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DCI Red Cell

Director of Central Intelligence

A Red Cell Special Memorandum

22 January 2003

Saddam's Eleventh Hour Options [redacted]

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In the run up to a second Gulf war, there may be a gap between the time when key political elements for a US invasion fall into place and US forces begin operations. This time gap could open a window for Saddam to attempt last-minute political gambits, terrorist attacks, or threats against neighbors—anything to delay, deflect, or derail an attack. Once Saddam sees that the US offensive spells the end of his regime, he will have little reason for restraint.

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]

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The Red Cell offers a speculative analysis on how Saddam might try to prevent a US offensive or to so derail the coalition that the US is forced to halt its drive. [redacted]

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Window for Creative Skulduggery [redacted]

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As events play out during and after UNMOVIC's 27 January report to the Security Council, a window may open through which Saddam sees a US determined to move against him but a temporal gap emerging between the final political preparations and the final military deployments. During such a diplomatic/military gap, Saddam has a variety of options to try to throw the US off stride and to buy time.

- Saddam likes to be in control and distrusts others, so the most plausible options for him are those that do not require trust in surrogates or foreign governments. But when it comes to his survival, "anything goes." [redacted]

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Saddam's Soft Options [redacted]

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France's statement that it will oppose a new UNSC resolution endorsing military action has given Saddam reason to believe that he is successfully staving off war by "cooperating" just enough with the UN to keep diplomacy active. UNMOVIC may yet disrupt this strategy if its 27 January report exposes comprehensive Iraqi mendacity and a return to WMD hide and seek. If Blix takes an unexpectedly hard line, Saddam would face a dilemma—if he openly defies the UN, he hands the US a *casus belli*. But if he confesses his programs and turns over weapons, he admits deceit and thus might still provide a justification for US action.

- An extension of Iraq's current strategy would be for Saddam to suddenly "discover" some hidden WMD materials, execute a plausible culprit or two, and turn over token materials to UNMOVIC while continuing to hide the bulk of his programs and munitions. [redacted]

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- Another possible "extension" ploy would be to wait until the UNMOVIC report is presented later this month, track the ensuing UNSC debate, and then offer to respond positively to "all inspection concerns." Saddam might see this as gaining several more weeks or even months of delay. [redacted]

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Less likely, Saddam could still stage his own regime change. Saddam could, for example, step aside in favor of a council of handpicked officials that would send him into ostensible retirement or even exile. Arab leaders might privately tell him that his departure ensures his survival and that of large parts of his regime, and that even his eventual return is possible.

- The Saudis and Turks are both mounting an effort to persuade Saddam to step down and accept exile. Most Arab leaders would see this as less risky for them than a US invasion and occupation of Iraq.
- Key Arab states might tell Saddam that they would withdraw support for a US invasion if he agrees to step aside. Such a charade would not change the nature of the Iraqi state, but Arab governments might see Saddam's removal from Baghdad as enough of an "Arab solution" to obviate a US invasion.
- Saddam need do nothing but receive delegations and string out discussions. Mere hints that Saddam might do the "unthinkable" and step down could induce Arab and Turkish leaders to press the US for more time. [redacted]

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Hard Options for a Desperate Dictator [redacted]

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Once military action appears imminent or actually begins, Saddam might turn to more deadly gambits to deflect a US offensive. Helping to cause a crisis elsewhere, using hostages or human shields, threatening neighbors with WMD—even claiming to possess, and threatening to use, a nuclear weapon—could be seen as derailing US plans.

- With the Muslim *haj* scheduled for February 9-14, religious fervor in Saudi Arabia and the Muslim world may peak during Saddam's window for skullduggery. About 17,000 Iraqis will make the *haj* this year—enough to conceal hundreds of agents who could feed off widespread Muslim emotion to instigate massive anti-US protests. Saddam could reason that large, violent demonstrations would cause the Saudis and other Muslim regimes to rethink support for a US offensive.
- European and US peace activists may provide useful tools for Saddam, posturing on top of power plants, bridges, and air-raid bunkers. Saddam could supplement foreign activists by "encouraging" other vulnerable groups, such as Iraqi schoolchildren, to similarly sacrifice their blood for "the Arab cause." Knowing that releasing his human shields in 1990 did him no good, Saddam may this time keep them in place.
- Saddam could try to stir up a humanitarian panic by in effect holding hostage portions of his own population, warning that he will use all means to defend Iraq and that his Shi'a and Kurdish citizens will be expected to sacrifice themselves—the implication being he will unleash CW and BW on the Kurds and Shi'a if Iraq is invaded.
- Saddam might cooperate with terrorists in staging a WMD attack designed to refocus US attention on al-Qa'ida. Agents directly under Iraqi control or hired by Iraq, releasing anthrax or a contagious disease in many locations in the US or elsewhere might be seen as igniting such a crisis that the US would have to address it even at the cost of diverting resources from Iraq.

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- Saddam could try to coordinate with North Korea's leaders to keep the US torn between two crises. While North Korea needs no Iraqi urging to cause trouble and there is no evidence of cooperation, Saddam is in a position to promise Kim Chong-il substantial rewards in oil and cash for stirring the nuclear pot.
- Saddam could try to make a virtue of US claims and announce that Iraq in fact has a nuclear weapon, either obtained from P'yongyang—to lend an air of truth—or developed domestically. [redacted] Regional leaders could cite the risk of a nuclear conflict as justification to balk at military action despite the fact that Saddam would be in major violation of UNSC resolutions. Some might even cite the North Korean case, and say that it was now time for the US to talk to Saddam.
- Saddam could escalate his threats to visit destruction on neighboring countries hosting US forces, hoping to fan domestic problems for Turkey and Saudi Arabia in particular.

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And When All Else Has Failed

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Once Saddam sees an attack coming regardless of what he says or does, he may decide his best option is to strike first against Israel, the US or its allies. Such a move would invite the regime's destruction but Saddam might reason that he has nothing to lose.

- Saddam has a limited but real capability to attack targets in Kuwait, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Israel with ballistic missiles and aircraft or UAVs loaded with CBW. Firing first would enable Saddam to maximize surprise and make the most effective use of his limited capabilities. A few lucky hits from chemical or biological warheads getting through anti-missile defenses could cause serious civilian and military losses, and in Saddam's calculus, derail the US offensive at an early stage.
- Saddam might try to increase the effectiveness of pre-emptive action by orchestrating it with other steps, such as terrorist strikes in the US or using "hired threats" from North Korea to beset the US with multiple distractions.
- Saddam could strike first at Israel, possibly even launching missiles purportedly coming from Syria, attempting to ignite an Arab-Israeli war. If Israel retaliates against both Iraq and Syria, Hizballah is likely to join in—to Saddam's delight.

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Saddam's options are not mutually exclusive, and he could sequence steps depending on circumstances—for example, first trying limited disclosures to UNMOVIC, while sabotaging the haj and draping peace activists on his command bunkers. If these ploys failed, he would still have the option to launch an attack on Israel and to ignite an Arab-Israeli war. With an American sword of Damocles hanging over his head, we should expect Saddam to grasp at any straw to avert his doom. [redacted]

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