

JIC Assessment, 21 August 2002

IRAQ: SADDAM'S DIPLOMATIC AND MILITARY OPTIONS

Key Judgements

- I. Saddam's aim will be to remain in power. He will use all options to achieve this. He remains innovative and capable of surprising us.
- II. Saddam is likely to pursue continued talks with the UN on the return of weapons inspectors as a means to delay a US attack. He would permit their return if he believed that the threat of large-scale US military action was imminent.
- III. Saddam will try a mix of charm, bribery and threats with his neighbours. Iraq's influence is limited, although Saddam is adept at manipulating popular Arab opinion.
- IV. Much as Saddam would like to seize the initiative before a US attack, his options remain limited. He is likely to be cautious in using force early and will play for time. But the closer and more credible an attack seemed, the more risks he will be willing to take, perhaps including deniable terrorist attacks, most likely in the Gulf region – though we cannot exclude a threat to the UK.
- V. Early on in any conflict, Saddam would order missile attacks on Israel, coalition forces and regional States providing the US with bases.
- VI. Saddam would order the use of CBW against coalition forces at some point, probably after a coalition attack had begun. Once Saddam was convinced that his fate was sealed, he would order the unrestrained use of CBW against coalition forces, supporting regional states and Israel.
- VII. Iraq would probably try to ride out air strikes while conserving its ground forces. Iraq's likely strategy for a ground war would be to make any coalition advance as slow and costly as possible, trying to force the coalition to fight in urban areas.
- VIII. There is significant potential for Saddam to miscalculate, either by escalating a crisis at an early stage, or by making concessions too late in the day to avert an attack.

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At the request of the MOD, we consider what diplomatic options Saddam has to deter, avert or limit the scope and effectiveness of a US-led attack. We also consider his military options for facing a US-led attack. We evaluate how he is likely to weigh the balance of risks and potential benefits of each course of action and how his analysis may change as an attack becomes increasingly imminent. We only briefly consider Saddam's WMD options. The JIC will consider this in more detail on 4 September.

Introduction

1. A US-led military attack with the avowed intention of regime change would be the most serious threat Saddam has faced. **Saddam's choices will therefore depend on his perceptions of the likelihood, credibility and imminence of such a US-led attack.** In general terms, we judge that he would consider increasingly risky options the closer and more credible he perceived an attack that spelled the end of his rule to be. In extremis, we judge he will consider any option. There is, however, significant potential for Saddam to miscalculate, either by escalating a crisis at an early stage, or by making concessions too late in the day to be acceptable. In the past, Saddam has shown an ability to be innovative and spring surprises; we should expect him to demonstrate this again.

2. Saddam's overriding goal will be to remain in power. He will therefore continue to play for time and will seek to:

- avoid giving the US a pretext to attack and **deter** it and/or its potential regional allies by seeking to show that a military campaign would be neither quick nor decisive; or
- **delay** an attack through diplomacy, and limit its scope and effectiveness by persuading or coercing his neighbours not to provide basing to the US and by limiting the US' ability rapidly to defeat Iraq militarily.

Secondary goals will be to preserve and enhance his WMD capability, re-establish the full capabilities of his conventional military forces and encourage the erosion of sanctions. We judge that Saddam would care little about any damage to Iraq which did not threaten his regime's hold on power. His propaganda would portray a US-led attack as part of a wider campaign against the Arab and/or Muslim world, and Iraq's suffering and survival through adversity as a great victory.

Iraq's diplomatic and military options for the short term

3. [...] by mid-July, Saddam had started to believe that a US-led attack was inevitable and would threaten his regime. But at least until significant, visible US military preparations begin, he is likely to hope that events in Israel/Palestine will work in his favour, with Iraq able to exploit popular Arab outrage at Palestinian hardship. He will also hope that his diplomatic options will offer him room for manoeuvre.

4. One key diplomatic option would be to continue to exploit to the full all the options on **weapons inspectors**. An Iraqi public statement that inspectors would be allowed to return unconditionally would attract considerable international approval (including from Russia) and reinforce regional concerns about the military option, even before Iraqi willingness to implement the agreement was put to the test. We judge that until US military action seemed imminent, Iraqi tactics would be limited to incremental improvements in their offer on inspectors that fell short of accepting the 'go anywhere, any time' requirements of the UN

Security Council Resolutions (UNSCRs). If these tactics were successful, Iraq might permit inspectors to return, judging that they had been rendered ineffectual. Supported by further intelligence, we judge that **Saddam would permit inspectors to return without preconditions if he believed an attack were imminent**. But some of his closest advisers believe that the US would attack anyway and that inspectors would be US spies. As we have previously judged¹, even if inspectors were allowed to return, Iraq would embark on a renewed policy of frustration, involving denial, deception, obstruction and delay.

5. Diplomatically, Iraq is likely to pursue every opportunity to split the UN Security Council, and particularly the P5. Its recent announcement of a projected large trade deal with Russia shows it will also continue to try to exert economic leverage². It would probably also try to play on differences within the EU and exploit any sign of divergence in policy between the UK and US. Meanwhile, Saddam would invite politicians and other international figures to visit Baghdad to show Iraq's supposed willingness to resolve its differences with the international community peacefully through discussion.

