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Iraq's Internal Security and Prospects for a Coup

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Saddam maintains a vise grip on Iraq's political and internal security system despite an erosion of military capabilities and further alienation of Iraq's Shia and Kurdish populations after 10 years of sanctions. Saddam remains obsessed with survival, and his multilayered security apparatus enforces his authority and cultivates an image of invincibility.

- Saddam's son Qusay presides over the security and intelligence community, oversees the Republican Guard and Special Republican Guard, and controls high level appointments in the regular Army. Qusay has the authority to implement the Baghdad Security Plan for securing the capital during emergencies.
- Senior government and military officials view their fortunes as tied to Saddam, and frequent rotations and close scrutiny by security services complicate the development of antiregime networks.

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Iraq exhibits many of the conditions of a regime susceptible to a coup, including a rigid political system, concentration of power and wealth in a small elite, and oppressive security that brutally eradicates perceived disloyalty and diffuses independent bases of authority through a combination of rewards and threats. In this atmosphere of suspicion and foreboding:

- Rivalries within Saddam's own clan have created fissures within the ruling elite that could threaten stability
- Saddam's inflexible power structure could crack under pressure if security forces were unable to sustain his image of invincibility.

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A successful coup would probably come from a critical segment within the regime that could sustain an alternate power base in order to supplant Saddam's rule.

- Essential tasks under any coup scenario would include sustaining a secure network, locating Saddam and purging key regime loyalists, seizing the national communications infrastructure, and integrating or neutralizing key security and military forces.

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Three distinct levels within the regime hierarchy could support a

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coup, although each would face a series of obstacles and opportunities. Saddam deliberately imposed barriers to overthrow during his 20 year reign, drawing on his personal experience plotting against the Iraqi government in the 1960s and directing Iraq's security apparatus under his predecessor.

- Saddam's bodyguards and select regime officials have direct access to Saddam but not to his daily schedule. They would have difficulty gaining support from military and security services.
- Elite security organizations responsible for outer layers of presidential security maintain regular contact with Saddam's inner circle and Iraq's most capable military forces, but they lack direct access to Saddam and do not control forces sufficient to sustain a new government.
- Senior military commanders control forces sufficient to depose Saddam and establish a new government, but intense regime oversight, frequent rotations, and a diluted command structure complicate their ability to sustain a secure network necessary to move against the regime.

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