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Iraq War Note: The “Not so Battle of Baghdad?”
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It is far too soon to predict the outcome of a city center that occupies over 100 square kilometers, and which is filled with different districts and complex road and water barriers. The preliminary indicators, however, are that the “battle for Baghdad” may be quicker and less lethal than USCENTCOM originally estimated.

US intelligence keeps talking about elements of the Republican Guards and regular forces retreating into the city, but there are few reports of armor or artillery movements from within the city. There do seem to be redeployments of some elements, but not of the size that could cohesively defend the core of the city or on a street-by-street basis.

The deployment of the Special Republican Guards, SSO, Mukhabarat, Fedayeen and Popular Army remains a bit of a mystery. US intelligence sources report activity, but it is not clear that there is order and structure to much of this activity or what elements of the city have well structured defenses. They may be there, but there is little sign of well structured command and control, and Arab sources inside the city do not report high levels of security activity.

The Problem of Low Force Ratios and Large areas to Defend

Today’s USCENTCOM briefing and British sources also indicate that far fewer elements of the regular forces in the south made it into the Baghdad area than had previously been estimated. The Marines seem to have inflicted a significant defeat on one regular army division on their drive south as well as on the Baghdad division and a Republican Guards infantry division. (Al Nida Division?)

The British 1st Armored Division and airpower seem to have broken up most of the 4th Corps: 1 armored, and 2 Infantry Divisions. It is normally headquartered at Al Amara and defends the border with Iran. It includes the 10th Armored Division headquartered near Al Teab and Al Amarra, the 14th Infantry Division headquartered south of Al Amara, and the 18th Infantry Division headquartered near Al Amara and Al Musharah.

The Iraqi 3rd Corps -- 1 armored, 1 Mechanized, and 1 Infantry Division -- was headquartered in the Nasseria area, and normally positioned near the Kuwaiti border. It included the 6th Armored Division headquartered near Majnoon and Al Nashwa, the 11th Infantry Division headquartered at Al Naserria, and the 51st Mechanized Division headquartered at Zubair. All of these divisions were broken up before the final stages of the dash to Baghdad. The 51st collapsed during the first days of the fighting near Basra, the 11th during the fight for Nasiriyah, and the 6th seems to have collapsed towards the north.

There are still three Republican Guards divisions and elements of the regular army in the city, but the force ratios seem to be very low for perimeter defense of the city and they have to concentrate on trying to delay the 3rd Infantry Division’s movements from the southwest and



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south, and the 1 MEF advance from the southeast. They probably have enough forces for clashes, but not enough forces to hold broad fronts cohesively even along the main lines of attack.

Low Republican Guards divisions and regular army force strength, and the uncertain combat power of the Special Republican Guards, Fedayeen, Popular Army, and security forces create other problems.

The Vulnerability of the City

Baghdad has a strange geography for urban warfare, and the US lines of advance seem well chosen to make the defense of the city much harder. The 1 MEF now seems to be in or around Rasheed Airport in the far southeast of the city. It has already crossed every major water barrier into the eastern side of the city. It is also positioned along major, relatively open, roads towards the Shaahb Stadium and Wathiq Square in the central area.

Vulnerability to the Southeast

Again, stressing the fact that this is speculation, the end result is that the Saddam loyalists face two major water barriers on the east side of the city – the Qanat Al Jaysh (Army Canal) just to the east of the Rasheed Airport and then a smaller set of canals that are the eastern perimeter of the urban area, and divide it from the eastern suburbs.

This makes it much easier for the US forces to divide up the city because all traffic across the Army Canal must go across one of 11 bridges and can be hit from the air or by helicopters and artillery. There are only six bridges across the far eastern water barrier.

Marine control of Al Kahhal Street, or even urban close air support, would further divide the city in war fighting terms so that the crowded area of the East Bank would be separate from the most open urban areas east of Al Kahhal Street and south of Bor Said Street (running northeast from the Tigris in the center of the eastern half of the city).

It also allows movement into the peninsula that juts out into the Tigris and which has two major bridges across the Tigris towards the Presidential Palace and New Presidential Palace areas. This still leaves densely built-up areas in the northeast half of the eastern bank, and west of Al Kahhal Street.

The fact remains, however, that southeast Baghdad is not easy to defend once 1 MEF forces cross into the Rasheed Area. Moreover, there are substantial areas in the east that are relatively open and suitable for sudden airmobile raids or dashes across bridges from the east. These include the area northeast of Saddam City, and the bridge into the Mahmud as Sallum area along the Ad Dawrah Expressway.

Vulnerability to the West and South



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Baghdad International Airport is far more strategic than a source of potential resupply. There are no water barriers between the airport and the western half of the city and there is a major web of streets coming out of the airport and to the west and north of the airport, that offer potential ways to advance or divide up the city.

The grandiose, and very wide Matar Sdama Al Duwali or Airport Road that goes east directly out of the airport is relatively clear on both sides into the center of the city until it hits the Qadisyah Expressway at Um Al-Tabul Square, less than a mile from the perimeter of the New Presidential Palace Compound.

Its branch along the Hilla Road may already have been used by other 3rd Infantry Division forces driving up from the south. It also connects with the Ad Dawrah Expressway, which is another main and relatively open expressway that cuts east across the Tigris to Al Kahhal Street about a mile to the northwest of Rasheed Airport. These roads potentially allow the US forces to cutoff the southwest part of the city.

The central part of the Eastern City and the core area of the regime are also difficult to defend in the face of urban close air support and attack helicopters, and have major open areas. Much of Arbatassh Tamuz (14th of July Street), the main street running northwest, is open on at least one side or provides an entry to either the Presidential Palace Compound or rail yards.

Another semi-open area extends along the Abu Ghrab Expressway – the main highway dividing the western side of the city from west to east. The same is true to a lesser extent of Al Urdun Street (Jordan Street) that comes out of the northeast side of Baghdad International Airport.

Once again, there are major open areas that might be used for some kind of air mobile raid in the area around the Zawra Park, west side of the Arbatassh Tamuz (14th of July Street), and power transformation station.

The North

It is again pure speculation, but the northeast of the city is relatively open, and there is at least one air strip in the northeast – Khan Bani Said – that could be a key point to seize on the main road up towards Ba'qubah.

The northwest is relatively free of canals and channels east of Baghdad International Airport, and the area is relatively open along the main road to Tikrit and Samarra from the north gate. The northern road net coming out of the Baghdad International Airport and along the road that branches east off of the Tikrit Road towards the main northern bridge across the Tigris allow fairly rapid movement to north. There is another airfield in the Sala ad Din area called At Taji Airfield.

These are all areas that allow the relatively free use of urban close air support and attack helicopters, as well as potential airmobile operations.



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Anything But Easy?

It must be stressed again that this analysis assumes low Republican Guards and regular army force levels in the city, and it is far too early to know exactly where and how well the Special Republican Guards/Fedayeen/SSO-intelligence/Popular army forces will fight.

The fact remains, however, that US forces have already advanced far closer into the city than the Iraqi regime can possibly want, and urban warfare is now far more difficult – and probably impossible – on a city wide basis. Geography may already have forced the regime into a zone of defense that is not particularly favorable in terms of urban geography.