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Intelligence Community Assessment

Stability of the Iraqi Regime: Significant Vulnerabilities Offset by Repression

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**National
Intelligence
Council**

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Stability of the Iraqi Regime: Significant Vulnerabilities Offset by Repression

Prepared under the auspices of Paul Pillar, National Intelligence Officer for the Near East and South Asia, at the request of Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. This ICA was coordinated with CIA, DIA, State/INR, NSA, and NIMA. Inquiries may be directed to the NIO

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Scope Note

This Intelligence Community Assessment was prepared in response to tasking from the Joint Chiefs of Staff for an assessment of the stability of the Iraqi regime, sources of instability or opposition to the regime, and the ability of the opposition to effect regime change.

1

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Contents

TOP SECRET

TOP SECRET

Key Points

☐ Stability of the Iraqi Regime: Significant Vulnerabilities Offset by Repression

☐ Saddam Husayn's regime survives through coercion, cooptation, and intimidation of the Iraqi populace. Concern that the United States will target Iraq has compelled Saddam to step up efforts to ensure that his regime is not undermined from within.

○ Despite recent efforts to buttress internal control, longstanding family strains remain a vulnerability that could threaten regime stability.

● We assess that Saddam is concerned that he may not survive another confrontation with the United States and is trying to ensure the regime's survival through his son Qusay.

☐ We judge that Iraqi military morale and battlefield cohesion are more fragile today than in 1991. Reporting since the 11 September attacks on the United States suggests that Saddam's regime is increasingly concerned about the military's willingness to fight. We assess that Iraq's air and air defense forces would be unable and unwilling to sustain combat if engaged by US-led coalition forces. The combat capabilities of Iraqi ground forces probably would erode more rapidly than was the case in 1991, especially in the Regular Army.

☐ The regime is composed of trusted officials; those suspected of being less than loyal have been killed or forced into exile. Although the enthusiasm and loyalty of the Ba'th Party has waned in recent years, party members are kept in the regime camp through co-optation, coercion, and perquisites.

☐ Internal opposition to Saddam's regime has been largely suppressed over the years. Although many tribal leaders may not be willing to risk the well-being of their people by moving independently against Saddam, some probably would cooperate with a concerted effort to remove the regime, provided they were convinced such an effort would be successful and final. External opposition to Saddam is fragmented and lacks credibility within the country, although some groups maintain contacts with military and tribal forces inside the country.

☐ Saddam faces internal pressures in many forms, but we assess that he is capable of retaining control absent outside involvement which would weaken the regime to the point where the internal opposition would seize an enhanced opportunity to move against him.

TOP SECRET

TOP SECRET

TOP SECRET

Discussion

Stability of the Iraqi Regime: Significant Vulnerabilities Offset by Repression

The Iraqi Regime: Vulnerable but Holding

Saddam Husayn has grown increasingly concerned about a potential US military operation against Iraq and threats to his regime in the last few months. In mid-February, Saddam's son and heir apparent Qusay told a gathering of senior security, military, and Ba'th Party officials that Iraq should consider itself to be in a "state of war." He warned that a US attack would be aimed at removing Saddam, his family, and senior regime members. Qusay said the leadership expected the United States to launch an intensive air campaign followed by a ground offensive. According to Qusay, Iraqi leaders are enhancing security measures to ensure their survival. Iraqi concern about US plans has increased since late January, when Deputy Prime Minister Tariq Aziz reportedly told Russian officials that the regime assessed it could withstand any combination of US airstrikes and local opposition forces.

Concern that the United States will target his regime has led Saddam to step up efforts to ensure that he is not undermined from within. He has embarked on an effort to alternately woo and intimidate traditionally restive groups.

E.O. 13526, section 1.4(c)

- Saddam last month warned the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) Prime Minister, Nechirvan Barzani, that Baghdad would strike the Kurds if they supported US efforts.

