

JIC Assessment, 13 December 2000

Impact of the NFZs on Iraqi Persecution

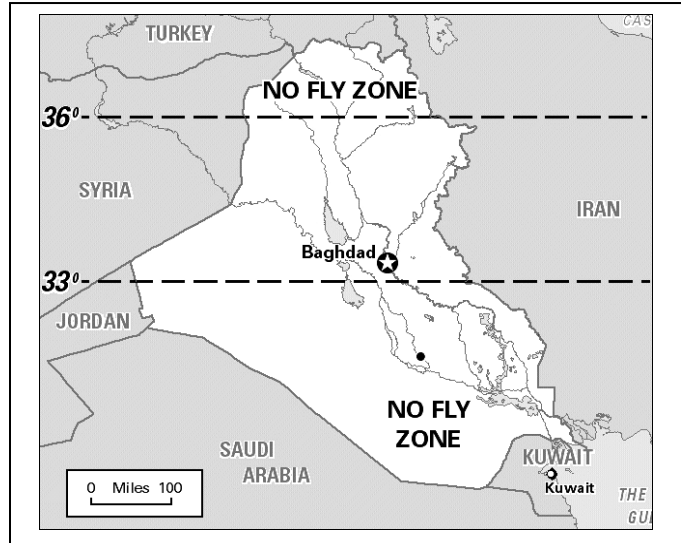
Key Judgements

- I. Saddam's minority Sunni regime sees Iraq's Kurds and Shia as a **threat**. It discriminates against them politically and in the allocation of resources. Human rights abuses have extended to the use of military force. Since 1991, **international monitoring and coalition enforcement of the No Fly Zones (NFZs) have constrained but not prevented this persecution**. (Para 1)
- II. **In the north**, Saddam wants to regain full control of the Kurdish autonomous zone. He uses **political manipulation, intimidation and sabotage operations** to divide, weaken and destabilise the different parties running the zone. Iraq's military forces remain **positioned to re-take the territory**. But Saddam is likely to wait for improved political and military conditions. (Paras 2-6)
- III. **Abolition of northern NFZ** would weaken the US "red line" and have a **major impact on Kurdish confidence**. [...] **Any resistance would be put down brutally and scores settled**, inducing a **refugee crisis** comparable to 1996. [...] that the Kurds united to resist Saddam, a full-scale attack to recover the north would lead to a **major humanitarian crisis** comparable to 1991. (Para 7)
- IV. **In the south**, the majority **Shi** have since 1991 faced a **campaign of murder, intimidation and deprivation**. Saddam uses his security forces to destroy villages, assassinate Shia clerics and execute suspects and their families. The Shia are made to bear the brunt of economic sanctions. (Paras 8-9)
- V. **Should the southern NFZ be withdrawn**, Iraqi air power would be used against Shia communities to enhance operations now conducted by ground forces. Such attacks would give Saddam more military options **and add to Shia misery**. But he does not need to kill or injure more Shia to achieve his current objectives. (Para 10)
- VI. Wide international support at the creation of the NFZs in 1991-2 has faded, especially since 1998. The NFZs are increasingly seen as an obstacle to progress on Iraq at the UN. Iraqi propaganda is effective in falsifying and exaggerating civilian casualties and collateral damage. (Para 11)

IMPACT OF THE NFZs ON IRAQI PERSECUTION

At the request of the Attorney General and FCO, we review the persecution of ethnic and religious communities in Iraq and consider how the No Fly Zones constrain it. The importance of the NFZs in relation to the threat to Kuwait was addressed in [...] of 1 December 2000.

1. Ethnic and religious persecution in Iraq has endured for decades. Iraq is governed largely by Arab Sunnis or central Iraq, less than a fifth of the population. More than half the population are **Shia Iraqis**, who live in the poorer suburbs of Baghdad and throughout southern Iraq. The **Kurds** of northern Iraq make up another 15-20% of the population and are predominantly Sunni. Both groups are seen by Saddam and the ruling elite as a **threat**. Compared to his predecessors, Saddam has more effective means of communication and coercion to impose his will. When he perceives a challenge, he meets it ruthlessly and systematically. Since 1991, the spotlight of international attention and the No Fly Zones (NFZs) have **constrained but not prevented persecution** of the Kurds and the Shia.



