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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY



DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

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A Second Iraq-Turkey Border Crossing: Potential Destabilizer in Northern Iraq

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**A Second Iraq-Turkey Border Crossing:
Potential Destabilizer in Northern Iraq**

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Summary

Iraq and Turkey are likely to proceed with their plans to open a second border crossing through Iraqi Kurdish-held territory that will improve Baghdad's strategic and commercial position, erode Kurdish control of northern Iraq, and increase threats to US forces and interests. Turkish officials claim a new crossing would take a year or two to put into operation.

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Iraq and Turkey view a second crossing point as a way to gain leverage over the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and rein in its efforts to enhance Kurdish independence from Baghdad by controlling or eliminating the KDP's access to the lucrative border trade. The KDP currently earns an estimated \$15 million a month from illicit oil trading and levies via the Habur Gate—a revenue stream that has helped the KDP dominate its rival, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, for nearly a decade.

- The new crossing would give Saddam a new foothold in the vital Iraq-Syria-Turkey tri-border area and increase his leverage over Kurdish affairs.
- Turkish disenchantment with the KDP has spurred Ankara to work more closely with Baghdad to undercut the Kurds' position in northern Iraq.

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The border initiative could spark a Kurdish-Iraqi conflict that would prompt Kurdish pleas for US intervention.

- Baghdad, emboldened by its improving regional position, the erosion of UN sanctions, and the success of other bilateral and illicit trading relationships, is determined to rein in the Kurds and wrest Turkish border trade revenues.

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Iraqi forces deployed to control the southerly approaches to a new border crossing would make warning of subsequent Iraqi offensive actions more

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challenging and alter the operating environment for Operation Northern Watch (ONW).

- Extending the line of contact with the Kurds, thereby creating a longer front, would put a greater number of potential objectives within easy reach of Iraqi ground forces.
- An extension of Iraqi-controlled territory could provide new hiding places for surface-to-air weapons that could threaten ONW aircraft and lead to additional Iraqi propaganda over real or alleged collateral damage.

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A Second Iraq-Turkey Border Crossing: Potential Destabilizer in Northern Iraq [redacted]

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(b)(3) [redacted] Iraq and Turkey are intent on moving forward on their agreement announced in April to open a second border crossing through territory currently held by the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP). [redacted]

(b)(3) [redacted] it will be located 10 km southwest of the UN-approved Habur Gate crossing, close to the Syrian border.

(b)(3) [redacted] the opening of the second border crossing had been postponed due to economic conditions, but [redacted]

(b)(1) [redacted] Ankara would build a 15-kilometer road and a 300-meter long bridge, and Baghdad would construct a 35-km road and a 800-meter long bridge.

(b)(3) [redacted] the crossing will be used exclusively for petroleum and petroleum products and that the Habur gate would be used only for passenger traffic and non-petroleum trade, [redacted]

(b)(3) [redacted] the new border crossing would cost Ankara \$4 million.

• Turkish Foreign Minister Cem publicly said the crossing would be open in one to two years, although Turkey has not sought UN involvement and neither side has begun preparations for construction on its side of the border. [redacted]

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(b)(3) **Mechanics of the Border Crossing** [redacted]

We estimate a crossing comparable to Habur Gate would take at least a year to build, but a "panel"

bridge, capable of carrying 35-ton trucks, could be constructed across the Habur River between Iraq and Turkey in a matter of days.

• Any crossing west of the main road through Habur would require a new bridge across the river, which runs the length of the Turkey-Iraq border. The Habur crossing has two concrete bridges, each carrying one-way traffic.

• The KDP controls the secondary roads west of Habur, which would require minor refurbishment to support high volumes of truck traffic, [redacted] Iraq also would need to secure roads and build checkpoints before work could begin.

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[redacted] the infrastructure probably would consist of an inspection shed on either side of the crossing, administrative and support buildings, and several parking lots. [redacted]

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In an effort to establish a new secure trade corridor, Iraq also might construct a bridge across the Tigris River just south of KDP-held territory, allowing Iraq-bound traffic to more quickly leave Kurdish areas.

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This assessment was prepared by the Office of Near Eastern, South Asian, and African Analysis with contributions from the Office of Transnational Issues and the Office of Russian and European Analysis.

