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Iraq War Note: Seige of Baghdad, New Iraqi Tactics and US/UK Response
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1. Evolving Iraqi Strategy

Iraq's current strategy is clear at one level. It is to:

- Disperse and shelter, and avoid presenting easy targets.
- Fight small, unexpected actions in depth at the front, along supply lines, and in the rear wherever possible -- using largely expendable forces of light vehicles, Fedayeen, Popular Army, etc.
- Intimidate and control the population and prevent any mass defections or shifts to the allies.
- Try to suck US and British forces into fighting in cities and populated areas outside Baghdad.
- Use a mix of main force units from the army and Republican Guards plus Fedayeen and irregulars to delay the US and British advance on Baghdad as much as possible.
- Prevent humanitarian aid and seek to create the image and reality of a US-British advance into a hostile nation.

There is no question that Iraq has had more success so far than US planners estimated, although such tactics were the subject of warnings by the US intelligence community and were considered as risks in US planning.

The question is what happens next, and it is important to note that in spite of reports of major coming battles between the US and Republican Guards, we may not see the battles we want. We do not know Iraqi strategy, but as we close on Al Kut, al Hillah and move north of Kerbala, we may or may not see aggressive attacks by the Republican Guard and Regular Army.

The best Iraqi tactic is to use elements of the Republican Guard and larger elements of the more expendable regular army to slow down the advance and inflict casualties, while keep most Republican Guard forces intact for defensive battles. It is to disperse into elements of battalion or sometimes brigade size and fight delaying actions, and then only defense major crossings and road junctions.

If Iraq seeks to fight a decisive battle in the field, it is the best case for the US and UK and worst case for Iraq. This gives US airpower the best killing ground, as well as the MLRS, AH-64/AH-1W, and other US technology.



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In contrast, offensive clashes, retreating into key defensive positions near the city, and fighting defensive battles only at key points for the defense of Baghdad will be far more effective for Iraq and allows surviving elements to retreat into the city for street by street fighting.

2. Iraqi Goals in a Siege or Attack of Baghdad

Iraq's broader objectives have to be to:

- Delay the taking of Baghdad as soon as possible.
- Inflict as many US/UK casualties as possible.
- Create as many images of collateral damage and civilian casualties as possible.
- Try to show the South and the Iraqi people are loyal to Saddam Hussein.
- Organize an urban defense of Baghdad so threatening or effective that the US and UK do not go into the city or cannot win.
- Delay any use of chemical or biological weapons as long as possible in the hope of political victory – although Saddam is reported to believe that the US is extremely sensitive to casualties and might see such weapons as a potential way of inflicting them.

The only hope of Iraqi victory, short of fleeing, is the hope that the US and UK cannot sustain the combined cost of casualties, fighting the war, and growing world opposition to the war.

3. US/UK Goals in a Siege or Attack on Baghdad

This creates a dilemma for the US and Britain, compounded by the restraint they need to use in using air attacks and force to protect civilians and lay the groundwork for winning the peace. It may be necessary to pause after the next major series of battles and as the US and UK close in on Baghdad if:

- Large elements of the Guards and regular forces are in the city area and are well organized.
- Large elements of the Popular Army and Fedayeen appear to be well organized for street-by-street fighting.
- The air campaign (the missing dimension in all our assessments) has not had major effect in preventing reinforcement, cohesive defense of the city, and disrupting the regime.
- Iraq is successful enough to prevent the Coalition from securing the South and rushing in humanitarian aid.



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A true siege, however, would tend to play into Iraqi hands. It would tend to make Saddam seem to be in popular control of the parts of the country that are not occupied, appear a victor in the Arab world, create a major humanitarian crisis in the south and in Baghdad, force a continuing bombing campaign and series of actions in and around the city with images of collateral damage and civilian casualties, and give Iraq more and more time to organize the most effective street fights possible.

In short, a siege is a very uncertain tactic for the US and Britain, but could be necessary if:

- Major elements of the Iraqi armed forces secure the approaches to the city and show they can fight.
- All forces dig in and disperse around the city in ways air power cannot locate and kill.
- The Fedayeen, security forces, Special Republican Guard, and Popular army create an effective defense of the inner city.
- The regime's power holds together.

4. The Humanitarian Weapon

It is too early to make predictions about how this will come out. We have (a) no data on the air campaign, (b) have not seen how wisely Iraq will fight on the way to Baghdad, (c) have not seen how cohesive their defenses will be, and (d) do not know the US plan for approaching Baghdad and how innovative it will be.

One thing is fairly clear, however, and that is that Saddam will seek to create and sustain a humanitarian crisis in the South and possibly in Baghdad and use it as a weapon.

Regardless of what happens in Basra over the next few days, a south critically dependent on oil for food (40-60% of all food with limited stocks and reserves) and with little margin in terms of water, medicine, and power will become an escalating humanitarian disaster unless the US and UK can get into most towns and cities.

The images will be blamed on the US and UK, and even if uprisings occur, these can suck US and British forces into urban areas that the US and UK sought to bypass. This aspect of the war can get very grim, very quickly.