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PINS INCOMING
Kurds

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DEPARTMENT OF STATE
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SECTION 01 OF 02

(b)(3):10 USC 424, (b)(3):50 USC 403-1(i)

SERIAL: DSA 808-91

SUBJ: IRAQ: SADDAM'S PLANS FOR THE NORTH (U)

DOI: 10 DEC 91 (AS OF 1657 EST)

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MAJOR POINTS

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1. ~~(S/NF)~~ IN THE NEAR TERM, BAGHDAD WILL TRY TO CONTROL THE KURDS THROUGH INTIMIDATION AND POLITICAL MEANS.

2. ~~(S/NF)~~ A MAJOR IRAQI OFFENSIVE IS UNLIKELY DURING THE WINTER.

3. ~~(S/NF)~~ SADDAM WILL EVENTUALLY WANT TO REGAIN FULL CONTROL OF THE NORTH AND TO REDUCE THE DEGREE OF KURDISH AUTONOMY TO, AT MOST, A NOMINAL LEVEL.

4. ~~(S/NF)~~ IF NECESSARY, MILITARY ACTION WILL BE USED, BUT IS NOT EXPECTED IN THE SHORT TERM.

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DISCUSSION

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5. ~~(S/NF)~~ SADDAM HUSAYN HAS RECENTLY WITHDRAWN HIS ARMED FORCES FROM A MAJOR PART OF WHAT IS GENERALLY REGARDED AS THE KURDISH "AUTONOMOUS REGION." THE ARMY IS POSITIONING UNITS ALONG A TRACE RUNNING ROUGHLY FROM ZAKHU IN NORTHERN IRAQ TO KHAMAQIN IN EAST-CENTRAL IRAQ. BAGHDAD HAS THUS GIVEN UP A SIGNIFICANT DEGREE OF CONTROL OF THE REGION, BUT THE REPOSITIONING PERMITS ECONOMY OF FORCE OPERATIONS TO CONTAIN THE KURDS WHILE ALLOWING THE ARMED FORCES TO IMPROVE SECURITY ALONG CRITICAL NORTH-SOUTH LINES OF COMMUNICATIONS, IN URBAN AREAS, AND AROUND OIL FIELDS AND INDUSTRIAL

FACILITIES. THE GOVERNMENT INTENDS TO RETAIN CONTROL OF THE IMPORTANT CITIES IN KURDISH AREAS: MOSUL, KIRKUK, KIFRI, KALLAR, AND KHAMAQIN. THE UNILATERAL WITHDRAWAL ALSO ALLOWS IMPROVED CONDITIONS FOR QUARTERING AND CONSOLIDATING GOVERNMENT FORCES DURING

THE COMING WINTER SEASON. POLITICALLY, BAGHDAD CAN CLAIM THAT THE KURDS NOW HAVE A FAIR MEASURE OF THE AUTONOMY THEY HAVE LONG SOUGHT TO ATTAIN.

6. ~~(S/NF)~~ THE IRAQI REGULAR ARMY PERFORMED POORLY IN ITS POST-GULF WAR OPERATIONS AGAINST THE KURDS, AND THE RGFC HAD TO BE BROUGHT IN TO SUPPRESS THE INSURGENCY. THE IRAQI PRESIDENT IS NOT EXPECTED TO

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RELY ON HIS REGULAR FORCE IN THE NORTH UNTIL MAJOR COMBAT AND SUPPORT UNITS HAVE RECONSTITUTED AND UNDERGONE ADDITIONAL TRAINING. IF REQUIRED, HOWEVER, THE RGFC WOULD BE DEPLOYED TO THE NORTH EITHER TO REINFORCE REGULAR ARMY UNITS OR TO ACT INDEPENDENTLY. ALTHOUGH THE RGFC WOULD UNDOUBTEDLY BE SUCCESSFUL AGAINST THE KURDS, SADDAM HAS RECENTLY SEEMED SATISFIED TO MAINTAIN MOST RGFC UNITS IN GARRISON IN CENTRAL IRAQ, WHERE THEY PERFORM A SECURITY ROLE FOR BAGHDAD AND WHERE THEY CAN PROCEED EFFICIENTLY WITH THEIR RECONSTITUTION.

7. ~~(S/NF)~~ SADDAM'S ACTION HAS ISOLATED THE KURDS, WHO REMAIN DIVIDED OVER ACCEPTING BAGHDAD'S TERMS ON THE AUTONOMY AGREEMENT. THEY WILL NOW BE FORCED TO ADMINISTER, SECURE, AND PROVIDE SUBSISTENCE IN THEIR HOMELAND. THE KURDS ALSO HAVE BEEN DENIED CONTROL OVER OILFIELDS AND INDUSTRIAL AREAS BY THIS MOVE. THEY ARE NOW EVEN MORE VULNERABLE TO ECONOMIC BLOCKADE OR MILITARY MOVES BY SADDAM.

