The US reaction to 11 September has been a jolt to Saddam's position. We continue to judge that Iraq had no responsibility for, or foreknowledge of, the attacks in the US on 11 September. [...] President Bush's State of the Union speech, labelling Iraq as part of an "Axis of Evil" because of its pursuit of WMD, will have reinforced his concern.

Developments at the UN

3. In conjunction with pressure from the US, developments at the UN since November 2001 threaten to de-rail Saddam's long-term strategy of refusing to comply with UNSCRs on weapons inspectors while working to circumvent sanctions and encourage their erosion. UK/US proposals to introduce the Good Review List (GRL) in June 2002, agreed in UNSCR 1382, undermine Iraq's propaganda over sanctions by offering Iraq unrestricted access to most goods. Iraq therefore sees the GRL as making sanctions politically sustainable indefinitely. Russia's acceptance of UNSCR 1382 while accepting only ill-defined assurances on steps to clarify UNSCR 1284, which established the UN Monitoring, Verification and Inspection Commission (UNMOVIC) and reaffirmed the link between Iraqi co-operation with inspectors and the lifting of sanctions, was also a defeat for Iraq.

Iraqi manoeuvring

4. There are signs that, in response to these developments, the Iraqi regime has embarked on a **nominal policy of re-engagement with the UN and a diplomatic charm offensive**. Saddam sent Deputy Prime Minister Tareq Aziz to **Moscow** (twice) and **Beijing** in early 2002 to solicit support against sanctions and the US threat. [...]

5. But **this tactical diplomacy has failed to improve Iraq's position**. [...] The UN Secretary General has been wary of accepting Saddam's suggestion of a renewed dialogue and accurately perceives Iraq's wish to prevaricate. And Kuwait has rejected the Iraqi advances, which we assess were disingenuous and intended to isolate Kuwait while appearing reasonable to the wider Arab world.

6. In the short term, Iraqi tactics will probably continue in similar vein, coupled with enhanced propaganda about sanctions. It is also possible that Iraq will reduce co-operation with the oil-for-

food programme. The UN is already concerned that Iraq is not providing sufficient revenue for the humanitarian programme, a result of [...]

Iraq's WMD Programme

7. Meanwhile, Iraq continues to pursue the development of weapons of mass destruction. Though we lack precise data, Iraq has probably reconstituted many of the elements struck during Operation Desert Fox in December 1998. Iraq's ballistic missile programme has extensively tested missiles under the 150km UN limit and intelligence indicates that design work for systems with ranges over 1,000km is underway. Iraq is assessed to have hidden 10-20 Al-Hussein missiles (range 650km) capable of hitting Israel. Iraq also continues with its chemical and biological warfare (CBW) programmes and, if it has not already done so, could produce significant quantities of BW agents within days and CW agents within weeks of a decision to do so. These can be delivered by a variety of means. Methods of ensuring survivability of CBW production facilities from attack are a high priority.

8. Procurement activity suggests that Iraq is continuing with a nuclear weapons programme, although its current status is unclear. Before the Gulf War intervened, Iraqi plans were well advanced and we judge they were only three years away from possessing a nuclear weapon. Were sanctions lifted now, we judge it would take Iraq at least five years to produce a nuclear device and a further two to produce a warhead. The acquisition of fissile material or significant technical assistance from abroad could significantly shorten this timescale. Iraq still has some low grade radioactive material which it could utilise in a radiological dispersal device, but there is no recent intelligence indicating that Iraq is pursuing such a course.

9. Saddam recognises that the greatest risk is that the Iraqi WMD programme and non-compliance with UNSCRs may be used to justify a US attack to overthrow him. He would probably see a force on the scale of Desert Storm (1991) as overwhelming. We judge that [Text redacted for national security purposes. The JIC judged that if the threat of large-scale military action was believed to be imminent, Saddam would permit the return of weapons inspectors.] his policy is evolving. His options remain the pursuit of both the UN track and other diplomacy, particularly in the Arab world. As an interim fall-back position, we judge that Iraq could try to resurrect Russian proposals to link the entry of inspectors to a pre-determined timetable of sanctions-lift. But this would be no more than a tactical move to buy time, not an admission of defeat. We also judge that **even if inspectors were allowed to return, Iraq would embark on a renewed policy of frustration**, involving denial, deception, obstruction and delay. Iraq would be able to conceal from inspectors much of its CBW work and research on longer range missiles, though probably not its missile production facilities.

