

**JIC Assessment, 29 January 2003**

**IRAQ: THE EMERGING VIEW FROM BAGHDAD**

*This paper was discussed and approved by the JIC at their meeting on Wednesday 29 January 2003.*

**Key Judgements**

- I. Retaining WMD remains a vital Iraqi interest. Saddam might nevertheless consider a last-minute tactical declaration of some of his WMD to avert a war, believing that he can rebuild his WMD capability later.
- II. Saddam does not appear to realise the severity of the military attack he faces. Senior Iraqi officials, although increasingly convinced of the inevitability of a US-led attack, are unlikely to be telling Saddam about their concerns.
- III. Saddam has not lost control or the capacity for rational tactical decisions. He continues to maintain regime cohesion, primarily through intimidation. He is unlikely to agree to relinquish power or to go into exile. He still believes he has a chance of averting military action or, once military action begins, forcing the coalition to cease hostilities before his regime collapses.
- IV. Once military action has begun, widespread lack of loyalty to the regime will become clear. Iraqis may not welcome coalition military forces, but most 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.
- V. Saddam probably believes he has some strong political and military cards to play, even in the face of an inevitable attack. These include exploiting international divisions over war with Iraq and rousing the Arab street. He may use human shields, fire CBW against coalition forces, launch a pre-emptive attack on the Kurds, coalition forces building up in Kuwait or Israel or sabotage Iraqi oil wells and water supply.

<p><b>Implications:</b> Given the high level of uncertainty over Saddam's response once he recognises his survival is at stake, we will need to plan for a wide range of humanitarian crises, including a possible humanitarian role for coalition forces.</p>
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## IRAQ: THE EMERGING VIEW FROM BAGHDAD

*This paper was commissioned by FCO to look at current developments in Iraq from the point of view of the Iraqi regime, particularly Saddam Hussein. It looks at possible Iraqi moves in coming weeks and updates previous JIC papers on Iraq.*

### Inspections

1. We judged in October [JIC Assessment of 11 October] that Saddam was confident he could prevent UNMOVIC from finding any evidence before military options start to close off in Spring 2003 and that concealment and dispersal of sensitive items were the basis of Iraq's strategy. [...] But by mid-January there were signs that Iraq was coming under pressure from UNMOVIC finds that were inconsistent with its December 2002 declaration. [...]
2. [...] Intelligence is unclear, but it is possible that UNMOVIC discoveries have increased Iraqi uncertainty. Blix's tough statement to the Security Council on 27 January surprised Baghdad and may have increased the regime's concerns about UNMOVIC. Saddam Hussein continues to believe that the possession of WMD is a vital Iraqi interest. [...] Any WMD admission would therefore be tactical rather than indicative of a genuine change of policy.

### Reading the Outside World

3. [...] **Iraqi officials are increasingly convinced of the inevitability of a US-led military attack.** [...] Saddam continues to give the impression that military action, though increasingly likely, is not imminent. His speeches in early January have been bellicose, calling for bravery and sacrifice in defending the homeland from invaders. [...]
4. It is not clear that Saddam and his officials have fully grasped the severity of the military attack they face from the US-led coalition assembling in the Gulf. [...] Reporting has also indicated that the Iraqis believe the West is squeamish about casualties.
5. **Saddam is misreading the international scene.** Media reporting of debate in the West may well lead him to overestimate the impact of opposition to military action on US determination to deal decisively with him. He may well also be unsure whether the aim of the coalition is regime change and disarmament or just disarmament. In mid-January Iraq continued to seek support from Russia and China as well as from other Arab and Muslim states. But such attempts to gather Arab and international support appear overambitious. [...]

### Iraq and Terrorism

6. We continue to judge that Iraq's capability to conduct effective terrorist attacks is limited, especially outside the Gulf region. We have previously judged that terrorism could be attempted against coalition forces during a military build-up if Saddam believed an attack was inevitable. There has been no indication that Iraq was behind the recent attack on US contractors working for the US military in Kuwait. It highlights, however, the vulnerability of the large numbers of coalition forces concentrated in an area as small as Kuwait.

7. Iraq may well seek to use its influence over some smaller militant Palestinian groups to encourage them to strike at US and coalition interests in the Middle East in the event of a coalition attack. There are also uncorroborated reports of Iraq assembling teams in various countries to attack UK and US interests in the event of war against Iraq. Despite the presence of terrorists in Iraq with links to Al Qaida, however, we have no intelligence of current cooperation between Iraq and Al Qaida.

#### **Iraqi Military Preparations**

8. [...] continuing Iraqi military defensive preparations including deployments and reinforcement of military units in the South, West and along the border of the Kurdish autonomous zone (KAZ). These appear to be directed against both the threat of internal uprising and external attack. Since early January part of the Iraqi 4<sup>th</sup> Corps has moved southwards, including possibly 1,000 troops on the Faw peninsula, apparently in response to the coalition build-up in Kuwait. [...]

