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**Iraq War Note: Air and Land Operations**  
**By Anthony H. Cordesman**  
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**1. Casualties**

The casualties are still very low. This is the first intense modern land combat for the US since 1991 – Afghanistan was very much light guerrilla warfare. The casualties are particularly light in view of the combination of Iraq conventional warfare and asymmetric raids, and have no precedent for anything like the size of the forces engaged:

Dead (Killed in Combat + Accidental Deaths) - 49

Dead (Killed in Combat) - 29

Dead (Unknown cause of death) - 1

Dead (Non Combat Related) - 19

POWs - 7

Missing - "at least 19"

**2. The Impact of Air Strikes**

The reports of loss of combat capability for the Republican Guards divisions are necessarily vague to the point that it is impossible to determine what methodology -- if any -- is being used to determine them, and this may account for the very different estimates being quoted in the press. The situation has not been helped by USCENTCOM's refusal to make any public estimates of damage at even the most general level (See transcript of USCENTCOM briefing of 31 March 2003). At the same time, the sheer scale of air operations gives credibility to the fact the Guard must have suffered badly. Up to March 30, USCENTCOM had reported over 6,000 precision weapons dropped and some 650 cruise missiles.

The sheer scale of US operations is indicated by what then happened on the day of the 30th: By 10 PM ET on March 30, the USAF alone flew a daily total of 1,800 missions over Iraq.

- 800 strike missions with 200 "aim points" or targets.
- The rest: 400 refueling tanker missions, 225 cargo or personnel airlift missions, 100 command/control/intelligence/surveillance/reconnaissance missions.
- They dropped 1,200 precision-guided bombs, including 14 Tomahawk cruise missiles.



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- More than 80 percent of the strike missions were to support ground forces in the South, north and west.
- 60 percent of today's missions will have focused on degrading the capabilities of Republican Guard divisions around Baghdad.
- Other targets, as usual, included command/control and leadership sites in and around Baghdad.

The RAF flew over 500 sorties as of March 29. The RAAF's sortie rate has not been reported. The daily totals for the US Navy and Marine Corps are not clear but the USS Lincoln, Kittyhawk & Constellation – launched 260 sorties in a 24-hour period ending 6 AM on the 30th. These three carriers have flown over 2,000 sorties to date for the war. They have been primarily providing close air support for ground troops. Latest strikes have "degraded Iraqi combat power" by hitting, tanks, vehicles, artillery, command-and control facilities and other military targets.

**For all of the debate over the "pause," these strikes may later prove to simply have changed the phasing of the air campaign so that the "softening up" of the Iraqi military occurred after the US land forces reached the perimeter of Baghdad rather than waiting to begin the land campaign after 3-4 days of bombing. Given the low casualties to date, this is scarcely an indictment of the "war plan" – which in any case did not survive the first hours of planning for the initial decapitation strike on the Iraqi leadership on the first day.**

### **3. Humanitarian Crisis Story**

There still is no reporting of the level of food and economic problems in Iraq as a whole and in Baghdad and the South in particular. Food stocks must reach a problem level at some point in the next week to 10 days, if they have not done so already.

### **4. Insecure Coast**

The fact that today's USCENTCOM briefing referred to seizing Iraqi gunboats raises continuing questions about how secure the coast really is. It is so narrow that it is surprising that the Iraqis have anything left.

### **5. Who Is Loyal to Whom?**

One of the greatest single uncertainties surrounding the war to date is just how determined the average Iraqi is to support the regime and actually fight for it. The conflicting stories coming out of the South, the pro-Iraqi reports in the European and Arab press, and rising tide of USCENTCOM stories saying Iraqis only are passive or support the regime because of force leave no clear picture of what is happening.



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It may be days before the situation in the South is clear. So far, no major town or city is secure, and there is no way to sort out the conflicting impressions. It is unclear that the South will be typical of Baghdad and the center in any case, and the South has shown no consistency in its support towards the regime even during the uprisings in 1991.

## 6. The Land Battle: Closing in on Baghdad

The broad pattern is still unclear but any "pause" is relative and key developments are:

- Army troops have pushed north to within several miles of Karbala, and took control of an area about six miles from the Euphrates River – a stretch of Highway 9 about 14 miles west of the town of Hilla and 20 miles southwest of the ruins of Babylon. They have evidently crossed the Euphrates and may be opening up the possibility of joining with the 1 MEF forces driving north from Nassiriyah.
- 3rd Infantry Division forces fought into Hindiya and battled Iraqi forces over a bridge across the Euphrates. The Americans captured several dozen Iraqis who identified themselves as members of Saddam Hussein's Republican Guard. The Iraqis are reported to have tried to use human shields on the brigade and prepared it for demolition. The status of the battle is unclear.
- US Army forces are reported to be on the East bank of the Euphrates near An Najaf and to have engaged an element of the Madina division.
- The 101st Airborne now has the joint tasks of pacifying Najaf while using its helicopter assault squadrons to support the ground campaign against the Madina Division at Karbala.
- USCENTCOM reports that US air hit Iraqi forces West of Ar Ramadi and killed some 10 tanks. The strength of Ranger and Special Forces in the West remains unclear, as does the presence of AC-130, helicopters, and C-130 transport flows in H-2 and H-3.
- The action in the North is confusing. Kurdish forces unilaterally withdrew from position near Iraqi forces, but US forces seem to be infiltrating forward.
- Marine forces fought an action near Al Fajar, South of Al Kut.
- USCENTCOM reports that AC-130s killed Iraqi aircraft on H-2 with the aid of Special Forces spotters. (The date is unclear and seems to have been on the 28th)
- A major shift is taking place in Nassiriyah in that the Marines are now carrying out house-to-house searches and have found weapons caches, Iraqi uniforms and unexploded ordinance.
- The "Battle of Basra" has now lasted at least a week longer than planned. The BBC reports that British forces took the village of Abu al-Qassib after a daylong battle against hundreds



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of Iraqi troops, in which they faced the hardest resistance they have seen so far. The British have described the village as an Iraqi stronghold and the possible source of Iraqi tank counterattacks around Basra. They say 200 Iraqi soldiers and five officers were captured.

- Forces securing the rear and lines of communication seem to have captured two major weapons caches: One near Basra and a second near the town of Ad Biwaniyah where the 1st Marine division came across a major arms depot of 40-50 buildings, thousands of rounds of ammo, mines, RPGs and rifles.
- Other key actions to secure lines of communication and rear areas include a dawn raid by US Marines on Shatra. North of Nassiriyah The 1st Marine Expeditionary Force, Third Bat. 2nd Reg. is being reinforced today by the 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU) to help secure the area. The exact level of security for the 3 bridges in and West of Nassiriyah is uncertain.
- In An Najaf and As Samana, forces from the Army's 3rd Infantry Division and 82nd Airborne Division are reported to have killed approximately 100 regime terror squad members and units also captured 50 enemy Prisoners of War.