Internal security and the opposition

10. The Iraqi regime is dominated by the Sunni minority. There are tensions within the regime, but we lack detailed intelligence. Saddam is ruthlessly efficient in the use of intimidation and patronage to keep such tensions in check. There is no organised Sunni opposition. Saddam ensures that key tribes are represented in the security, military and political structures, but real power is concentrated mostly in his hands. Since the late 1990s, however, Saddam has given his second son, Qusai, increasing responsibility for security. Qusai is now better placed than his potential peer competitors; we judge that he is Saddam's undeclared successor.

11. Saddam operates a **large and proven security apparatus**. In addition to 300,000 troops in the regular army and 75,000 in the Republican Guard, Saddam relies on a myriad list of security organisations (see Annex A). Collectively, they provide several layers of defence against coups, military revolts or civil uprisings. Saddam habitually rotates and purges key military and security personnel. Saddam is secure, internally.

12. There are numerous groups in opposition to the central government in Baghdad (see Annex B). Outside Iraq, the Iraqi National Congress (INC), an umbrella organisation of opposition groups, and the Iraqi National Accord (INA) are the best connected in the West. But the two vie for foreign support and neither has significant military forces or much of a following within Iraq. [...]

13. Within Iraq, Kurdish and Shia groups form the most significant opposition. There are 3-4m **Kurds** in northern Iraq, accounting for about 15% of the total Iraqi population. Most live in the Kurdish Autonomous Zone (KAZ), created in 1991. Each of the two main Kurdish groups, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (**PUK**) and Kurdistan Democratic Party (**KDP**), can call on tens of thousands of fighters, albeit of variable quality, in addition to a smaller number of permanent forces. But Kurdish goals are limited and they are broadly content with the status quo; at most they would want to control over the main northern cities outside the KAZ: Kirkuk and Mosul.

14. Though Arab Sunnis dominate in positions of authority in Baghdad, some 60% of Iraqis are **Shia**; most live in southern Iraq. The foremost Shia opposition group is the Iranian-backed Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (**SCIRI**); its military wing, the Badr Corps, comprises at least 3,000-5,000 fighters. Saddam's army is forced to wage a continual low level counter-insurgency campaign against these forces and the affiliated Shia tribes of southern Iraq.

15. In addition to their numerical weakness, the **opposition is riven by factional differences**. Co-operation between the PUK and KDP has been opportunistic at best; they have split the KAZ into zones of control. In 1996 the KDP assisted the Iraqi army in an assault on the Kurdish capital of Irbil, then held by the PUK, allow Saddam to eliminate or expel opposition groups from the area. These differences are **exacerbated by Iraq's neighbours, Turkey and Iran**, which each have their own enmities and alliances among the different groups. In the south, SCIRI is tainted by its association with Iran and unable to call on mass support. And although links between Shia and Kurdish factions exist, they are minimal. There is little chance of a leader appearing capable of unifying the opposition.

16. Nonetheless, Saddam is undoubtedly concerned about potential US military support to his internal enemies. Since 1991, international monitoring and coalition enforcement of the No Fly Zones have constrained, but not prevented repression by the regime. Saddam probably fears spontaneous uprisings in the south if his military and security forces come under sustained attack by the US. The Kurds could also become a threat to Saddam's vital interests if the US were able to base forces inside the KAZ. [...]

17. The disposition of the Iraqi military has also shown that Saddam wants to retain the option of retaking the KAZ quickly if necessary. So far he has not acted partly because the US has made it clear that this would cross a US "red line" and would provoke a harsh military response. Since 11 September, however, Iraqi military deployments have been adjusted to put Iraqi forces in a

better position to attack if necessary. We judge that **the Iraqi army could gain effective control of the KAZ within days, with little or no warning.**

18. Overall we judge that, **unaided, the Iraqi opposition is incapable of overthrowing the Iraqi regime; in the present circumstances a coup or military revolt remains only a remote possibility.** With outside help short of direct US intervention on the ground, the opposition would still be unable to succeed. Spontaneous mass uprisings might be more important if the regime's control wavered, but this is not in prospect; however, it might hasten the regime's downfall in conjunction with a massive US attack.

