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Iraq's Saddam Husayn: The Next Six Weeks

Special National Intelligence Estimate

*This Special National Intelligence Estimate represents
the views of the Director of Central Intelligence
with the advice and assistance of the
US Intelligence Community.*

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Iraq's Saddam Husayn: The Next Six Weeks

*Information available as of 17 December 1990 was used
in the preparation of this Special National Intelligence Estimate.*

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in the preparation of this Estimate:*

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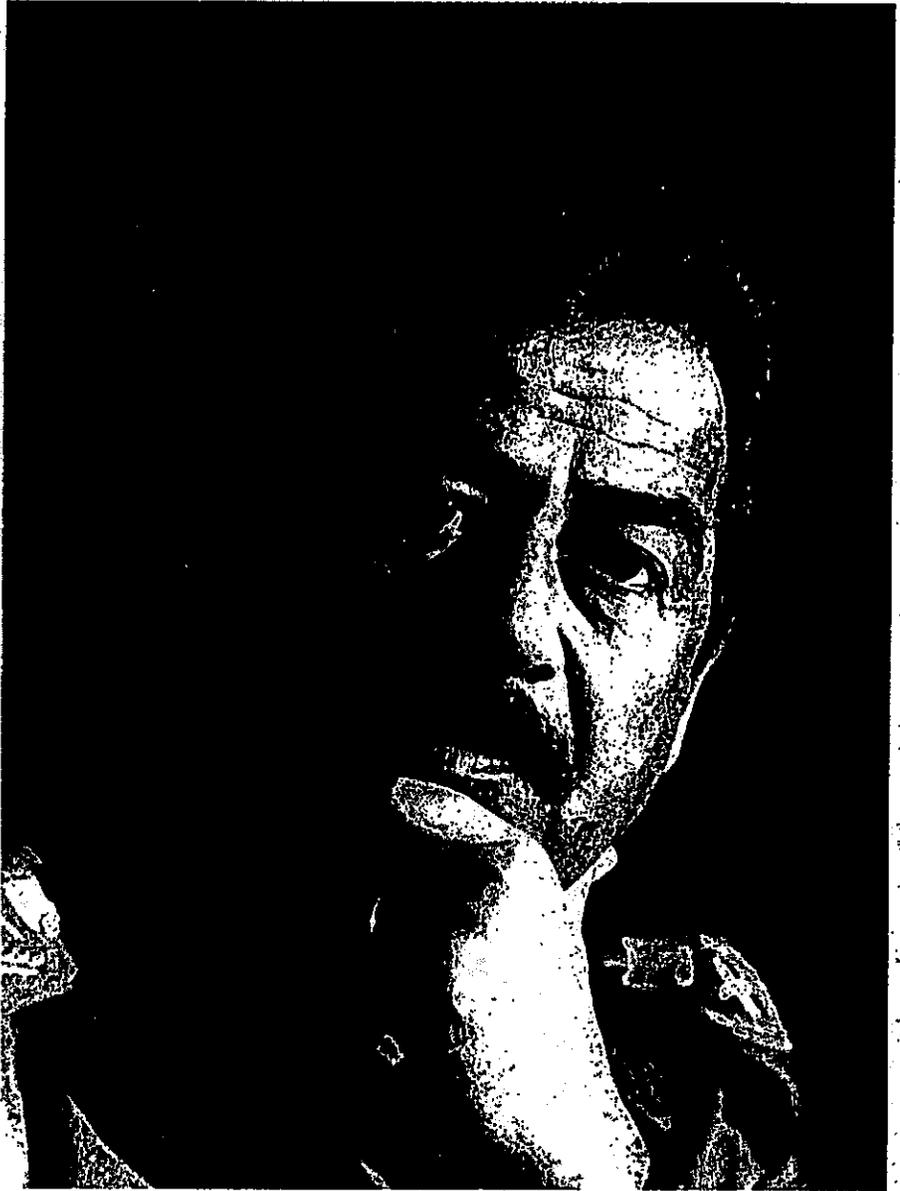
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[Redacted]

*Saddam Husayn, President of
Iraq* [Redacted]



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Key Judgments

Iraq's Saddam Husayn: The Next Six Weeks

During the critical weeks ahead, Saddam Husayn will attempt to defy the United States, mixing propaganda with diplomacy to avert a military assault, to pry apart the US-led coalition, to exploit antiwar sentiment in Congress, and to shift attention from Kuwait to the Palestinian issue. This represents a continuation of his strategy to stand fast and play for time. The danger for Saddam of misreading signals and misinterpreting intentions will remain high.