6. Iraq is likely to continue to use a mix of **charm, bribery and threats** with its neighbours. Saddam could:

- return Kuwait's archives and co-operate on the issue of Kuwaitis missing since the Gulf War;
- offer additional trade deals to the other Gulf States, Turkey and Jordan, to raise the cost to them should war occur and thereby make them more reluctant to support the US;
- resolve the outstanding issues from the Iran/Iraq war, such as the return of prisoners of war; agree the mutual border on Iran's terms, or, less likely, offer to disband or disarm the Iranian MEK terrorist group;
- play on regional fears that an attack would have unacceptable outcomes e.g. threaten Iraq's territorial integrity, lead to Iran's encirclement, or embolden the US to attack other countries;
- threaten the use of WMD against regional states.

However, we continue to judge that Iraq's ability to influence neighbouring governments is strictly limited. Where positive diplomacy fails, Saddam could make increasingly direct threats to states likely to provide the US with bases. [...] He could also order a temporary cessation of illegal oil exports to Turkey or Jordan to remind them of the economic cost of incurring Baghdad's displeasure.

7. Saddam is likely to try to do all he can to exploit the **Israel/Palestinian** crisis. Practical Iraqi support to the Palestinian rejectionist groups is limited. The most effective groups are closer to Iran, leaving little scope for Iraq to improve its position. But Iraq could discomfort its Arab neighbours by pointing out divisions among the Arab countries on Palestine and between their governments and popular opinion. Saddam is adept at manipulating popular Arab opinion. Iraqi **propaganda** would try to reinforce already strong popular Arab perceptions that equate the suffering of the Iraqi people under sanctions to that of the Palestinians, and that see the UK/US as anti-Arab and pro-Israeli.

8. Iraq has made military preparations in anticipation of a US attack, such as repositioning ammunition stores and building some defensive positions, but it probably expects sufficient warning to take additional

¹ [...] 27/2/02 IRAQ: SADDAM UNDER THE SPOTLIGHT

² Trade as a tool of Iraqi policy will be covered by a CIG paper to be presented to the JIC on 4 September.

measures against a threat of a large ground invasion. Most Iraqi preparations to date involve additional internal security measures and precautionary preparations to disperse and protect personnel and military equipment from air strikes. So far we have not detected unusual training or military deployments which would signify preparations for a ground war. Iraq will continue trying to obtain military spares and upgrades from abroad, but sanctions would probably prevent it from obtaining significant complete new systems.

Could Saddam seize the initiative?

9. Saddam might see some benefit in engineering a 'mini crisis' before coalition forces were fully prepared for a major campaign, to provoke an early and less decisive attack which would leave the regime in power but damage regional support for further military action. A concerted attempt to bring down an Allied aircraft in one of the No Fly Zones is a possibility. He is likely to remain cautious, however, as he could not guarantee a limited US response.

10. We judge it unlikely that Saddam would escalate and order a **pre-emptive attack on either the Kurds or Kuwait**, [...]. Either option would cross explicit US 'red-lines' and provide a justification for military action. More likely would be an effort to destabilise the two main Kurdish parties (the PUK and KDP) through propaganda, threats, covert support to Islamic Kurdish groups, and possibly terrorism, to complicate coalition planning.

Once a US build-up is clearly under way

11. We judge that Iraq's military reaction to the build-up would be restrained. Pre-emption against coalition forces would remain an unlikely choice as it would bring forward a decisive US attack. Iraq's diplomatic and political activity would be likely to intensify. Iraq would probably threaten States co-operating with the US while propaganda would promote Iraq's position in the Arab world. Saddam might consider, however, using Westerners, including weapons inspectors, if they were present, as **human shields** against attack.

12. Iraqi military preparations would accelerate. Possible options include:

- a large programme to construct **fixed defences**, including trenches, minefields, earth works and water barriers (through extensive flooding);
- larger scale military **training**, particularly within key units such as the Republican Guard;
- the **mobilisation** of hundreds of thousands of reservists, as in previous wars. But this might not significantly improve Iraq's war fighting potential, and [...] there is some concern that newly distributed weapons would be turned on the regime.

13. The regime could embark upon further **internal repression** of its enemies, real or suspected. [...] Any uprising, before or during a coalition attack, would be dealt with ruthlessly.

14. Saddam would probably also order preparations for a campaign of **terrorism and sabotage** in the region. There is conflicting intelligence on current Iraqi activity. [...] However, we know that Iraqi Special Forces and other organisations, such as the 'Saddam Fedayin', also possess the capability to conduct sabotage or terrorist attacks. Iraq could also encourage Palestinian groups to conduct attacks. However, they could be reluctant to carry out attacks which did not further their own objectives.