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for the last four years has denied NGOs access via Habur.

A second border crossing would facilitate Turkish-Iraqi trade by reducing heavy traffic flows through Habur and, if manned by Iraqi officials, cut the Kurds out of the lucrative commercial trade.

[Redacted]

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- The average number of oil tankers and cargo trucks last year at the Habur-Zakho border crossing was about 1,800 at any given time. [Redacted]

[Redacted] This average increased to about 2,200 as of May 2001.

- The KDP earns an estimated \$15 million a month from illicit oil trading and levies on trade through Habur Gate. [Redacted]

Opening a second border crossing that monopolizes petroleum trade would be the most significant Iraqi action against the Kurds since 1996, when Baghdad assisted the KDP in ousting the PUK from the Kurdish capital of Arbil. The move would aid Baghdad's long-term efforts to retake the north. For the foreseeable future, however, the lack of a Kurdish threat to the regime, the prospect of a costly occupation and reintegration, the threat of US retaliation, and preoccupation with sanctions relief are likely to deter Saddam from making a major move to regain control of Iraqi Kurdistan. [Redacted]

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Iraq Looking to Reassert Control [Redacted]

The new crossing would enable Saddam to increase his influence in the north by reducing KDP financial independence and its ability to dominate the rival PUK and Iraqi Kurdish affairs in general. In the past, Iraq has temporarily cut off the north from trade with Baghdad to demonstrate that Saddam, rather than the Kurdish leaders, controls the Kurds' economic lifeline.

- Baghdad already controls the amount of diesel fuel exported to Turkey through KDP territory, and in recent years has reduced the flow of fuel during periods of tension with the United States.
- KDP control of border trade has given the group a strong upper hand over the PUK for most of the last decade. Baghdad's control over trade through the region would increase Saddam's leverage in playing one party against the other. [Redacted]

Access by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to northern Iraq could be closed off if Iraq assumes control of the area contiguous to the Syrian border, where all NGO workers enter northern Iraq. Turkey

A logical first step in implementing the new border agreement would be the relocation of Iraqi mechanized forces north of Mosul toward the Iraq-Turkey-Syria tri-border. Iraqi forces currently stationed north of Tall Kayf—an undermanned infantry division and a lone mechanized battalion—are insufficient to control the line of communication between Mosul and the border with Turkey.

- Saddam's lack of consultation with the KDP on the border-crossing agreement suggests that he plans to control the crossing and its southerly approaches.

- To control a corridor to the border, reinforce key river crossings and mountain passes, restrain smuggling, and deter KDP interference, Iraq would need to deploy a mechanized division and an infantry division between Ain Zalah and the border. Such an operation probably would require corps-level combat support and river-crossing assets.

- Realigning forces northward probably would draw regular army forces from the Arbil or Kirkuk area

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while leaving Republican Guard forces currently garrisoned near Mosul and Kirkuk available for offensive operations.

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- An alternative scenario for extending Iraqi military presence toward the border—on the north side of Saddam Lake, between Dahuk and the border—would require a much greater commitment because Iraqi forces would need to secure KDP-controlled urban areas and ridgelines along this route.

- In late May, [redacted] reports that Ankara had developed a policy to react with military force if the Iraqi Kurds declared independence.

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Turkey Flexing Its Muscles [redacted]

The Turks have talked about opening a second border crossing into northern Iraq for several years.

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[redacted] Prime Minister Ecevit and Foreign Minister Cem in early June were touting plans to open a second border crossing with Iraq, outside KDP control. The Turks have held a number of meetings with the Iraqis to finalize a potential location and to discuss who would run the border crossing.

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[redacted] the Turks are prepared to take strong steps to make sure the Iraqi Kurds cannot create an independent entity and Turkey would retaliate if the KDP used force to block progress on the new border crossing.

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- The Turks have improved their ties with the KDP's rival PUK and could use this growing relationship to press the KDP—perhaps going so far as to foster clashes between the two groups.

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- Border trade with Iraq—worth an estimated \$600-\$800 million a year for Ankara—is a vital economic safety valve for Turkey's impoverished Kurdish southeast. A substantial portion of the local population is engaged in supporting the trade.