19. The resilience of the Iraqi military is uncertain; much would depend on the particular nature and scale of the attack it faced and how it perceived that threat. Though the Iraqi military is relatively large, well-trained and well-equipped by regional standards, and used to coping with adverse circumstances, it also has severe weaknesses. It suffers from politicised and over-centralised command and control, poor logistics, low morale, its training and equipment is inadequate to face Western forces on equal terms and it is especially vulnerable to air power.

20. The Republican Guard (RG) and Special Republican Guard (SRG) are the elite of the Iraqi military: they are better equipped and trained than the regular army. For these reasons, we would expect them to be relatively resilient under attack. Selected on the basis of loyalty to the regime, the SRG in particular receives commensurate rewards and has the most to lose if the regime was overthrown. It would defend any attempt to topple Saddam. In dire straits, the RG's loyalty would be more open to question. The regular army would be most liable to waver in its support of the regime, or disintegrate, if subject to a strong US attack.

Outlook

21. Despite widespread speculation about the possibility of a US attack, we judge that Saddam is not yet convinced that such a move to overthrow him is inevitable. While the coalition campaign continues in Afghanistan, he probably believes the US is militarily preoccupied; in any case, US rhetoric has not so far been backed up by overt preparations to attack. He still hopes that his efforts to counter progress at the UN will undermine support for sanctions and for US military action, reducing the risk of an attack. The Arab summit, planned for 27 March will be a focus for his attempts to win over the Arab world.

22. The Kurds and Shia will not show their hand until US resolve to overthrow Saddam is absolutely clear and, given the abortive uprisings in 1991, demonstrated by a powerful US military presence on the ground. There is no obvious leader among these groups who is capable of unifying the opposition and who has credibility and popular appeal inside Iraq. Nor is there presently any sign of a likely replacement for Saddam from within the regime. If, however, internal change did take place, it is likely that any successor would be autocratic and drawn from the Sunni military elite.

23. In the event of a US attack, Saddam would probably shift to a well-tested defensive strategy in the hope that Iraqi resistance to a US ground campaign would strain US resolve, leading eventually to a withdrawal. Alternatively, if Saddam believed he was unable to deter a US attack to oust his regime, we judge he would go down fighting and could adopt high risk options, such as seizing northern Iraq, to disrupt US planning. Faced with defeat, Saddam could resort to

~~TOP SECRET~~ Declassified

even riskier options such as conducting terrorist attacks or using weapons of mass destruction against US forces or Israel.

24. Iraq could fragment under attack. But all Iraq's neighbours agree that a fractured Iraq is deeply undesirable. Each will try to influence events as they develop; it is likely that Iran, for example, would try to maintain and build its influence through Shia proxies even as any US campaign continued. But we judge it would try to avoid becoming directly involved in fighting on either side.

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ANNEX A TO [...]

IRAQ'S SECURITY APPARATUS

In addition to the Regular Army and Republican Guard (RGFC), Saddam can also look to:

- The **Special Security Organisation (SSO)**: around 2,000 strong, the SSO oversees the security of the President and monitors the loyalty of the regime's other military, intelligence and security services; it forms an inner ring around Saddam;
- The **Special Republican Guard (SRG)**: about 8,000 strong and equipped with the best available military equipment, members are selected mostly from the RGFC and on the basis of loyalty to the regime. The SRG are the only troops normally stationed in Baghdad;
- The **Directorate of General Security (DGS)**, which is primarily responsible for countering threats from the civil population. The DGS maintains a paramilitary force for quelling civil disturbances, although these units are ultimately under SSO control;
- The **Directorate of General Intelligence (DGI)**, which monitors and suppresses dissident activities at home and abroad;
- The **Directorate of Military Intelligence (DMI)**, whose role includes the investigation of military personnel;
- The **Saddam Fidayin**, which are under the control of Saddam's oldest son, Udai Hussein, are possibly 10-15,000 strong and have been used in the past to deal with civil disturbances;
- The **Al-Quds Army**, an irregular force nominally created in the late 1990s to fight the Israelis, but in practice used for internal security functions; and
- The **Mujahideen-e Khalq**, an Iranian opposition group supported by Iraq and used for internal security.

