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Director of Central Intelligence

# DCI Red Cell

A Red Cell Report

Number 107

13 March 2003

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## Exploiting the "Saddam in Exile" Gambit

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 provide authoritative assessment. Please direct questions or comments to the DCI Red Cell.

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*Actively promoting a "48 hour departure" type-exile for Saddam might undercut perceptions that the US is pursuing only military options—and may also discourage Saddam's early use of WMD in a war. If Saddam rejected a blessed exile offer, the onus of war would be on him. Whether or not an exile offer flew, US backing for exile initiatives might help Arab regimes mollify domestic critics. Engaging Putin on such an initiative might give the approach greater credibility and the Russian leader an argument against those urging him to oppose the US in the UNSC. Although an exile negotiation offers both Saddam and antiwar diplomacy additional chances to stall, such problems might be surmounted by linking a UNSC exile guarantee to immediate implementation of disarmament resolutions. Even so, Iraqi resentment that Saddam's crimes might go unpunished would be a longer-term problem, as would the need for guarantee that a post-Saddam regime would be truly different from the old order.*

Discussion of possible exile for Saddam continues and may reach a crescendo on the eve of war. The Red Cell offers a speculative assessment on the pros and cons of the "exile option."

### An Offer He Can't Refuse?

President Bush's comments last Thursday—that exile might be an acceptable outcome, provided the succeeding regime fully met UNSC disarmament resolutions—may inspire a new burst of interest in the exile option as Gulf states and others seek a last-ditch alternative to war.

Our assessment of Arab world commentary suggests that following up the President's remarks with a formal endorsement of the exile option would carry significant weight internationally and garner support with Arab governments and publics.

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- Even in the aftermath of victory or defeat of the US-UK resolution, adopting the exile option might portray the US as open to a real alternative to war—to the point of giving Saddam a form of UNSC protection if he leaves office peacefully and immediately, and the new regime meets disarmament obligations.

Putin remains anxious to avoid burning his bridges to the US by using a veto at the UNSC. He might grab at the opportunity to play a central role in trying to avert war—perhaps

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through a joint US-Russian "presidential initiative" offering Saddam a UNSC-guaranteed exile

- Moscow's involvement might also make an offer more credible to Saddam, a man who trusts no one but has as much confidence in Putin as he does in any foreign leader. Saddam might see a guarantee backed by Russia and the Arab world as reliable—and even if not, such an offer would seem believable elsewhere

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**Would He Buy it?**

The odds are slender, but real, that Saddam would actually take up the offer. If he were to realize his regime is finished, he may grasp survival for himself and his clan with whatever loot they can drag out with them. Saddam might see exile as allowing him to survive to fight another day, just as Napoleon did—after his first exile, at least.

- Saddam would only seriously consider exile when convinced he has exhausted every last option—most likely as US forces are on their way to Baghdad. Making a last offer of exile contingent on non-use of WMD might convince him to defer use simply to keep his options opened

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The UAE proposal offered at the Arab League summit even called for the UN and the Arab League to supervise creation of a successor regime.

- Such arrangements would make a post-Saddam Iraq a UN and not a US problem—and might relieve the US of some expense and responsibility.
- Although Washington would have less direct control over Iraq's future, sharing responsibilities with Iraq's neighbors would moderate anti-US sentiments now whipped up over Iraq, deflate charges of US "hegemonism," and start the process of refurbishing the US image in the Muslim world

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**Potential Pitfalls**

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Should Saddam decide he loves life more than martyrdom and accept exile, a new set of challenges would immediately surface.

- **Delay.** Saddam would try to use an exile offer to start a new round of negotiations while remaining in control of Iraq. States trying to prevent a war would play along. To prevent such a dynamic, any offer of exile would need to be non-negotiable and offered to Saddam on a take it or leave it basis with the clock still ticking.
- **Disarmament.** For many governments, the case for disarming Iraq is based on getting WMD out of the hands of a dangerous megalomaniac. With Saddam gone, many states would be willing to give a new regime a pass on WMD. Any UNSC-endorsed exile would still require a short deadline for implementation of disarmament resolutions.
- **Power vacuum.** Saddam's exit before Iraq is occupied by US and UK forces might result in a dangerous power vacuum or a splintering of the country into Kurdish, Sunni, and Shi'a regions. If Iraq devolved into chaos, authorities might lose control of secret WMD stocks to faction leaders, rebels, or even terrorists. Outside powers—Iran

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and Turkey—would be tempted to intervene. An exile deal would need to be accompanied by rapid occupation of key positions by an international force that included US and UK troops already in the Gulf. (b)(3)

(b)(3) Saddam's other Arab neighbors would be more than willing to settle for a Sunni military clique to continue in Saddam's place. The international community would probably split again over the issue of a successor regime, with Russia, France, and the Arabs arguing a Sunni successor was acceptable, and the US, Britain, and others demanding more far-reaching changes.

- The Iraqi people and the exile community would feel betrayed and abandoned if Saddam went into a comfortable exile, leaving a Sunni military leader in control. Exempting Saddam and his henchmen—arguably the prime perpetrators of massive crimes against humanity during the past two decades—from accountability would be a dangerous model.
- Kurdish and Shi'a Iraqis might see Saddam's departure as an opportunity to overthrow a confused and weakened successor regime. The US could be faced with a situation similar to the aftermath of the war in 1991 if Kurdish and Shi'a rebels were to seize control of their local areas and then demand US support.
- Even Iraqi Sunnis might be discomfited. With Saddam and his senior henchman gone, lines of authority and loyalty would be unclear, especially in the security forces, opening the way for ambitious cliques of lower-ranking officers to bid for power. Saddam's departure might open the door for a series of destabilizing coups (b)(3) as factions within Iraq struggled for control of the new regime. (b)(3)

Without a large occupying force, the greatest long-term danger would be that Saddam would be replaced by a successor who would say all the right things but who, once attention focused elsewhere, would become a new Saddam and resurrect Iraq's WMD program. Even if all the weapons are destroyed, the expertise to build new ones, including nuclear weapons, will remain. Without a basic change in the nature of the Iraqi state, few ways exist of guaranteeing that a successor regime would eschew WMD. (b)(3)

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