

Abizaid, GEN John P

From: Sanchez, Ricardo S., (LTG) [REDACTED] (b)(3), (b)(6)
Sent: Wednesday, August 20, 2003 9:18 AM
To: Abizaid, LTG John P
Subject: (U) Muqtada Al Sadr

Classification: ~~SECRET//X1~~

Sir - Want to outline my position on the proposed operation to arrest Muqtada Al Sadr (MAS). I would like your thoughts. Clearly, the timing of this operation could not come at a worse time given the recent unrest we have faced in the south due to basic services being disrupted, the fragile nature of the economic job initiatives that are underway, the timelines for introduction of Coalition forces and the emerging terrorist threat. This operation would come during a period of multiple transitions that increase our vulnerabilities - stabilization of oil and electrical power production is tenuous, introduction of a substantial number of Coalition forces with a transfer of authority on 3 Sep, distribution of fuel, all types, is near catastrophic failure, Shia factions are showing increasing signs of cooperation and unity, Interim council is on the verge of ministry appointments, and regional leaders/tribes are beginning to cooperate with security across the country.

MAS IS A THREAT BUT NOT AN IMMEDIATE THREAT:

Advocating anti-coalition activity
Continues to push his plans to create Mahdi's Army and an alternative governing structure in direct opposition to Coalition initiatives.
Success of these Al Sadr initiatives is unclear - It would be prudent to assume that some rudimentary success and organization has been achieved. It is unclear whether he will be able to gain increased support in the near term.
He has demonstrated the ability to rapidly muster reasonable levels of protesters, a mix of hired and loyal supporters, very quickly.
Will not flee the country - sees himself on the road to martyrdom like his ancestors.
Senior clergy are actively working to marginalize him.
Attendance at his Friday sermons has dropped recently.
Indications are that he is aware of investigation and it must be assumed he knows an arrest warrant is pending.
This makes him a tough target and will likely lead to resistance. He is well protected and has modified his routine in the last few days.

CAN WE PUT ENOUGH OF AN IRAQI FACE ON THIS OPERATION TO MAKE IT CONVINCING TO THE IRAQI PEOPLE? No!

Iraqi police will conduct the operation - assault team and 1st QRF are resourced by Iraqi police. An Najaf police, the main effort, is known to be controlled by the Marines.
Probability of U.S. involvement during arrest is extremely high given the force protection levels and operating patterns for MAS.
Detention facilities are operated by Coalition forces. Still searching for a viable, Iraqi run detention facility that can satisfy the requirement to put MAS in Iraqi custody.
Coalition force will have to augment Iraqi guard forces, if a suitable Iraqi detention alternative is located.
The Central Criminal Court is CPA appointed.

CHALLENGES FOR THE CONDUCT OF THE ARREST:

We assume he is aware of the pending issuance of the arrest warrant.
He has modified his routine, did not travel to Karbala this week. He has increased his personal security and has remained within the Ali Mosque compound for the last two weeks.
Arrest operation in the Ali Mosque or Kufa Mosque compound is not an option - probability of collateral damage to the Mosque is too great. This would practically guarantee a violent, massive reaction by the Shia population and would bring condemnation from the Muslim world in general.
Arrest options remaining are 1) Wait and conduct the arrest during one of his trips outside of the Ali Mosque compound or 2) Issue the warrant, begin an aggressive IO campaign to discredit and attempt to gain a voluntary surrender. At a minimum, option two I believe will lead to discrediting MAS and rendering him irrelevant. Both options require tremendous patience.
Only the surrender option provides the possibility of no casualties.

CONSEQUENCES OF THE ARREST AND MANAGING THE AFTERMATH:

Very high probability that demonstrations will ensue in Shia areas with significant reactions in Baghdad and Najaf.

Should expect lesser reactions in An Nasiriyah and Basra.

Must expect that demonstrations will turn violent. Supporters clearly demonstrated propensity during the "Flag Incident" in Sadr City this week.

It is likely that MAS will be elevated to martyr status and become a rallying point for the Shia.

Press will inevitably portray this as a Coalition operation. Could lead to Coalition challenges given the position of the UK with other coalition partner positions undetermined at this point.

Gauging the reaction of the rest of the Muslim world is difficult from where I sit but we must not underestimate the possibility that we will be increasingly seen as occupiers and repressive in the treatment of religious leaders.

The tactical risk for this operation is primarily confined to the likelihood of having to fight the personal security detachment/forces protecting MAS. The operational risk is of more concern and more difficult to assess. At the end of the day, the real unknown is the likelihood of a hostile reaction on the part of the Shia community and the level to which the Shia will turn against the coalition. If the resulting demonstrations turn violent and require the use of deadly force, the compounding effect of this situation is unpredictable.

Pursuing the arrest of Muqtada Al Sadr, I believe, is a gamble that could open a second front for coalition forces. This has the potential to fracture the Interim Governing Council as it struggles to begin the processes leading to self governance. The implications for the coalition are also unpredictable. I do not believe the timing is right as you are well aware and as I understand it the Prime Minister has raised this at the Presidential level. We have not received any word today on the status of the investigation and the issuance of the arrest warrant.

BOTTOMLINE: MY BEST JUDGMENT IS THAT WE SHOULD NOT UNDERTAKE THIS OPERATION IN A MANNER THAT REQUIRES THE INTRODUCTION OF CJTF-4 MILITARY CAPABILITY. THIS WILL LEAD TO THE OPENING OF A SECOND FRONT AND A CHAOTIC PERIOD OF INSTABILITY THAT WILL DIVERT RESOURCES AND PLAY RIGHT INTO THE HANDS OF THE FORMER REGIME LOYALISTS. THE ONLY FEASIBLE NEAR TERM SOLUTION, SHOULD WE WANT TO PROCEED, IS THE VOLUNTARY SURRENDER OPTION.

I AM PREPARED TO EXECUTE AS ORDERED. I HAVE TOLD AMB BREMER THAT I MUST OBTAIN AN EXECUTE ORDER FROM YOU BEFORE WE IMPLEMENT THE MILITARY OPTION. CJTF-4 HAS THE CONTINGENCY PLAN IN PLACE TO ENSURE SUCCESS OF THE IRAQI POLICE. THE IO STRATEGY AND THE DETENTION FACILITY TO BE USED ARE THE ONLY LOOSE ENDS AT THIS TIME.

V/R Ric

Sir, We will have to wrestle this pig soon unless this has been turned off indefinitely at higher level.

DRV FM: 123-2

Dated: 24 Feb 98

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Approved for Release