

JIC Assessment, 6 December 2002

IRAQ: MILITARY OPTIONS

Key Judgements

- I. 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. Until a coalition ground attack began, he could move against the Kurds at any time.
- II. Saddam would use chemical and biological weapons (CBW) if he faced defeat. He might also use them earlier in a conflict, including against coalition forces, neighbouring states and his own people. Israel could be his first target.
- III. Iraq has contingency plans to weather coalition air strikes while maintaining government control over the country. Iraq's integrated air defence system would be overloaded by an all-out coalition attack and would quickly become much less effective. The Iraqi Air Force is not capable of mounting a significant challenge to coalition aircraft.
- IV. A ground attack might fracture Saddam's regime, but only a massive coalition force is guaranteed to topple him. The smaller the initial coalition force, the more likely Iraqi forces are to resist. A phased coalition attack could allow Iraq to claim military successes.
- V. If the Special Republican Guard and Republican Guard remained loyal and effective they could inflict serious casualties on coalition forces in urban warfare.
- VI. Other Iraqi responses might include seizing hostages as 'human shields'; using non-lethal BW agents in a deniable manner; suicide attacks; or a 'scorched earth' policy with the aim of creating a humanitarian or environmental catastrophe. At some point, motivated by revenge, Saddam would seek to inflict the maximum damage on his enemies, whether Iraqis or outsiders.

Implications:

If an attack does not precipitate regime collapse and if Saddam's key forces remain loyal, they could inflict damage and casualties on coalition forces, the Iraqi people or Iraq's neighbours.

A slow-start coalition attack would increase these risks.

Clear messages to the Iraqi military might reduce their willingness to obey orders to use CBW, but we cannot rely on this being the case.

IRAQ: MILITARY OPTIONS

At the request of the MOD, we evaluate Iraq's military capabilities and consider what military options Iraq has, and which it is likely to pursue a) during coalition air strikes, b) during a coalition ground attack. We also assess what Saddam might seek to achieve at each point by fighting. Scenarios for Iraqi use of chemical and biological weapons were assessed in greater detail in [the JIC assessment] of 9 September 2002. The threat from Iraqi terrorism was assessed in [the JIC assessment] of 10 October 2002. This paper is not intended to be a comprehensive review of all Iraq's options.

Saddam's calculation if it comes to war

1. Saddam knows that an Iraqi military victory over a US-led coalition is implausible. If attacked, he would initially seek international pressure to halt coalition action. He would continue to protest his willingness to co-operate with the UN and would spread propaganda about civilian casualties. Meanwhile, he would try to drag out the fighting. As the conflict progressed, he would be increasingly likely to use chemical or biological weapons, in order to undermine the coalition's will to continue. He would almost certainly try to attack Israel in the hope of provoking a response that would weaken the coalition. In the last resort, he would seek to inflict the maximum possible damage on his enemies and on Iraq's oil infrastructure.

Missiles and CBW

2. Iraq is assessed to have retained up to 20 Al Hussein missiles with a 650km range, though their condition is not known (See Annex for further details). Given the limited number of these missiles, we judge that Iraq would use them principally against Israel. Shorter range (150-200km range) missiles, or unguided rockets (up to 70km), might be used against deployed coalition forces or Iraq's neighbours, especially Kuwait, Jordan, Turkey or, less likely, Iran. [...] Iraqi rocket and short range missile forces have been conducting numerous test launches in training. We judge Iraq would continue to deploy and hide these units nearer Iraq's borders when it considered war to be imminent.

