

JIC Assessment, 19 April 2002**IRAQ: REGIONAL ATTITUDES****Key Judgements**

- I. The current Israeli/Palestinian crisis makes **Arab support for an attack on Iraq politically impossible at present**. There is no sign that strong anti-US sentiment will dissipate quickly, even if there is progress towards an equitable resolution to the Palestinian issue.
- II. Iraq exerts considerable economic leverage over Jordan and Syria. Iraqi propaganda successfully plays up Iraq's suffering under sanctions. And Iraq uses its support for the Palestinians to gain popularity on the Arab street.
- III. **But Iraq has no real allies**. Iran, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia remain concerned by Iraq's conventional military capabilities. Iran is also concerned by its development of WMD.
- IV. **Turkey** would probably be willing to provide basing for a US-led attack on Iraq. In the longer term, with real progress in Palestine, [...] could also be willing to provide basing or staging facilities. **Saudi Arabia** is very unlikely to provide basing for an attack, though it might permit overflights. A strong case for action would need to be made. US determination and willingness to deploy overwhelming force could help bolster regional support. However, all would strongly prefer covert operations to topple Saddam rather than a full-scale attack.
- V. Regional states would prefer UN inspections to a US-led attack on Iraq. Such an attack would provoke large-scale protests across the Arab world. Jordan would be particularly exposed to internal instability, but the Gulf States would also be nervous. None of Iraq's neighbours would regret Saddam's overthrow and none would provide practical, including military, support for Iraq against a US-led attack.
- VI. There is consensus among Iraq's neighbours that its territorial integrity must be preserved, but there are great mutual suspicions and differences over the place of the Kurds and the Shia in any new Iraqi regime, the regime's nature and its relationship with the West.

IRAQ: REGIONAL ATTITUDES

At the request of the JIC, we assess Iraq's relations with its neighbours – the Gulf States, Iran, Turkey, Syria and Jordan. We consider what influence Iraq has over them and how it is trying to improve its position; where Iraq's neighbours' concerns and interests lie; and we evaluate the regional reactions so far to the prospects of a US-led attack on Iraq.

The effect of the Israel/Palestine crisis

1. Arab attitudes towards Iraq, and particularly towards any prospective US-led attack, are inextricably linked to bilateral relations with the US, events on the ground in the Occupied Territories and perceived Western “double standards” in favour of Israel. Strong anti-US sentiment has been expressed recently on the streets and in the media across the region. Iraq-related concerns have dropped significantly down the Arab agenda. We judge that, **in the present circumstances, even the most pro-Western Gulf States, [...], would find it politically impossible to support a US-led attack on Iraq.** We judge it **unlikely that the current strong anti-US sentiment will dissipate quickly.** Only significant progress towards what the Arab world would see as an equitable resolution of the Palestinian issue would mitigate this. Even if this is achieved, recent events in the West Bank will make it harder in the medium-term to win regional support for military action against Iraq.

Longer term regional concerns

2. Though overshadowed by current events, however, longer-term concerns will influence the future calculations of Iraq's neighbours. Iraq's regional relations have been burdened by the legacy of two wars, first with Iran (1980-1988) and then over its 1990 invasion of Kuwait, which left it facing an unprecedented coalition including all its neighbours except Iran and Jordan. Iran, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia remain concerned about Iraq's **conventional military capabilities** and its willingness to use **terrorism** as a policy tool. Iraq's hosting of and support for the dissident Mujahedin-e Khalq (MEK) has been a fundamental barrier to improved bilateral relations with Iran. And Iran in particular shares Western concerns about Iraq's continued development of **weapons of mass destruction (WMD)**. For its part, Iraq has until recently strongly criticised Kuwait and Saudi Arabia for hosting UK/US forces enforcing the No Fly Zones.

3. However, Iraq is rarely perceived as the greatest security threat within the region. Except for Kuwait, the Gulf States see Iran as the greater long-term threat and want an Iran-Iraq balance; Syria is focused on Israel; and Iran worries about US activity in the region and Israel.

Iraq's influence

4. Iraq has been able to exert influence in three ways:

- **economic leverage from sanctions evasion.** The Iraqi regime has made considerable efforts to circumvent sanctions in order to maximise revenue outside UN control. It has offered neighbouring

states subsidised oil deals outside the UN oil-for-food programme. **Jordan** is economically dependent on the oil it receives from Iraq; [...];

- **playing up Iraq's suffering under sanctions.** Iraqi propaganda has been very effective in the Arab world at all levels; though regional governments have not permitted a complete collapse of the sanctions regime, genuine concern about the effect of sanctions is one reason for official toleration of some sanctions-breaking;
- **playing up Iraq's support for the Palestinians.** Saddam has taken the opportunity of the Middle East crisis to boost his popularity [...] and by announcing a 30 day cessation of (legal) oil exports to punish the West for its support for Israel. Though the immediate benefits to Iraq of this policy are intangible, and Iraqi posturing on oil exports probably irritates some of its neighbours, this adds to the popular pressure on the pro-Western governments of the region.