9. But Iraq's options for redeployment are limited. Any significant redeployment in the South would risk triggering a coalition attack by breaching the Southern No Drive [sic] Zone. The regime does not trust the Republican Guard enough to deploy them in Baghdad, except possibly as a last resort, leaving them exposed beyond the capital's boundaries. **We judge that Iraqi military preparations so far in and around Baghdad are of limited utility. A hard-fought, professional defence of Baghdad appears unlikely, although some elite military and security units closely identified with the regime may fight until their positions become untenable.**

10. **There has been no clear indication of any plan for a pre-emptive military strike against the Kurds, neighbouring countries or Israel.** [...] Saddam would have little incentive to launch such a strike while the Iraqi strategy focuses on convincing UNMOVIC that Iraq does not have WMD holdings **but it may become an attractive option in the face of imminent coalition military action.** We are unlikely to receive any advance warning of a pre-emptive attack on the Kurds. We judge that a pre-emptive limited artillery strike on Kuwait using CBW could be launched in as little as two hours. Preparations for a possible attack on Israel are likely to be more extensive and to stretch Iraqi capabilities to the limit, increasing chances of detection. [...] indicate plans to sabotage oil fields to prevent them falling into coalition hands.

#### **Maintaining control at home**

11. [...] **the regime is continuing to maintain regime cohesion primarily through intimidation.** It has attempted to maintain its hold by claiming that the return of inspectors has averted a US attack, that the international community is intent on disarming Iraq, not on regime change and that the regime is maintaining "business as usual": anybody thinking of deserting will face serious consequences. [...] we may not see clear signs of dissent or defection until the regime is about to fall. [...] Saddam has sought to mitigate the regime's unpopularity by promising some measures of liberalisation. Such measures have little credibility, however, as the regime has made them when under pressure in the past, then withdrawn them once the crisis has passed.

12. There is little intelligence on Iraqi popular attitudes towards a coalition attack. We judge that most Iraqis will welcome the departure of Saddam. A few reports suggest that some Iraqis may fight to defend their homeland from what they see as external aggression. [...] Overall, we judge that **while Iraqis may not welcome coalition military forces, they will at least acquiesce in coalition military action to topple the regime, as long as civilian casualties are limited.**

[...] morale in much of the regular army is low and that many soldiers are reluctant to fight. But as long as Iraqi security officers remain with military units and able to enforce discipline, fear of execution is likely to keep regular units at their posts.

### **Saddam's Mindset**

13. [...] But we judge **Saddam is still in control and that he is unlikely to relinquish power voluntarily**; he will fear the humiliation of exile, possible assassination and the threat of trial before an international war crimes tribunal. [...] suggesting to Saddam that he step down to avert a war would be likely to provoke murderous rage. [...] Nor do prospects look good for the Turkish initiative to promote a regional peace plan. Although there has been no indication that Saddam is preparing to flee, there have been uncorroborated reports of plans for Saddam's family to seek refuge abroad in the event of a coalition attack.

14. Saddam is under increasing pressure as the inspections regime intensifies, UNMOVIC makes significant discoveries and the coalition military build-up continues. We judge that Saddam underestimated UNMOVIC's capability to expose his deception. He failed to realise that he was facing a situation different from the days of UNSCOM. UNMOVIC's limited success highlights the risks Saddam took in providing a weak declaration of Iraq's WMD-holdings.

15. **There is no sign, however, that Saddam is unstable or losing the capacity to make rational tactical decisions. He may well believe that he has some strong cards left to play.** He is already placing military targets in residential areas to score a propaganda victory in the event of a coalition air campaign [as noted in the JIC Assessment of 6 December 2002, Iraq: Military Options].

In the face of an attack, or even before hostilities if he judged that an attack was imminent, he could:

- make a last minute declaration of his WMD;
- take hostages or exploit foreign volunteers from countries such as UK and France as human shields;
- move against the KAZ to provoke a humanitarian crisis and to provide a military distraction;
- pre-emptively attack Israel to provoke a wider regional crisis and rouse the Arab street; and
- to inflict high enough casualties on any coalition ground forces, perhaps in Kuwait, including through the use of CBW, to halt a coalition attack and to swing public opinion in the West against hostilities.

Once hostilities were underway, he might also:

- seek to cause an international outcry over the level of Iraqi or coalition casualties sufficient to swing public opinion in the West against hostilities; and

- pursue a scorched earth policy, including the destruction of oil wells and poisoning the water supply.

16. We judged in December [JIC Assessment of 11 December 2002] that Saddam would initially seek international pressure to halt coalition action. If this failed, he would seek to inflict serious casualties on Iraq's neighbours and on coalition forces, in order to undermine the coalition's will to fight on. **We judge he still believes he has a chance of averting military action or, once military action begins, forcing the coalition to cease hostilities before his regime collapses.**