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IRAQ: JIC ASSESSMENT AND PERSONAL OBSERVATIONS

1. On 29 January the JIC discussed recent developments on Iraq in a review of key judgements made since last July. The result has emerged as the attached paper "Iraq: The Emerging View from Baghdad" (Flag A).
2. The JIC looked especially closely at its conclusions on Saddam's continuing control inside the country and the readiness of Iraqis to resist or accept outside military intervention to overthrow him. The resulting paragraphs (8, 10, 11) reflect a lot of discussion, but we were all happy with them.
3. In submitting the Assessment for the Prime Minister immediately before his visit to the United States, I would add some personal observations on the overall intelligence picture, which I have been studying now for nearly a year.

WMD and Inspections

4. Our intelligence reporting has been consistent and convincing. I have not seen a single reference to Saddam even considering the renunciation of WMD to save his regime (and probably his own life).

Over the past year, as the crisis has developed, the Iraqi leader has followed essentially the same strategy and tactics as during the 1990s: play for time; concede ground when you absolutely have to but not before; conceal; deny; deceive. He probably has considered making a "partial" declaration of WMD holdings, but even that has proved too difficult, at least so far. (It would be an obvious tactic to deploy at the very last minute as the UNSC builds up for the second Resolution.) A genuinely full and open renunciation is simply too dangerous. It would remove the one weapon of last resort with which Saddam can threaten his population and neighbours and send a signal of weakness to both with possibly unmanageable consequences (for him). Given the decision not to come clean, a "partial" admission (for example in the 9 December Declaration) would have been a big risk. The chance of opening up lines of investigation to what was still being concealed would have been too great. Better to submit a flat denial leaving no loose ends. From Saddam's point of view, that was probably the right decision. It has certainly made it difficult to find concrete proof of his WMD and leaves him the continuing options of concealment and delay.

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5. Until now, Saddam and his closest advisers have seemed confident that concealment would work. Oddly, they have not appeared worried by the obvious risk of leaks from the thousands of people aware of this concealment activity. They have relied on the brutal discipline of the regime and so far it has worked. Even now we cannot be confident of finding really significant evidence of retained WMD. The one clear weak point in the policy, as they have recognised, has been interviews especially interviews outside Iraq. The regime has no choice but to continue to resist these. They may be able to give a bit of ground on "private" interviews inside Iraq although they will hesitate about meetings in UNMOVIC's Baghdad HQ, where there is some sort of secure speech facility. Everywhere else, and even in the HQ, they can probably feel confident that the overall level of extreme intimidation will deter interviewees. This is the nature of this kind of totalitarian regime. "You never know who is listening", however safe it might appear. Any why put your life and that of your family in the hands of an inspector who may not even come from a serious or (in your eyes) trustworthy country?

6. In practice, it is proving more difficult to deal with the new inspection regime than Saddam and his close advisers probably expected. Events are moving faster than anticipated. And Blix is now pursuing the line that "passive cooperation" is coming close to non-cooperation. In other words, it is no longer enough to drag the inspection even to the WMD hardware. This must be difficult to handle because Blix is pushing Saddam close to red lines he cannot afford (outside interviews) or is simply not able (proof of destruction of VX, chemical munitions, etc) to cross. But, if you are Saddam, you do not give up hope. The key tactic remains delay in the hope or expectation that something will turn up: a major political or terrorist distraction for Bush; delaying manoeuvres by erstwhile allies in the Security Council; powerful public opinion swings in the key Western countries, the UK or even the US.

Saddam's Hold on Power: Before Invasion

7. Just as Saddam plays hard ball with UNMOVIC/IAEA and the international community, so he does with his own people and supporters. Saddam has never pretended to hold power by anything other than extreme ruthlessness. He does not expect people to love him or be loyal in the unselfish sense of the term.

The key factor is not loyalty but fear. No cracks must show, even to your closest advisers and indeed we have no evidence of any wavering on Saddam's part. If he is considering exile he will

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not give even a hint of it until he is off. But he is almost certainly not considering it. Life in another country would offer no protection since by definition he would not control the levers of power, and fear. It is probably a good tactic for the US/UK to encourage Arab-led moves to persuade him to depart. But we should not persuade ourselves that he will actually do so.