Recent Iraqi diplomatic efforts...[sic]

5. The conjunction of the threat of US military action and the pressure in the UN to permit the return of weapons inspectors has led Iraq to pursue a revitalised foreign policy. In addition to trying to give the impression of flexibility by engaging in talks with the UN Secretary General over inspectors, Iraq has made several attempts to win over its neighbours. [...] At the Arab League Summit on 27 March Iraq declared that it recognised Kuwait's sovereignty and independence – its most forthright attempt at reconciliation since 1990. In return, Iraq achieved an Arab League resolution that its members would not support an outside attack on any other member. In a public gesture of solidarity, Saudi Crown Prince Abdullah (CPA) embraced the Iraqi representative and there are hints [...] bilateral contacts. A marked decline in the number of militant attacks on Iran suggests that Iraq has at least temporarily restrained the MEK.

But no steadfast allies

6. But despite its economic leverage and recent diplomatic efforts, Iraq remains bereft of real regional allies. **Iraq's neighbours remain suspicious of its intentions and are focused on economic gain.** [...] There has been little real improvement in bilateral relations.

7. Given Saddam's responsibility for Iraq's turbulent history, most regional leaders have reason to distrust him personally. Kuwait and Iran in particular will be wary of taking Saddam's advances at face value. Iraq has not made clear whether it will co-operate with Kuwait over its other concerns – missing Kuwaitis and property stolen during the Gulf War. Even progress on these issues may not be sufficient to overcome Kuwaiti distrust of Saddam. And given the well-known personal animosity between Saddam and Saudi Crown Prince Abdullah, we judge that any Iraq-Saudi rapprochement is likely to lack substance. While Saudi Arabia wants to minimise disagreements with a powerful neighbour, the two countries have few genuine common interests.

8. There is conflicting reporting on whether Saddam believes he can influence his neighbours against supporting a US attack. We judge that Iraq's neighbours will manage their relations with Iraq on the basis of a tactical analysis of their self-interest. The lack of trust and common objectives means that none of Iraq's neighbours will make significant sacrifices on Iraq's behalf, either politically – with the US or on Iraq's behalf in the UN – or economically.

Longer term attitudes to a US-led attack on Iraq

9. In the longer term, and given real progress on Israel/Palestine, it might be possible to rebuild support for action against Iraq. [...]

10. The Gulf States may be influenced by **Saudi Arabia**, which has said it opposes an attack. Saudi Arabia is very unlikely to provide basing for military operations. But it may, in time, be willing to permit overflights [...], **US resolve and readiness to deploy the necessary force** for a quick and decisive victory is proven, and the case for action clearly stated. **Turkey**, as a NATO ally, would probably provide basing if asked, despite its reservations, [...] However, Iraq's neighbours would all strongly prefer covert attempts to topple Saddam.

11. None of Iraq's neighbours would regret Saddam's overthrow. But the indirect economic costs of a US-led attack on Iraq would weigh heavily on Turkey, Syria and Jordan. **Iran and Syria would most likely be publicly critical**, though Iran's reaction would be tempered if the MEK was destroyed or displaced in the process. **Jordan** has voiced its opposition, but would try to stay on the sidelines. We judge that **none of Iraq's neighbours would offer Iraq practical, including military, support against a US attack**.

12. Until US plans are closer to completion and military preparations begin, regional attitudes to an attack will remain tentative. But a number of themes are already discernible:

- governments in the region would want any military campaign to be short and decisive;
- there is consensus that **the territorial integrity of Iraq** must be maintained; but
- **mutual suspicions among Iraq's neighbours** mean that regional co-operation is likely to be minimal. In the north, Turkey and Iran are suspicious of each other's intentions towards the Kurds; in the south, the Gulf Arabs are nervous of Iranian support for the Shia opposition group SCIRI. Such suspicions feed concern over
- **the place of the Iraqi Shia and Kurds in any new regime**. Iran wants a greater role for the Iraqi Shia in a new regime, but any pro-Iran Shia regime, though unlikely, would be anathema to the Gulf Arabs. Iran and Turkey are keen not to set a precedent for their own Kurdish regions, [...] A **power vacuum** could cause particular problems and might tempt Iran and/or Turkey to intervene;
- **The nature of any post-Saddam regime and its relationship with the West**. The Gulf

Monarchies may be willing to support a representational government, but would equate democracy with Shia rule. Iran and Syria would be distrustful of any attempt to install a pro-Western government. Concerned about US regional hegemony, Iran's sense of encirclement would be heightened by the presence of US forces, particularly if they remained in Iraq for an extended period.

Making the case

13. **For governments expected to support a US-led attack, the justification and evidence will be crucial in managing their public presentation.** Given that we judge Iraq had no responsibility for, or foreknowledge of, the 11 September terrorist attacks, Iraq's neighbours are likely to demand stronger proof of Iraq's development of WMD (even though many of them are ambivalent on the issue); using Saddam's brutal and repressive regime alone in justification would not attract much support. A UN Security Council Resolution authorising force would reduce regional governments' objections to an attack. **Partly because their populations will not be persuaded by any likely justification for a military operation, Iraq's neighbours, except for perhaps Kuwait, would prefer UN inspections to a US-led attack.** [...] Equally, it is possible that by offering to allow inspectors back into Iraq (even if he then obstructed them) and making some new but limited concessions to the disarmament process, Saddam could strengthen his regional political position, at least in the short term.