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SENIOR EXECUTIVE INTELLIGENCE BRIEF
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PASS SEIB 02-271CHX

Iraq: Saddam Could Complicate Oil Restoration Efforts [redacted]

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[redacted] indicates

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Saddam has put explosives on oil wells and other facilities.

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Iraq probably can wire about 200 of its nearly 1,500 wells with explosives placed 50 to 100 feet below the surface, judging from the number of workover rigs it has and the amount of time needed to plant the explosives; it could rig explosives on the surface assemblies of the remaining 1,300 wellheads, as was done in Kuwait. Wells detonated below the surface probably would not burn, but each would discharge as much as thousands of barrels of oil per day.

-- Capping wells destroyed below the surface generally requires drilling a relief well to shut off oil flow; to drill a relief well quickly requires knowledge about how the original well was drilled and the exact location of the wellbore. [redacted]

[redacted] even Iraq might not know where these records are kept.

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-- Capping 1,300 Kuwaiti-style blowouts probably would take about a year. [redacted]

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If Saddam used subsurface detonations in the northern region, where geologic conditions mean oil wells have concentrations of deadly hydrogen sulfide gas, the release of the gas along with the oil would create a dangerous environment for coalition forces and firefighters.

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because the gas is heavier than air and hugs the ground, industry practice is to evacuate several square miles around a spill.

-- To eliminate the danger of hydrogen sulfide, well-control teams probably would have to try to set fire to the area; the fires then would need to be extinguished before stopping the oil flow.

-- ***Even with preparations such as pre-positioning key equipment and personnel, the need to burn off hydrogen sulfide gas, put out resulting fires, and dig relief wells means it could take more than five years in a worst case scenario to cap 200 northern wells that***

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suffered subsurface detonations. [redacted]

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Saddam could complicate firefighting efforts by destroying existing water distribution systems in the oilfields. [redacted]

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water is the single most important ingredient in extinguishing well fires. Saddam did not destroy pipes leading to water sources in the Persian Gulf war, probably because he anticipated his continued rule, but he could force firefighters to construct new water systems in Iraq by doing so this time. [redacted]

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Saddam also could detonate production facilities and pumping stations to destroy customized equipment, such as pumps and pump drivers, generators, and pressurized gas oil separation vessels. The destruction of such equipment, which generally has manufacturing leadtimes in excess of a year, would prevent any oil from being processed or moved to export facilities.

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Crude oil production could be restored most rapidly by focusing immediate restoration efforts solely in the southern producing system, which accounts for more than 2 million barrels per day (b/d) of Iraq's more than 3 million b/d output capacity.

-- If mines and unexploded ordnance were cleared while water system reconstruction and firefighting efforts were under way, and, if key parts and personnel were prepurchased and pre-positioned, restoring partial output of about 1 million b/d would be possible in about six to eight months; this period would roughly double if parts were not readily available.

-- Even if all of Iraq's oil-producing infrastructure were destroyed, it is estimated as much as 2.5 million b/d of output, primarily in the south, could be restored in about two years.

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