Kurds Unnerved by Talks [redacted]

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The KDP and PUK have alleged that plans for a second Iraq-Turkey border gate staffed by Iraqi officials will embolden Saddam to move north. Both parties have expressed concern that the Turks would facilitate access for Iraqi officials to set up border operations on the Kurds' western flank.

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The key goal for the Turks is to rein in [redacted] the Iraqi Kurds, primarily the KDP, by using a second crossing to gain more control over a key source of Kurdish revenues.

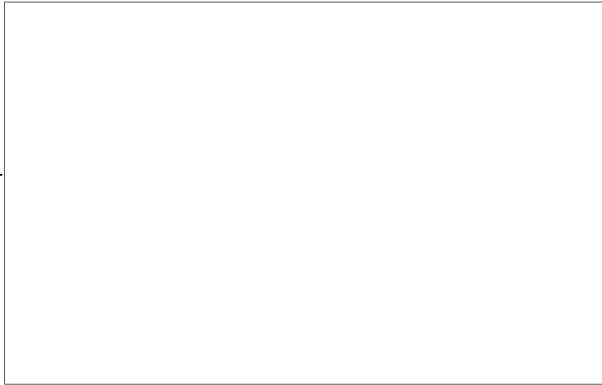
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- Until a new crossing opens, [redacted] Turkey will use its rail line through Syria—which opened in May for the first time in more than 20 years—to transport cargo outside the oil-for-food program to Baghdad. [redacted]

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Iraqi control of the approaches to a new border crossing would create a longer line of contact with the Kurds and put a greater number of potential Kurdish objectives within easy reach of Iraqi ground forces.

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Impact on US Interests [redacted]

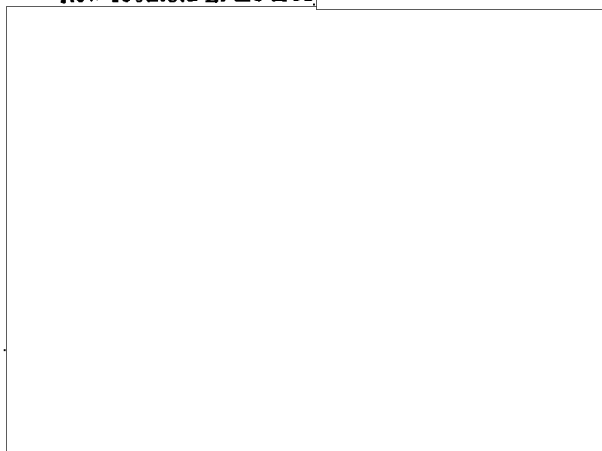
The border initiative portends a Kurdish-Iraqi conflict with the potential for dragging Washington into the fray. Baghdad, emboldened by its improving regional position, the erosion of UN sanctions, and the success of other bilateral and illicit trading relationships, is determined to rein in the Kurds and wrest Turkish border trade revenues.

- Warning of Iraqi offensive operations would be complicated because it would be harder to determine Baghdad's military objective if it mobilizes armored or mechanized forces in the area.
- The longer front would require Iraqi troops to patrol more roads and man additional checkpoints, increasing opportunities for clashes with the KDP.

Iraq could use the additional territory to deploy surface-to-air weapons targeted at Operation Northern Watch (ONW) aircraft, further restricting ONW's freedom of movement.

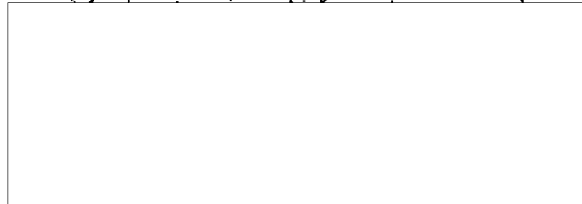
- The Kurds appear equally determined not to lose a vital revenue stream or to give Saddam's regime a new foothold in the area [redacted]

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- The new swath of territory would play host to a large volume of truck traffic, increasing the potential for collateral damage—and Iraqi propaganda—should ONW strike Iraqi surface-to-air units nearby.
- Iraq could deploy surface-to-air units within miles of the Turkish border, including the border crossing used by Turkish forces deployed to northern Iraq.

