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# Iraq: Saddam Maneuvering To Survive 2002

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~~TOP SECRET~~ [REDACTED]**Iraq: Saddam Maneuvering To Survive 2002**  
[REDACTED]**Summary** [REDACTED]

Saddam enters 2002 concerned that Washington intends to overthrow his regime. In response, he has adopted a strategy of reengaging the UN to forestall US action, hoping that protracted negotiations will dissipate potential support for military action.

- Saddam in early January agreed to restart talks with UN Secretary General Annan on all UN Security Council resolutions, including the return of weapons inspectors, which the regime had unequivocally rejected for more than three years. [REDACTED]

If Saddam perceives his delaying tactics will fail to divert an attack, Saddam could make a tactical retreat by acceding to some UN and US demands and then renege on them at the earliest opportunity. Saddam also will play to Arab sympathies by portraying the crisis as part of a larger US-Israeli conspiracy to divide and weaken all Arabs, a tactic he used unsuccessfully during the Gulf war.

- The failure of diplomatic measures to avert a US attack probably would cause Saddam to shift to a well-tested defensive strategy in the hope that Iraqi resistance to a US ground campaign would strain US resources and raise casualties to unacceptable levels, leading eventually to a withdrawal.

[REDACTED]

Alternatively, if Saddam believes he is unable to deter a US attack to oust his regime, he is likely to go down fighting. Saddam could adopt high-risk options, such as seizing parts of northern Iraq, to disrupt US planning. A US ground offensive could trigger Saddam to take riskier options such as conducting terrorist attacks or using weapons of mass destruction against Israel or US interests.

- These dire outcomes are highly contingent, however, on the pace of the conflict, Saddam's subjective calculations of his survivability, and the willingness of Iraqi officers to implement Saddam's desperate orders.
- [REDACTED]

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~~TOP SECRET~~ [REDACTED]**Iraq: Saddam Maneuvering To Survive 2002** [REDACTED]

Until 11 September, a conviction that time was on his side shaped Saddam's strategy toward UN Security Council decisions on sanctions and weapons inspections. His relatively secure domestic situation, easing international isolation, and an increasingly porous sanctions regime, encouraged, if not validated, his post-Desert Fox strategy of stonewalling the Security Council.

- Saddam showed no interest in engaging the UN, flatly rejected the return of weapons inspectors, showed little interest in improving relations with Iran except on his terms, and consistently pilloried Kuwait and Saudi Arabia [REDACTED]

**11 September Changes the Game** [REDACTED]

The US-led war on terrorism has taken Saddam out of the driver's seat, compelling a change in his strategy in the face of what he perceives is increased US resolve to overthrow his regime. Saddam knows that current US debate is focused on his removal, in contrast to Washington's more limited goal in 1990 to liberate Kuwait. On several issues, he is showing flexibility unseen since Desert Fox to remove any US pretext to attack him.

- Babil—the Iraqi newspaper run by Saddam's eldest son Uday—in late January said Iraq's flexibility would deny the United States the chance to

“capitalize” on the aftermath of 11 September. [REDACTED]

**A Shrewd Opening Gambit** [REDACTED]

Saddam has tried to seize the advantage by feigning greater cooperation in the UN sanctions debate, and Saddam in early January agreed to restart talks with UN Secretary General Annan on all relevant resolutions without any preconditions, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Iraq's past behavior suggests it would use any such dialogue to try to renegotiate the terms and implementation of key UN Resolutions.

- In late January, Baghdad extended an invitation to the UN Special Rapporteur for Human Rights to visit Baghdad after nearly a decade of refusing visa requests, [REDACTED]
- Baghdad is also using the promise of significant economic incentives to keep key Security Council supporters, Russia and China, in its corner. [REDACTED]

Closer to home, Saddam is trying to rally opposition to a possible US attack by offering to mend fences with neighbors, appealing for Arab unity, and using “carrot and stick” tactics to shore up internal control.

This assessment was prepared by the Office of Near Eastern, South Asian, and African Analysis. Comments and queries are welcome and may be directed to the [REDACTED] NESAF, on [REDACTED]

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- He has stepped up appeals for a united Arab front to oppose US "terrorism," and softened his usually harsh rhetoric toward Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. Iraqi Foreign Minister Hadithi in early January said Iraq was ready to meet with Saudi Arabia and Kuwait "either directly or through the Arab League away from US-British pressure," according to Iraqi press reports.
- In an effort to ease pressure on Iraq's eastern flank, Saddam in late January sent his foreign minister to Tehran for the first time since the Gulf war after more than four years of on and off again talks yielded few results. Baghdad, undoubtedly hoping to exploit perceived Iranian concern about encirclement by the United States, is offering to curb regime-sponsored dissident attacks against Iranian targets—a longstanding Iranian demand.

[REDACTED]

**"Flexibility" Less Than Meets the Eye** [REDACTED]

Saddam's eleventh-hour flexibility is intended to buy time and sympathy. He will not repent his pursuit of weapons of mass destruction or determination to shake off other UN obligations. He appears to calculate that simply agreeing to reopen dialogue with the United Nations—which he would ensure would be protracted and difficult—would thwart a UN Security Council and regional consensus against him, delaying, or even blocking, a US attack.