E.O. 13526, section 1.4(c)

- In November, Saddam sent Ali Hasan al-Majid (who is in charge of security in the south and at times has been responsible for the violent suppression of Shias and Kurds) to warn tribal shaykhs in southern Iraq that they would be held responsible, and subject to severe reprisal, for any security incidents in their areas. These threats were followed a month later by Saddam's more "congenial" public meetings with a variety of tribal leaders in which they pledged their support to the regime.

Despite the recent efforts to shore up internal control, longstanding family strains remain a vulnerability that continues to weaken regime stability.

- An altercation in early 2002 within the ruling Tikriti clan resulted in Saddam ordering the imprisonment of two of his half brothers and their sons.

E.O. 13526, section 1.4(c)

- Saddam humiliated another one of his half-brothers, Barzan, at the Ba'th Party Regional Command elections in May 2001 by ensuring he received only 21 out of 295 votes. A few months later, he accused Barzan of disgracing the clan by marrying the widow of an executed traitor and forced their divorce.

E.O. 13526, section 1.4(c)

TOP SECRET

o Saddam—seeking to reduce potentially damaging defections—last year decreed that 75 family members, including his first wife, his daughters, and his half-brothers, were barred from traveling outside Iraq.

E.O. 13526, section 1.4(c)

Saddam is attempting to garner support among the regime's key players for his son Qusay, whom he is grooming to replace him. Such a transition would not necessarily be smooth. Qusay is the younger son; his older brother, Uday, is widely believed to be unstable. Saddam's clear preference for Qusay is likely to cause continued instability within an already fractious family.

The Ba'th Party: In Decline

Morale within the Ba'th Party has deteriorated in recent years. Saddam's conversion of the party into a cult of his personality at the expense of its traditional ideology has marginalized much of the party. Moreover, his placement of Tikriti clan members in important posts has alienated other party members.

o Attendance at party meetings has plummeted in the past decade, in part because of the disillusionment of the membership. As a result, [ ] regime had begun to impose penalties, including the withholding of rations, on Ba'th Party members who miss consecutive party meetings.

E.O. 13526, section 1.4(c)

- Party members perform mandatory security duties, especially in areas of Baghdad and southern Iraq, where they are frequently targets of assassination.

[ ] the regime

continues to execute Ba'th Party members who are suspected of disloyalty.

Party membership still has its rewards, however. We assess that most members belong to the party for economic and professional, rather than ideological, reasons. Membership is a prerequisite for gaining access to better food rations, education, employment, land, and housing.

Saddam appears to be concerned about the decline of the party. He recently promised incentives for leaders, stepped up party indoctrination—particularly focused on the younger generation—and called for a greater party role in daily life.

Origins of the Ba'th Party

The Iraqi Ba'th Party was originally founded by a Shia and Shias dominated the party's membership in its first decade. Now, however, the party is dominated by Sunnis, particularly Tikritis. Shia participation in the party started to dwindle in the 1960s and was eclipsed in the wake of the 1968 Tikriti takeover of the government. The Kurds similarly are marginalized. Shia fortunes declined further in the wake of the 1991 post-Gulf war uprising against Saddam, when Shias were purged from party, government, and military positions.

A small number of Shias continue to hold high-level positions in the party. These few positions have not translated into improved conditions or political power for other Shias.

Since 11 September 2001, the Ba'th Party has been ordered to adopt defensive measures to secure vulnerable neighborhoods.

- o In early March 2002, the regime gave Ba'th Party militia personnel explicit

instructions on maintaining control in restive areas. Party members were to respond to regime emergency sirens by reporting to assigned duty stations, and Ba'th Party offices were designated as command centers.

- In mid-March, Ba'th Party elements in Basrah were at the highest level of alert; groups of party members patrolled roads and commercial areas.

- As of late March, the party security apparatus in some areas had commandeered vehicles from citizens for use in an emergency.

The Military: Morale Poor

We assess that Iraqi military morale and battlefield cohesion are more fragile today than in 1991. We judge that Iraq's air and air defense forces would be unable to maintain determined resistance if engaged by US-led coalition forces. The combat capabilities of Iraqi ground forces probably would erode more rapidly than was the case in 1991, especially in the Regular Army. Reporting since 11 September suggests Saddam's regime is increasingly concerned about the willingness of the military to fight.

