

JIC Note, 13 March 2003

SADDAM'S PLAN FOR BAGHDAD

This note was prepared by the Assessments Staff and reflects discussion at the JIC on 12 March 2003.

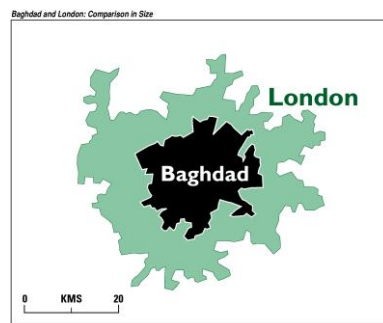
SUMMARY

- The Iraqi regime expects the Regular Army only to delay any coalition attack en-route to Baghdad. It wants to drag out fighting and play for time, hoping that international pressure will force the coalition to halt its attack and come to a negotiated settlement, leaving Saddam in power.
- Much of the Republican Guard, including Iraq's best-equipped military units, is based around Baghdad. Defensive positions have been prepared 15-25 kilometres to the west and south of the city. Less significant preparations have been made to the north and east. These defences have clear vulnerabilities and are not sufficient to stop a coalition assault.
- Iraqi security and militia organisations, backed by RG special forces brigades, are responsible for the inner city. There is no evidence of a systematic fortification of the city for use by large-scale conventional ground forces. However, surviving RG forces could retreat into Baghdad and quickly prepare ad-hoc fall-back positions. Even a few thousand lightly armed troops could require disproportionate time and resources to overcome, with significant risk of coalition and civilian casualties.
- Iraq's plans for Baghdad depend on the morale and cohesion of its forces, including the ability of the authorities to continue exercising effective command and control. Intelligence strongly suggests morale is already low.

Introduction

1. This note sets out our understanding from intelligence of Iraqi military preparations in Baghdad, and an initial view of their potential effectiveness. It only covers Baghdad and its immediate vicinity; but defences being constructed further afield cover key approaches, providing a layered defence of the capital.

2. Greater Baghdad is a city of 5.6 million people. It is split into nearly equal portions by the Tigris river, which is about 200 metres wide. Numerous canals criss-cross the city. Outlying areas consist mostly of detached, low density, low-rise residential property. High-rise buildings are found closer to the city core and are more closely packed. City streets are laid out in a grid pattern, with a mix of four-lane divided boulevards, two-lane through-streets and two-lane residential



streets.

Baghdad and the Iraqi leadership

3. [The note suggested that] Qusai, Saddam's second son, [was likely to have] been given delegated authority for the defence of Baghdad in the event of war. Intelligence indicates that the regime strategy is to try to drag out any fighting and play for time. This includes Baghdad. The Iraqi leadership expects the Iraqi Regular Army in the south or north of Iraq only to delay the coalition. It hopes that international pressure would force the coalition to halt its attack, or that by dragging the coalition into urban warfare and inflicting casualties, it could force the coalition to come to a negotiated settlement, leaving Saddam in power.

4. For many years, only lightly armed security forces and the 3rd Republican Guard (RG) Special Forces Brigade have been permitted inside the city, for fear that the military could conduct a coup. The dilemma facing the regime remains whether to drop these limitations in the face of a coalition attack, and if so, when.

5. We do not know whether Saddam plans to remain in Baghdad. The capital is the best defended location in Iraq and is central to regime command, control and communications (C3). Irrespective of Qusai's role, remaining there would offer Saddam the best chance of influencing events. Intelligence shows that the leadership has contingency plans to use new portable communications equipment and couriers to maintain C3 once hostilities begin, but it is unclear how effective these methods would be. However, Saddam is very security-conscious. We cannot be sure that we know the location of key bankers or that Saddam would use them. And until there was intense fighting in Baghdad, we judge that he would be able to move around Baghdad without detection.

Iraqi military forces in and around Baghdad

6. Intelligence confirms that Iraq's defence will be based on successive rings of defence around Baghdad. The most significant military forces currently deployed just outside the city are three RG armoured divisions. With about 35,000 of the RG's 75,000 troops, 600 of Iraq's best tanks and over 900 other armoured vehicles, they are the best equipped units in the Iraqi military (though they are still inferior to Western equivalents). Intelligence shows that RG forces further away from the city have orders to resist in-place, then fall back towards the capital. It remains possible that, in advance of hostilities, the RG infantry division near Kirkuk could be withdrawn from the north to defend Baghdad. But we judge that to be unlikely: if that were Iraq's intention, preparations would probably have followed soon after the redeployment of the Adnan division in late February.

