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Director of Central Intelligence

DCI Red Cell

A Red Cell Special Memorandum

18 March 2003

In response to the events of 11 September, the Director of Central Intelligence commissioned CIA's Deputy Director for Intelligence to create a "red cell" that would think unconventionally about the full range of relevant analytic issues. The DCI Red Cell is thus charged with taking a pronounced "out-of-the-box" approach and will periodically produce memoranda and reports intended to provoke thought rather than to provide authoritative assessment. Please direct questions or comments to the DCI Red Cell at [redacted]

If Saddam Should Accept Exile . . . [redacted]

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Saddam might gamble that an eleventh-hour acceptance of exile will buy time—either for UNSC foes of war to delay military action until the dust settled in Baghdad or for his own efforts to mount a surprise WMD attack as coalition forces are lulled into a false sense of security. Saddam might even send one of his doubles into exile while he remains in Iraq. Saddam's actual departure would probably prompt widespread international reluctance to press a successor regime too soon on WMD. Longer-term problems would include assuaging Iraqi concerns that Saddam's crimes will go unpunished and devising guarantees that the new regime will truly differ from the old order. [redacted]

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With exile the only option left for Saddam other than war, the Red Cell speculates on how he might try to manipulate a "final" offer. [redacted]

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Is He for Real? (S//NF)

If Saddam confounds expectations and actually accepts exile, the most immediate challenge would be ascertaining whether the move is for real or only a ploy. Saddam might calculate that gaining even a few hours of maneuver would give the French or Russians a chance to introduce a UNSC resolution calling for a suspension of military action until the situation in Iraq "clarified itself."

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- A best case for Saddam might be such a "wait-for-war" resolution, followed by a US and UK veto [redacted]

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A number of other pitfalls lie in wait should Saddam seem to accept a last-minute exile:

- **Stall.** Saddam might try to use an exile bid to start a new round of negotiations as he remains in control. States trying to prevent a war would play along. To head this off, any exile offer would need to be non-negotiable and offered on a take it or leave it basis—with the clock ticking and a plane waiting to fly the dictator off.
- **Is it him?** Another challenge would be determining if it is truly Saddam who has gone into exile or one of his doubles. Knowing such a ruse would eventually be found out, Saddam might use the period of uncertainty to launch a preemptive WMD attack, hoping to find the coalition forces off guard.
- **"My way."** Saddam might depart on his own terms, going to a friendly country, like Syria or Belarus, while leaving a trusted surrogate behind to run the country. Or he might claim to be leaving—or send a double—while remaining in Iraq. [redacted]

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Potential Pitfalls of Verified Exile [redacted]

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A decision for exile would pose to the coalition a different set of challenges. [redacted]

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Disarmament. For many governments, the case for disarming Iraq is based on getting WMD out of the hands of a dangerous megalomaniac. With Saddam gone, some states will probably be willing to give a new regime a pass on WMD.

- We would expect international—and particularly Arab states—pressure to limit the number of US and UK forces entering post-Saddam Iraq to verify disarmament, in favor of relying on UNMOVIC inspectors. [redacted]

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Power Vacuum. Saddam's exit—whether real or faked—before Iraq is occupied by US and UK forces might result in a dangerous power vacuum or a splintering of the country into Kurdish, Sunni, and Shi'a regions. This might lead to loss of control over secret WMD stocks, and the possibility that faction leaders, rebels, or even terrorists might get them.

- Outside powers—Iran and Turkey—would be tempted to intervene. An exile deal would need to be accompanied by rapid occupation of key points by an international force that included US and UK troops already in the Gulf. [redacted]

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Splits Over Sunni Rule. If the succession issue emerged before Iraq's occupation by coalition forces, the international community would probably split again over the successor regime, with the Russia, France, and the Arab states arguing for a Sunni regime as acceptable, and the US, Britain, and others demanding more far-reaching changes.

- Kurdish and Shi'a Iraqis might see Saddam's departure as an opportunity to topple a confused and weakened successor regime. If Kurdish and Shi'a rebels were to seize control of their local areas and then demand US support, Washington could be faced with a situation similar to the aftermath of the war in 1991.
- Even Iraqi Sunnis might be discomfited. With Saddam and his senior henchman gone, lines of authority and loyalty would be unclear, especially in the security forces, clearing the way for ambitious cliques of lower-ranking officers to bid for power. Saddam's departure might open the door to a series of destabilizing coups as various factions within Iraq struggled for control of the new regime. [redacted]

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Justice Denied? The greatest long-term danger would be a successor who said all the right things but who, once attention focused elsewhere, would become a new Saddam and resurrect Iraq's WMD program. Even if all WMD were destroyed, the expertise to build new ones, including nuclear weapons, will remain. Without a basic change in the nature of the Iraqi state, few ways exist of guaranteeing that a successor regime would eschew WMD.

- The Iraqi people and the exile community would feel betrayed and abandoned if Saddam went into a comfortable exile and was able to leave a Sunni military leader in charge. Exempting Saddam and his henchmen—arguably the prime perpetrators of massive crimes against humanity during the past two decades—from accountability would set a dangerous precedent and deny a sense of justice and closure. [redacted]

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