- Baghdad reportedly issued orders that Army soldiers deserting in wartime would be shot and has taken steps to have military families relocated if war occurs, apparently to serve as hostages, thereby ensuring the loyalty of the officers.

Low morale is a major factor undermining Iraq's military capabilities. Morale problems have several causes.

- Iraqi military personnel are reportedly war weary and tired of crisis operations, especially within air defense units that are required to maintain a high level of

readiness while on the move. Anecdotal reports indicate that being put on alert—a more or less constant strain on Iraq's military since 1990—is a drain on morale and fighting spirit.

- Morale also is undermined by military equipment and manpower shortages, especially in the Regular Army.

- Saddam's oppression of his military—he has assigned much-despised security agents to tactical units where they have authority over commanders—undermines military morale and cohesion, according to Iraqi military sources.

All of these problems are compounded by rampant corruption within the military and the inherent tensions and distrust that often exists between the various ethnic, religious, or tribal groups that comprise military units.

Defensive Preparations

Since mid-September, Baghdad has been preparing for what it believes will be an inevitable US military campaign to topple Saddam's regime. Iraqi preparations were accelerated after the US President's State of the Union address.

- Iraqi ground forces are constructing defensive positions to protect equipment from anticipated air strikes, while those in the north are enhancing the defensive lines against potential Kurdish assaults.

- Baghdad apparently is mobilizing some reservists, using Al Quds militia units to form new Army infantry formations.

- Another large-scale military repair campaign is underway and is benefiting from increased spare parts imports. As many as 175 previously derelict heavy equipment transporter trailers apparently

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E.O. 13526, section 1.4(c)

are being repaired, as are 15 to 20 percent of Iraq's strategic SAM batteries.

- The Air Force has increased MiG-29 sorties and pilot training.

- Iraq is modifying new trucks to carry air defense weapons, and [redacted] ammunition and POL products are being distributed or dispersed in protective revetments.

[redacted] Saddam has reactivated his regional commands to enhance the regime's control over the country and ensure military loyalty. In the past such moves have been publicly announced to project an image of regime strength. No public announcements have yet been made.

[redacted] We judge that Saddam's forces generally are unable and would be unwilling to sustain combat against US-led ground forces, but with the recent defensive enhancements, they would be better able to "hunker down" in the hopes of outlasting a US-led air campaign.

[redacted] **Internal Security Forces**

[redacted] Saddam has created a multilayered, redundant, and pervasive security and intelligence apparatus. Personnel generally come from tribes or regions deemed to be loyal—mainly from among Sunni Arabs. Selection criteria and the monitoring of personnel become more stringent the closer one's assignment is to Saddam. With a crisis looming, Saddam's personal security detail probably is increasing its protective measures, changing Saddam's location more frequently, and restricting access to leadership venues.

[redacted] The security and intelligence services are the linchpin of regime survival.

(U) Human Shields

[redacted] The Iraqi regime uses Iraqi citizens, and foreigners as "human shields" to protect key political and military sites. It did this most notably in 1990 prior to the Gulf war, but has done so more recently as well.

- During a confrontation with the United States over UNSCOM inspections in 1997, Saddam ordered ranking members of the Ba'th Party to bring at least ten families a day to sit in government and security installations as human shields. [redacted] Iraqi television showed Ba'th Party "guests" visiting several palace complexes at this same time.

In 1991, Iraq threatened to use Coalition POWs as human shields, but apparently did not carry out this policy.

E.O. 13526, section 1.4(c)

The intelligence services monitor all levels of Iraqi society and the armed forces; the paramilitary security services protect the regime's key installations, leaders, and its weapons of mass destruction (WMD). With the regime feeling more threatened, it is likely to increase its intimidation of Iraqis through more arrests, interrogations, and even executions of prominent people, including military leaders, whose loyalty becomes suspect.