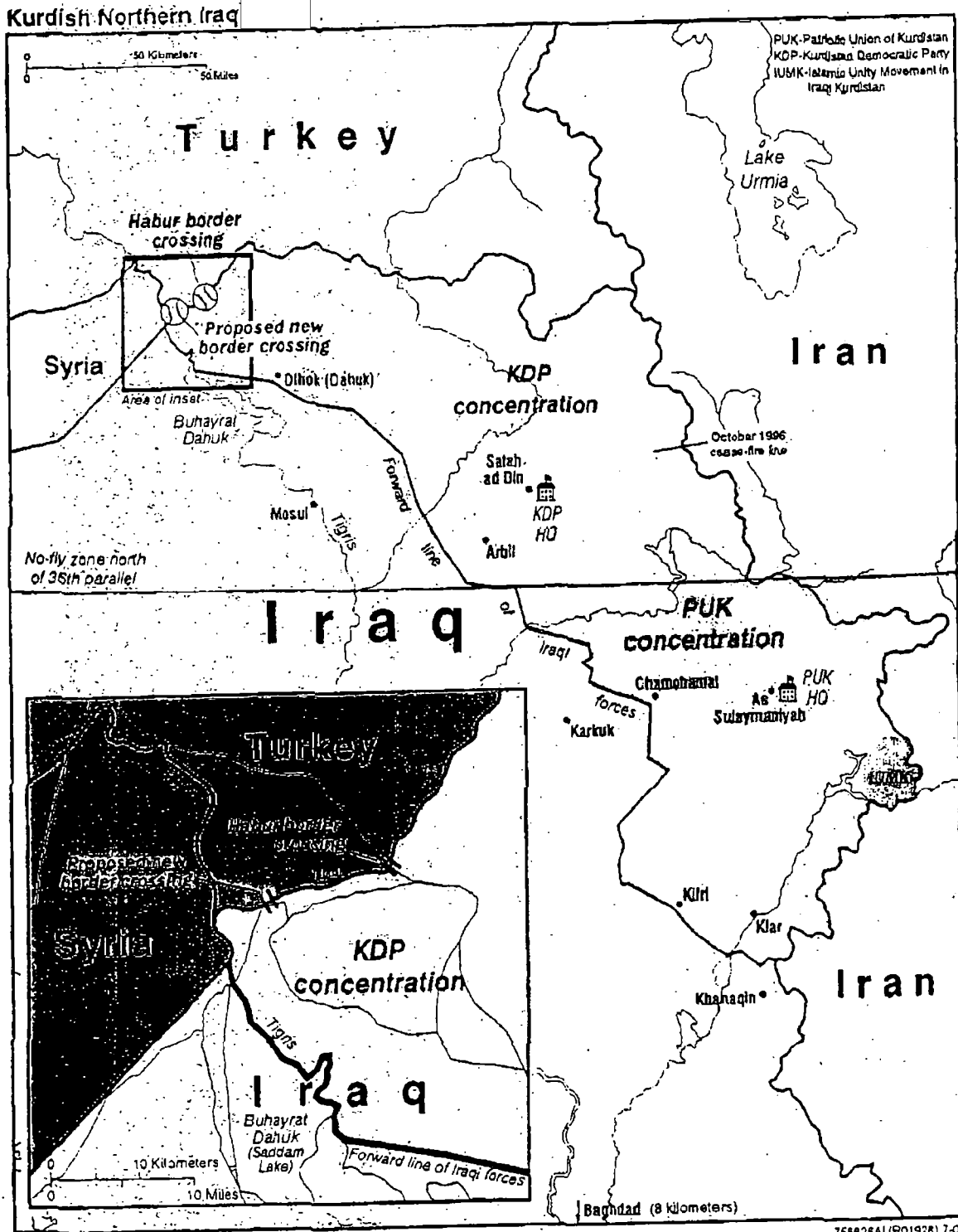
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- Iraq illicitly exports about 95,000 barrels per day of oil to Turkey via tanker trucks, [redacted] making Ankara the third highest importer—behind Syria and Jordan respectively—of Iraqi illicit oil.

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