15. Saddam would have to balance his desire to disrupt any US military build-up against the risk of provoking the US further and undermining his diplomatic position. We judge that any such Iraqi plans would probably only be implemented during wartime, unless they were conducted deniably by non-Iraqis. The threat would probably be greatest in the Gulf States. Attacks directed against coalition forces or their bases in regional States would be most likely as they could be portrayed as military attacks on military targets. But it is possible that Iraqi terrorist attacks could be conducted against other Western interests or the leadership and economic (e.g. oil industry) targets of regional States. We do not know enough about Iraqi capabilities to discount the threat outside the region, including within the UK, though previously Iraqi attempts to mount terrorist attacks, or engage proxies to do so on their behalf, have been largely ineffective.

Saddam's options in war time

16. Saddam would have few conventional military options to counter a major US-led attack. The Iraqi military is inferior in equipment and training to modern Western forces and it is only about a half the strength available at the start of the Gulf war. Once war began, the Iraqi goal would be to ride out air strikes and make any ground fighting as slow and costly (in terms of casualties) as possible. Iraq would certainly try to manipulate the media to show civilian casualties and other collateral damage from coalition action.

17. Iraqi forces would most likely be relatively passive during any initial period of **air strikes**. The Iraqi air force would be unable to present a serious threat to coalition air superiority, and it might not engage at all. It would be unable to perform more than isolated attack missions and then only with a low probability of success. Iraq's air defences include numerous guns and missile systems, but would not be able to stop coalition air operations. [...] Iraq's naval options would also be limited to mining and a few land based anti-ship cruise missiles, both of which could present a threat in the northern Gulf.

18. We have little insight into how the Iraqi military might plan to fight any **ground war**. We judge that Saddam would be likely to retain the Republican Guard, as well as his core security forces (the Special Republican Guard and Special Security Organisation), close to Baghdad. At present we have little evidence to judge whether Iraq sees urban or guerrilla warfare as feasible options. Iraqi effectiveness would be mitigated by problems of command and control, inadequate training and poor morale. We doubt that guerrilla activity would be very effective; urban warfare is more plausible. Regular Army (RA) units would probably be assigned the defence of key cities elsewhere, but others would remain 'in the field'. Most RA units would be limited to static defence due to shortages of vehicles. Poor morale in at least the RA would make desertions likely to occur rapidly once war began.

Missiles and WMD

19. We judge that Saddam would probably order **missile attacks** on Israel and the coalition early on in a conflict in an attempt to attract Israeli retaliation and thus widen the war, split the coalition and arouse popular opinion in the Arab States. Such missiles could be armed with chemical or biological warfare (CBW) agents. Saddam might be deterred, at least initially, by the threat of Israeli nuclear retaliation. Other factors would be the limited number of long range missiles Iraq would have available (we assess he has retained 12-20 650km range Al Hussein missiles) and the need, in the case of attacking coalition forces in Kuwait, to deploy short range missiles (we assessed in March that at least 50 150km range al-Samoud missiles had been produced; more will have been produced since then) into the 'no drive zone'. Although a pre-emptive missile attack on Israel would offer many of the same advantages, we judge this would be less likely

because it would show Iraq had been lying about its retention of long range missiles prohibited by the UN, providing a justification for US action.

20. Although we have little intelligence on Iraq's **CBW** doctrine, and know little about Iraq's CBW work since late 1998, we judge it likely that Saddam would order the use of CBW against coalition forces at some point, probably after coalition attacks had begun. Iraqi CBW use would become increasingly likely the closer coalition forces came to Baghdad. Military targets might include troop concentrations or important fixed targets in rear areas such as ports and airfields.

Alternative scenarios and at the death

21. It is also possible that Saddam might pursue an extreme course of action at an earlier stage than we have envisaged. He might judge that such options would provide sufficient advantages, through disrupting US plans, causing US casualties or inflicting psychological damage, to be worth the risk of providing the US with overt justification to attack. In particular, unorthodox options might include:

- the early or pre-emptive use of **CBW**. Because of the time lag between infection and incapacitation, there is some incentive to use biological weapons early. Coalition forces would also be most geographically concentrated directly before or at the onset of a military campaign. He might also consider
- **CBW terrorism**: although Saddam probably lacks the capability to deploy a sophisticated device, he could cause widespread panic;
- a '**scorched earth**' policy as regime units withdrew from the south and north, with the aim of creating a **humanitarian or environmental catastrophe** for the coalition to handle. Preparations could be made in advance to destroy Iraq's oil wells and critical civilian infrastructure such as the water supply. However, such an order might not be obeyed and would unite local Iraqi and international opinion against the regime. Increased Saudi oil production would be able to compensate for a sudden cut in Iraqi oil production and exports, although it might take several weeks to do so.

22. Should he feel his fate is sealed, Saddam's judgement might change to 'bring the temple down' on his enemies no matter what the cost to the country as a whole. We judge that at this stage, Saddam would order the unrestrained use of CBW against coalition forces, supporting regional states and Israel, although he would face practical problems of command and control, the loyalty of his commanders, logistics problems and the availability of chemical or biological agents in sufficient quantities to be effective and the means to deliver them.