

JIC Assessment, 28 November 2001

**IRAQ AFTER SEPTEMBER 11 – THE TERRORIST THREAT**

**Key Judgements**

- I. On the basis of the intelligence available, we judge **Iraq had no responsibility for, or foreknowledge of, the attacks in the US on 11 September**. The criminal investigation has produced no evidence of Iraqi participation. Nor is there any evidence, or intelligence, of an Iraqi role in the subsequent anthrax attacks.
- II. There have been contacts between UBL and Iraqi officials in the past, but these did not lead to practical co-operation. **Saddam has refused to permit any Al Qaida presence in Iraq**. He is ideologically poles apart from the Sunni extremist networks linked to UBL and fears their impact on the population.
- III. Iraq has long seen terrorism as a potential weapon in its conflict with the US and regional enemies. [...] Since September 11, however, **Saddam is likely to have ruled out such attacks for the time being**, for fear of a heavy US response.
- IV. But in the medium term the threat against Western interests and regional states remains credible. **Saddam has not given up terrorism as a policy tool**. He would consider:
  - the assassination of key oppositionists, if he felt threatened, most likely in the Middle East where there would be a greater chance of success and of deniability in the West;
  - terrorist attacks on coalition forces and regional allies in the event of a major US attack which threatened his hold on power; and
  - WMD terrorism, if his regime was under serious and imminent threat of collapse. In other circumstances **the threat of WMD terrorism is slight**, because of the risk of US retaliation.

## IRAQ AFTER SEPTEMBER 11 – THE TERRORIST THREAT

*At the request of the FCO. we consider Iraq's support for terrorism.*

### Background – the track record

1. In the 1970s and 1980s Iraq provided finance, logistics and training to a range of secular terrorists and groups, including [...] and the Abu Nidhal Organisation (ANO). During the Gulf War Iraq encouraged and sponsored terrorist groups to mount attacks on coalition targets, primarily US interests overseas, in addition to deploying its own personnel. But its efforts were largely ineffective. A number of Iraqi trained terrorists were disrupted in 1991. Promised Palestinian attacks failed to materialise.

2. Since the Gulf War Iraq has been cautious in pursuing terrorist attacks abroad, lest it jeopardise the lifting of sanctions. Nearer home, Iraq was less constrained. Baghdad was probably responsible for **a series of terrorist attacks in northern Iraq** between 1992 and 1996, including car bombs in Kurdish cities and attacks on UN and NGO personnel, killing a total of 18 people. [...]

3. [...]

4. In recent years **Saddam** has expanded his contact with terrorist groups to include Islamic extremists, such as Hamas. In his rhetoric he has referred more to Islam as he has sought to exploit the Palestinian issue in his conflict with the US, Kuwait and Saudi. But **ideologically** he is **poles apart from the Sunni extremist networks linked to UBL**; [...] he is wary of allowing any presence in Iraq for fear of the radicalising effect on the population.

### Iraqi links to UBL

5. The evidence of contact between Iraq and UBL is fragmentary and uncorroborated. [According to fragmented and uncorroborated intelligence, IDGI were in contact with AQ for exploratory discussions on toxic materials in late 1998.] With common enemies, principally the US, but also the al Saud and other Gulf regimes, there was clearly scope for collaboration.

6. But there is no evidence that these contacts led to practical co-operation; we judge it unlikely because of mutual mistrust. Any Iraqi offer of refuge may have been conditional on UBL not conducting operations from Iraqi soil, and is now highly unlikely to be repeated. [...] There is no evidence UBL's organisation has ever had a presence in Iraq.

### September 11 attacks

7. [...]

8. We cannot definitively rule out any past Iraqi support to individual hijackers. But the criminal investigation has produced no evidence of Iraqi participation in the plot. [...]

Overall, we judge that Iraq had no responsibility for, or foreknowledge of, the 11 September attacks.

## The wider picture

9. [...]