3. We judge Iraq would be able to arm at least some of these missiles and rockets with chemical and biological (CBW) warheads. Iraqi aircraft or artillery could also deliver CBW. [...] in mid-September Saddam re-iterated his willingness to use CBW, [...]. Saddam also envisaged using CBW against Israel, Kuwait and Jordan. This is consistent with earlier intelligence, but we lack definite corroboration. [...] Iraqi interest in procuring large quantities of CBW protective equipment and treatments for exposure to nerve agent. [...] the regime would consider using CBW against internal uprisings or Shia-populated Iraqi cities, and for propaganda purposes could seek to blame the coalition. CBW use against civilians could cause severe casualties. And even relatively small-scale use could cause widespread panic and a serious humanitarian impact. Iraq's ability to use CBW might be constrained by its available stocks of agent and the difficulty of producing more while UN inspectors are present. But we do not know the extent of Iraq's current stocks or what it might have at such a stage.

4. In determining whether to use CBW, Saddam would have to balance the risk of strengthening the coalition's political case for removing him against the desire to widen the war by involving Israel or inflicting unacceptable casualties upon the coalition. We judge that, faced with the likelihood of military defeat and being removed from power, it is unlikely Saddam could be deterred from ordering the use of CBW. Any use

of CBW warheads would make an Israeli response likely, even if the attack were not very effective. Saddam might nonetheless choose to attack Israel with CBW early in any conflict.

Iraq's military options during coalition air strikes

5. **Saddam's primary goals during coalition air strikes** would be to maintain government control over the country and conserve the military to counter a coalition ground invasion. We know from intelligence that Iraq has contingency plans [...] in case a coalition attack disrupts communication links with Baghdad. All headquarters would evacuate to alternate sites when hostilities were expected. Iraq has well rehearsed plans to disperse units, including within urban areas, in order to complicate coalition targeting, increase the chances of collateral damage and improve the regime's ability to maintain internal security. Iraq might deliberately cause collateral damage and blame it on the coalition. Iraq would also use dummy equipment to divert coalition attacks. [...]

6. **The greatest threat to coalition aircraft** would be from the Iraqi integrated air defence system, particularly its heavy surface to air missiles (SAMs), which are concentrated around Baghdad. The system could be overloaded by an all-out coalition attack and would quickly become far less effective. Nevertheless, Iraq's many anti-aircraft guns and short-range SAMs would continue to represent a threat to low-flying coalition aircraft throughout a campaign.

7. With poor training and inferior technology, **the Iraqi Air Force's (IAF) capability** is very limited. It is possible that Saddam would demand that the IAF challenge coalition air supremacy, but we have no intelligence on this. The IAF has increased its activity levels over recent months and has raised the number of aircraft held ready at short notice. We judge it more likely that Saddam understands that the IAF could not make a significant difference to the war's outcome by a general engagement. Even at this stage, he might order some one-way attack missions against Israel or coalition bases, possibly carrying CBW. These would have a low probability of success, faced with sophisticated defences.

8. **Iraq's naval capability is very limited**. But either before a conflict or during air strikes, Iraq could lay a credible naval minefield along the Iraqi coast. Some mines might break free or be deliberately floated out into the Gulf and could present a hazard to shipping throughout a campaign. Iraq might also be able to use civilian maritime craft for the clandestine deployment of limited numbers of naval mines, including in Gulf ports and shipping lanes.

9. **Once coalition control of the air had been established**, Iraq's ground options would be severely limited. However, once air strikes had begun, but before a ground attack started, Iraqi forces might seek to seize the mountainous parts of the Kurdish autonomous zone (KAZ) overlooking the main route south from the Turkish border. They might attack the wider KAZ, in order to divert the coalition air effort, destroy the Kurdish threat and to try to force the coalition to engage in ground fighting earlier than it had planned. This might also aim to distract the coalition by forcing Kurdish civilians to flee, causing a humanitarian disaster.