ANNEX B TO [...]

IRAQI OPPOSITION GROUPS

There are a large number of opposition groups. The main organisations are:

- **Iraqi National Congress (INC):** formed in 1992 and based in London, the INC is the main umbrella organisation for opposition groups. The INC's greatest asset is its charismatic leader, Ahmad Chalabi. Chalabi was born in 1944 to a Shi'ite Iraqi family which was loyal to the Hashemite monarchy and suffered after the 1958 revolution. He has studied in the US and received British nationality in 1997.

Chalabi was instrumental in encouraging the US Congress to pass the Iraq Liberation Act (1998), which voted \$97 million to be distributed among opposition groups through INC. However, this funding is restricted to providing non-lethal aid and much has not been released by US State Department. In January 2002, US State Department temporarily curtailed financial support to the INC after an audit of INC spending identified "accounting problems"; funding was resumed by February 2002.

Personal differences between Chalabi and other oppositionists have caused resentment and splits. Chalabi is tainted by his role in the collapse of the Petra Bank in Jordan, for which he was indicted in the 1980s. The INC failed to hold a National Assembly meeting between 1993 and 1999 because of infighting. The revival of the INC in 1999 led to the formation of a seven man Executive Council in an attempt to sideline Chalabi, but he continues to be the most influential figure and has retained the position of Chairman.

The INC co-operated with the PUK in an attack on Iraqi forces along the KAZ's demarcation line in March 1995, but the operation failed to gain broad support and quickly faltered. The INC's presence in Iraq was destroyed when the Iraqi army, with KDP co-operation, occupied Irbil in 1996. The INC has no military forces of its own.

The INC has minimal regional support; it has a representative office in Tehran, but at least Jordan, Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait would oppose any significant role for Chalabi in a new regime. [...]

- **Iraqi National Accord (INA):** led by Dr Ayad Allawi, the UK-based INA espouses a moderate Ba'athism and as such contains many diplomats and junior Ministers from the 1970s. [...]

The personal animosity between Allawi and Chalabi led the INA to suspend its membership of the INC in 2000. The INA has been openly critical of the ideal of arming the INC.

The INA is active in Jordan, from where it conducts radio and other anti-regime propaganda and provides humanitarian support to Iraqi refugees. It also operates an office in northern Iraq. But it does not control significant military forces.

- **Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP):** led by Masood Barzani, the KDP controls the western part of the KAZ. It is the oldest Kurdish political party. The KDP co-operated with the PUK for a short time after the 1991 uprising, but the two groups fell out shortly after the 1992 Kurdish elections. In August 1996 the KDP invited Iraqi forces to re-take Irbil, the Kurdish capital then held by the PUK, leading to the death of many INC and PUK members. The resulting legacy of mistrust persists. The KDP maintains links with Baghdad and its commitment to the revived INC and to permitting opposition groups to set up bases in northern Iraq is probably weaker than that of the PUK.

The KDP derives considerable wealth from its control of the border trade with Turkey. It has also co-operated on occasion with Ankara to fight the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK).

- **Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK):** led by Jalal Talabani, the PUK was formed in 1975 when it split from the KDP. The PUK controls most of the eastern part of the KAZ. It has relatively strong links with SCIRI and the INA, which both have offices in PUK-controlled territory. Like the KDP, the PUK retains contacts with Baghdad.

The PUK controls dams which are important for the supply of water and hydroelectricity to southern and central Iraq. Border trade with Iran produces a limited amount of revenue.

- **Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI):** set up in 1982 and led by Muhammad Baqir al-Hakim, SCIRI is the major Shia opposition organisation, supported by and based in Tehran. Its military wing, the **Badr Corps**, carries out raids across the border. In 1991 it played a major role in the uprising after the Gulf War, though its brutal murder of low ranking members of the Ba'ath party and army probably exacerbated Sunni mistrust of possible Shia rule.

SCIRI is relatively close to the PUK. However, in the past it has made plain its opposition to US interference in Iraqi opposition affairs.

- **Da'wah Party:** the traditional Shia anti-regime party, but in decline since the 1970s. Its rump is based on Damascus, but it has lost its influence to SCIRI.