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Director of Central Intelligence

A Red Cell Report

Number 111

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In response to the events of 11 September, the Director of Central Intelligence commissioned CIA's Deputy Director for Intelligence to create a "red cell" that would think unconventionally about the full range of relevant analytic issues. The DCI Red Cell is thus charged with taking a pronounced "out-of-the-box" approach and will periodically produce memoranda and reports intended to provoke thought rather than to provide authoritative assessment. Please direct questions or comments to the DCI Red Cell at [redacted]

Can The Coalition Kick-Start A Rising in the South? [redacted]

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In the battle for Shia opinion, Saddam's continued access to the airwaves and his thugs' presence in the south may be overshadowing the growing coalition military pressure. Intimidation by the regime's killers is magnified by a coalition strategy that initially bypassed southern cities on the way to Baghdad. Locals remember their catastrophic rising of 1991; this time a full-scale rebellion might not happen until the Shia see two developments: full control of Basra by coalition forces and further destruction of the Republican Guard, which was responsible for crushing the rising 12 years ago. Blasting the myth of Saddam's "invincibility" requires that coalition forces neutralize the regime's instruments of coercion and quickly develop liberated zones to empower southern tribes and families, legitimize cooperation with the "liberators," and advertise the definitive end of Tikriti rule. [redacted]

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The Red Cell was asked to speculate on why the population of southern Iraq has not yet risen against Saddam Husayn and on what coalition actions might inspire the Shia to more robust action. [redacted]

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Why Risk Another Disaster? [redacted]

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Western reporters' interviews with locals provide anecdotal evidence that, despite coalition advances, an image of Saddam's personal power is a potent deterrent to rebellion. Many in the south acknowledge coalition military power but remain unconvinced that Saddam is really finished. For now, the perceived risk-reward ratio provides insufficient incentive to rise against the regime. [redacted]

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- Our reading [redacted] suggests a population still cynical of US motives in the wake of the 1991 catastrophe and made even more wary by the initial bypass of southern cities—leaving the Shia exposed to the terror of Fedayeen thugs as coalition forces minimize their own casualties. (b)(1) (b)(3)
- The regime's survival in Baghdad and continued broadcast of messages nationwide despite coalition air power stokes the fear that Republican Guard tanks—which crushed Shia small arms in 1991—will return to settle scores with rebels. [redacted] (b)(3)

Indeed, the trauma of the 1991 suppression and the present Shia caution suggest that another great uprising may not be in the offing. This time, a more prudent southern populace might wait until they are physically liberated before they feel sufficiently safe to cooperate with their liberators. At that time they might savagely turn on Saddam's remaining killers and flunkies.

- Some who hate Saddam but lost family members in 1991 may remain overtly hostile towards the US even after liberation; their mood may be akin to that of Warsaw after the Polish resistance rising of 1944, when a powerful Soviet army just across the river stood by while the Germans destroyed the rebellion. This memory remained vibrant throughout the Communist period. [redacted] (b)(3)

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Prompting More Active Cooperation [redacted]

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We see daily signs that visible coalition success against the regime's bully battalions does facilitate local cooperation. Supportive remarks [redacted]

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[redacted] are revealing—"three days ago I'd be to afraid to tell you what I'm telling you now"—and growing more common. We see four factors as critical in fostering an intellectual break with the regime and in determining whether the Shia will exorcise the ghosts of 1991 in a definitive move toward the coalition. [redacted]

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Physical Liberation. The liberation of cities and towns in the south—especially Basra—could create accelerating Shia support for coalition operations. We surmise many local notables would see the fall of Basra as compelling evidence that Saddam's forces are gone for good and that Iraqis can and should turn to the common task of constructing a better future.

- Demonstrated coalition willingness to risk casualties for the sake of cleaning out Saddam's thugs might be critical to how far the Shia in particular take risks. [redacted]

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Building Political Legitimacy. We surmise that, once coalition forces are clearly seen as intent upon eradicating the regime presence, some locals will cooperate—and even lead—the building of new authority. In an atmosphere where local Shia are seen as the successors to the Ba'athists, increasing numbers might be willing to direct coalition forces to Saddamites in hiding and, perhaps, to revolt in areas still controlled by the regime.

- The destruction of the regime's coercive means will involve revenge-taking against the murderers of 1991. Reports that locals are able to take revenge on Saddam's henchmen in the south might stir up rebellion elsewhere.
- Revenge-taking may provide needed catharsis but will require careful coalition management. Such oversight is more likely to work if local notables share responsibility with liberating officers—local courts might establish a version of the legal vetting process used in post-Communist Eastern Europe and could become a basis for local government. [redacted]

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Hammering the Snakehead. As the liberation of the south is completed, prospects for active southern cooperation would probably increase with coalition military success against Saddam's elite units around Baghdad. In particular, Iraqis need to see televised proof that the hated Republican Guards and other armed pillars of the regime are being destroyed.

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Protecting the Holy Sites. The Shia holy sites at Najaf and Karbala will remain a neuralgic issue regardless of strategy employed in the South. We worry that Saddam will destroy the Tomb of Ali or other holy places and blame the US. Public statements of alarm at Saddam's plans should be repeated over and over, and willingness to consult local Shia leaders—and perhaps even Iran—over how to arrange the departure of Saddam's forces from the sites might improve the coalition position in this public relations battle.

- Inviting local leaders to discuss the holy sites and view US and UK troop activities—perhaps modeled on the Western reporters embedded in coalition military units—might improve the US image with the Shia population and give them a new and trusted source of information. [redacted]

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