Iraqi options during a ground campaign

10. A ground attack might cause the regime to fracture, although we continue to judge that only massive military force would be guaranteed to topple Saddam. Should the coalition pursue a phased campaign (the 'rolling attack'), beginning with a less than overwhelming force, a number of options would remain open to Iraq. Despite the limited capabilities of its forces, it would probably seek an opportunity to inflict casualties before the full weight of coalition forces was assembled. Saddam could attack his

perceived internal enemies (e.g. the Iraqi Kurds or Shia) and might claim some military 'success' if there was a pause in the coalition campaign. He would take advantage of every opportunity to cause the coalition political problems. We judge that the smaller the initial coalition attack, the more likely that Iraqi forces would resist rather than cave in. Iraq could even try to conduct harassment attacks against coalition forces in Kuwait. Much would depend on the effectiveness of coalition air power in limiting the IAF's operations and Iraqi ground forces' ability to move.

11. [...] Some RA positions could be within urban areas, but most RA defences are likely to be constructed further forward, nearer Iraq's borders, or along key roads and at junctions. We judge that Iraq's options could include the use of water barriers (created by flooding or by the destruction of bridges), minefields, or possibly even the creation of CBW-contaminated areas, to try to channel coalition forces into urban areas or 'kill zones' where Iraqi artillery, or CBW, would be used. [...] However, we judge the RG would be permitted into Baghdad only at a late stage because this would increase its ability to conduct a coup.

12. This strategy would rely heavily on a static defence, largely because the Iraqi military's ability to conduct manoeuvre warfare is very limited, even in the RG. Morale and loyalty are weak, especially within the RA. Should Iraqi defensive positions be left behind the front lines by a rapid coalition advance, many RA units would probably surrender rather than fight. However, provided that the security and military organisations central to the regime's survival, such as the SRG, Special Security Organisation and the RG, remained effective, Saddam would accept the sacrifice of virtually any forces or territory to the coalition. Provincial cities would be defended, but ultimately, we judge that only Baghdad would be politically vital, as its capture would be a final symbol of defeat of the regime. Although Iraqi forces would look for opportunities to counter-attack, only a few RA units and the RG would be capable of doing so in practice. And we judge that Saddam would not be willing to risk the RG units held around Baghdad except in a final defence of these vital areas. If the SRG and RG remained loyal and effective, they could inflict serious casualties during urban fighting.

The problem of urban warfare

Fighting in built up areas would:

- require large numbers of infantry and significant logistics support;
- make the coalition's use of artillery and air support very difficult;
- force the coalition to fight at close quarters;
- cause greater coalition casualties;
- cause significant collateral damage.

However, urban warfare places significant demands on leadership, initiative and training at the junior officer level and below. The Iraqi military is weak in these areas.

Other options and asymmetric responses

13. Saddam might see some benefit in engineering a 'mini crisis' before coalition forces were fully prepared for a major campaign, to provoke an early and less decisive attack which would leave the regime in power but damage regional support for further military action. A concerted attempt to bring down an Allied aircraft in one of the No Fly Zones is an option. [...] Adjustments to the RA's deployment in northern Iraq means its ability to conduct a quick attack on the Kurds has improved over recent months. Saddam is likely to remain cautious, however, as he could not guarantee a limited US response.

14. Other Iraqi responses to a coalition attack include:

- seizing foreign hostages, possibly including UNMOVIC or other UN affiliated personnel, as 'human shields' against attack;
- CBW terrorism: although Iraq probably lacks the capability to deploy a sophisticated device, it could cause widespread panic through attacks in the region;

- using non-lethal BW agents in a deniable manner to cause sickness amongst coalition troops as they assembled;
- suicide attacks on coalition forces, using aircraft, boats or ground troops. [...]
- a 'scorched earth' policy, with the aim of creating a humanitarian or environmental disaster. [...] Iraq might deliberately destroy oil wells and other infrastructure as its forces withdrew. It might also target the civilian Shia or Kurdish populations, possibly with CBW. The aim would be to hit out at Saddam's perceived internal enemies and to force the coalition to divert resources to deal with the consequences.

