

JIC Assessment, 11 October 2000

IRAQ AFTER SADDAM

**Key Judgements**

- I. Reports that **Saddam** is seriously ill persist but are unproven. Even if Saddam has cancer, he **could survive for many years**. (Para. 3)
- II. If Saddam dies soon, younger son Qusai would be well-placed to succeed him initially. But many in Iraq would see Saddam's death as an opportunity to get rid of his family completely. There is a significant risk of a period of **violent factional and internecine strife** amongst the Sunni elite, followed by the emergence of a new military leader. (Paras. 4-8)
- III. If the regime appeared weakened, the **Kurds** would be likely to try to re-establish control of the northern towns of Mosul and Kirkuk. But they would settle for consolidation of their autonomy rather than secession. The **Shia** would attack regime targets in the south, but they do not seek independence from Baghdad, only to play a bigger role in central government. Iraq's territorial integrity would be maintained. (Paras. 9-10)
- IV. **Any new regime** is likely, as now, to be **autocratic** and drawn from the **Sunni elite**. Its policies and methods are unlikely to be different from Saddam's. Given Iraq's strategic interests in the Gulf, this will include a long-term desire for weapons of mass destruction (Para. 11)
- V. Pressure would build internationally to end Iraq's pariah status and isolation. The level of pressure would reflect the extent to which the regime appeared to moderate its behaviour. But **Iraq's political rehabilitation could be rapid**, overwhelming any voices of caution from London, Washington or elsewhere. (Para. 11-12)

## IRAQ AFTER SADDAM

*At the request of No. 10, we assess the prospects for Iraq in the aftermath of Saddam's death. [...]*

1. For most of his Presidency, Saddam's instinct for self-preservation has precluded the establishment of a designated successor, second-in-command or other alternative focus for loyalty. Reshuffles, purges and executions reflect Saddam's overriding desire to eliminate potential opposition. No-one, not even his own sons, could be sure of their place in the pecking order.

### **Premonitions of mortality?**

2. But this changed, at least in one respect. In the last few years, Saddam has evidently been grooming his younger son **Qusai** as his successor. There has been no official announcement. But [...] In August 2000, he reportedly lowered the minimum age limit for accession to the Presidency, in order to accommodate Qusai, who is 34.

3. Talk of Qusai as Saddam's successor lends weight to unconfirmed reports that Saddam is unwell. We know he has a long-standing **back problem** and periodic attacks of **gout**. Intelligence that he has **lymphoma** first appeared in May 1999. [...] In between there are reports of symptoms and treatment consistent with the diagnosis. But their provenance is doubtful. Other reports, [...], say he is showing his age but is otherwise healthy. [...] In any case, only a small proportion of lymphoma sufferers face an early death (see box).

#### ***Lymphoma***

*Lymphoma is a broad term covering a variety of cancers of the lymphatic system. If Saddam has the more serious Non-Hodgkin's Lymphoma:*

- *it requires aggressive treatment and Saddam would become increasingly debilitated over time*
- *but he could survive for many years. The disease has an average five-year survival rate of at least 50%*

### **If Saddam dies soon....**

4. The aftermath of Saddam's death would to some extent depend on how it occurred: natural causes, assassination or a coup. Only a deterioration in Saddam's health might be detectable in advance. But **in no case is the outcome easily predictable**. Saddam's normal low profile, and Qusai's day-to day management of the security forces, means that confirmation of Saddam's death could be suppressed for a number of days.

5. Succession is unlikely to be smooth. But **Qusai is best placed to succeed Saddam initially**. He appears to be Saddam's appointed heir and the most convincing figurehead. He has gradually risen within the regime and now directs or controls most of the components of state power that secure Saddam's control over Iraq. Qusai has been able to develop a network of supporters, some of whom have been placed in key positions in the security and intelligence apparatus. He is ruthless in carrying out his father's orders and is prepared to use murder and intimidation to deal

with opponents. But Qusai **lacks a political profile and may not have the support of all senior military commanders.**

