

JIC Assessment, 28 June 2000

IRAQ: NO LET UP IN THE NO FLY ZONES

Key Judgements

- I. Iraq rejects the US/UK-enforced No Fly Zones (NFZs) and has challenged coalition air patrols for the last 18 months. The capability of Iraq's air and air defence forces is limited. **But there is a continuing, albeit small, risk of losing a coalition aircraft over Iraqi territory, including from aircraft failure.**

- II. Saddam's reasons for challenging the NFZs are political rather than military;
 - challenges help to maintain his image of defiance;
 - shooting down a coalition aircraft, and subsequent retaliation by the coalition, would have important propaganda value;
 - coalition bombing stirs Arab and non-aligned sympathy, plays into the UN stance of Russia, China and France, and could therefore lead to the isolation of the UK and US.

He will continue to exploit the situation in the NFZs for these purposes.

- III. Iraq is confident that the UN Security Council will not expect it to sign-up to UNSCR 1284 while the US and UK continues bombing. **If Saddam were to decide to co-operate with UNSCR 1284, he would seek the abolition of the NFZs in return.** This would be an attempt to move the onus for progress from Baghdad to Washington and London.

Background

1. In 1991-92, two No Fly Zones were established by the UK, US and France, with wider international support, to prevent Iraq using air power against the Kurdish population in the northern Iraq and the Shia in the south. Coalition aircraft patrol the NFZs in support of UNSCR 688, which condemned Iraq's repression of its civilian population in the aftermath of the Gulf War. The southern NFZ was expanded from the 32nd to the 33rd parallel in 1996 as an asymmetric response to Iraq's attack on the Kurdish town of Irbil.



2. Saddam has always rejected the NFZs as illegal, and a threat to the sovereignty and integrity of Iraq. But he acquiesced, apart from brief periods in 1993, 1996 and 1997 when he ordered his air and air defence forces into the NFZs to challenge coalition air patrols. On these occasions, coalition aircraft responded when threatened and Saddam backed down. However, a few days after *Desert Fox*, in December 1998, Saddam again ordered his forces to ignore the NFZs. At this point, **France** withdrew from coalition operations, claiming that the aim was no longer humanitarian. Despite losses, Iraq has sustained a military challenge to the NFZs ever since.

Iraqi tactics and capability

3. Initially – in early 1999 – Iraq sent combat aircraft and **long range surface-to-air missile (SAM) systems** into the NFZs to target coalition aircraft or lure them towards SAM traps. This proved costly. Coalition policy was, and remains, to respond proportionally with air attacks against Iraq's air defence system. By mid-1999, we assess that Iraq had sustained more damage to its air defences than during *Desert Fox* itself. As a result, many of the long range SAMs were moved back to the centre of Iraq.

4. For the last year, Iraq has concentrated on using **anti-aircraft artillery**, along with highly mobile **short range SAMs and rockets**, to fire at coalition aircraft on most days they fly. By moving rapidly between prepared ambush sites these systems pose the day-to-day threat to coalition aircraft. Sometimes this is well-targeted and aggressive and there have been occasional near-misses. On other occasions it appears token. There is a pattern of peaks and troughs as air defence units are rested, repaired and re-supplied, and tactics reviewed. Camouflage and decoy systems are used in an attempt to mislead the coalition and Iraqi air defence units are sometimes sited close to civilian areas. A small number of tactical SAMs are still rotated into the NFZs and they pose the most serious threat to coalition aircraft. Iraqi aircraft violations are now rare.

Operations in the NFZs since December 1998 (after Desert Fox):

Iraqi threats (aircraft violations, missile and artillery firings or hostile radar illumination) and coalition military response:

	<u>Days</u>
<u>Northern NFZ</u>	
<i>Iraqi threats</i>	152
<i>Coalition response</i>	134
<u>Southern NFZ</u>	
<i>Iraqi threats</i>	149
<i>Coalition response</i>	74

5. Iraq's air and air defence forces are no match for the coalition. [...] A variety of **unorthodox tactics** have been developed, with Saddam's backing, in the search for a successful surprise attack. They serve to boost activity and morale but all are crude and unlikely to succeed. The threat to coalition aircraft remains small but continuing, and includes a risk of aircraft failure or collision over Iraqi territory.

- Unorthodox Iraqi tactics:**
- *SA-2 fired ballistically to obtain range of up to 180 km (Javelin)*
 - *Artillery rockets fired vertically, to detonate at altitude (Rushdi)*
 - *Air-to-Surface missiles modified to fire in an air-to-air role*

6. Iraq's air and air defence forces, already weakened by UN sanctions, continue to be damaged by NFZ operations. Although Iraq retained large stocks of missiles and ammunition after

the Gulf War, [...]. Damage to fire control radars has been a particular problem. We judge, however, that Iraq has enough spares from cannibalisation, pre-sanctions stockpiles and indigenous production to maintain its low-level challenge to the coalition. There is some evidence of spares being supplied from Russian and other sources. But we have seen no convincing evidence that any country is willing to provide Iraq with new weapon systems to increase significantly the threat to US/UK aircraft.

Saddam's strategy

7. In the weeks following *Desert Fox*, Saddam challenged the NFZs to save face, to demonstrate his defiance, and to provoke international sympathy for Iraq. [...] Despite this, and his military losses, he **chose not to back down**. The withdrawal of France from post-*Desert Fox* coalition operations in the NFZs, and Russia's mounting criticism of them, is likely to have persuaded Saddam that continuing his challenge would, in the longer term, maintain divisions in the UN Security Council and modify attitudes to Iraq and UN sanctions. In particular, we judge, he saw that the NFZs would be a useful bargaining chip against calls for renewed Iraqi co-operation with UN weapons inspectors, later passed as UNSCR 1284.

8. [...] We judge that Saddam continues his challenge for essentially political reasons, not least to maintain his image of defiance at home and abroad. To shoot down a coalition aircraft would be a bonus. He believes that the propaganda value of a downed coalition aircraft, and possibly a captured pilot, would outweigh the potential consequences. He would also seek to turn to advantage any disproportionately heavy retaliation by the coalition. We assess that his challenge will continue since the bombing it causes, at a level he can in effect control, suits his strategy to stir international sympathy. By this he hopes to isolate the US and UK, and to use the NFZs as a bargaining chip against UNSCR 1284. He has made progress in both cases.

9. Iraq exaggerates **civilian casualties and collateral damage** from air strikes, even though Iraqi experts assess coalition attacks to be accurate and effective at minimising these.

- On 27 occasions in 1999 Iraq claimed civilian casualties on days when no munitions were used by the coalition, including some days when no aircraft flew.
- On 6 April, Iraq claimed that 14 civilians were killed during a series of coalition air strikes. [...].
- On 17 May, Iraq claimed that a boy had been killed by a coalition attack. [...].

Despite authoritative corrections by the coalition, there is an impression that civilian/collateral damage is commonplace rather than rare. This feeds growing sympathy among Arab populations, if not their leaders, and plays into the UN stance of Russia, China and France.

10. Russia and France have stated repeatedly that continuing action over the NFZs makes it impossible for Iraq to sign-up to **UNSCR 1284**. As a result, Iraqi officials are confident that the Security Council will not expect Iraq to implement the resolution while the US and UK continues bombing. If Saddam were to decide to co-operate with UNSCR 1284, we judge that he would seek

the abolition of the NFZs in return. This would be an attempt to move the onus for progress from Baghdad to Washington and London.