We believe Saddam is also developing alternative options and has not foreclosed any of them to date. The key to his behavior in coming weeks will be whether he becomes fully convinced that he faces a devastating war if he does not pull out of Kuwait. All agencies agree that he is not yet convinced and that convincing him will be difficult. Several agencies believe that he cannot be convinced short of war itself.

We judge that, if Saddam becomes convinced that a coalition attack on him not only would be certain but also would be devastating, quick, and decisive, he would take bold action to emerge from the crisis with his regime and military intact. His most likely option under such conditions would be to announce a withdrawal from Kuwait.¹ Exploiting this move as his principal weapon to divide the coalition, he would try to implement such a withdrawal over a lengthy period and only partially. We believe he could survive a withdrawal from Kuwait. At the moment, however, he continues to question US resolve, despite the increase in US forces in Saudi Arabia. He will stay in Kuwait so long as doubts about US resolve persist.

Should Saddam withdraw from Kuwait, in whole or in part, coalition military options could be severely constrained and the coalition significantly weakened. Partial withdrawal would be widely perceived among coalition members as a positive move toward implementing the UN resolution. As a consequence, support for a hard line toward Iraq would erode.

¹ The Director, Defense Intelligence Agency, the Director of Naval Intelligence; the Assistant Chief of Staff, Intelligence, Department of the Air Force; the Director of Intelligence, Headquarters, Marine Corps; and the Deputy Chief of Staff for Intelligence, Department of the Army, believe that, in the absence of any prospect for negotiations or an Arab brokered solution following withdrawal, Iraq is likely to stay and fight in Kuwait.

As long as Saddam is not convinced of the coalition's determination to attack if he does not withdraw from Kuwait, and even as he becomes fully aware of the risks he is taking, Saddam will try other ploys to divide the coalition:

- He may propose an easing of sanctions as an incentive for further Iraqi concessions, holding an international conference on Middle East issues, pursuing an "Arab solution" to the Gulf crisis, and allowing more frequent nuclear inspections.
- Saddam will try to play the "Israel card" to rally Arab popular support, force Arab governments to abandon the coalition, and reinforce his credentials as an Arab leader. Saddam defines the Israel card as a policy that portrays his Arab adversaries as "stooges" of Israel and its American patron. He will also try to link the Palestinian problem to resolution of the Gulf crisis.
- These diversionary steps are unlikely to work. They will not materially improve Saddam's position.

Despite Saddam's current unwillingness to agree to dates for the Baker-Aziz visits, we judge that he regards the US proposal as an opportunity to begin a protracted process of negotiations. He hopes that this process will lead to movement toward a political solution of the crisis that leaves him with some of his Kuwaiti gains.

Simultaneously, he will continue to strengthen his military defenses in the Kuwait Theater of Operations to reinforce his diplomatic strategy and to prepare for its possible failure. We estimate that over the next six weeks he will improve his barrier and obstacle system and upgrade the survivability of his forces. Reinforcements will consist primarily of more infantry divisions, but a few additional heavy brigades probably will be added to the theater. These defensive improvements and reinforcements are likely to be concentrated in the western sector of the theater.

If Saddam concludes—rightly or wrongly—that he is about to be attacked and decides to stand and fight, he may conduct a preemptive strike by air or missile attacks to disrupt perceived coalition operational plans. We consider an all-out ground attack less likely because it would move Iraqi forces out of their favored defensive positions and expose them to the full effect of coalition airpower.

