

JIC Assessment, 14 November 2002

IRAQ: REGIME COHESION UNDER PRESSURE

- I. Iraq accepted UNSCR 1441 because Saddam knew this was the only way to avert a large-scale US-led coalition ground attack. The regime probably believes that a coalition attack will not be possible when inspectors are inside Iraq.
- II. Iraq could try to overload UNMOVIC by releasing large volumes of information about legitimate industries. Although less likely, Iraq might admit to some 'expendable' parts of its WMD programmes to demonstrate ostensible co-operation and to provoke divisions in the UN. But it will focus on concealing sensitive items from inspectors.
- III. There is no evidence as yet of real cracks within the regime, but these might appear if UNMOVIC makes real progress. But loyalty within the Iraqi military or security apparatus is unlikely to collapse until an overwhelming coalition attack is perceived as inevitable or actually begins. And regime breakdown cannot be guaranteed short of a major ground invasion.
- IV. If Saddam were to perceive a large-scale coalition attack to be inevitable, he would probably cease any co-operation with the UN and become far more confrontational.
- V. Saddam's total control means that Iraqi policy can change substantially with little warning. There is considerable scope for Saddam to miscalculate or react unpredictably.

<p>Implications: Iraq still has options available for delaying and diverting inspections. But UNMOVIC has been given the power to carry out effective inspections and must use this to bring full pressure to bear on Iraq.</p>
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In July, the JIC considered the cohesion of the Iraqi regime. At the request of the JIC, we revisit the issue and examine how the Iraqi regime is responding to mounting international pressure. We assess whether there are any signs of strain within the regime and evaluate the speed and effectiveness of Iraqi decision-making.

1. Agreement by the UN of new, tougher rights for inspectors in UNSCR 1441 came as an unwelcome surprise to the Iraqi leadership. We judge that Iraqi officials overestimated Iraq's ability to influence the UN, [...] and failed to appreciate the possibilities for the US and its allies to modify the course of international debate. [...] and we judge that they were dismayed that Syria did not abstain in the UNSC vote.
2. Regime survival is Saddam's overriding priority. But he also has a very strong commitment to retaining WMD, which he sees as key to Iraqi power and influence. Saddam probably accepted UNSCR 1441 'unconditionally' because he knew this was the only way to avert or at least delay a coalition attack which would mean the end of his regime. We judge that the regime probably believes that a coalition attack will not be possible when inspectors are inside Iraq.

Current military and security preparations

3. The regime remains concerned about internal security. Ba'ath Party militia and members of the many security agencies are manning additional checkpoints and conducting more patrols, particularly in and around key cities. [...]
4. In the Iraqi military, [...] Key units, such as those of the Republican Guard, have kept their vehicles dispersed to improve their survivability under air strikes. [...] But we would expect to see substantial further measures when Iraq judges an attack to be imminent. The JIC will consider Saddam's military options in a paper early next month.

Regime cohesion

5. In July, the JIC judged¹ that real loyalty and support for Saddam was confined to the top of the hierarchy. Low morale was widespread. But regime collapse could not be guaranteed short of a large-scale ground invasion. We judge that this remains the position. The Iraqi military, including the elite Republican Guard, [...]
6. [...] top officials have a good understanding of at least some of the regime's problems. There is an awareness that the Regular Army is weak and unreliable. Concerns about internal support probably prompted Saddam's declaration of a general amnesty for prisoners on 20 October. Unusually, he would have had to overrule his security agencies' concerns in doing so.

¹ JIC Assessment of 4 July 2002 IRAQ: REGIME COHESION

7. The security apparatus, with overlapping responsibilities and oversight, is designed to prevent internal rebellion. Although internal security is tight, many precautions (such as investigations of military loyalty and personnel rotations to prevent the development of networks which might support a coup) are conducted periodically in any case. Fear of punishment remains a key motivator keeping officials at their posts. And although security and military officers fear a coalition attack, top officials, at least, already associate their fate with that of the regime, fearing retribution from the Iraqi population, or the coalition. [...]

8. The regime's security posture is also aimed at minimising the risk of a general rebellion. [...] the regime's concerns about internal security are focused on southern Iraq. The regime is aware of the low level of genuine popular support it receives. It knows there has been speculation among the Iraqi people that life might be better post-Saddam. However, we continue to judge that an internal uprising would be unable to overthrow Saddam except in conjunction with a large-scale external attack.

Regime decision-making

9. So far, Iraq has made few serious tactical errors. It seems that Saddam has been able to pursue his policies rationally. He confers most often with a small group of family and long term friends (see box). At present, although Qusai has taken on increasing responsibilities, particularly for security, it seems all key decisions continue to be made by Saddam. [...]

Saddam's inner circle

[...] Saddam's key advisers are:
Qusai Saddam Husain, his second son;
Ali Hasan al-Majid, his cousin;
Vice President Taha Yassin Ramadan;
Vice Chairman of the Revolutionary Command
Council Izzat Ibrahim al-Duri; and
Deputy Prime Minister Tariq Aziz.

Foreign Minister Naji Sabri al-Hadithi is also often involved in important discussions but his access to Saddam seems much less.

Outlook

10. Iraq has no credible alternative to ostensible co-operation with the UN; it can only continue playing for time in the hope that the international pressure it faces eventually weakens. We judge that Saddam will avoid extreme actions, at least in the short term. But there is still considerable scope for Saddam to miscalculate, react unpredictably and surprise us. His total control means that Iraqi policy could change substantially with little warning. Coalition military preparations in the region around Iraq might also persuade Saddam that he can not prevent an attack. Were this to happen, we judge that he would become far more confrontational.

11. We have no new intelligence on whether Iraq will declare any prohibited materials or activity in response to UNSCR 1441. Iraq can be expected to release a large volume of information which UNMOVIC will need time to sift and evaluate. Iraq might deliberately try to divert UNMOVIC's efforts by releasing new information about industrial activity which, while entirely legitimate, could only be verified by inspections. If Saddam judged it would not precipitate a coalition attack, it is possible that Iraq might declare some 'expendable' elements of its WMD programmes. He might hope, thereby, to demonstrate ostensible co-operation with the UN while opening divisions in the international community. However, this would damage the regime's already limited credibility, given its continuing blanket denials of WMD possession. [...] we judge that Iraqi policy will focus on concealment.

12. There is no evidence yet of real cracks within the regime. But the new UN resolution, with its tough powers for inspectors, significantly raises the pressure on Iraq. The regime will seek to take advantage of

any opportunity to fudge Iraq's obligations or delay the UN process. Senior Iraqis agree that Iraq should maintain a WMD capability. But if UNMOVIC makes demonstrable progress which threatens to overcome Iraq's policy of deception and concealment, and Saddam refuses to give ground, there could be pressure on key insiders to break with Saddam in order to ensure their own survival.