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CDI 2/12/2 & 3/4

26 Mar 02

PS/SofS

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PS/Policy Director
MA/DCDS(C)
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AXIS OF EVIL: IRAQ

Reference:

A. MO 6/17/15/H of 20 Mar 02

1. At reference you requested information on the cohesion of the Iraqi military and their reaction to a coalition ground offensive. I attach our response at Annex A.

[signed on CHOTS]

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Annexes:

A. Iraqi military cohesion and reaction to a ground invasion

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SafS
A useful and
thoughtful
piece.

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ANNEX A
CDI 2/12/2 & 3/4
DATED 26 MAR 02

IRAQI MILITARY COHESION

1. The Iraqi military (Special Republican Guard (SRG), Republican Guard (RG) and regular forces) are motivated by four principal factors:

- **Fear:** Saddam operates an all-pervasive state security system. Dissent within the military is ruthlessly and efficiently suppressed. Ba'ath Party and security structures parallel military organisation at all levels.
- **Tribe:** The Iraqi officer class and the bulk of the RG and SRG are dominated by families and tribal groups linked to Saddam. Those from Tikrit (the seat of Saddam's tribe, Al Bu Nasr) are prominent. But other groups from the Mosul area (e.g. the Jubbur) and elsewhere in Iraq are also important. Saddam ensures that they are among the chief recipients of the state patronage system. But tribal links are also dangerous - they represent a form of social and political organisation that can, potentially, rival the regime. Coup plotting against Saddam has at times been organised along tribal grounds. Hence Saddam is careful in managing such affiliations.
- **Sunni Hegemony:** 60% of Iraqis are Shia. However, the Iraqi military Officer Corps (SRG, RG and Regular) is a Sunni dominated institution. This forms the chief bulwark of the Sunni minority's hegemony within Iraq. Rank and file soldiers of the Regular Army are typically Shia. Fear is their primary motivation.
- **Professionalism:** The Iraqi military remains one of the most capable forces in the Middle East, with a strong military tradition and sense of history. The Officer Corps retains a conception of itself as a guardian of national values (a role which, they perceive, is ensured by their continued dominance).

REACTION TO GROUND INVASION

2. Perception of coalition intent would be critical to the reaction of the Iraqi military. In 1991 there were significant desertions and mutinies among Regular Army units withdrawing from Kuwait. In Shia-dominated Southern Iraq there was widespread revolt. The local populace, along with deserters and insurgents took control of major cities. The military was also affected - indeed, anti-regime action by military forces in Basra was the catalyst for the southern uprising. Shia rank and file deserted in significant numbers. This widespread revolt was largely due to the perceived destruction of the state security apparatus, the disruption of Party control of the military and, above all, the perception of

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a credible threat to regime survival from coalition ground forces. In essence the first of those cohesive factors – fear – ceased to operate.

3. Cessation of the coalition ground offensive, combined with Saddam's ability to deploy intact RG units, re-established 'fear' as a cohesive factor. Perception of a threat to regime survival quickly diminished. But defence of Sunni hegemony and tribal links were also important. The widespread Shia uprising (in particular local massacres by the Shia of Ba'ath and regime officials) was seen by the Sunni officers as a threat to their continued domination. As a result the Officer Corps (even potential anti-Saddam elements) coalesced behind the regime. That the regime was only defended by RG and SRG units is a fallacy - significant regular army units (such as 51 Mech. Div. in Basra) ruthlessly suppressed Shia insurgents. Within a fortnight organised resistance was crushed in the Southern cities.

4. Hence, a ground offensive that is seen as a threat not merely to the regime, but to Sunni hegemony itself, is likely to increase rather than diminish military cohesion. Information Operations would be crucial to managing that perception, as would the role of the Shia. A ground offensive from Kuwait (through Basra), combined with coalition destruction of regime security organs in Southern Iraq may create conditions similar to those of 1991. That is likely to convince Sunni officers that their hegemony is under threat. Calls for a democratic Iraq are likely to have similar effect – Shia dominance of the state will be seen as the inevitable consequence. Attempted imposition of a government in exile (i.e. Ahmed Chalabi and the INC) will also induce cohesion. Under any of those circumstances Iraqi military resistance to ground operations is likely to be significantly increased.

5. However, were the Iraqi military to consider an attack as aimed solely at Saddam's (and his immediate entourage's) removal they may themselves seek to remove Saddam in order to ensure their survival. But they would not attempt such a move unless they were wholly convinced of unwavering 'coalition' intent to remove Saddam. The Officer Corps' desire to defend Sunni hegemony is Saddam's greatest strength while he is seen as guaranteeing it. But it is also his greatest vulnerability if his continuance in power seems to threaten it. The RG (and SRG) are capable military forces but they would not defend Saddam under all circumstances. Indeed, coup plotting has occurred within both organisations.

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