

JIC Assessment, 4 July 2002

IRAQ: REGIME COHESION

Key Judgements

- I. Only massive military force would be guaranteed to topple Saddam. The regime expects a US attack [...]
- II. The clear prospect of a major attack aimed at toppling Saddam would put the regime under unprecedented pressure. But regime cohesion is unlikely to collapse in the absence of a large scale invasion.
- III. Saddam relies on a mix of patronage and extreme fear to retain power and contain opposition. Real loyalty and support for his regime is confined to the top of the hierarchy.
- IV. The Special Republican Guard (SRG) and the Republican Guard Forces Command (RGFC) are more reliable than the Regular Army (RA). All would initially fight a US-led attack. Once the regime was perceived as doomed the military's will to fight on would be sorely tested.
- V. Regime disintegration would be most likely if Iraqi ground forces were being comprehensively defeated; if top military officers could be persuaded that their fate was not irrevocably tied to that of Saddam; or if Saddam himself were to be killed. Military units are more likely to suffer mass desertions than revolt as coherent units.

<p>Implications: Saddam and his regime must be convinced that any move to topple him is serious and likely to succeed before they begin to feel the pressure.</p>
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IRAQ: REGIME COHESION

At the request of the MOD we assess how the cohesion of the Iraqi regime is maintained and how the regime would fare under pressure or attack.

Saddam's regime

1. The Iraqi regime is defined by Saddam Husain. The fate of his closest associates is intimately tied to his survival. Security is the overriding principle determining the regime's structure and actions; all other interests are subordinated, whether ideological, economic or political. Intelligence on the regime is limited. But we know there is a **large and proven security apparatus**. In addition to 300,000 troops in the **Regular Army (RA)** and 75,000 in the **Republican Guard Forces Command (RGFC)**, a lengthy list of security organisations (see Annex) provide several layers of defence against coups, military revolts or civil uprisings.

The ties that bind...

2. Saddam has traditionally relied heavily on **family, tribe and a small coterie of long-time comrades**, some of whose allegiance dates back to before the 1968 revolution. They remain loyal supporters. [...] Many of the security bureaucracy around Saddam are drawn from his own Tikriti tribe.

3. A limited number of Sunni tribes deemed reliable [...] provide most officers for the RGFC. They, and other members of the Sunni elite, are motivated by a mixture of self interest and loyalty to Saddam. Additionally, **Saddam has preserved the political dominance of the Sunni Arab minority** (20% of the population, compared to 60% Shia Arabs and 20% Kurd and other minorities) who thus have a vested interest in the status quo, but no real loyalty to Saddam.

4. The regime relies on a mix of **patronage and extreme fear** to motivate its supporters at all levels and to keep opposition in check. Rewards include social status, money and better access to goods. **Ba'ath Party** membership totals an estimated 700,000 (about 3.5% of the population) and is compulsory for anyone holding an official position. Most important for Saddam, the extensive Party network provides **all-pervasive oversight** of Iraqi society, with representatives in most Iraqi social, government and military organisations. [...] In parallel the regime uses coercion, torture and execution against its enemies, real or suspected. [...]

Potential internal strains

5. Blood ties have been no guarantee of harmony. Saddam is known to have had many of his relatives executed. He has also marginalised his first son, Udai, probably because of his unpredictable and violent temperament. However, we judge that, although **family strains** will occasionally arise, and may cause trouble for Qusai were he to succeed his father, they are **unlikely to trouble Saddam significantly**. He has efficiently operated a policy of 'divide and rule' both within his own family and among the tribes, ensuring others are implicated by having 'blood on their hands'. An external threat is more likely to unify rather than divide his closest circle.

6. Regime policies are probably better at preventing opposition than engendering true loyalty. Political connections and bribery can usually mitigate punishments for minor crimes. But the culture in which arbitrary arrest, torture and death can occur on the slightest suspicion of disloyalty, means only the top few,

if anyone, can ever feel secure. The status and perks of loyalty can be removed as easily as they were given. Even Sunni tribes generally deemed reliable, and the source of many RGFC officers, have not escaped purges. Saddam has sent emissaries to the tribes warning them of harsh consequences if they support any uprising. [...] But the risks associated with opposition mean that there is a strong inherent caution about acting until the regime's fate is certain.