- **Against the regional Western military presence.** [...] If such attacks were to take place, they would be portrayed by Iraq as military attacks on military targets;
- **Against allied Gulf states and Iran.** [...] In addition, it continues to provide basing and support to the Mujahedin-e Khalq (MEK), an Iranian opposition group;
- **Against the Iraqi opposition.** [...]

10. Most of the intelligence is inconclusive and from opposition sources keen to influence as well as inform. No attacks have occurred against Western or Gulf interests which could be attributed to Iraq and no arrests have been made. Similarly, we have no evidence that a new campaign against the Iraqi opposition is yet under way. And the MEK may have been at least temporarily reined in, in an attempt to moderate Iranian hostility while the international situation is uncertain.

11. **Against Israel**, however, there is a clearer picture of state sponsorship of terrorism:

- Iraq has maintained its links with a wide range of mostly secular Palestinian rejectionist groups. [...]
- [...]

Overall, the level of activity by most of the Palestinian groups Iraq supports has been low. They have less support and infrastructure in the occupied territories than the more effective Islamic groups, such as Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ), which are closer to Iran and Syria.

## What now?

12. Since 11 September, Saddam has felt under pressure and has adopted a low profile. [Text redacted on national security grounds. It described the steps being taken as a result of that pressure]; dispersed key equipment in the defence industries and military; and temporarily curtailed the export of oil-related products to [...] to allow stockpiling. [...]

13. The current US focus on the war against terrorism would make a heavy response inevitable if Iraq mounted or sponsored a terrorist attack on Western or regional interests. Iraq would also pay a wider political price, losing the international support it derives from sanctions-related propaganda. We assess that **Saddam is likely to have ruled out any terrorist attacks against the US or its allies for the time being.**

14. Operations against the Iraqi opposition are probably less constrained. Saddam would consider assassinating key oppositionists if he felt threatened. But this is most likely in the Middle East where there would be a greater chance of success and deniability than in the West. [...]

15. Although the risks to Iraq have increased, we judge the regime is likely still to see terrorism as a tool of policy. Saddam may be currently constrained, but he hates the US and UK, and Kuwait and Saudi Arabia for their continued support to the West. In the medium term, therefore, the threat to Western and Gulf interests remains credible. Saddam is an opportunist. We judge he would be willing to use terrorism if he thought he could gain advantage or exact revenge on his enemies without attracting disproportionate retaliation. Saddam has miscalculated in the past and he could again misread the response his actions would attract.

**If the US attacks?**

16. The Iraqi regime is likely to consider terrorism one of its few realistic options in response to a major US attack against Iraq. We assess it sees no need to raise the stakes in response to the ongoing limited coalition action in the No Fly Zones. Nor, evidently, was the Desert Fox campaign sufficiently damaging to justify the risk. But a longer campaign aimed at regime change could alter Saddam's calculations.

17. Iraq would claim any terrorist attacks against US targets were acts of self-defence, and thus legitimate. The threat to Western interests and personnel would be greatest in countries most accessible to Iraq, especially the Gulf states, Jordan and Turkey. It is also possible that terrorist groups not previously aligned with Iraq would consider conducting terrorist attacks against the Western "aggressors"; these would be most likely in other parts of the Muslim world, but could occur elsewhere. Overall, we assess that, **unless the Iraqi regime's hold on power was threatened, it would be unlikely to undertake or sponsor such terrorist attacks**, for fear of provoking a more severe US response.

18. Iraqi capability and willingness to conduct **WMD terrorism** is not known with any certainty. We judge Iraq is capable of constructing devices to disperse chemical or biological agent, or radiological material. We have no reliable intelligence of any current Iraqi intent. Nor do we have any credible evidence of covert transfers of WMD-related technology and expertise to terrorist groups, or of any Iraqi role in the anthrax attacks in the US. Iraq would have to consider the risk of US retaliation, even if an attack was conducted through surrogates. On balance, we judge the **threat of Iraqi WMD terrorism is slight**, unless the regime was under serious and imminent threat of collapse.