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Intelligence Community Brief

(b)(3) **Iraq: Potential of a Coup During Coalition Attacks**

Key Points

(b)(3) If a US-led Coalition attacked Iraq, the chances for a coup to topple Saddam Hussein would increase as Coalition ground forces closed in on Baghdad and as Saddam's system of command and control broke down. An air campaign alone probably would be insufficient to provoke a coup.

- The largely Sunni military officer corps most likely would provide the coup leaders. Sunni officers control forces sufficient to change the regime and establish a successor government.
- Intense regime oversight of the military hampers the ability of senior commanders to move units intact against the regime, and entrapment and collective punishment inhibit coup-plotting in the military.

(b)(3) The prospect that the Coalition would install a representative government dominated by the Shia majority probably would dissuade some Sunni officers from attempting a coup. Others might launch a coup to try to retain leverage in a post-Saddam environment.

(b)(3) Iraqi opposition groups, both external and internal, are fragmented and lack the military force required for a successful coup. The external opposition also has little credibility inside Iraq. The opposition elements probably have contacts within the military, however, and could support a senior officer attempting to unseat Saddam.

(b)(3) A Sunni military commander who led a successful coup could bring some stability to post-war Iraq but probably would resist surrendering power absent an offer of a prominent role in a successor government.

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[redacted] **Military Coup Attempt: Balancing Risks and Opportunities**

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[redacted] A military coup would be more likely to oust Saddam during a Coalition war against Iraq than would a civilian revolt. We suspect that latent opposition to Saddam Hussein exist within the military forces; these elements have the means to pursue a coup.

sufficiently to embolden officers. During the month-long Desert Storm bombardment of Iraq, the military continued to follow orders although desertions increased.

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- [redacted] morale is low in the armed forces. The level of resentment is significant but active opposition is muted.
- Saddam's preferential treatment of his Special Republican Guards (SRG) and security apparatus as well as poor pay and benefits for other troops contributes to chronic morale problems.

- A Coalition ground campaign probably would lead to widespread breakdown in discipline, undermining the ability of the regime to enforce loyalty by reprisals. This climate would be more conducive to a military coup, although commanders would have to act while their units maintained some cohesion.

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[redacted] Since 11 September 2001, Saddam increasingly has become concerned about coup-plotting and has strengthened the security apparatus in all military units.

- Regular Army officers are poorly positioned to move against the regime and would be tempted to launch a coup only after significant attrition of the Republican Guards (RG) and security forces.

- A more likely scenario is that commanders would stand down and signal Coalition forces that they are returning to garrison, thereby saving themselves and their troops for a potential role in a successor regime.

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- These overt intelligence officers can countermand the orders of commanders, effectively undercutting their authority and further undermining morale.

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[redacted] Widespread unrest in the cities could improve the atmosphere for a coup. Iraq's security forces have extensive training and experience in handling unrest, and Saddam can be expected to use the SRG, the RG, and Saddam Fedayeen units to ruthlessly suppress any internal uprisings. Dissident military leaders, however, could exploit a breakdown in discipline to rally troops to their side, although many probably would desert rather than turn on the regime. Refusal by security forces to fire on civilians during a disturbance would be evidence of such a breakdown.

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[redacted] We judge that officers would move against Saddam only if he were losing control of his security apparatus and the media and his defeat by Coalition forces was near. Even then they might simply lay siege to Baghdad and await the arrival of Coalition forces.

- Draconian measures by the security forces against troops or units could spark an uprising.
- Retribution and mutiny are possible in the military. Most of the troops are Shia, and

[redacted] Saddam would be relatively secure from a coup during the initial phases of a war. As the war progressed, however, military defeats and widening fissures throughout the Iraqi armed forces could create increasing opportunity for military officers to attempt a coup.

- A Coalition air campaign probably would not degrade Saddam's security apparatus

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they could mutiny against the senior Sunni officers if they perceived a crumbling of regime defenses.

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Limited Access to Saddam. Saddam's preoccupation with security has led him to surround himself only with those he can trust, making a direct physical attack on him difficult. Any military coup-plotters also would have to overcome the intensive oversight of the military and the security forces that Saddam has implanted in each command to guard against a coup.

- Regular Army combat units are stationed away from Baghdad and deployed on the fringes of the country. Even Republican Guard forces are kept largely outside Baghdad.
- A series of internal security forces with overlapping responsibilities monitors dissent among the populace and within the government and party—including the armed forces and security services.
- Security elements closest to Saddam are carefully vetted and tend to be drawn from Saddam's and other co-opted tribes.
- The Special Security Organization (SSO), and the SRG probably would be loyal to Saddam to the end. Dominated by the Tikriti and Duri tribes, both groups are closely identified with the regime. They would become targets for retribution and marginalized in any new government. Consequently, they would have little reason to participate in a coup.