Iraqi military capabilities and dispositions

1. Iraq's military is far weaker than before the Gulf War in 1991 (see box). Its ground forces suffer from many problems: poor command and control, low morale, old technology, poor training, low mobility due to a lack of vehicles and a weak air defence capability. Its ability to obtain accurate information about a fast-moving war is also poor. Iraq's air force is mostly obsolete and represents a limited threat to coalition aircraft. The Iraqi Navy only has a few anti-ship cruise missiles and a limited capability to conduct mining of the northern Gulf. However, Iraq's ability to procure limited quantities of military spares illegally, and the diversion to the military of goods obtained through UN authorised trade, has averted a wholesale decline in military capability.

Iraqi military strengths	<u>Oct 2002</u>	<u>Jan 1991</u>
Troops	400,000	1,000,000
Tanks	2,700	5,700
Other armoured	3,100	5,100
Artillery	2,050	3,800
Combat aircraft	180	750

2. The most powerful arm of the Iraqi military is the 75,000 strong Republican Guard (RG). Its most significant units are three armoured divisions (with about 600 of Iraq's best tanks) based around Baghdad. Although RG units suffer from many deficiencies compared to Western forces, they are better trained and equipped than the Iraqi Regular Army (RA). The RG has sufficient heavy equipment transporters to move a whole division at one time, so can quickly re-deploy, at least in peacetime. Most RA units are capable only of static defence. The Special Republican Guard (SRG), 8-15,000 strong, and other internal security organisations are responsible for security in Baghdad itself during peacetime, but lack much heavy military equipment.

3. Iraqi deployments reflect a good understanding of potential avenues for a coalition attack. Three of the five RA Corps are deployed in the north, two along the line of control with the Kurds (61,000 men) and one (35,000) covering the north-south route from the Turkish border. They are supported by two RG divisions. Two RA Corps (54,000 men) are deployed in the south, facing Kuwait. RG deployments south of the 32nd parallel currently are precluded by the UK/US imposed 'No Drive Zone'. Smaller RG units cover the main east-west route to Jordan.

4. Iraq has been making defensive preparations for months. Much military equipment, ammunition and fuel have already been dispersed. Long trenches and numerous foxholes have been dug at many points across Iraq, including some in and around Baghdad. Such preparations are likely to continue steadily over forthcoming months. Iraq could make a huge effort to lay minefields, construct water barriers by flooding (particularly in the south, where the Tigris and Euphrates can be used) and prepare fighting positions in urban areas. However, Iraq would want to leave the preparation of these fixed defences as late as possible, to minimise the coalition's opportunity to study them. We have not seen, nor would yet expect to see, the large-scale fortification of urban areas. We judge that many such preparations would be made only once the Iraqi military thought war was imminent (within a few weeks).

5. [The JIC Assessment] of 9 September "Iraqi use of Chemical and Biological Weapons – Possible Scenarios" gave details of which CBW agents are judged to be available to Iraq:

- following a decision to do so, Iraq could produce significant quantities of mustard agent within weeks; significant quantities of the nerve agents sarin and VX within months (and in the case of VX

Iraq may have already done so). Production of sarin and VX would be heavily dependent on hidden stocks of precursors, the size of which are unknown;

- Iraq could produce more biological agents within days. At the time of the Gulf War Iraq had developed the lethal BW agents anthrax, botulinum toxin and aflatoxin. Iraq was also researching a number of other agents including some non-lethal (incapacitating) agents.

6. [...]

IRAQ : Disposition of Forces

SECRET

Republican Guard/Regular Army corps HQ		Forward line of Iraqi forces		Regular Army division designator	16
Republican Guard armoured division		Army corps boundary		Regular Army armoured division	
Republican Guard infantry division		Republican Guard division names		Regular Army infantry division	
Republican Guard Special Forces brigade		A Adnan	H Hammurabi	Regular Army mechanized infantry division	
Republican Guard mechanized infantry division		AN Al Nida	M Medina	Major heavy equipment transporter garrison	
		B Baghdad	N Nebuchadnezzar		