7. A number of security organisations already operate within the city itself. The Special Republican Guard (SRG, 8,000 strong) and Special Security Organisation (SSO, 2,000 strong) are the most important, providing security for Saddam's inner circle and key regime facilities. They are backed by a range of intelligence/security (Directorate of General Intelligence, Directorate of Military Intelligence, Directorate of General Security) and militia (the al-Quds Army, the Saddam Fedayyin, and the Ba'ath party militia) organisations. The strengths of these organisations are unknown, and each has its members dispersed in small units at many sites. But together they could muster at least 10,000

men in Baghdad, possibly many more. They are lightly armed; only the SRG possesses a small number of tanks and artillery pieces. Intelligence suggests that Iraq will use one or both of its RG Special Forces Brigades (each with 2,000 men, also lightly equipped) in its inner Baghdad defences. [...]

8 Baghdad is also the hub of Iraq's air defence network, with most of the best surface-to-air missiles deployed in and around the city. Although these are vulnerable to coalition attack, there are also a large number of anti-aircraft artillery pieces which would present a threat to coalition aircraft at low altitudes throughout any campaign.

Preparations for air strikes

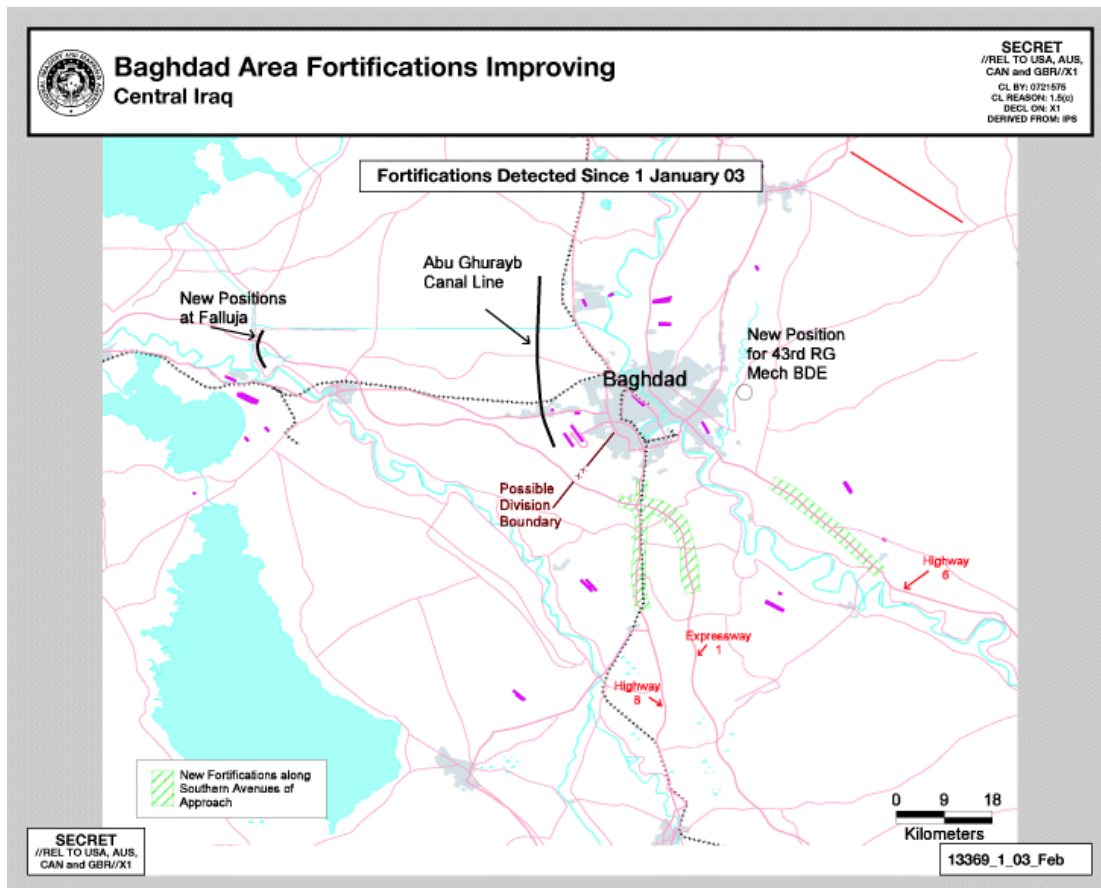
9. Iraq has well-practised contingency plans for air strikes. It aims to maximise the survivability of its equipment and personnel by dispersing them when air attacks are expected. A large body of intelligence shows that the Iraqi RG divisions around Baghdad have built thousands of revetments (earth barriers which provide only very limited protection) in and around their garrisons and have evacuated their peace-time headquarters and moved to alternate locations (only some of which we have located). These are often located deliberately in or near civilian areas in order to complicate coalition targeting and increase the chance that bombing will cause collateral damage.

