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cc JIC Members

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IRAQ: THE FIRST WEEK

1. At its meeting on 26 March 2003, the JIC discussed the following questions:

- does the regime (in whatever form it now exists) genuinely believe it has a chance of surviving the coalition attack and negotiating a settlement?
- do we continue to judge that "most [Iraqis] will at least acquiesce in coalition military activity to topple the regime, as long as civilian casualties are limited? A hard-fought, professional defence of Baghdad is unlikely, although elite military and security elements closely identified with the regime may fight until their positions become untenable" (of 29 January).

2. In discussion, the Committee noted that:

- it is difficult to judge the mood of the Iraqi leadership.

Officials
cannot show their hand while the regime's grip remains strong and they continue to fear retribution;

- Saddam, and perhaps those closest to him, have always believed they can survive. But indications of fracturing seen in the first hours after the coalition attack, such as senior figures planning their escape, have not continued;
- regime tactics were always geared towards urban resistance as well as large-scale conventional warfare. The regime has taken heart from its ability, so far, to maintain command, control and communications, the lack of a northern front, and the propaganda advantages it derives from domestic (controlled) and international media coverage of the war;
- the regime has not yet been faced with visible coalition successes which would shake the foundations of its self-belief. The "shock" of coalition operations on the Iraqis has been limited. Coalition forces have deliberately bypassed population centres, leaving the regime in control of urban areas. The regime's command, control and communications have

1
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been more resilient than either it or the coalition expected. The prospects for an early regime collapse have therefore lessened;

- the Iraqi population is reacting cautiously in the face of the regime's continued security presence and its propaganda. The population fears that the coalition will not follow through on its initial operation and remove Saddam, leaving it open to regime retribution for popular uprisings. The memory of 1991 is strong. Coalition information operations have also encouraged people to stay in their homes; and that
- the defence of Baghdad may be more determined and professional than previously thought. Additionally, a small number of determined fanatics may present significant resistance in the city itself.

3. The Committee also noted that circumstances are affected at least as much by the timing and nature of coalition operations (including information operations) as by Iraqi activity. A key question was when the perception would begin to change that the regime was in control. This could follow major success against a key support structure such as the Republican Guard or breaking the regime's hold over a major city, such as Basra. The Committee commented that the regime might have underestimated the coalition's resolve to see the matter through to conclusion.



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26 March 2003