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JIC Note

SADDAM: THE BEGINNING OF THE END

This note was prepared by the Assessments Staff following discussion at the JIC on 19 March 2003.

1. Intelligence shows the Iraqi regime making final preparations for war. Saddam has rejected US demands for his exile. The US has now made clear that even a last-minute change of mind by Saddam would not stop the coalition from moving against Iraq's WMD. On 15 March Saddam publicly activated his regional command structure, effectively putting Iraq on a war footing. Iraq's military forces and security services are on the highest state of alert.

2. In previous JIC papers [18 September 2002, 16 October 2002, 11 December 2002, 31 January 2003, 26 February 2003] we assessed what Saddam might do at the point where war was inevitable and imminent. This note covers the latest position in Iraq and revisits previous JIC judgements in the light of recent events and intelligence. It looks at the range of options from which Saddam might choose, before and after a coalition attack. We continue to judge, however, that Saddam's scope for extreme and unpredictable action is increasing as the prospect of an attack approaches. The timing and sequence of Saddam's next moves are already highly uncertain.

Regime cohesion

3. There are indications that regime cohesion is under increasing pressure, but no sign that it will collapse before military action begins. Reporting suggests desertion rates are rising in the Republican Guard (RG), up to some 20%. One report also indicates that members of the RG are waiting for an attack to begin before escaping. Media reporting shows small numbers of Iraqi soldiers already offering to surrender. The regime proved able, however, to restore stability rapidly after limited anti-regime protests in mid-March.

The situation in the North

4. The redeployment in recent weeks of elements of the Republican Guard from the border of the Kurdish Autonomous Zone to Tikrit strongly suggests Saddam is not planning a full-scale pre-emptive strike against the Kurds. But he still retains the capability to launch attacks against the Kurds (see CBW section below). The movement of over a thousand Kurds out of Kirkuk after anti-regime protests there on 10/11 March were put down suggests continued fears that the regime is prepared to move against them.

The situation around Baghdad

5. Saddam is focusing on the defence of Baghdad. Imagery indicates elements of the Special Republican Guard (SRG) have been deployed near to Saddam International airport and SRG security units have been dispersed in central Baghdad. One report indicated SRG had also been deployed in the northern outskirts of Baghdad in the direction of Tikrit. Imagery indicates Republican Guard units deploying to the South, West and East 30km, outside the capital, apparently to concealment sites for protection against air strikes.

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The situation in the South

6. Reporting indicates there were limited anti-regime protests in Kerbala on 14 March, which the regime easily suppressed. We continue to judge that the Shia fear that the regime will move against them if they rebel. But [...] some Shia resistance groups may be ready to rebel even before a coalition attack begins, once they are sure an attack is imminent.

Use of CBW

7. A report [...] in mid-March indicated that Iraq's chemical weapons remained disassembled and that Saddam had not yet ordered their assembly. However, [...] showing the issue of gas masks and injections for CBW antidotes to the Special Security Organisation and the

We judge Iraq has a useable CBW capability, deliverable using artillery, missiles and possibly unmanned aerial vehicles. We judge Iraq possesses up to 20 al-Hussein missiles with a range of up to 650km and 100s of shorter range missiles, mostly with a range of 150km or less. These missiles may be able to deliver CBW, although intelligence suggests that Iraq may lack warheads capable of effective dispersal of such agents.

Special Republican Guard indicate Iraqi plans to use CBW. Reporting also suggests Iraq could try to blame civilian deaths resulting from CBW use on the coalition. Intelligence on the timing of CBW use is inconsistent. [...]

8. Intelligence on the deployment of CBW is sparse. Uncorroborated reporting suggests the delivery of CW shells to Republican Guard units near al-Kut south of Baghdad. Ballistic missile launchers were deployed in range of Kuwait in late January, and destroyed by coalition air action in February. There is no evidence that they were equipped with CBW warheads. But we cannot be sure that we would receive indications prior to an attack. [...] Saddam retains ultimate control of CBW use. But [...] suggests he has contingency plans to devolve military decision-making, including CBW, to regional commands, if communications are cut with Baghdad. Saddam might take this decision early, once the severity of the initial attack becomes clear or in the face of Kurdish or Shia uprisings.

