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Director of Central Intelligence

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DCI Red Cell

A Red Cell Report

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Could Saddam Step Down as a Ploy to Delay US Action? []

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 []

In a last ditch effort to disrupt US plans, Saddam might resign as Iraq's President and pass the mantle to a puppet, perhaps his younger son Qusay but possibly a stooge he thinks the international community may find less malodorous. Saddam might calculate a sudden, well-timed resignation—although deceiving no one about who calls the shots in Iraq—could throw the US off stride and postpone an invasion as UN members demand an assessment of the "new" situation and support for military action erodes. If a resignation ploy had little effect, Saddam could easily orchestrate his recall to power "by the Iraqi people" and use his gesture to stoke Arab resistance to the US.

Saddam realizes that if the US invades Iraq, he will lose power and probably his life. Based on his past behavior, Saddam surely has some surprises up his sleeve. The Red Cell consulted CIA analysts and speculates on an eleventh hour gambit Saddam might use to thwart an invasion. []

Standing Down to Upstage Washington []

Saddam relishes power and will do virtually anything to retain it. His foes are therefore prudent to prepare for the unthinkable—steps even Saddam might see as anathema until he sees the end approaching. For example, a sham resignation in which Saddam ruled from behind the scenes would be far preferable to him than exile abroad, but he might fear losing control, especially of the security forces. He would be mindful of Milosevic's fate, perhaps calculating a successor would eventually turn him over to the War Crimes Tribunal.

- Moreover, Saddam's personality is ill suited to stepping aside. He reacted negatively when a diplomat raised with him the possibility of exile, reflecting his determination to hang on to power even if offered personal security. []

Nevertheless, in the face of overwhelming US and coalition force, Saddam may come to see a resignation gambit as offering the best hope for personal survival and the only way to preserve his influence. Compared to death at US hands or foreign exile, voluntary resignation might strike him as a way retain control through a hand-picked successor while posturing as elder statesman, sacrificing position for the good of Iraq and Arab peoples.

- Saddam has already played the puppet master. Before he became president in 1979, he exercised near absolute power from behind the throne as Iraq's number two leader. []

What He Might Hope To Gain []

If an attack against Iraq seemed inevitable, Saddam might calculate that a last minute resignation would at least buy him additional time while the world puzzled over the significance of such a move. If key actors played their parts adroitly, Saddam might hope

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to break up any existing coalition while denying the US the objective of regime change. In a best case for him, Saddam might even be able to resume formal power at the "behest of the Iraqi people" when the heat eventually subsided.

- Even if the US refused to bite and moved ahead with invasion plans, Saddam would probably calculate—correctly, in our view—that other states would pressure Washington to pause and let the UN try to deal with the "new" regime.

[redacted]

- Neighboring Arab leaders might even praise Saddam's statesman-like move to avert a potential crisis for them in dealing with the Arab "street"—especially if Saddam claimed his departure would allow the world to focus on the "real" issue of Israeli aggression against the Palestinians.
- A Saddam resignation would also throw the already fractious Iraq opposition off balance and cause a scramble for influence inside and outside Iraq. Despite suspicions of what Saddam was really up to, Kurds and Shia opposition elements might approach a new Iraqi leader to cut a deal. [redacted]

A resignation might enhance Saddam's policy of trying to appear forthcoming on UN inspections. Saddam could calculate a figurehead would be even more effective in selling the notion that Iraq had nothing to hide. With several years to conceal its programs and remove evidence from suspect facilities, the regime stands an excellent chance of fooling UNMOVIC and creating pressure in the UNSC to dismantle the sanctions regime.

- With inspectors back in Iraq and Saddam on the sidelines, international support for a hard line would erode. Over time, a "new" Iraqi regime could resume its efforts to develop WMD. [redacted]

Qualified Candidates for Front Man [redacted]

To undertake a faux resignation, Saddam would need a "successor" strongly committed to Saddam's personal safety and the interest of the family and broader Tikrit clan. The new president would need to be willing to serve as a facade behind which Saddam would rule and to resist efforts to transform the system or marginalize the Bath party. A Saddam surrogate would also need credibility with the security services and the Revolutionary Guard and have a measure of international standing, especially among Arab states. [redacted]

With these considerations in mind, Saddam might go one of three ways:

- **Dynastic.** Saddam's preferred successor is his younger son, Qusay, whom he has been grooming for power. Qusay has close ties to the security organizations and the Bath party. He would protect family and clan interests. He is steeped in the Arab tradition of deference to parental authority and has less incentive than other potential successors to betray Saddam's trust, as long as he remained comfortable in an ersatz role. Qusay would be seen as identical to Saddam, however, with almost no fig leaf to cover Saddam's continuing power.
- **Constitutional.** According to the interim 1970 Constitution as revised, the Vice Chairman of the Revolutionary Command Council, Izzat al-Duri, should be Saddam's

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successor. Al-Duri is a loyal Saddam henchman, having survived in the position since 1979. His poor health and lack of charisma suggest he would not be a threat to Saddam. He is, however, a sleazy figure tainted by involvement in WMD and would be a poor "face" to the outside world.

- Pragmatic. Saddam might turn to Deputy Premier Tariq Aziz if he thought someone with greater standing in the outside world would complete the ruse. Aziz is well known abroad, having dealt with Western and Arab leaders for years, and is seen as a relative moderate. As a Christian of some urbanity, Aziz might be the sort of benign face that can help make Saddam's strategy of tactical retreat work. His lack of a power base and age (72) would make him easy to manipulate. [REDACTED]

How It Could Happen [REDACTED]

If he decided to resign at the eleventh hour, Saddam would in all likelihood make a major speech, perhaps to a Ba'hist concave, explaining that he was stepping down to save his countrymen and to promote Arab interests. He might blame the US, with its imperialist ambitions and Zionist string-pullers, noting that efforts to oust him violated the collective will of the Iraq people expressed in his "unanimous" reelection in October. He would make a plea to the Arab world to no longer let a "false" confrontation with him deflect from resistance to US and Israeli aggression. [REDACTED]

Saddam would avoid touching—much less playing—the resignation card until he was convinced he had no other alternative. In 1991, he offered to withdraw from Kuwait only when major coalition military movements were underway, but by then the coalition saw Saddam's offer as a transparent stalling tactic. This time, support for moving against Saddam is much softer and a late surprise might find greater receptivity. [REDACTED]

If Saddam plays this "low probability, high impact" gambit, we might see some indicators.

- On the eve of a resignation Saddam might purge of officials of questionable loyalty lest anyone suspect he is going soft.
- Saddam and the Iraqi media might increasingly portray the struggle with the US exclusively as a personal vendetta against Saddam, helping pave the way for an accommodation with the new leader.
- Saddam might consult with his sons, al-Duri, and some Ba'ih Party leaders. We might detect such efforts to script a resignation. [REDACTED]

If a staged resignation appeared unlikely to delay US military action, Saddam could quickly reassume the reins. He would swing the Iraq propaganda apparatus into action behind a "grass roots" recall to power. The media would stress that Saddam, in a last attempt to avert conflict and protect the Iraqi people, had been willing to step aside, but that even this "magnanimous" gesture would not satisfy the "rapacious" US administration and its allies, the Israelis and anti-Islamic Arab "lackeys."

- Such themes would resonate in the Middle East and could activate the Arab "street" to violent protest against any support provided to US forces. [REDACTED]

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