6. Few Iraqis would support **Udai** for the leadership. He is widely regarded as too unstable. He suffers disability after an assassination attempt in 1996 and has been effectively marginalised since. But he controls a significant proportion of the legal and illegal trade upon which the regime relies. [...] Earlier this year Udai was elected to the National Assembly. If Saddam allows his political rehabilitation to continue, he could challenge Qusai's position as *de facto* heir before or after Saddam's death. We judge he is unlikely to succeed. Even if he were to do so, we judge **his rule would be short-lived.**

7. Among other key figures in the regime, there is little prospect that Tariq Aziz or Saddam's powerful Private Secretary Abed Hamud would rise to the top in any outcome. Both men owe their position entirely to their association with Saddam. They might play a role in the transition. But without Saddam, they would be vulnerable and, at some risk, would have to choose whom to support. Nor is there any prospect of the discredited external opposition playing a significant role.

**.....there is a significant risk of insurrection**

8. Yet even Qusai would have to face down those Iraqis who would see Saddam's death as a **longed-for opportunity to get rid of Saddam's family.** There are many scores to settle within and between the tribes and clans of the ruling Sunni elite. Qusai's best chance would be to harness the support of leading military figures as Kemal Mustafa al-Tikriti and Ali Hasan al-Majid. But these are capable, ambitious men whose interests in an uncertain transition period would be self-preservation or greater power for themselves. There is a significant chance that Qusai, out of Saddam's shadow, would be unable to control events. If so, or if Saddam's demise came at the hands of a military group, there would likely be **a short period of violent factional and internecine strife, followed by the emergence of a new military leader.**

**But no break-up**

9. Any period of **uncertainty after Saddam's death** would be seen by Iraq's Shia (more than half the population) and the Kurds as an opportunity to increase their authority in their heartlands - the Kurds in the north, the Shia in the south. If central government appeared weakened, the Kurds would try to re-establish control of Mosul and Kirkuk, to re-absorb them into what they define as Iraqi Kurdistan. The Shia would mount revenge attacks on regime officials. This would rally Sunni centre around whichever Sunni strongman emerges. But any sign of weakness in suppressing the Shia would exacerbate the struggle at the centre.

10. We judge that Saddam's death is unlikely to precipitate Iraq's disintegration into three distinct entities – a Kurdish north, Sunni centre and Shia south:

- **Iraq's neighbours** oppose the idea. None has active territorial ambitions over a portion of Iraq. They would be concerned about refugee flows but see a strong central government in Baghdad as the best way to control the activities of Iraq-based opposition groups;

- the Iraqi **Kurds** do not see full independence as an achievable aim. They would settle, as now, for a measure of real autonomy;
- the **Shia**, who lack leadership and organisation, see little prospect of autonomy and would reject absorption into Iran. They would settle for a role in central government more commensurate with their numbers; and
- the **Sunni elite** would try to use their control of the military to defend their control of the northern oil fields and access to the Gulf in the south.

### No longer a pariah

11. When the dust settles, **any new regime is unlikely to be radically different from now:** autocratic rule by the Sunni elite. There is no guarantee that it would be pro-Western or more co-operative with UN resolutions. Iraq will not abandon a long-term desire for weapons of mass destruction, not least for regional reasons. But a new regime might seek initially to give the impression of moderating its behaviour while suspending or hiding its weapons programmes. There would be a reduction in the rhetoric against Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and other neighbours, and a lighter atmosphere in Baghdad. To the extent that a new image is generated, pressure will build internationally to end Iraq's pariah status.

12. In most scenarios, **Saddam's demise** will be seen in the region and elsewhere as **a decisive opportunity to end Iraq's isolation**, even if the new leaders are from Saddam's family or have a similar reputation for thuggery and repression. Strategic considerations and barely suppressed political, economic and commercial interests, would produce strong pressure for **early and widespread rapprochement**. With the initial exception of Kuwait, the Arab world would seek an early return for Iraq into the Arab fold. Iraqis, and their new leadership, would have good reasons to respond positively. **Iraq's political rehabilitation could be rapid**, overwhelming any voices of caution from London, Washington or elsewhere.