10. It is also likely that Iraq will try to hinder coalition targeting by setting fire to oil-filled trenches. Recent imagery shows Iraq has nearly completed a system of over 100 trenches around Baghdad. In a test in late February, thick black smoke from one trench extended for 4.5km. If all 100 identified trenches were ignited simultaneously, the resulting smoke could cover the city, regardless of the prevailing wind direction. However, prevailing weather conditions would significantly affect the duration of the smoke cloud. In addition, to maintain the effect, the trenches would have to be resupplied frequently (perhaps every hour) with oil. They might also have unintended side effects: there is a risk that fires could spread to nearby residential property and intelligence suggests that the local population resent the regime because of the potential health hazard the fumes would create.

Defences against a ground attack

11. Iraq has begun preparing substantial, if imperfect, defence positions against a ground attack on Baghdad. Two distinct segments of defences are being constructed about 15-25km to the west and south of the city (see map below). To the west, about 350 new positions have been prepared in a rough north-south line near the Abu Ghurayb Canal. To the south, new positions have been dug along the main roads into Baghdad, many adjacent to residential and industrial areas in Baghdad's outer fringes.

12. Imagery shows over 400 revetments have also been constructed to the east of Baghdad, but unlike those to the west and south, these preparations are not a coherent defensive belt. This may be because Iraq expects the predominantly marshy terrain to restrict a coalition approach from this direction.



13. Defences in the north of Baghdad also appear to be limited. Imagery shows that some defensive positions have been prepared along major canal crossing points just outside the city, but they are on a much smaller scale than those to the west and south. Iraq may be depending on its forces deployed further north, such as the RG Adnan mechanised division (currently deployed north of Tikrit, with 10,000 troops and 150 ranks) or those deployed elsewhere in Baghdad's defences, to defend against a coalition approach from the north.

Inner city defences

14. From imagery, we know that some defensive positions have been prepared in Baghdad itself, probably for the SRG. But to-date, this has been on a very limited scale. **There is no evidence of a systematic fortification of the city** for use by large conventional ground forces. Intelligence strongly suggests that the defence of the city will be left to the SRG, other security services and militia units and perhaps the two RG Special Forces brigades. However, they are too few in number to defend the whole city perimeter (a length of over 90km) and will have to focus on defending particular locations or subsections. The regime will probably defend the west bank of the Tigris, where many regime facilities are located. This would allow it to use artillery fire against either coalition forces or an uprising in other areas.

