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Intelligence Community Brief

DECLASSIFIED UNDER AUTHORITY OF THE INTERAGENCY SECURITY CLASSIFICATION APPEALS PANEL, E.O. 13526, SECTION 5.3(b)(3)
ISCAP APPEAL NO. 2014-002, document no. 1
DECLASSIFICATION DATE: November 21, 2017

Iraq: Prospects for Confrontation (U)

Key Points (U)

During the remainder of the year, Saddam Husayn will continue to look for a way to break out from UN-imposed sanctions. Although he has weakened UNSCOM, he has not yet achieved a significant breakthrough in getting sanctions lifted. He has, therefore, decided to step up pressure on the UN and the Coalition:

- Saddam appears to expect an end to sanctions—or at least tangible progress toward that goal—by the end of the year at the latest. He could initiate another crisis with the UN without warning.
- Saddam's main strategy remains weakening coalition resolve through confrontation or threat of confrontation. He could create a crisis by interfering with UNSCOM inspections, or he could choose from a range of other options—such as suspending oil-for-goods, encouraging sanctions busting, and undertaking military actions—to cause disagreement among UN Security Council members.

Saddam will be persistent. Recurring Iraqi-initiated confrontations followed by periods of feigned Iraqi cooperation are likely to continue even beyond the next crisis, although the options Saddam uses may change over time.

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This memorandum was prepared under the auspices of the National Intelligence Officer for Near East and South Asia. It was coordinated with representatives of CIA, DIA, INR, NSA, NIMA, DoE, Army, Air Force, and the Marines. Comments may be addressed to the NIO for NESAs on [redacted]

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Saddam's Goals (U)

We assess that Saddam has three primary, and interrelated, goals: maintaining power, having sanctions lifted as soon as possible, and, over the long term, reasserting Iraq's regional dominance. []

Maintain Power . . .

With respect to the first, Saddam's domestic position appears to be as strong as it has been at any point since the Gulf war:

- His intelligence and security services have undercut political opposition inside Iraq, as demonstrated by an extensive security crackdown and execution campaign in November 1997.
- There have been no known coup attempts or new splits within Saddam's immediate family since 1995, when Husayn Kamil al-Majid defected to Jordan. We have not confirmed any serious security incidents since the assassination attempt on Saddam's son Uday in 1996. []

Nevertheless, Saddam has been scarred by ongoing sanctions-induced political and economic pressures that continue to create an uncertain environment for the regime:

- During the recent standoff with the UN, Saddam calculated that internal opposition groups and disaffected tribal elements would try to exploit US strikes by attacking regime targets and trying to ignite large-scale unrest. For example, at the height of the crisis in February 1998, Saddam deployed Republican Guard units at strategic points in Iraq, probably to deal with potential unrest.
- Baghdad has had to contend in the south with a continuous, low-level Shi'a rebel insurgency—whose members have

assassinated numerous local government and Ba'th Party officials over the past year. Baghdad also lacks military control over the Kurdish north. []

. . . Have Sanctions Lifted . . .

Saddam appears to have made a strategic decision that confrontation would be necessary to gain an end to UN-imposed sanctions. He resorted to a long period of brinkmanship between October 1997 and February 1998 to spur Iraq's UN Security Council sympathizers into action. Iraq's tactics have weakened UNSCOM's authority and credibility but have not produced a breakthrough for Saddam, causing him to step up pressure on the UN:

- Baghdad has succeeded in shifting the debate within the Security Council from Iraq's failure to fully account for its weapons of mass destruction (WMD) programs to the issue of UNSCOM's capabilities, mission, and effectiveness.
- Revelations, such as the discovery that Iraq had filled missile warheads with the highly toxic nerve agent VX, however, could shift the debate back to UNSCOM's favor at least temporarily. Iraq has countered by vehemently denying that it developed VX missile warheads. []

. . . Reassert Long-Term Regional Dominance

Saddam is committed to seeing Iraq reemerge as the dominant power in the region:

- He is determined to retain elements of his WMD programs so that he will be able to intimidate Iraq's neighbors and deter potential adversaries, such as Iran, Israel, and the United States.