[redacted] **Two-Pronged Strategy.**
[redacted] The Iraqi intelligence services (IIS)—instrumental in Baghdad's efforts to counter the threat from a US-led campaign against Saddam—are preparing to counter US operations with a two-pronged asymmetric strategy:

- The Iraqi President has long sought to undermine possible alternatives to his regime by *disrupting the Iraqi opposition.*

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The IIS has intensified its efforts to target the Iraqi National Congress (INC), the Iraqi National Accord, the Supreme Council of the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), the KDP, and Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK). We assess the IIS plans to execute, intimidate, or coerce members of the opposition.

- The intelligence services *could attempt terrorist strikes against US and allied targets* in an effort to disrupt ongoing operations. We assess the Iraqi intelligence services have the capability, infrastructure, and surge capacity to attack US targets in Kuwait, Jordan, and possibly even Turkey. Other potential targets include US and allied facilities in Southeast Asia, the Persian Gulf, Europe, or possibly even South America and West Africa.

The Special Republican Guard (SRG) is the paramilitary security force trusted to defend the area around Baghdad, including protecting presidential areas, WMD facilities, and key government ministries; it also secures sensitive regime facilities near Saddam's hometown, Tikrit. The SRG has dispersed its units within garrison since DESERT FOX (December 1998) and recently built protective dispersal revetments for its armored units. We assess the SRG probably is on high alert, but units have not increased their dispersal activity, nor have we seen increased security checkpoints throughout Baghdad.

Other paramilitary forces have recently been relocated for general security duties, probably in anticipation of US strikes against Iraq, although we do not know the full extent of these deployments.

- The Al Quds Force militia recently assigned a division to each regular Army corps.

Foreign Policy Initiatives

Saddam is mounting an aggressive campaign to rally regional opposition to a possible US attack by offering to mend fences with neighbors and appealing for Arab unity. The escalating Arab-Israeli violence has helped him gain Arab support.

- Baghdad's recent actions at the Arab League Summit have improved—at least temporarily—its standing in the Arab world and probably are viewed by senior Iraqi officials as the best way to block or complicate US efforts to remove the regime.

- In the Summit's final communiqué, Baghdad—for the first time since the Gulf war—agreed to recognize Kuwait's borders and security and promised not to repeat the invasion of 1990.

- Saudi Crown Prince Abdallah publicly embraced Saddam's deputy Izzat Ibrahim al-Duri, partly in response to Baghdad's conciliatory gestures of releasing a Kuwaiti detainee, the agreement with Kuwait, and allowing the Summit to adopt the Saudi peace initiative unanimously.

- Iraq advised its diplomats to engage Saudi and Kuwaiti officials in Europe and to look for new areas of cooperation.

- In the north, Fedayeen Saddam elements have been collocated with air defense units.

The primary function of the paramilitary forces is to suppress domestic unrest and internal threats. Although they could be deployed to bolster the Regular Army—most likely in the event an Army unit was deemed unreliable—their actual combat

E.O. 13526, section 1.4(c)

11

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capabilities are negligible and would erode rapidly under pressure.

[ ] the SRG and other security forces suggests at least some elements suffer from low morale. Several confirmed post-1991 coup plots originated among security apparatus personnel. However, Kurdish and especially Shia anti-regime activity may discourage Sunni opposition within the security forces, prompting them to rally behind Saddam. Members of the Sunni-dominated security apparatus probably see their fate tied to Saddam and expect to bear the brunt of anti-regime retributions should the regime collapse. Therefore, we expect these forces to be the most steadfast in their support of Saddam.