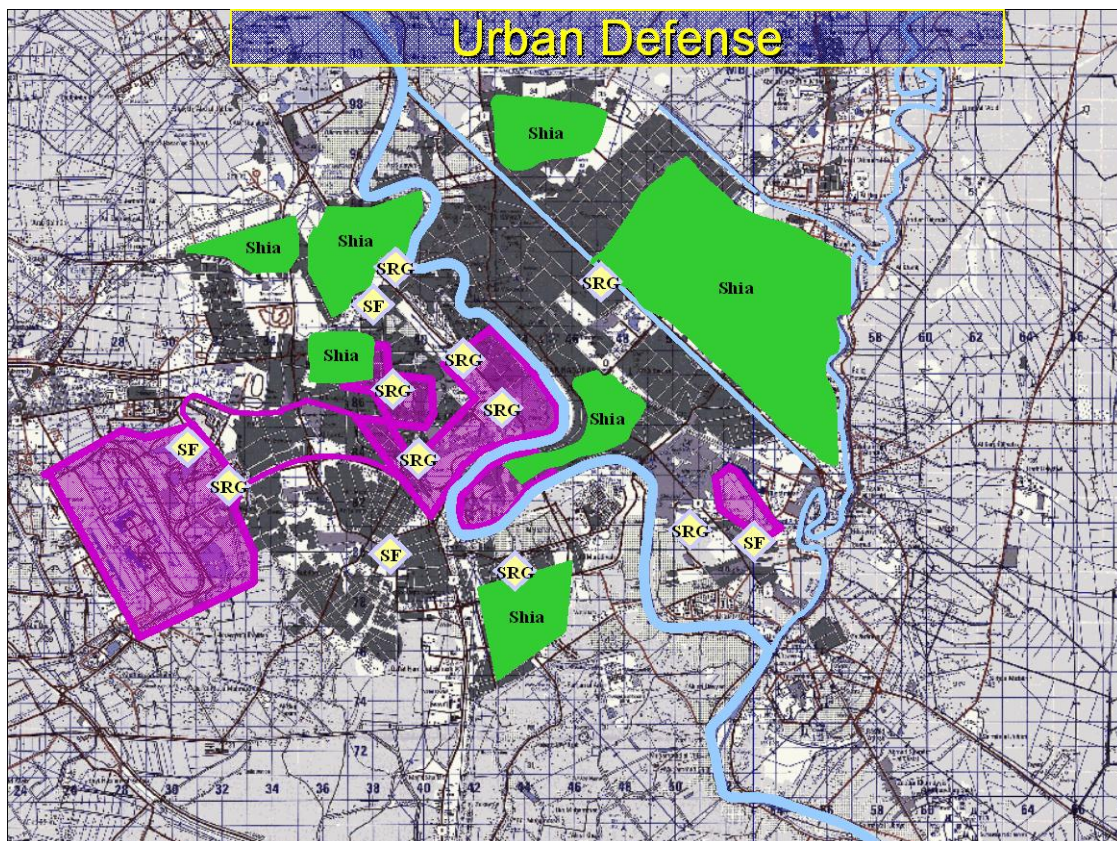
CBW

15. The JIC has previously judged that Saddam would be willing to use chemical and biological warfare (CBW) against the coalition and against the Iraqi population. It is likely that, even if it had not

done so already, the regime would use CBW in the defence of Baghdad if it could. This would depend on the survival of leadership command and control, and of some delivery means, such as artillery. Intelligence indicates that the SRG and SSO retain control over Iraq's CBW munitions and that the regime has been distributing protective CBW clothing and medical supplies for treating exposure to nerve agents to units around Baghdad.

Internal security

16. The map below shows the locations of SRG and RG Special Forces (SF) deployments in Baghdad, key areas where regimes facilities are locations (shaded pink) and the significant Shia dominated districts of Baghdad (green).



17. [...] the regime aims to prevent the civilian population leaving the city. It has dispersed military equipment in residential areas and located some headquarters in mosques and schools. It hopes, thereby, to ensure that civilian casualties occur, for propaganda purposes. It might use CBW against Shia uprisings and blame the coalition. Iraqi action against the civilian population could draw coalition forces into the city.

18. [...] Significant uprisings in the Shia districts could strain the security and militia organisations' ability to cope. However, Iraqi security forces might cordon off areas where trouble occurs rather than immediately try to reassert control. We do not have specific intelligence on how the population of Baghdad would react to coalition forces, but intelligence suggests that the regime thinks Saddam's removal would be welcomed, but not a lengthy coalition occupation.

Assessing the effectiveness of the Iraqi defence

19. Iraq's defensive preparations in and around Baghdad clearly depend on the morale and cohesion of its forces, including the ability of the authorities to continue exercising command and control. Intelligence strongly suggests that morale is low, even within the RG and various security services, [...] We judge that a massive coalition air attack and a swift coalition advance towards Baghdad would further undermine the Iraqi military and security services' willingness to fight on. Other vulnerabilities are that:

- the defences currently being constructed are vulnerable to air attack.
- the SRG and other security units within Baghdad lack heavy equipment, particularly armoured support, and are not trained for fighting an all-out conventional battle. However, it is possible that elements of the armoured RG divisions could retreat into Baghdad in good order, and quickly prepare ad-hoc fall-back positions;
- the challenges of defending against an external attack while also maintaining internal security would stretch the security organisations' capabilities;
- the defensive line in the west lacks any depth and many of the positions are badly positioned, making it difficult for Iraqi defenders to react to any coalition breakthrough;
- there is a five kilometre gap between the defences to the west and those to the south. And the defences along the separate roads to the south have not been joined laterally;
- air attacks on tactical ammunition and fuel storage points, at least some of which have been detected on imagery, could hinder the RG's ability to conduct a drawn-out battle.

20. In addition to its vulnerability to coalition air attack, Iraq's other generic military weaknesses, such as poor training and out-dated technology, would limit the effectiveness of the defence of Baghdad, though less so if units were to be positioned in the city itself.

21. Iraq's defensive preparations in and around Baghdad will continue, but are unlikely soon to overcome the vulnerabilities identified above. However, most SRG, SSO and RG officers originate from the Tikrit area and are closely linked to the regime. Their expectations of their fate post-Saddam might be an important influence on their course of action. We cannot rule out that some units would fight to the death. Even a few thousand lightly armed soldiers defending Baghdad could require disproportionate time and resources to overcome, with significant risk of coalition and civilian casualties. The RG SF brigades, and/or any surviving elements of the RG armoured divisions would be capable of putting up particularly tough resistance in Baghdad itself.