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In Their Own Words (U)

During a previous confrontation with UNSCOM in December 1997, the chief editor of the Iraqi newspaper Al-Jumhuriyah—believed to be a confidant of Saddam—explained Iraq's strategy as follows:

The material and military balance of power was clearly in favor of the enemy. It [Iraq] therefore adopted a rational stand toward the achievement of victory so that there would be several limited victories—which would deprive the enemy of part of its power and morale and other states' support for it. (U)

Thus, we would begin fulfilling the conditions of recording victory by gradually exhausting the enemy and driving it into a corner until it admits failure and fatigue and surrenders. Thus, Iraq would score final victory under the plan of collecting separate and partial victories, rather than a plan of dealing one decisive blow. (U)

- He also recognizes that, in order to enhance his role as a regional player, he must restore Iraq's economic power—and a first step is ending sanctions.

Saddam's Strategy: Keep Pushing (U)

Saddam feels that putting pressure on UNSCOM and the Security Council is the only way to achieve his goal of ending sanctions. He does not intend to fully comply with relevant

Security Council resolutions, and he, therefore, believes the US will respond by blocking his efforts to get sanctions lifted.

We assess that over the next several months Saddam will focus on weakening international support for UNSCOM and continuing to press and cultivate the international community:

- Iraqi officials have attacked UNSCOM Chairman Butler personally and have successfully put UNSCOM on the defensive to the point that some previously friendly Security Council members now question UNSCOM's practices and mandate. Baghdad will continue to lobby sympathizers in the Security Council—especially Russia—to rigorously contest UNSCOM's assertions of Iraqi noncompliance and to press the rest of the Council to move toward lifting sanctions this year.
- Baghdad will step up efforts to convince Arab countries to violate the sanctions unilaterally. It will work to cultivate new support in the Security Council, focusing on Bahrain—the only Arab state on the Security Council—and the three African members. Iraqi officials recently asserted that Baghdad will count on an Arab bloc to break the embargo unilaterally if the Security Council fails to lift sanctions.
- Saddam has said publicly that he wants the United States to have to use its veto in the Security Council to preserve sanctions. He added that a US veto would be a "major victory for Iraq."

Saddam will not be content to isolate UNSCOM in the Security Council and will demand concrete movement toward a lifting

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of sanctions. An attempt to force an endgame could come at any time. Saddam has warned that he expects sanctions to be lifted by the end of the year and that he will provoke a confrontation if his demands are not met:

- Although Iraq has failed to follow through on threats before, Baghdad already has laid the rhetorical groundwork for a new confrontation. There may be no warning prior to another challenge.

Saddam's Options for Confrontation (U)

Baghdad has several options for renewing confrontation with the UN or the US and its allies. None is mutually exclusive. Moreover, Saddam has demonstrated an ability to devise new and unexpected options.

Saddam's strongest leverage lies in provoking another confrontation with UNSCOM.

Saddam can impose a variety of restrictions on the inspection process, ranging from limits on certain nationalities—as he did in October 1997—to a general expulsion order. Iraq would make the resumption of normal UNSCOM operations contingent upon progress in the Security Council toward lifting sanctions.

Other options include harassing or refusing to guarantee the safety of inspectors, challenging either militarily or diplomatically UN-sponsored U-2 flights, refusing to work with Chairman Butler or otherwise participate in technical talks, or turning off monitoring cameras. Saddam could also attack the integrity of UNSCOM inspectors:

- Saddam probably assesses that almost all Security Council members are prone to

Potential Triggers (U)

The threat of confrontation will remain high. An actual confrontation could be triggered as a result of a number of events including:

- A Security Council decision against closing the nuclear file in July 1998
- The results of the French and Swiss X-rays
- An Iranian attack against MEK bases in Iran
- UNSCOM Chairman Butler's early August 1998 visit to Baghdad to assess the schedule of work
- The August 1998 sanctions review
- UNSCOM Chairman Butler's October 1998 report to the Security Council
- The October 1998 sanctions review
- Saddam's announcement of a provocation to coincide with developments elsewhere in the region, such as a crisis in the Middle East, peace talks in Dayton, or the Gulf and Balkan crises

negotiate rather than to penalize. He would expect any crisis to lead to a new round of direct talks with the Secretary General, whom Baghdad managed to draw into the last crisis, or with senior officials from Security Council member countries.