Sources of Instability and Opposition

[ ] Saddam faces internal pressures in many forms, but we assess that he is capable of retaining control absent outside involvement which would weaken the regime to the point where the internal opposition would seize an enhanced opportunity to move against him. [ ] most Iraqis despise Saddam and his regime and want to see him removed. There is no safe way, however, of expressing opposition to Saddam's rule or even to criticize political repression, poor economic prospects, corruption, or lack of individual freedoms. Saddam's willingness to use draconian measures to quell unrest has effectively dampened any enthusiasm for challenging his regime. No large-scale civil unrest has erupted since 1999, when Shia riots protesting the assassinations of senior Shia clerics resulted in severe reprisals against whole villages and neighborhoods.

[ ] Despite the fairly widespread belief among Iraqis that the United States will attack Iraq at some point, the Iraqis probably are reluctant to take steps on their own because of Saddam's record of retaliation. If an attack damaged the effectiveness of the security forces, some segments of the population (especially in the more poverty stricken Shia areas) might rise up against the regime.

[ ] Many Shia and Sunni tribal leaders probably are not willing to risk the well-being of their people by independently launching a major offensive against Saddam. Some might cooperate with US-led forces in a concerted effort to remove the regime, provided they were convinced such an effort would be successful and final. While co-opting the tribes, however, Saddam has successfully played tribal jealousies and family squabbles to his advantage. Some of these frictions could rise to the fore once a move against Saddam was initiated.

[ ] A Fractious Opposition...
[ ] The Iraqi opposition is composed of some thirty widespread, fractious, and fluid groups. With the exception of the Kurdish and other minority parties in northern Iraq, opposition parties tend to be based outside Iraqi territory. Consistently divergent goals, personal rivalries, and interference by neighboring countries have stymied opposition efforts to destabilize Saddam's regime. The inability of the oppositionists thus far to produce a message or leadership with broad appeal has limited their following inside Iraq. Members of the opposition groups based outside Iraq, in particular, are not seen as a credible alternative to Saddam's regime; many Iraqis resent their presumption that they have a right to rule Iraq.

o Most opposition radio stations and newspapers are considered suspect. Various opposition groups use these media to spread exaggerated claims of anti-regime "operations"—viewed by Iraqis within the country as largely ineffectual.

12

Many of Iraq's opposition groups also have credibility problems in the region. Most regional states doubt the ability of any of the groups to topple the regime. At the same time, however, many of Iraq's neighbors—notably Syria, Iran, and Turkey—are hedging their bets by attempting to consult with or co-opt certain groups in an effort to ensure their interests are addressed in the event Saddam does fall. The Turks have been actively grooming the minority Turkomans in northern Iraq to play a much larger political role in a successor government, while the Iranians have close ties with Kurdish and Shia groups in an effort to maintain some influence.

Despite their inability to pose an organized, unified challenge to the regime, some of the Iraqi opposition groups located outside the country have supporters or contacts within Iraq that could influence events if the regime were weakened or removed.

...With Weak Military Capabilities The three opposition groups with paramilitary capabilities inside Iraq—the PUK, the KDP, and the SCIRI—lack the organization and firepower to challenge the Iraqi military absent extensive external support. These groups can harass military units in northern and southern Iraq, but they do not have the means to threaten centers of regime authority in Baghdad and Tikrit.

- In 1995, some opposition elements, led by the PUK, mounted a coordinated attack against an under-strength and underfed infantry division and managed to overrun some forward positions, but the attack failed to ignite an intended uprising within the military—Iraqi forces quickly recovered and opposition forces withdrew.

- Opposition fighters specialize in hit-and-run guerilla raids against isolated Iraqi

military units and government offices—they lack the heavy weapons, transport assets, organization, and training to stage conventional military assaults.

- The KDP, for example, claimed in February to have only one week's worth of ammunition, virtually no transport assets, and few antiaircraft or artillery systems,

- The KDP and PUK each claim about 20,000 full-time fighters. SCIRI has an estimated 3,500 to 6,000 fighters.

The Kurds in northern Iraq do not have the ability to project their power base beyond the northern governorates. Viewed by many Iraqis (including some members of the opposition) as secessionist and opportunist, the Kurds are widely distrusted. A move by the Kurds beyond the north probably would be seen as a possible land grab to strengthen their northern resources and could actually serve as a rallying point for Saddam.