- Past Iraqi demands regarding the organization and mission of weapons inspections suggest Saddam would drag out negotiations on disarmament versus monitoring and modalities for access to sensitive sites. He would expect a reorganized, "toothless" UNMOVIC to be less intrusive and demanding, and

seek an ironclad guarantee for the lifting of sanctions after a finite period of inspections.

- Baghdad dragged out peace talks with Iran for two years and only offered meaningful concessions in mid-August 1990 after Iraq's invasion of Kuwait brought intense international pressure on the regime. [REDACTED]

**More Pressure Could Bring Iraqi Concessions** [REDACTED]

Saddam's decisions at this crucial juncture will hinge principally on his perception of US resolve to destroy his regime and the US Administration's vulnerability to domestic and international opposition. In past confrontations with Iran and the United States, Saddam has demonstrated the capability to make tactical retreats in the face of overwhelming odds. At other times, ideological factors motivated him to dig in his heels, with ruinous consequences. If Saddam perceives his delaying tactics have failed to blunt Washington's resolve to attack, he loses little by capitulating to some UN demands, at least temporarily, to throw the United States off its stride.

- He has laid the groundwork for reversing his longstanding rejection of renewed WMD inspections. He could accept them and plan to impede their efforts on the ground.
- Baghdad could agree to bring some illicit revenue, such as earnings from the Syrian pipeline, under UN control.
- Baghdad could cease challenging the no-fly zones to remove another pretext for US strikes.
- Baghdad has tried to open several back channels to the United States seeking improved relations, including hinting to US protecting power diplomats in Baghdad late last year that it might release two Iraqi-Americans imprisoned for alleged espionage. Seeking maximum public relations mileage, Baghdad might even offer to account for missing US Gulf war pilot Spiecher. [REDACTED]

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To rally Arab opposition against US strikes, Saddam is trying to play to Arab sympathies by portraying the crisis as part of a larger US-Israeli conspiracy to divide and weaken all Arabs. During the Gulf war, Saddam similarly but unsuccessfully, decried the coalition as an Israeli-inspired plot to destroy the most powerful Arab country, believing Arab publics would force their leaders to withdraw support from the United States.

- Baghdad will try to use the Arab summit scheduled for late March in Beirut to play the Arab unity card and press Arab governments, especially Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Jordan, to oppose a US attack.

Other less likely options include:

- Offering Kuwait a more credible accounting for missing Kuwaitis and returning stolen property to entice the emirate into a bilateral dialogue and create resistance to using Kuwait as a launching point for US operations.
- Deploying Iraqi forces to the Syrian border as a propaganda ploy to demonstrate Arab leadership and divert attention to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Absorbing an Attack Still His Key Option [REDACTED]

The failure of diplomatic overtures and concessions to avert a US attack probably would lead Saddam to shift to well-tested defensive strategies in the hope that Iraqi resistance would strain US resources and raise casualty levels, leading eventually to withdrawal. This strategy would include an aggressive media and diplomatic campaign casting Iraq as the victim and the US offensive as illegal and unjust.

- Saddam could station Iraqi military units in cities, including Republican Guard armored divisions in Baghdad, leaving US ground forces the dangerous and costly task of extricating them. Saddam would calculate that his tactic would mitigate the effects of air power, because the United States would be unwilling to target military forces in densely populated civilian areas.
- Iraq would invite international media to cover the fighting as he did during the Gulf war, highlight civilian casualties, and press its case through diplomatic channels, particularly through the UN.
- Baghdad probably would refrain from attacking US logistics centers outside its borders to reinforce the image of Iraq as a victim and to mobilize international sentiment against the operation.

A Desperate Saddam, More Dangerous [REDACTED]

If Saddam perceives he is unable to deter a US offensive to overthrow his regime, he will not go down without a fight. Saddam could exercise a number of high-risk options designed to disrupt the timing and planning for US action.

- In a preemptive move, Iraqi military forces could seize Kurdish-held territory to prevent the US from using it as an operational base.
- Saddam could reposition Iraqi military forces in the south to deter the establishment of a southern enclave for Iraqi oppositionists.

As US military action intensified, Saddam could embark on riskier options if he believed his regime were in jeopardy and if he maintained the loyalty of officers able to execute his orders.

- A US ground offensive could trigger Iraqi terrorist attacks against US interests.

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- **Saddam might attack Israel with weapons of mass destruction—we assess that he has chemical and biological agents and a small force of Scud-type missiles—calculating that Israel’s retaliatory response would win him Arab support. Last year he publicly warned that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was becoming “intolerable” and has sustained a propaganda campaign that exceeds his Gulf war vitriol.**
- **Saddam would consider attacking US interests with weapons of mass destruction if he believed he would not survive. He field-deployed chemical weapons assets during the Gulf war for such a contingency.** [redacted]

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