Despite US and international actions, there is a good chance² that Saddam over the next six weeks will remain unconvinced that the United States will attack Iraq. He might also overestimate his own military capabilities. In this situation, he would probably stick to his basic tactic of playing for time. This "standfast" option could result either from an Iraqi miscalculation of US intentions, military capability or resolve, or from Saddam's judgment that Iraq's postwar political position would be stronger if it were seen in the Arab world as the victim rather than the initiator of hostilities.³

If Saddam decides to stand firm and endure a US attack, he would try to undermine US national will by using his formidable defensive position to cause maximum casualties, stop the coalition short of its objective, and seek a stalemate on the ground to force the United States to negotiate a settlement.

² The Director, Defense Intelligence Agency; the Director of Naval Intelligence; the Assistant Chief of Staff, Intelligence, Department of the Air Force; the Director of Intelligence Headquarters, Marine Corps; and the Deputy Chief of Staff for Intelligence, Department of the Army believe that over the next six weeks it is likely that Saadam will remain unconvinced.

³ The Director, Defense Intelligence Agency; the Director of Naval Intelligence; the Assistant Chief of Staff, Intelligence, Department of the Air Force; the Director of Intelligence Headquarters, Marine Corps; and the Deputy Chief of Staff for Intelligence, Department of the Army believe that Saadam will not abandon this option without some level of US military action.

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Discussion

The US announcement in mid-November doubling US troop deployments in the Persian Gulf, the UN resolution approving military action after 15 January, and President Bush's offer of direct talks are apparently prompting Baghdad to adjust its tactics, although Saddam's strategy is still to stand fast and play for time. He has adapted to the fluid environment by showing a willingness to take bold steps. Nevertheless, for Saddam the danger of misreading signals and misinterpreting intentions will remain high over the next several weeks.

We believe Saddam is developing alternative options and has not foreclosed any of them. His actions reflect both worry over US military intentions and his perception that opposition to war is growing in the United States and is subject to manipulation. His initial acceptance of the President's proposal was quickly followed by the test-firing of Scud-type missiles and the appointment of a more effective defense minister, intended as signals of Iraq's military capability and resolve. His recent decision to release all hostages held in Iraq and Kuwait is designed to show flexibility on an issue important to the United States and the world community but of declining value to him.

Saddam's Goals and Objectives

Saddam's basic goals are to emerge from the crisis with his regime and military forces intact and to retain as many of his gains in Kuwait as he can. Between now and 15 January, he will try to:

- Make that deadline irrelevant through efforts to buy time by creating conditions in which it would be progressively more difficult for the coalition to launch an offensive after mid-January.
- Drive a wedge between the United States and its coalition partners by exploiting what he sees as the latter's "softness" on the use of force against Iraq, especially with respect to some European and Arab countries.

- Exploit antiwar sentiment in Congress and among the American public, thus weakening US resolve to pursue the military option.
- Continue extensive military preparations to deter military action and underscore the possibility of a heavy toll in American lives if war breaks out.
- Divert attention from Iraq's occupation and dismantling of Kuwait by emphasizing the importance of the Palestinian question.
- Seek relief from economic sanctions.

These short-term objectives are directly related to Saddam's longer term goals of surviving, keeping intact his military capabilities, retaining his capacity to exert Arab leadership and intimidate his wealthy neighbors, increasing oil revenues needed for economic development and continued military modernization, and avoiding reparations.

Saddam's Actions *

Over the next month or so, Saddam will pursue political and military courses of action. He will continue extensive military preparations in the Kuwait Theater of Operations both to extend his defenses and as a political signal of staying power. Simultaneously, he will offer diplomatic initiatives to gain international support for a political solution.

This dual strategy—extending defenses and offering diplomatic initiatives—reflects Saddam's continued doubts about US resolve. It remains uncertain at this point whether Saddam understands his own vulnerabilities and sees them as foreclosing his ability to win

*The Intelligence Community is preparing a Memorandum to Holders of SNIE 36.2-5-90 *Iraq as a Military Adversary*. This Memorandum will address current Iraqi military preparations and perceptions of a possible war with the coalition.