The military and its reliability

7. The Special Security Organisation (SSO) forms the innermost ring around Saddam and his personal bodyguards. The **Special Republican Guard (SRG)**, the only military organisation allowed in Baghdad during peacetime, is also geared to internal security. The **RGFC** is the regime's most capable heavy force. Formed of six divisions (three armoured) in two corps, it is also relatively well equipped and is central both to Iraq's offensive capabilities and to regime defence, with some brigades specifically earmarked for the latter role. The **RA** is larger but, unit-for-unit, less well equipped or trained, and morale is poor. By comparison with the Iraqi ground forces, the threat to internal security from the Air Force is not significant and that from the Navy negligible.

8. The regime takes few chances with military loyalty. Rotations and purges minimise the risk that officers can develop support networks for coups. [...] Though there have been coup attempts originating in the RGFC, with uncorroborated reports of an attempt in early 2000 among the most recent, the security apparatus has successfully detected and countered them. [...]

9. In general, we judge that the SSO, SRG and RGFC are more reliable than the RA. However, the **Sunni officer corps is a powerful unifying factor** and key to Iraqi military cohesion. With a strong institutional identity as the guarantor of Sunni hegemony, the Sunni officer corps is likely to rally round if the regime is threatened. By contrast, most of the RA rank-and-file are Shia whose allegiance is weaker. We judge that **the SRG and RGFC would fight any US-led attack. As a whole, the RA would too**, but with greater variability between units; some would probably become ineffective through desertions relatively quickly. Once the regime was perceived as doomed, the military's determination to fight on would be sorely tested. We judge, however, that **military units would be more likely to suffer mass desertion than revolt against the regime as coherent units**.

Coping in a crisis

10. Saddam and his regime have proved durable. They are veterans of several previous crises. The regime faced its greatest internal challenge after Desert Storm in 1991 but did not fracture. *[Text redacted on grounds of national security. It indicated that Saddam Hussein was believed to be worried and expected an attack.]*

11. The Iraqi military are aware of their vulnerability to air power, probably their greatest weakness; their main way of mitigating this is through dispersal, including into urban areas. *[Text redacted on grounds of national security. It indicated that one of the greatest Iraqi concerns at the time was the possibility of an insurgency.]* We have only fragmentary intelligence indicating how the regime might deal with an all-out attack including ground forces. **But we assess that only massive military force would be guaranteed to topple Saddam.**

12. [...] Under these circumstances, a successful military coup or revolt remains only a remote possibility. If a US-led attack was clearly in prospect, with the explicit aim of toppling Saddam and with sufficient military forces credibly to do so, there would be unprecedented pressures on the regime. We lack detailed knowledge about the significance of particular motivators and alternative loyalties (e.g. to tribe versus State) for regime insiders and thus cannot be certain about when particular key individuals might abandon Saddam. Nonetheless, we judge it unlikely that regime cohesion would collapse in the absence of a large scale action, including a ground invasion of Iraq.

13. Regime disintegration during a US-led attack would be most likely if:

- Iraqi ground forces, and particularly the RGFC, were being comprehensively defeated;
- top military officers could be persuaded that their fate was not irrevocably tied to that of Saddam and that they would have a role in post-Saddam Iraq; or
- Saddam himself were to be killed.

ANNEX

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. It has assassinated oppositionists abroad in the past;
- 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;
- The **Ba'ath Party**, estimated to be 700,000 strong, forms a large pool of Iraqis who benefit from some degree of regime favouritism. The Party's **Militia** is often used as an emergency force in the suppression of localised unrest; and
- The **Mujahideen-e Khalq**, an Iranian opposition group supported by Iraq and used for internal security.