9. [...] Saddam's initial response to attack would be for Iraqi resistance to last long enough for the coalition to be forced by international outcry to halt military action. If he managed to rally international support and halt coalition action, Saddam would consider offering concessions, possibly including over WMD, in order to remain in power. This would argue against pre-emptive attacks and devolving control over CBW to regional commanders. Saddam could attempt to boost international opposition to a war by trying to portray Iraq as a victim of coalition aggression and to blame the coalition for causing high levels of Iraqi civilian casualties, particularly women and children. We cannot rule out, however, an early strategic U-turn, once Saddam realises the intensity of the attack he faces and the risk of losing control of his CBW capability. He may then order early CBW attacks on Israel, on the Kurds and the Shia, on coalition forces or on Gulf states where coalition forces are based.

10. We continue to judge that in the face of death and the destruction of his regime, Saddam will try to wreak as much havoc as possible. Saddam's ability to do so will be limited, however, by the possible refusal of his subordinates to obey orders once the regime is seen as doomed and by the use or loss of CBW during the earlier stages of the campaign. A further risk, however, is that CBW could become available to extremist groups either as a last vindictive act by Saddam, or through loss of control in the final days of his regime.

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Oilfields

11. Intelligence offers compelling, but not conclusive, evidence that Saddam intends to destroy oilfields and refineries to prevent them falling into coalition hands. [...] But Iraqi military deployments suggest the regime intends to defend rather than destroy the oilfields, at least initially. [...] Imagery shows the digging of flame trenches to obscure the oilfields from airborne attack.

Israel

12. Saddam might judge that an early attack on Israel would draw in support from Arab nations. [...] show Israel to be among the targets for Iraqi missile attack. Israel is distributing gas masks to the population to protect against CBW attack from Iraq, as a precautionary measure. But according to one briefing given to foreign observers, the Israelis judge the risk of an attack to be low. Two recent reports suggest that some or all of Iraq's al-Hussein medium-range missiles that could reach Israel were disassembled to hide them from inspectors. It would take Iraq at least several days to reassemble the missiles once they decided to do so. As with attacks on coalition forces, we judge that Saddam is more likely to move against Israel when the severity of coalition action becomes evident to him.

Terrorism

13. [...] Iraq continues to prepare for attacks against Western interests in the Middle East, Europe, South East Asia and elsewhere. It is also encouraging [...] to launch terrorist attacks against Israeli and Western interests. [...] however, that a positive [...] response has been limited to small-groups dependent on Iraqi support and with limited capabilities. [...] immediately after the outbreak of hostilities. One report suggests Iraqi intelligence has recruited individuals for suicide attacks against US and other Western interests in the Gulf. Overall we continue to judge that Iraq's capabilities to launch terrorist attacks are limited, especially beyond the Middle East. But the risk of opportunistic attacks by others is high.

Human shields

14. [Reporting on possibility of human shields.] Iraqi citizens face being used as involuntary human shields. [...] It has dispersed military equipment in residential areas and located some headquarters in mosques and schools. It hopes thereby to maximise civilian casualties, for propaganda purposes.

Water resources

15. [...]

Saddam's ultimate options

16. Intelligence does not indicate what Saddam's last steps will be. [...] There are no indications so far that Saddam intends to transfer – or appear to transfer – overall control. But if he does confine his contact to Qusai, his increasing isolation would risk losing a grip on the conduct of the war. Other reporting indicates detailed Iraqi planning, however, to preserve communications during a war. Intelligence also indicates Saddam has taken steps to increase his personal security, suggesting he recognises a greater threat of assassination or coup attempt, as war looms.

17. Saddam portrays himself as a fearless warrior. His entourage publicly claim that he will remain in Iraq and, if necessary, die fighting. We judge he would rather do so than face the humiliation of

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arrest and trial. One report [...] suggests, however, that [...] share the popular [...] view that Saddam, once convinced of the seriousness of the situation, will attempt to flee abroad.

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