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Iraq War Note: Developments During the 7th Day of War
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1. Iraqi anti-aircraft tactics

Iraqi tactics for using AA guns and short-range defenses reflect a good adaptation of Soviet methods. They are evidently using forward spotters to alert troops to oncoming helicopters and possibly low flyers like the A-10. The Iraqi AA guns and other automatic weapons then send up a sudden curtain of fire from concealed positions as the helicopters flies into or over the position.

There are no firm data on this, but the same tactics call for sudden use of short range surface-to-air missiles, put on alert by forward observers, when helicopters or aircraft are well within the range envelope of such systems, rather than firing at maximum range to disrupt the attack pattern of the oncoming aircraft. (Of course both tactics can be used at the same time since the target of the aircraft may be well within the dispersed mix of air defense weapons.)

2. Iraqi Readiness

Too much emphasis is being placed on the lack of readiness and sustainability in Iraqi combat units.

Iraq has had months to quietly raise manning levels in key units, move supplies into the forward areas most likely to be attacked, bring key units up to strength at the expense of other units deployed in less critical areas, preload civilian trucks and transports, and create dispersed support facilities in civilian areas.

It also has had ample opportunity to funnel illegal imports and key munitions and equipment into the key fighting units.

The kind of training needed to defend the approaches of Baghdad does not need large, visible field exercises, or even major command post exercises.

This does not mean Iraqi units are ready and sustainable by U.S. and British standards, but generalizations about the entire Iraqi force structure can be very misleading.

It is important to note that well led Arab troops have often shown amazing courage, and the Iraqi units that broke and surrendered during the Gulf War were often low grade infantry units that were badly equipped and led and manned by Shiite and Kurdish conscripts.

Iraqi forces should not be patronized, and pockets of excellence will steadily emerge during the fighting.



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3. New Iraqi "Combined Arms" Methods

Many of the warnings about asymmetric warfare seem to be coming true. The Gulf War has led many analysts to forget the level of innovation and adaptation Iraq showed in defeating Iran in 1987-1988, and how much opportunity Iraq has had to learn from the Serb and Somalia conflicts.

This is reflected in the use of dispersal, concealment, decoys, and civilian areas. It is reflected in what is clearly a higher degree of independence of action and in the command chain.

Another important development, however, is what seems to be the combined use of Iraqi Republican Guards and Fedayeen in combined operations, and then a mix of stay-behinds in cities and rear areas.

It is not yet clear how well Iraq can mix the Republican Guards, Fedayeen, Regular Army, and elements of the Popular army, but it is probably dangerous to assume the US/UK forces face anything like set piece battles between US forces and the Republican Guards.

One key point: Iraqi is clearly fighting a fluid defense in depth, not a simple "Battle of Baghdad," and the U.S. and Britain are responding. The media emphasis on the "lines" defending Baghdad confuses the main area of Iraqi force concentration with the overall Iraqi method of defense.

4. Minimizing the "Battle of Baghdad:" Sucking the U.S. in versus Sucking the Iraqi Forces Out

Although some reports act as if the point of the US-British operation was to race to Baghdad, this is almost certainly not the objective. At this point, the U.S. and Britain benefit most from getting the Iraqi heavy and elite forces to come out of Baghdad and dispersed and sheltered positions in its surroundings, and to use air, artillery, and armor to kill them in the open.

Poor weather is making this tactic more difficult, but the unseen kills by airpower and long-range artillery like the MLRS may be gravely weakening the Iraqis.

If the U.S. and Britain want to suck Iraqi forces out into the open, Iraq wants to suck the US and British forces into prepared positions and not expose their forces and maneuver. The Battle of Baghdad favors Iraq under such conditions unless the US can use airpower, helicopter mobility, and superior intelligence to weave through and bypass the Iraqi divisions.

5. "Siege of Baghdad" versus "Battle of Baghdad"



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Another issue needs careful consideration. The US and Britain may well want to pause and strengthen their forces after destroying the main Iraqi field units around Baghdad. Unless there is a clear opportunity to defeat the regime, there is every incentive to isolate it, avoid urban warfare with the present force ratios, give the Marines and British 1st Armored time to maneuver, use air power and artillery selectively, secure rear areas, and provide examples of humanitarian aid.

This is not a TV war game. Rushing into urban combat with images of slow street fighting is not the best tactic. A limited siege of at least several days is not inevitable but may well make sense.