Indicators of an Iraqi Decision To Withdraw From Kuwait

If Saddam is contemplating withdrawal from Kuwait, we might see several signs in advance:

- *A toning down of references to Kuwait as Iraq's 19th province.*
- *Street demonstrations clearly organized by the Iraqis in Kuwait City or Baghdad noting support for Saddam and approving withdrawal.*
- *Stories in the Iraqi media focusing on the possibility of withdrawal following Kuwait's "liberation."*
- *Reports that Iraqi security forces in Kuwait have stopped security searches and are not enforcing regulations that Kuwaitis be re-registered as Iraqi citizens.*
- *Saddam's use of Arab intermediaries to obtain guarantees that his forces would not be attacked during or after a withdrawal.*
- *An Iraqi press barrage about how much Saddam has done to dramatize the Palestinian cause, coupled with thinly veiled hints that Iraq will "sacrifice" Kuwait for the PLO.*

Military indicators of an intent to withdraw are unlikely. Iraqi ground forces probably would continue preparations to defend Kuwait until Saddam received assurances that they would not be attacked. We cannot rule out that Iraq would begin construction of defensive fortifications in northern Kuwait or along the Iraqi border before announcing an intention to withdraw. Baghdad, however, is aware of US imagery capabilities and might not want to tip its hand by providing such an obvious indicator.

or even survive a war with the United States. He probably believes the US Administration would be prepared to use military force against him, but he thinks it is under increasing public and Congressional pressure to avoid war. Saddam has often voiced his belief that the US experience in Vietnam left it with no will to fight or to risk the kind of casualties he believes the Iraqi people have proved they can absorb. He probably hopes to exploit President Bush's offer of talks to make gains with those in the United States opposed to war, but Saddam also suspects that the administration is going through the motions of seeking a peaceful solution before it attacks.

Saddam will probe for diplomatic and economic avenues to divide or distract our European and Arab partners in the coalition:

- He will continue efforts to woo Paris and Moscow by urging that an international conference be held to resolve broader Middle Eastern issues, including an Israeli withdrawal from "Palestine," a term he does not define.
- He will continue to pursue an "Arab solution" by suggesting talks with Saudi Arabia and Egypt. He will also play upon a perception in the Middle East that the US-Iraqi talks imply negotiations over Kuwait. He will urge Arab intermediaries to contact King Fahd and President Mubarak to encourage them to enter into direct negotiations with him.
- He will intensify his efforts to get relief from sanctions as a reward for his decision to release the hostages and to encourage further Iraqi "flexibility." He will also continue to exaggerate the impact of sanctions in an effort to strengthen US domestic opinion against early resort to military action. The impact of sanctions is being felt in Baghdad, but Saddam probably thinks he can continue to cope. We believe that economic hardships alone will not compel him to rethink his policy toward Kuwait over the next several weeks.
- Baghdad apparently is willing to allow the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to step up inspection and verification of the only weapons-grade uranium known to be in Iraq, possibly in

January or February. The safeguarded uranium in question is not relevant to the achievement of Iraq's long-term nuclear aims. But he is probably aware that the issue of a near-term Iraqi nuclear explosive capability is on the "short list" of rationales garnering public support for coalition military action. By removing the hostage and nuclear issues, Saddam would challenge the United States to rebuild domestic and international support.

Despite Saddam's current unwillingness to agree to dates for the Baker-Aziz visits, we judge that he regards the US proposal for talks as an opportunity to begin a protracted process of negotiations leading to movement toward a political solution of the crisis that leaves him with some of his Kuwaiti gains.

Such a process, in Saddam's view, would greatly complicate the use of force by the coalition at an early date. He will try to engage the United States in negotiations about negotiations, calculating that Washington would not be able to stop its diplomatic initiative without looking as though it had no interest in a process short of war.

