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INFORMATION MEMORANDUM

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DECL: 20120214

TO: The Secretary

FROM: INR - Carl W. Ford, Jr. *CF*

SUBJECT: Saudi Arabia/Iraq--What Riyadh Wants (U)

(S//XD) For years the Saudis have wanted Saddam removed from power. But they are concerned that any U.S. military action to oust Saddam would be prolonged and stir up serious anti-U.S. sentiment. They believe opposition to the Saddam regime that comes from inside Iraq is the most effective, and would be willing to cooperate on covert operations that assist opposition groups inside the country. The Saudis view the INC as fractious and incompetent.

(S//XD) Notwithstanding its reservations and preferences, the Saudi government would not actively oppose US military action.

(S) Abdallah and other senior Saudi leaders oppose a post-Saddam Iraq broken into several parts dominated respectively by the Kurds, Shia, and Sunni. They would be especially unhappy if a Shia-dominated government were to emerge.

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INR

United States Department of State
Bureau of Intelligence and Research

(U) Saudi Arabia/Iraq: What Riyadh Wants

(S) The Saudis want Saddam Hussein removed from power sooner rather than later but are unwilling to take serious risks to achieve this goal. They also prefer ways other than overt military action.

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The extent of Saudi cooperation against Iraq would at the least be consistent with Riyadh's role in the Afghanistan phase of the war on terrorism.

■ Saudis want Saddam gone, but how?

(S) Riyadh fears that a US military attack on Iraq to achieve a regime change would pose a greater threat to Saudi internal security than the threat currently posed by a weakened Saddam, at least in the near term. Riyadh sees its own staying power threatened by popular anger toward the United States and questions how well Saudi and US interests would be served if Saddam were removed but Washington and the Al Saud incurred a new wave of Arab enmity. Riyadh argues the ongoing intifada already has enraged ordinary Saudis and focused resentment against the United States, which is seen as Israel's major supporter and supplier. An overt US military attack intending to remove the Iraqi leadership but also involving still more suffering for the Iraqi people could raise anti-American sentiment to dangerous levels. Nonetheless, the Saudis will not actively oppose US military action.

(S) The Saudis would feel more confident about managing anticipated public outrage at any Iraqi civilian casualties if first there were new and promising signs of US engagement in curbing Israeli-Palestinian violence, conveying the impression of a more balanced US approach to the Palestinian-Israeli issue. Riyadh's frequent suggestion that Washington follow a proper sequence in addressing regional problems is based on this concern.

(S) The Saudis fear that Saddam, like Usama bin Laden and Mullah Omar, could evade US forces for months, increasing the opportunities for US forces to make mistakes that cause significant civilian hardship and generate regional blowback. Saudis point out that Saddam has long succeeded in distracting the Iraqi people from his failings by focusing on "hostile" outside intervention.

■ What the Saudis prefer

(S//XD) Instead of military action that the Saudis fear might fall short or be agonizingly prolonged, UN action is under renewed consideration by Riyadh. Saudis believe lifting non-military sanctions against Iraq and returning UN inspectors would reduce international tensions. That in turn would lead Iraqis to begin focusing on Saddam's failings and to become more open to efforts to topple him, in the Saudi view. Riyadh's long-standing Iraqi policy has demanded Saddam's full compliance with UNSC resolutions. Despite Saudi distain for Saddam and realization that he may prepare to accept inspectors as a ploy, Crown Prince Abdallah recently indicated his willingness to give the UN apparatus—which offers an opportunity to win the sympathy of the Iraqi people—another chance.

(S) The Saudis often have expressed their belief that the most effective opposition against Saddam must come from within; they claim they have been willing to work with the United States to help groups inside the country depose Saddam. Prince Turki al-Faisal, former head of Saudi intelligence, in a "Meet the Press" interview on February 3 said he believes a US covert operation linked to internal opposition groups could remove Saddam, and the Saudis would be willing to work closely with Washington on it.

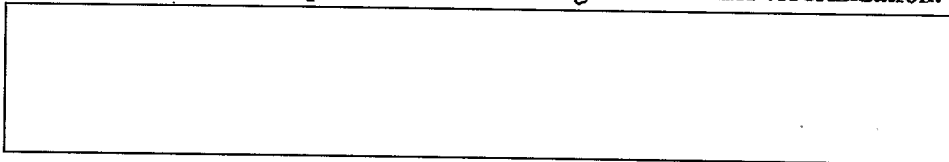
(S) The Saudis have little use for outside opposition groups, such as the Iraqi National Congress (INC) based in London. They view the INC not only as fractious and incompetent, but also as incapable of ever drawing the dedicated supporters and firepower necessary to do the job. The Saudis do not see the INC, or any group now based outside Iraq, as able to form a viable government in a post-Saddam era.

■ What Riyadh wants in post-Saddam Iraq

(S) No clear description of Riyadh's preferences for a post-Saddam Iraq is available. But bits and pieces of the reported thinking of Abdallah and other senior Saudi leaders indicate they want a unified and stable Iraq that would be non-threatening to Saudi economic, political, and security interests. At minimum this would mean a government with significant Sunni leverage. Saudis do not want an Iraq broken into several parts dominated respectively by the Kurds, Shia, and Sunni; they would be especially unhappy if a Shia-dominated government were to emerge.

(S) Saudis would probably also be wary of any post-Saddam regime promising representative government and elections. They look to Kuwait and Bahrain as harbingers of what representative government might look like and have been disappointed. In Kuwait, for example, Islamic extremists were able to exploit the electoral system to win a significant number of seats in parliament. This new clout has allowed them to restrict further the school curriculum and enforce conservative social mores. The Saudis also watch Bahrain, where recent political liberalization, promising eventual parliamentary elections, has stirred Shia protests for additional rights. Though they are small societies, these examples have led some Saudis to expect their population, if given an opportunity, would choose rigid, right-wing Islamist leaders.

(S) Moreover, though probably small in number, other Saudis may use the opportunity to press for women's rights and other liberalization.



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