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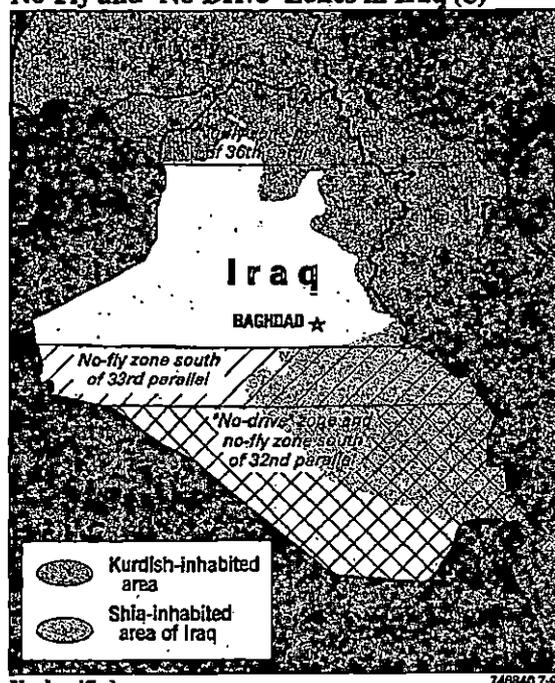
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- Baghdad would justify its actions by citing US domination of UNSCOM and UNSCOM's failure to produce tangible evidence of weapons concealment. Baghdad would gamble that the Security Council would choose to grant Iraq concessions to avert a crisis.

Saddam's other options for challenging the UN include:

- *Suspending oil-for-goods.* Iraq could cease participating in or interfere with the UN-sponsored oil-for-goods program, betting that many governments—particularly in the Arab world—would seek to resolve the situation to prevent a humanitarian crisis. Completely suspending the program, however, could place heavy financial costs on Baghdad or risk political unrest in Iraq.
- *Encouraging sanctions-busting.* Iraq has threatened to try “breaking” the UN economic embargo—including the ban on commercial air activity—on its own if it does not achieve its goals in the Security Council. Baghdad already has stepped up efforts to incite other countries to ignore the embargo. Although there has been some leakage, no country has openly agreed to defy the sanctions.
- *Withdrawing from the UN.* Saddam could withdraw from the UN—even though he would lose access to a key negotiating forum—in the hope that Iraq could negotiate a more lenient future relationship or rally other countries to defy UN restrictions. Iraq publicly portrays its relationship with the UN as a contract and expects reciprocal treatment in exchange for its cooperation.

No-Fly and "No-Drive" Zones in Iraq (U)



Rather than challenging the UN, Baghdad could take steps aimed at creating dissension within the Coalition, such as:

- *Intervening in northern Iraq.* Baghdad could press Kurdish factions in northern Iraq to reach a political settlement that would increase Saddam's influence in the north. Increased Iranian or Turkish presence in the north or an appeal for assistance from either the KDP or the PUK could provide a pretext for Iraqi military intervention. Baghdad also could exert economic pressure on the Kurds.

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Intelligence Gaps [redacted]

We lack specific intelligence information
on many issues pertaining to Baghdad's
strategic thinking. [redacted]

E.O. 13526, section 1.4(c)

We do not know the minimum amount of
improvement toward the lifting of sanctions
that Saddam would accept as a sign of
progress. We cannot be certain at what
point his patience will run out.

We do not know Saddam's perception of
the level of domestic opposition that he
faces. We also lack intelligence on the
attitudes of senior security and military
officials toward the regime.

We do not have a complete understand-
ing of Saddam's perception of the
economic and financial difficulties he
faces. We do not know how important a
role economic factors play in Saddam's
decisionmaking process. [redacted]

- **Testing the no-fly zones.** Saddam could renew Iraqi flights into the no-fly zones using either civilian or military aircraft in an attempt to provoke a US military response. Baghdad could use the humanitarian situation or Iranian military or covert operations against the MEK as justification. Iraq could also move additional air defense units into the zones or activate air defense radars while US aircraft are nearby.

- **Moving militarily in the south.** Iraq could augment its military forces south of the 32nd parallel on the pretext of defending the country against Iranian-sponsored Shi'a insurgents. [redacted]

Finally, Iraq could undertake more drastic measures aimed at threatening its neighbors or key Coalition members. We believe such measures are unlikely for a variety of reasons, however:

- **Another Iraqi move of forces to the Kuwait border** cannot be ruled out as an act of desperation designed to refocus world attention on Iraq. Baghdad, however, probably would be unwilling to jeopardize diplomatic gains it has made in the Gulf by moving against Kuwait.
- **An attack against Israel** likewise cannot be ruled out, but such an attack would belie Iraq's claim that it has complied with UN resolutions. Saddam is also doubtless aware that attacking Israel could result in heavy retaliation against Iraq.
- **Terrorism.** Although much less capable since the end of the Gulf war, Iraqi intelligence maintains the ability to conduct limited terrorist operations outside Iraq. If the Middle East peace process continues to falter, Saddam could strengthen ties to Palestinian extremists and thus increase his terrorist capability. [redacted]

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