Saddam's current delaying tactics signal his intent to try to string out the talks beyond mid-January. He will expect no US attack as long as the talks continue. To supplement his strategy, he will use forthcoming visits of high-level officials from Europe and the Middle East to show that he is not diplomatically isolated and that he desires peace.

Saddam May Offer a Surprise

Saddam is likely to take bold steps to emerge from the crisis with his regime and military intact. He will change direction in response to US initiatives. At the moment, however, he continues to question US resolve, despite the increase in US forces in Saudi Arabia. Most dramatically, he could announce a partial or total withdrawal from Kuwait as his principal weapon against the coalition. He would try to implement such a withdrawal over a lengthy period and only partially. If Saddam becomes fully convinced that he faces the prospect of a devastating war

if he does not pull out of Kuwait, a partial or even a total withdrawal from Kuwait, in our view, would be his most likely course.¹ Such an action might also result if he comes to believe that he would retain significant political or territorial advantages as a result of a withdrawal. We believe he could survive a withdrawal from Kuwait. []

An offer to withdraw probably would be accompanied by a request for a buffer of Arab troops while the withdrawal took place and thus be part of the "Arab solution" that Saddam has talked about for several weeks. He probably would also announce a willingness to abide by a plebiscite to decide the fate of "free" Kuwait; he would hope that he had created a new population base that would accept de facto Iraqi hegemony. []

On the diplomatic front, Saddam could propose to meet President Bush one-on-one in Geneva. He would remind the United States of his perception that it faces two choices: a war it cannot win without massive casualties or a negotiated settlement that would allow him some gains. He might offer to compromise on his linkage proposal by accepting a vague declaration or agreement in principle to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict. []

Saddam will try to play the "Israel card" to rally Arab popular support, force Arab governments to abandon the coalition, and bolster his credentials as an Arab leader. Saddam defines the Israel card as encompassing a portrayal of his Arab adversaries as "stooges" of Israel and its American patrons. He almost certainly assumes that Israel wants the crisis to be resolved by military action. As part of a settlement, therefore, he may ask for US assurances that Israel will not attack him. He will also try to link the Palestinian problem to resolution of the Gulf crisis. []

¹ The Director, Defense Intelligence Agency, the Director of Naval Intelligence, the Assistant Chief of Staff, Intelligence, Department of the Air Force, the Director of Intelligence, Headquarters, Marine Corps, and the Deputy Chief of Staff for Intelligence, Department of the Army believe that in the absence of any prospect for negotiations or an Arab brokered solution following withdrawal, Iraq is likely to stay and fight in Kuwait. []

We believe that Iraq will not authorize terrorist action against Western targets over the next few weeks because such attacks would run counter to Saddam's strategy of presenting himself as a peace-maker and because of the risk of retaliation by the coalition. Incidents staged by Iraqi agents and Palestinian collaborators cannot be ruled out if Saddam believed he could avoid retaliation and maintain deniability. Such actions probably would be targeted primarily against Arab governments that support the coalition. Some extremist Palestinian groups, acting independently of Baghdad, may use terrorism in efforts to provoke a Middle Eastern war if it appears that a diplomatic solution that does not address the Palestinian problem is likely. []

To reinforce his diplomatic strategy and to prepare for its possible failure, Saddam will continue to beef up his defenses in Kuwait. Over the next several weeks, the Iraqis will strengthen the main obstacle belt and add more maneuver units. The additional soldiers Saddam is calling up probably will be used in units that replace those guarding the Iranian border area, thus freeing those troops for duty in Kuwait. These units, however, will vary widely in training, personnel, and equipment. Because all of Iraq's heavy divisions are already in Kuwait, future reinforcements, consisting of a few additional heavy brigades, will represent smaller increments of combat power. Iraq's overall combat potential will be increased primarily by reinforcing and extending the western portion of Iraqi forward defenses in the Kuwait Theater. The additional troops, however, will impose a heavier burden on an already strained logistic system. []