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Insider Coup? Although unlikely, we cannot rule out that someone in Saddam's inner circle might attempt to overthrow him. The family, party, and security inner circles have the access to Saddam that the military does not. We do not know the degree to

which these elites see their fate inextricably linked to that of Saddam and the regime.

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Saddam's Security Apparatus

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Saddam's security and intelligence services have a 20-year record of deterring and destroying organized opposition to his regime. Saddam and his younger son Qusay dominate the elaborate system used to maintain his hold on the nation.

The Special Security Organization (SSO) is Iraq's premier security organization. The SSO is primarily responsible for Saddam's personal security and actively monitors the rest of Iraq's intelligence and security services.

The Special Republican Guard (SPG) is an elite security force primarily responsible for protecting presidential residences; it also works to suppress civil unrest and to conceal weapons of mass destruction.

The Iraqi Intelligence Service (IIS), Iraq's primary collector of foreign intelligence, also plays an important role in internal security.

The Directorate General of Security surveils and penetrates suspect elements of Iraq's population and operates paramilitary "emergency battalions" that are Saddam's first line of defense in the streets.

The General Directorate of Military Intelligence monitors the loyalty of military units, provides security at defense facilities, and gathers foreign intelligence.

The Saddam Fedayeen, nominally under the control of Saddam's eldest son, Uday, is a militia tasked with combating internal unrest.

Ba'th Party Militia. Every member of the Ba'th Party is a member of the militia and can be mobilized during a crisis.

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- Although Saddam's inner ring alone has access necessary to target the President, only a few trusted aides know Saddam's location at all times. Even if they wanted to, these insiders would have difficulty enlisting the support the military and security services because most career officers mistrust and resent the regime elite.
- Saddam's son Qusay controls the security and military services and is one of his father's two deputies in the Ba'ith Party's military bureau—giving him the means and the access to topple his father. Uday, the elder son, does not have a power base but is unpredictable. Although we assess both sons will remain loyal, we cannot dismiss the possibility that one or both, as ruthless as Saddam, would move against their father.

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Potential Coup-Plotters—Personal Interests Dominate

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In calculating the risks of a coup, the largely Sunni officer corps would be guided more by individual self-interest than by any desire to safeguard troops or to reduce the suffering of the Iraqi populace.

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The prospect of a Coalition-imposed democracy, meaning greater power for the numerically dominant Shia, might discourage some officers from pursuing a coup or joining Coalition forces.

- Alternatively, Sunni officers might see a coup as the only way to stave off external efforts to give power to the Shia and to retain leverage in post-war Iraq.

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Military officers might be responsive to incentives advertised by Coalition forces.

- Some within Iraq's military leadership have executed orders requiring them to repress the populace, and many probably could be prosecuted for war crimes or

crimes against humanity. An amnesty could encourage them to abandon Saddam and even to try to topple him.

- Similarly, senior military leaders probably would respond to assurances that the military and its leadership were considered an important institution for the post-Saddam era and that Coalition forces had no intentions of dismantling it. Although such guarantees probably would not provoke coup-plotting, they might encourage military officers to defect.

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Senior officers considering a coup also would gauge the support they are likely to receive from regional governments.

- Some could solicit support from neighbors in Jordan or Turkey prior to making the decision to try to oust Saddam.

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The Opposition: Not a Credible Threat

Iraqi opposition elements, both internal and external, have little capability to depose Saddam and are unlikely to form the core of any coup attempt. Most opposition parties probably have ties to elements of the military, however, and a senior officer contemplating a coup might try to exploit such associations, especially as a channel for soliciting foreign support.

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Internal Opposition. Both the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) have small forces, scant weaponry, and little power to project.

- The KDP and PUK each claim about 20,000 full-time fighters, figures that probably are inflated.

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[redacted] Ethnic and Religious Makeup

[redacted] Deep religious divisions (Arab Sunni versus Arab Shia) and ethnic conflict (Arab versus Kurd) weaken Iraqi social cohesion.

Group	Population (Millions)	Share (%)
Shia Arabs	13.5	56
Sunni Arabs	5.3	22
Kurds	4.1	17
Turkomans	0.5	2

- In contrast, Iraq maintains 11 Regular Army and two Republican Guard divisions comprising about 200,000 troops arrayed against the north, while six Regular Army divisions and three Republican Guard with about 100,000 troops are stationed in south and south-central Iraq.