8. Since last July the JIC has judged, through several discussions, that the only guaranteed way of removing Saddam is through a large-scale ground invasion. That remains the case and, as we get closer to the deadline, it is increasingly likely that the regime will hold until the invasion actually occurs. I am very comfortable with this assessment. A pre-invasion implosion (eg assassination or successful coup) cannot be excluded. But it is hard to see how an assassin would get close enough to kill Saddam or a coup plotter could organise the necessary military formations without being discovered and eliminated. Nor is a wider break down of order or discipline in view. Indeed, I continue to be struck by the regime's ability to conduct complex deception and surveillance operations without unforced errors or major slip ups. Coordinating the dispersal of materials and associated documentation around the country and fielding surprise UNMOVIC and IAEA visits to hundreds of sites in a few weeks is a complex undertaking and evidence of the regime's continuing grip on the population at least of central Iraq. That is not to say that even Saddam's closest advisers are not thinking about how to avoid the coming storm. But we should not see that as indicating a collapse before an invasion starts.

Saddam's Options After an Invasion

9. But what does Saddam expect to happen then? He knows the weakness of his Regular Army and does not expect them to resist effectively. He may genuinely have better hopes for the Republican Guard and place some reliance on their ability to delay the occupation of Baghdad and other cities. In his mind, he may not need such delay to last for long. Given the perceived inability of his enemies to take significant casualties or setbacks. Para 15 of the attached paper describes some of the moves he might make to give us pause even after a military operation begins. We must take these seriously. I would especially pick out:

- Attempted use of CBW and missiles against deployed forces (in Kuwait) immediately before an attack or (in Kuwait and Southern Iraq) in the early stages of the attack itself. Very difficult to pull off but even a small number of short range artillery rockets getting through would have a disproportionate effect on world (and US/UK domestic) opinion. It is not unreasonable for Saddam to think it would give us second thoughts.

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- CBW armed al-Hussein attack on Israel. Again very difficult to achieve, but the benefits of success are obvious.
- A move against the Kurds either immediately before or after a Coalition invasion. If immediately after, this and the humanitarian consequences it would cause would be seen as having been provoked by the US and the UK.

10. The other options listed are more in the nature of "spoilers" or revenge tactics which would be unlikely to achieve (in his mind) strategic effect. But Saddam is ruthless and, if necessary, will try anything. So, at the right moment he will look to take hostages. The speed of events between now and the likely start of hostilities, the large number of third country nationals in Iraq and the difficulty of advising them to leave well in advance may give him a significant number to play with. And he will almost certainly try to sabotage the oil fields in Southern Iraq

Saddam's Hold on Power After the Invasion

11. The JIC has judged, over many months, that once the invasion starts Saddam's regime is likely to prove brittle and fold quickly. It is, therefore, correct to prepare a military strategy designed to make this "quickly" very quick indeed. The attached paper predicts a widespread acceptance, at least at the beginning, of the arrival of US/UK forces and no serious ability to defend Baghdad. I think, and have always thought, this is right. Indeed initially we might be openly welcomed especially if there have been few civilian casualties. But circumstances require us to look very carefully for areas where matters might go wrong or not exactly according to plan. This should be a major focus for the next period. Questions in my mind, apart from those in paras 9 and 10 above, remain:

- Tough resistance from individual military units capable at least in the available time of inflicting significant casualties on the attacking force.
- Uprisings against regime forces or general blood letting especially in Southern cities such as Basra. This is our proposed Area of Operations (AOR). If you have an AOR, you cannot disclaim responsibility for what happens within it.

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- The end game in Baghdad especially the fate of Saddam himself. The US do not want to fight inside the city. It is very important they cause as few casualties as possible. They will probably hesitate to occupy it in large numbers. But if they do not, how do we ensure that Saddam's power in his own capital is truly broken thereby depriving him of the options referred to in para 9 above?

Conclusion

12. However confident we are in our assessment of rapid Iraqi collapse after military action begins, it is not irrational of Saddam to believe he still has a chance, even then. In recent months he may have been underestimating US/UK resolve and over estimating his diplomatic room for manoeuvre. But given his fundamental objectives, as set out here, he has not had many choices. He knows he is up against it but I have seen nothing yet to indicate that he sees himself and his regime as finally doomed.

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