Saddam is more likely to withdraw from Kuwait unilaterally than to launch a preemptive attack on coalition forces. At a minimum, such an attack would be unlikely while the talks remain active. Should Saddam believe, particularly in January, that coalition military operations are imminent, and should he make the decision to fight, a preemptive attack would become more likely. Its purpose would be to disrupt coalition plans. It probably would take the form of air

and missile attacks and could involve up to brigade-size spoiling attacks. []

We consider an all-out ground attack less likely. Such an attack would move Iraqi forces out of their carefully prepared and favored defensive positions and expose them to the full effects of coalition airpower. A large-scale ground offensive would involve extensive preparations, and thus would provide additional warning to the coalition, and it would also severely tax the Iraqi logistic system. []

Despite US and international actions, there is a good chance⁶ that Saddam over the next six weeks will remain unconvinced that the United States would attack Iraq. He might also overestimate his own military capabilities. In this situation, he would probably stick to his basic tactic of playing for time, choosing neither to withdraw nor to preempt. This course of action—a standfast option⁷—could result either from an Iraqi miscalculation of US intentions and military capability or resolve or from Saddam's judgment that Iraq's postwar political position would be stronger if it were seen in the Arab world as the victim rather than the initiator of hostilities. If Saddam decides to stand firm and endure a US attack, he would try to undermine US national will by using his formidable defensive position to cause maximum casualties, stop the coalition short of its objective, and seek a stalemate on the ground to force the United States to negotiate a settlement. []

Effectiveness of Saddam's Actions

The Iraqi withdrawal scenario would be the most effective Iraqi option for disrupting the coalition. Other actions, including efforts to sow suspicion

⁶ The Director, Defense Intelligence Agency, the Director of Naval Intelligence, the Assistant Chief of Staff, Intelligence, Department of the Air Force, the Director of Intelligence, Headquarters, Marine Corps, and the Deputy Chief of Staff for Intelligence, Department of the Army believe that over the next six weeks, it is likely that Saddam will remain unconvinced. []

⁷ The Director, Defense Intelligence Agency, the Director of Naval Intelligence, the Assistant Chief of Staff, Intelligence, Department of the Air Force, the Director of Intelligence, Headquarters, Marine Corps, and the Deputy Chief of Staff for Intelligence, Department of the Army believe that Saddam will not abandon this option without some level of US military action. []

among the Arabs about US intentions, are not likely to have significant impact among key coalition governments. His various ploys undoubtedly will receive considerable media attention and indirectly will heighten concern that sanctions have not been given enough time to work and that all avenues toward a diplomatic solution have not been fully explored. []

Saddam probably would like to extend the timetable for talks with Washington. He may calculate that Arab resolve will wane, domestic pressures in the United States and Europe will grow, and religious and political factors will force the Saudis to seek a drawdown of US forces. This calculation would depend on stretching the talks through mid-March, when the Islamic holy month of Ramadan begins, and June, when the annual pilgrimage to Mecca (Hajj) begins. []

Implications of an Iraqi Withdrawal

Should Saddam withdraw from Kuwait, in whole or in part, coalition military options could be severely constrained and the coalition significantly weakened. A partial withdrawal would place a heavier burden on the sanctions regime to achieve remaining coalition goals. Total withdrawal, however, could lead to the lifting of sanctions. In addition, the availability of economic assistance to adversely affected states would become more critical to the maintenance of sanctions against Iraq. If Saddam succeeded in using his withdrawal ploy to craft an "Arab solution," he could emerge with territorial and economic gains, as well as enhanced regional influence. He would continue to strive for regional leadership and would be tempted again to exert his will through force in the future. []

On the other hand, a peaceful solution to the crisis could reduce the regional instability that would result from major hostilities between Iraq and the coalition. If, as is likely, Gulf Arabs request some form of US

military presence, Saddam might be further constrained by the knowledge that the international community had demonstrated its ability to take action against him.

A resolution of the crisis that allowed Saddam to keep his military establishment intact would increase the danger of an Israeli military attack aimed at eliminating Iraq's missile, chemical, biological, and nuclear capabilities. Such an attack would generate a broad-based and adverse reaction against the United States in the Arab world.