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To: ; ; Robert Wilson; Sian Evans; Helen  
Cowie; Martin Hetherington; Robert Wilson;  
Subject: FW: LEAD: TT FCOLN/ABDHA : IRAQ: ANNUAL REVIEW, 2002

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From: ROBERT WILSON, MENARG

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SUBJECT: IRAQ: ANNUAL REVIEW, 2002

In the absence of an Embassy presence in Baghdad, this Annual Review for Iraq for the year 2002 has been prepared by Research Analysts with input (on northern Iraq) from Ankara.

Summary

1. A year shaped by the fall-out from 11 September; an evident US determination to rid Iraq of Saddam Hussain, unilaterally if

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necessary; and UN SCR 1441. The year ended with Iraq's declaration on WMD which left key questions unanswered; and a major Iraqi opposition conference in London.

## Internal

2. There were no serious internal threats to the security of the regime or to that of President Hussain himself. In mid October Saddam secured the continuation of his presidency for a further seven year term in a referendum in which he claimed a 100% vote in favour.

3. There have nevertheless been signs that the regime has felt the pressure more than in previous years. US President Bush's identification of Iraq as a member of his "Axis of Evil" warned the Iraqi leadership that this US administration's patience might be short. Even so, the leadership continued to insist that there was no question of a return of UN inspectors. But over the year it became clear that external sympathy was dwindling, and internal loyalty fraying. Soon after Hussain's laughable referendum Baghdad announced the release of all prisoners from Iraq's gaols, intended, no doubt, to rally popular support. This did not go as planned: there was unrest and some demonstrations when disappointed family members realised that relatives had not been released. Most of those who re-emerged were common criminals. Opposition organisations allege that few if any political prisoners were released, if indeed they are alive.

4. Later still rumours of a new constitution began to emerge as the regime dallied with a group of ostensible oppositionists (in reality, alienated Baathists) who claimed to be interested in negotiating. Similar hints of an opening-up have been made in the past, when the regime has been under pressure. Another sign was Saddam Hussain's "apology" to Kuwait, again seen by most as a sign that pressure is taking its toll.

## Northern Iraq

5. With the possibility of US-led action against Iraq apparently drawing closer, the US re-energised its links with the Iraqi opposition. For the two main Kurdish parties, the KDP and PUK, this revival of US interest sparked more intense efforts to bury the hatchet. This culminated in the reconvening of the Iraqi Kurdistan Assembly (IKA) in October. Further measures to implement the detail of the 1998 Washington Agreement continue. The two parties, and a host of Kurdish, Turcoman, Assyrian and Islamist organisations, have been working on a common approach to the broader Iraqi opposition and prospects for post-Saddam Iraq. They agree on the need to safeguard the rights and freedoms enjoyed by the communities of the north since the Baghdad's withdrawal from the area in 1991. They will also seek the continuation of the 13% oil for food allocation (or some equivalent distribution of oil wealth) for the north in the event of regime change.

6. Islamist activity has continued to be a thorn in the side of the PUK, which has had a number of armed clashes with the Ansar al Islam (a new extreme offshoot of IMIK). The PUK blamed the attempted assassination of its Prime Minister in April on this group. The KDP, while less directly affected, has faced a number of sabotage and bomb attacks which it too blames on Ansar extremists. International media interest in Ansar al Islam and possible links with al Qaida have been fanned by a number of high profile visits to the region by prominent journalists. This interest is likely to continue into the new year, as are sporadic clashes between PUK and Ansar al Islam.

7. In broader regional terms, the KDP has continued to struggle to keep a cordial relationship with the Turks while courting the Syrians and Iranians. The Turks have expressed concern over the KDP's draft "constitution" for Iraq, and the reopening of the IKA.

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Turkish general election rhetoric over what the Turks perceive to be Barzani's statehood aspirations have made for a rocky ride. But the KDP has begun to work its relationship with the incoming AK government and a visit by Barzani to Ankara is likely in the early new year. The PUK too has worked to develop its relationship with its neighbours and with a broader range of Arab governments including Egypt and Kuwait in an effort to put across more effectively its message of self-determination within the territorial integrity of Iraq.

## External

8. Iraq continued its vigorous campaign of the previous year to rebuild relations with the outside world, particularly in the region, and had some superficial success. But the Syrian decision to support SCR 1441 in the Security Council in November showed how insubstantial these rapprochements were. The unanimous vote encouraged regional states, previously reluctant to support unilateral US action against Iraq, to suppress some of their misgivings about a prospect that now had some UN cover.

9. Further afield, the French continued, in Iraqi eyes, to play a useful spoiler role, but their characteristically independent line fell disappointingly short of effective support. The French, though, put in a strong showing at the Baghdad Trade Fair in November. Russia's attitude towards Iraq saw some evolution and growing irritation on both sides. Announcement of a \$40 bn economic co-operation programme in August seems to have had little real significance. By year end Iraq found that Russian patience had finally been exhausted, and little political support came from that direction. Iraq vented its frustration at Russia's Lukoil by terminating their contract at the end of the year.

10. Nevertheless, even if Iraq has been unsuccessful in developing its support at state level within the region, it has been relatively successful in maintaining and developing street-level hostility to any US led operation against Iraq. Saddam capitalised on regional unease over Palestine, and raised payments to families of suicide bombers from \$10,000 to \$25,000. He has also helped to muddy the waters over US motives by manipulating the full range of Arab and Muslim emotional levers.

## UN

11. The year saw an important new level of resolve in the UN, starting with the approval of the Goods Review List in May (SCR 1409) and culminating with the unanimous adoption, on 8 November of SCR 1441. In the face of this, Iraq had no realistic choice but to back down from its categorical refusal, frequently restated during the year, to allow the return of inspectors. The full and final declaration that it was required to make was inadequate, even with regard to issues raised by UNSCOM prior to their departure in 1998. We and the US remain certain that Iraq is far from having abandoned WMD aspirations; but the Iraqis seem confident that inspectors will find no smoking guns.

## The External Opposition

12. In an attempt to draw the fractious - and fractured - Iraqi opposition together the US hosted talks with four of the key groups - the KDP, PUK, SCIRI and INA (the "Group of Four", who had been developing a semi-formal alliance for some time) in mid year, and followed up by meeting the G4 together with the INC and the Monarchists in August. From these meetings emerged the US's "Future of Iraq" project. Under US sponsorship this drew together teams of Iraqi expatriates to examine many of the areas that a post-Saddam Iraqi administration would have to address. Though intended to be composed of technocrats rather than politicians it was difficult to

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avoid the impression that the working groups had been hijacked by the opposition politicians. Two sessions of the "Democratic Principles" working group were convened in the UK.

13. The opposition were also encouraged to pursue an initiative of their own, to convene a broad conference of the Iraqi opposition. Its aim was to overcome the rivalry that had developed between the INC and the G4 and to map out a way ahead for the Iraqi opposition. Although this was to be resourced entirely by the opposition, and held on more "neutral" territory than the UK or US, it was - after postponements and changes of venue - held in London and funded (not very discreetly) by the US. Progress was made, but many bona fide, if small, Iraqi movements were excluded (or excluded themselves). The intention is for a follow-up conference to be held in northern Iraq in January (though the date is already slipping). Continued competition among the groups who were included and sniping from the ones that were excluded cast doubt on whether a credible new front can emerge. At the same time, press reports of developing US planning suggest that these groups have already been written out of the US's Iraq script.

14. I will not venture to offer an outlook for 2003.

Signed: ROBERT WILSON

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