Northern Iraq – home of Iraq's Kurds

2. Saddam used military force, including air power and chemical weapons, against the Kurds in the late 1980s when at least 100,000 lost their lives. He again used ground and air power against the Kurdish revolt in the immediate aftermath of the Gulf War in 1991. As a result the northern NFZ was introduced above the 36th parallel to back up an international safe haven. The Kurdish autonomous zone (see map attached) was also created in 1991, when the Iraqi regime withdrew its forces and administration and imposed an economic blockade. Since then, Saddam has been unable to directly control economic and humanitarian support for the Kurdish zone provided by the UN and international agencies. The Kurds are

Iraq's ethnic cleansing

Iraq has stepped up its long-standing campaign against the ethnic Kurds and Turcomen who live in the oil-rich area just outside the Kurdish zone. The aim is gradually to Arabise the region – to invalidate a claim of a non-Arab majority and undermine any Kurdish claim on the oilfields. The Iraqis use intimidation and force:

- *Land is appropriated*
- *villages are destroyed or renamed*
- *Kurds and Turkmen have to move out*
- *or are forced to adopt Arab nationality*
- *Arabs from elsewhere in Iraq are given financial incentives to move in*

According to UN report, more than 94,000 have been expelled from Kirkuk since 1991.

better off than the Shia and other deprived sections of the Iraqi population. But **the Kurds who still live under Baghdad's control suffer at the hands of the government** (see box).

3. Saddam uses various means to destabilise the Kurds and oppositionists based in the Kurdish zone who use it as a haven. By manipulation and intimidation he exacerbates tension amongst them to ensure they remain weak and divided. His intelligence services regularly mount **bombings and assassinations**. Although not responsible for all incidents, we judge that Iraq has carried out many attacks on Kurdish, opposition, UN and NGO individuals and their facilities since 1991. Six Kurds died in one bomb attack in Irbil in November 2000.

4. Saddam's long term aim, however, is to re-establish control. More than half of Iraq's armed forces, including two divisions of the elite Republican Guard, are lined up opposite the Kurdish zone. [...]

5. An important factor in Saddam's planning is the presence of patrolling US/UK aircraft in the northern NFZ. Although NFZ patrols cover only half of the Kurdish zone and **could not stop either a limited incursion or a full-scale attack** on the Kurds, they have a considerable **symbolic and psychological impact on both Saddam and the Kurds**. The aircraft committed to patrolling the NFZ also give credibility to the US "red line" threatening a military response in the event of an attack on the Kurds. Together, these two factors complicate Saddam's calculations and reduce the risk of an assault on the Kurdish zone.

6. **While the NFZ remains** – if Saddam were provoked (by Iranian or oppositionist activity amongst the Kurds) or perceived political advantage, he would consider launching a **limited** attack. But we continue to assess that Saddam's preference is to deter a **full-scale** attack to recover Kurdish territory until after the lifting of UN sanctions and the withdrawal of US/UK forces, when there would be fewer political and military risks. Saddam will continue to exploit differences between the Kurds. Recent developments show that Saddam is seeking to extend his influence by expanding commercial and administrative ties [...]

An Iraqi incursion against the Kurds

On 9 December a small Iraqi force moved forward a few kilometres into neutral and Kurdish territory in an opportunist attempt to nibble ground, and to test Kurdish and coalition "red lines". Local Kurds captured then released 150 Iraqi soldiers.

A stand-off followed, with both sides reinforcing. US and UK aircraft flew over the Iraqi positions [...] the Iraqis were concerned about a coalition response.

On 12 December, the Iraqis began to withdraw. Although this has halted while the Iraqis check that the Kurds are not themselves moving forward, the Kurds say that the coalition operations in the No Fly Zone were decisive.

