



Center for Strategic & International Studies
Washington, DC

Iraq War Note: Action in the North
By Anthony H. Cordesman
March 28, 2003

The Impact of the US Force

The deployment of the 173rd Airborne Brigade fills a critical gap in the North.

This force fills a critical gap in the North, reassuring the Turks, Kurds, and Turcomans in very different ways, as well as putting pressure on Iraq to keep its forces deployed in the North. It is misleading, however, to call this initial deployment a "front." It is far too limited in size and firepower to perform such a role.

It is important to understand, however, that the 173rd is a light brigade and that even when the base (and possibly other bases in the Kurdish security zone) is fully secure, a C-130 can at most carry one light artillery weapon or armored vehicle per sortie and it generally takes another sortie to support it for light combat.

It may take a week to build up to 3,000 men, very limited armored mobility, and sustainability in armored combat – although the deployment of assault lift and attack helicopters would allow elements to be very mobile and effective.

The Iraqi Threat

The 173rd would also face serious opposition if it came out of the mountain and Kurdish areas and tried to drive south. The Iraqi forces in the South have the following strength:

- Regular Army in the North.
- The 1st Corps is headquartered at Kirkuk and the 5th Corps at Mosul. They guard the Turkish border area and deploy on the edge of the Kurdish enclave, and guard the oilfields in the North. They have a total of 8 divisions, but only two are heavy mechanized divisions.
- The 1st Corps: 1 Mech Division; 3 Infantry Divisions. It has its headquarters at Khaleed Camp (al Rashid Command Center) in Kirkuk City. It includes the 2nd Infantry Division headquartered at Alrabee, the 5th Mechanized division headquartered at Shuwan, the 8th Infantry Division headquartered at Shuwan, and the 38th Infantry Division headquartered at Quader Karam.
- The 5th Corps: 1 Mech Division; 3 Infantry Divisions. It has its headquarters at Alsalamia Camp (Amouria Command Center) in Mosul. It has units defending the border area with Syria and Turkey as well as covering other parts of the north. It includes the 1st Mechanized Division headquartered at Makhmur, the 4th Infantry Division headquartered at Bashiqa Maonten, the 7th Infantry Division headquartered at Alton Kopri Castle, and the 16th Infantry Division headquartered near the Saddam Dam and Mosul.



Center for Strategic & International Studies
Washington, DC

- The Northern or 1st Corps of the Republican Guards: 1 Armored and 1 Infantry Division.
- This corps can act to defend against Iran and Turkey, operate against the Kurds, and defend the greater Baghdad area and Tikrit. It is headquartered in Tikrit and in the Al Rashedia area of Baghdad (allah Akbar Command Center).
- The 1st Adnan Mechanized Division has left Mosul and is moving south. It was last located near Baji, above Tikrit, but now may be further south.
- This leaves the Al Nida (Al Nedaa) Armored Division near Bagubah.
- The 2nd Baghdad Infantry Division at Maqloob Maontin-Mosul, and the Al Abeid (Al Abid) Infantry Division at Kirkuk- Khalid Camp seem to have left their positions and shifted south. Some elements may be south of Baghdad, but this has not been formally confirmed by US intelligence experts.

In the East:

- Regular Army Forces in Eastern Iraq: 1 Armored, 2 Infantry Divisions
- The 2nd Corps is headquartered at the Mansouria Alabal Camp (Al Yarmouk Command Center) in Deyala, and is deployed east of Baghdad to defend against Iran or any attack by Iranian-backed Iraqi opposition forces. It includes the 3rd Armored Division headquartered at Jalawia, the 15th Infantry Division headquartered at Amerli, and the 34th Infantry Division headquartered near Khanaqin.

The Limits of US Capability

The situation is very fluid. The US has flown a massive series of air strikes against the Iraqi forces in the North and East, but no battle damage data are available.

"Surprise" air and helicopter movements of other light forces could take place, including some AH-64 and other elements of the 101st Air Mobile Division. Air transportable stocks are prepositioned in Eastern Europe for rapid airlift.

At the same time, some 60% of the Iraqi army is still positioned north of Baghdad, and there is no air mobile or air transportable force that could challenge the mix of Iraqi forces in the North in anything like the same way as the armor and heavy forces in the 4th Infantry Division and 3rd Armored Cavalry Division.