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**Iraq War Note: Desert Light versus Twin Rivers Tyranny**  
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It is far too early to make judgments about a war in which a week of intense air and missile activity has not produced one word about battle damage assessment on the overall air campaign for 7,000 fixed wing sorties and an unknown number of helicopter and UAV sorties; where the success of the Marine advance is unclear, where the battle plan in the west and north are unclear, and the role of the British 1st Armored is still to be revealed.

It is equally dangerous to talk about an Iraq where 19-20 out of 26 divisions remain uncommitted, three divisions in the South have not been heard from, and the full nature of the defense in depth of Baghdad remains unclear.

That said, a few points do seem to be emerging:

**1. Shock and Awe versus Restraint and Persistence**

It may be time to remember that rather than shock and awe, this has been an amazingly restrained campaign in terms of willingness to inflict visible damage on civilians and infrastructure, and to shatter cities in urban warfare.

There is also the fact that shock has been limited by:

- The lack of any massive air campaign on the scale the US military initially stated would have occurred as restraint was shown waiting to see if Saddam was killed or the leadership collapsed.
- The loss of Turkish bases and the entire northern line of advance with roughly one-third of the planned US armor, some 2025+ combat aircraft, 100 helicopters, and the ability to flood forces into the Kurdish areas by staging out of Turkish bases.

**2. Desert Light or Desert Pause**

There needs to be a careful analysis after the war of the events that led the US and Britain to go to war with so little of the war plan intact. A great deal of armchair criticism is being directed at the military and the war plan that ignores some very important realities:

- The US military did not negotiate with Turkey.
- The US military was given assurances early on that there would be one UN Resolution and a much earlier war, and then that the second resolution would come relatively early and pass.



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- The original war plan did not call for months of negotiations that gave Iraq additional time to plan and disperse.
- The 4th Mechanized and 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment are not in the North and are delayed through mid-April.
- Follow-on forces cannot deploy until ports clear of the 4th Mechanized.
- Constant political decisions that delayed or disrupted key call-ups, deployments, and logistic movements, including delays for the 101st and items like bridging equipment.
- Civilian policy planners, not career military and intelligence officers, felt that Saddam was extremely fragile, the probability of uprisings was high, and push for smaller support and rear area forces.

The end result is "desert light," but it does not have to stay that way. The US and UK do not have to close on Baghdad before the Marine and British units can operate forward with the 3rd Mechanized. The 101st is fully closing. The 173rd may be on the way. It is possible to give airpower and precision artillery time to work; support and rear area forces are still coming in, and the 4th Mechanized and 3rd ACR will begin to close in mid-April.

This could argue for a strategy in which the US defeats the Iraqi forces in the field, secures most of the country, isolates Baghdad, keeps up pressure through the air and attacks on concentrations outside it, and negotiates while it seeks collapse of the regime and waits for reinforcement.

### **3. Twin Rivers Tyranny**

It is far too soon to determine how fragile Saddam's power structure and forces are. The impact of airpower is unclear and the impact of any decisive defeat of the Republican Guards is still to come. There are, however, some potential lessons that need much more careful study than they have been given in the past:

- Tyrannies use incentives and propaganda, not just repression. They often coopt many, if not most, of the population, and patriotism is a major force they can exploit. Eastern Europe is only one model of the willingness to die for a bad regime. Nazi Germany, Stalin, Spain, Italy, Portugal, North Korea, Cambodia, and Maoist China are all warnings about talking only about the negative side of such regimes and underestimating their ability to fight.
- Tyrannies can adapt, and use asymmetric warfare with great success. They are not inherently rigid, over centralized, lacking in innovation, or slow to react. All of the warnings about asymmetric warfare issued under the Clinton Administration, and in more depth by the Bush Administration before 9/11, are proving valid.



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- The Iraqis learned a lot from the Serbs. Regimes learn from each other.
- Cultural images among the majority of the people may be far more important than the views of exiles, Western educated minorities, and oppress factions. We may have badly underestimated what Iraqis feel as national patriots, their unity as Arabs, their reaction to oil for food, and their reaction to the images of the Second Intifada. Disliking Saddam is not the same as liking us.
- There is a reason the Iraqi security and force structure is so complex and overlapping. Thirty years of experience show it works.
- Even uprisings could be a serious problem for us if they suck us into the cities we want to bypass. We may have underestimated both the ability to conduct defense in depth and the need for humanitarian support and urban control. Once again, Iraq could still collapse quickly and catalytically, but we need a far more objective view of the strengths as well as the weaknesses of Saddam's regime, and of how Iraqis as a whole view us. We may have badly mirror-imaged them because we know so many Westernized Iraqis.