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[redacted] The Shia, despite their numerical predominance in Iraq, similarly lack the centralized organization, military forces, or the capability to force Saddam out.

- We estimate the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI) has 4,000 to 10,000 fighters.
- Baqr Al-Hakim, the leader of SCIRI, has indicated publicly he would participate in a transitional government that incorporates Iraq's majority Shia population. He eventually would push, however, for a national referendum, which he presumably anticipates would secure Shia leadership of the government.

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[redacted] A Kurdish or Shia coup attempt might have the negative effect of rallying the largely Sunni military behind Saddam. Sad-

dam has made a priority of maintaining the allegiance of elite Sunnis—particularly those in the military, intelligence, and security services—by providing patronage and manipulating Sunni fears that US goals include partitioning the country.

- Despite the Shia allegiance to Iraq during the Iraq-Iraq War, Sunni Arabs distrust the close ties Shia parties have with Iran. Additionally, the bloody violence that erupted in southern Iraq after the Gulf War has led many Sunnis to fear that Shia from the poor suburbs would and raid middle class and wealthy Sunni neighborhoods.
- Similarly, Sunni Arabs question the commitment of the Kurds to Iraq's territorial integrity and the country as an "Arab nation."

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[redacted] *The Tribes.* Roughly three-quarters of Iraqis identify with a tribe, and their shaykhs can mobilize thousands of armed men. The tribes maintain an unsteady relationship with the regime. Most shaykhs have cooperated with Saddam because he has given them political and material benefits and fear his retribution if they do not cooperate. Most tribesmen probably would remain neutral, only actively opposing Saddam when they concluded that the United States was determined to overthrow him.

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[redacted] Shia tribes to the south may seek to remain uninvolved until an outcome is clear. Many are wary of jeopardizing their uneasy level of accommodation with the regime. Like others, if they perceived a widespread uprising or knew US ground forces were approaching, they probably would join the anti-regime forces.

- Since the Gulf war, a number of tribally organized independent Shia guerrilla groups have emerged in southern Iraq.

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Despite some military experience, they do not have the capability to topple the regime alone but do have extensive tribal connections among sympathetic Shia within the Iraqi Army and the Iraqi National Congress (INC).

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External Opposition. The INC and other external groups presently have a narrow support base in Iraq from which to launch a coup. Sunnis are not well represented in the INC, and Iraqi military officers are unlikely to line up with them.

- Most Iraqis—Sunnis and Shia alike—have little regard for opposition elements outside the country. Many exiled dissidents and activists have not been in Iraq for years, and their influence and public recognition is diminished by that absence.

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Implications of a Coup

A coup by a strong military officer in command of a mechanized or armored brigade or division would have the most chance of success. If such an individual could rally other members of the Sunni-dominated military and security elite, the odds of success would increase. Even then, he probably could only lay siege to Baghdad and not get to Saddam. Such an individual probably would be steeped in the brutality and strong-arm methods that characterized the Saddam regime.

- Such a person probably would not want to relinquish power to Coalition forces, although he might provide a relatively stable interim government.
- Somewhat more likely would be a general on the periphery declaring himself the new ruler of Iraq and calling for troops across the country to rally to his cause. The chances of such a leader taking Baghdad, however, would be slim.

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Coup Attempts Widely Reported (b)(1)
Few Verified (b)(3)

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the Iraqi opposition press frequently report coup attempts within the Iraqi military, the security service, or Saddam's family. These reports generally originate within the opposition and are followed by amplifying reports that provide corroborating details, often about how the coup-plotters have been arrested and summarily punished. The reports tend to be widely circulated but appear to be rumors spread to highlight Saddam's vulnerability as well as his penchant for brutality.

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Reports of coup attempts or political purges close to Saddam's inner circle are difficult to verify, but certain indicators can help corroborate specific incidents.

- Intelligence reporting of security forces reacting to a coup attempt or suppressing related unrest would provide strong evidence.
- Sustained and detailed reports from a wide variety of sources would help confirm an incident—as they did in 1999 after opposition press reported that the regime executed Lt. General Kamel Sajed Al-Janabi and others for trying to organize a coup. Such reporting, however, often comes well after such events have transpired.

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Infrequently, Baghdad will publicly acknowledge an assassination attempt against a regime figure, as it did with Saddam's son, Uday or Vice President Izzat Ibrahim, when it occurs in public venue and its disclosure is unavoidable.

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