7. **Without the NFZ** – the withdrawal of US/UK air patrols would reduce the credibility of the US "red line" and cause a loss of confidence among the Kurds. [...] Saddam would still attack those areas resisting his control and would settle scores. Mopping up operations are likely to be brutal, both to boost his strong man image and to portray re-integration as a military victory. We judge that this would lead to a **refugee crisis at least comparable to 1996** (the last time Iraqi forces invaded the Kurdish zone), running to many tens of thousands. It is less likely that the

Kurds would unite and refuse to submit to his terms. But if they did, we judge that Saddam would eventually launch an assault to recover the whole territory. In that event, many Kurds would flee, leading to a **humanitarian refugee crisis comparable to 1991**. Once Saddam regains control, UN management of humanitarian aid will become untenable and the regime would be able to persecute the Kurds at will.

Southern Iraq and the Shia

8. Since the late 1980s the activities of Iranian-backed Shia opposition groups and the support they receive from the local population have led Baghdad to conduct a campaign of **murder intimidation and deprivation**. As a result, although many collaborate and some hold government positions, most Shia hate Saddam and oppose his Tikriti regime. The 1991 Shia uprising in southern Iraq was dealt with by Saddam as ruthlessly as its northern counterpart, with attacks by ground and air forces, especially helicopter gunships. To protect the Shia, a No Fly Zone below the 32nd parallel was established by the US, UK and France in 1992. The NFZ was expanded to the 33rd parallel in 1996 as an asymmetric response to Iraq's attack on the Kurdish town of Irbil.

9. Since 1992, the NFZ has prevented Saddam using air power against the Shia. But he has used other means of oppression:

- throughout the 1990s, Iraq progressively **drained the southern marshlands** both as a punishment for the 1991 uprising and to make it easier for Iraqi ground forces to operate against Shia insurgents. Some 150,000 marsh Arabs lost their homes and livelihoods;
- although the tempo of operations has fallen over time, Saddam continues to use ground forces to **burn villages and attack settlements** suspected of disloyalty or harbouring insurgents. In July 1999, they razed whole villages including one near Al Rumaithi, in which 270 private, school and religious buildings were destroyed;
- **assassinations of Shia clerics and executions of Shia suspects** have accelerated. The assassination of Iraq's top Shia cleric in 1999 united the Shia population against the regime. Weeks of unrest were brutally suppressed by Iraqi's security forces. [...], Saddam ordered the crushing of rebellious elements by executing those deemed responsible and their families. Saddam's forces remain poised to crush any more unrest;
- the Shia are made to **bear the brunt of international economic sanctions**. The Iraqi government has restricted food rations, water and electricity to the Shia, even when more money became available with the oil-for-food programme and from smuggling.

10. Saddam already has sufficient ground forces in the south to suppress the Shia. If the **southern NFZ were withdrawn**, however, he would be able to **persecute the Shia even more effectively**. As now, military operations would be directed in particular against those communities suspected of supporting Shia insurgents. But by using air power, especially helicopter gunships, he would be able to respond more quickly to perceived threats, reduce the deployment of other security forces and minimise the risks to his own forces. Airpower would give Saddam additional military options and **add to Shia misery**. We cannot predict whether he would choose to use

airpower to increase rather than sustain the scale of his persecution. But we judge that he does not need to kill or injure more Shia to achieve his objectives.

NFZ operations and international support

11. France finally withdrew from NFZ coalition patrols in 1998, claiming that the aim was no longer humanitarian. With Russia and others it believes that progress on UNSCR 1284 requires an end to US/UK bombings in the NFZs. Turkey, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Bahrain provide facilities to support NFZ operations.

12. Many countries accept Iraqi propaganda that coalition attacks are regularly harming civilians. Coalition aircraft fire at Iraq's anti-aircraft sites only in response to Iraqi attacks. In the last two years, collateral damage has occurred on a handful of occasions. But Iraq regularly reports civilian injury, even when they know otherwise:

- in April 2000, Iraq claimed 14 civilians killed, but [...];
- in May, Iraq claimed that a boy was killed by a coalition fire, but [...]; and
- in November, Iraq announced that three civilians were wounded in an attack on a civilian target, when they knew that they were soldiers manning a AA artillery unit.