The Kurds do, however, have some contacts with Iraqi military officers. Kurdish claims regarding the extent of their contacts probably are exaggerated, but lines of communication do exist because the Kurds have been able to work with high-ranking military officers defecting through northern Iraq. Similar, and possibly stronger, contacts probably also exist with other opposition groups, especially among the various former Iraqi officers who have joined the opposition, such as former Chief of Staff Nizar Khazraji, former Director of Military Intelligence Wafiq al-Sammarrai, former Chief of Staff of the Army's 1st Mechanized Division Najib al-Salihi, and former Army General Fawzi al-Shamari.

These relationships have not proven sufficiently strong to pose a threat to Saddam

E.O. 13526, section 1.4(c)

13

on their own, but they could provide a line of communication to officers inside Iraq who might be in a position to take control if he is ousted. If the currently fractured opposition manages to increase its level of cooperation—at least to include those groups with internal contacts—it might help to minimize the potential for factional fighting and power struggles in a post-Saddam period.

Iraqi opposition groups have not demonstrated the ability to mount joint operations against Baghdad, as internecine rivalries have traditionally hampered broader anti-regime goals.

- The PUK and KDP enjoy limited autonomy in the north, using rugged mountain terrain as a safehaven, and have not attacked the regime in seven years. Their mutual animosity undermines cooperative efforts against Saddam. Both groups maintain contact with Baghdad and have demonstrated their willingness to work with the regime on a range of economic and security issues. Nevertheless, they cooperated against the regime during the 1991 uprising when Saddam's regime was weakened by DESERT STORM, and they might be able to do so again, if they felt they had adequate outside support.

- SCIRI fighters used to conduct occasional raids against regime targets, but Iraq's draining of the southern marshes in the mid-1990s deprived Shia opposition groups of a haven—SCIRI fighters usually retreat to bases in Iran. The flat desert terrain of central and southern Iraq places Shia forces at a severe disadvantage against Iraqi armor and mechanized infantry. A SCIRI representative said publicly that the organization's leaders decided to cut back on operations until they assessed the

United States had become serious about removing Saddam.

- SCIRI has close relations with the PUK and has a small number of fighters in those areas of northern Iraq controlled by the PUK.

If Iraq were under attack from abroad, harassing attacks by the opposition against Iraqi frontline units could increase pressure on Baghdad and exacerbate instability. Opposition groups would be able to exploit openings to pursue local interests at the fringes of the regime, although opposition militia are not equipped to threaten Saddam's authority without expansive external support.

- Kurdish fighters could move against Mosul or Karkuk and its oilfields, attempting to drive Saddam's forces from these strategic areas, thereby strengthening the Kurds' bargaining position with any successor regime. Over time this situation could lead to conflict with a new regime.

- Shia opposition groups could target regime military and security elements in the south, as they did in 1991, attempting to wrest Shia population centers in Karbala, Najaf, and Basrah from Saddam's control. They also might try to mobilize the Shia population in Baghdad (which is more than half Shia), although success against Saddam's security forces in the capital would be more difficult to achieve.

Opposition groups would be hard pressed to independently defend their gains against a concerted regime counteroffensive—the PUK in 1996 held the city of Irbil for less than six hours when confronted with a determined Iraqi assault.

The National Intelligence Council

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National Security Information	Unauthorized Disclosure Subject to Criminal Sanctions

Information available as of 03 April 2002 was used in the preparation of this Intelligence Community Assessment

The following intelligence organizations participated in the preparation of this Assessment:

The Central Intelligence Agency

The Defense Intelligence Agency

The National Security Agency

National Imagery and Mapping Agency

The Bureau of Intelligence and Research, Department of State

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Dissemination Control Abbreviations	NOFORN (NF)	Not releasable to foreign nationals
	ORCON (OC)	Dissemination and extraction of information controlled by originator
	REL...	This information has been authorized for release to...
	RD	Restricted Data
	FRD	Formerly Restricted Data

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