8. ~~(S/NF)~~ IRAQI FORCES IN THE NORTH ARE SAID TO BE PRESSURING

KURDS TO LEAVE THE AREAS ALONG THE CURRENT FORWARD LINE OF TROOPS (FLOT) IN ORDER TO CREATE A BUFFER ZONE. THERE ARE SOME REPORTS OF FORCED EVICTIONS FROM AREAS NEAR IRAQI POSITIONS. KURDS AND IRAQIS

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EACH EXPECT ATTACKS BY THE OTHER SIDE, AND THE CONTINUING TENSION ALONG THE FLOT COULD RESULT IN MAJOR CLASHES, PARTICULARLY IN THE KIRKUK, KIFRI, AND KALLAR AREAS. IRAQI FORCES WILL MOST LIKELY SEEK TO AVOID DECISIVE ENGAGEMENTS, TRYING TO RELY ON ARTILLERY AND LOCALIZED OPERATIONS.

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OUTLOOK

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9. ~~(S/NF)~~ KURDISH GROUPS MAY TRY TO PRECIPITATE BATTLES WITH THE IRAQIS IN THE HOPE THAT MULTINATIONAL FORCES WOULD ASSIST THEM, EVEN THOUGH THE COALITION HAS REPEATEDLY STATED IT WOULD NOT INTERVENE. THE CONTINUED INTERNAL DIVISIONS AMONG KURDISH GROUPS WILL ALSO LIMIT THE CONTROL THE KURDISH FRONT HAS OVER VARIOUS GROUPS. ATTEMPTS BY INDIVIDUAL GROUPS TO EXPAND THEIR CONTROL VIS-A-VIS OTHER GROUPS IN THE AREA OF THE FLOT COULD LEAD TO BATTLES WITH THE IRAQIS.

10. ~~(S/NF)~~ THERE IS NO HISTORICAL PRECEDENT FOR LONG-TERM UNITY AMONG THE KURDS. THE PRINCIPAL KURDISH GROUPS IN IRAQ ARE UNLIKELY EVER TO BE IN COMPLETE HARMONY, AND THEIR DIFFERENCES WILL CONTINUE TO RESULT IN OCCASIONAL SKIRMISHES, BUREAUCRATIC COMPETITION, AND

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OBSTRUCTIVE AND DESTRUCTIVE ACTIONS.

11. ~~(S/NF)~~ THE WEAKNESSES IN THE KURDISH ADMINISTRATION OF THE REGION WILL GIVE SADDAM'S REGIME GREAT POWER TO INFLUENCE AND INTIMIDATE THE KURDS. ANY SUCCESSOR TO SADDAM'S REGIME WOULD ALSO LIKELY BE ABLE TO EXERT SIMILAR PRESSURES AND CONTROL.

12. ~~(S/NF)~~ OVER THE NEAR TERM, SADDAM'S ACTIONS WILL BE INFLUENCED BY THE POSSIBLE EXPIRATION OF THE PROVIDE COMFORT-TURKISH AGREEMENT ON 31 DECEMBER. THE CURRENT PRESENCE OF UN AND NONGOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS IN NORTHERN IRAQ AND PROVIDE COMFORT FORCES IN TURKEY PROVIDE SOME RESTRAINTS ON SADDAM'S ACTIVITIES. IRAQ REMAINS

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RELATIVELY QUIESCENT, AS SEEMS LIKELY DURING THE INCLEMENT WEATHER, THE STATUS QUO IN THE NORTH IS LIKELY TO PERSIST AT LEAST THROUGH THE WINTER, ALTHOUGH OCCASIONAL LOCALIZED FLAREUPS OF FIGHTING ARE

ALMOST CERTAIN. CONDITIONS THAT COULD LEAD TO A DECISION BY SADDAM TO CONDUCT A DELIBERATE OFFENSIVE IN THE SPRING WOULD INCLUDE:

- A PERCEPTION BY SADDAM THAT INTERNATIONAL ATTENTION IS NOT FOCUSED ON THE KURDISH ISSUE.

- CONTINUED OR INCREASED KURDISH UNREST, OR THE PERCEPTION OF IMMINENT UNREST.

- CONFIDENCE IN THE GOVERNMENT'S ABILITY TO CONTROL CENTRAL IRAQ AND TO EXTEND ITS AUTHORITY NORTHWARD.

14. (S/NF) UNLESS THESE CONDITIONS ARE MET, BAGHDAD WILL BE UNLIKELY TO ORDER A SPRING OFFENSIVE. AT SOME POINT, SADDAM WILL WANT TO REASSERT FULL CONTROL OF THE NORTH, BUT PROBABLY HOPES THAT ECONOMIC PRESSURE AND THE THREAT OF MASSIVE FORCE WILL BE ENOUGH TO ACHIEVE THIS GOAL. ALTHOUGH BAGHDAD HAS GRANTED A MEASURE OF DE FACTO AUTONOMY TO THE KURDISH AREA, IT IS UNLIKELY TO FEEL COMFORTABLE WITH THIS SITUATION OVER THE LONG TERM. THE KURDS THEMSELVES WILL OBVIOUSLY PLAY A KEY ROLE IN WHETHER CIRCUMSTANCES ARE SUFFICIENT TO PROVOKE SADDAM TO ATTACK, PARTICULARLY IN TERMS OF

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THEIR ABILITY TO COOPERATE AMONGST THEMSELVES AND OF THE EXTENT TO WHICH THEY ARE WILLING AND ABLE TO COOPERATE WITH BAGHDAD.

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