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Iraq War Note: The End Game: A battle of Tikrit?

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1. Strike on Saddam

There is no way to know how many elements of the regime's apparatus are left in Baghdad, including elements of the Fedayeen, Special Republican Guards, Special Security Organization, Mukhabarat, and Baath Party Security – the organization that Saddam used to gain power. The lack of incidents over the last few days, however, that involve any weapons heavier than mortars and RPGs indicate that such resistance is minimal.

Since April 9th, most of the remaining 10 Regular Army Divisions seem to have surrender or collapse, and there only seem to be elements of one brigade of the Adnan Division of the Republican Guards left near Tikrit.

Fleeing to Tikrit? Or Not?

There is no way to know how many elements of the regime's power base have fled north from Baghdad, and how many will head towards Tikrit. The idea that mostly are loyal, or cannot survive Saddam's fall, seems to have little real validity. Iraqis do not generally blame each other for going along with the regime, and most of the security services are more the bureaucrats of tyranny than torturers and killers.

If there are problems to come, they may occur when the Kurds and Shi'ites have enough power throughout the country to exert some form of methodical searches and war crimes trials, but in the interim virtually all of the personnel in the regime's core security forces, intelligence apparatus, Special Republican Guards and Republican Guards can fade back into greater Baghdad or into the Sunni areas north of Baghdad. The exceptions – including the more abusive elements of the Fedayeen who committed a long series of crimes and rapes – are more likely to hide or flee than fight.

The vast majority of the regime's power base that do flee Baghdad are more likely to avoid Tikrit than go there. Losing once is bad enough, and no city is a clearer target for US attacks, searches and Iraqi postwar follow-on investigations and war crimes trials. If anything, the fact that the 3rd Infantry Division closed the Tikrit road early on, but not the roads to the northeast and Baqubah are likely to lead those who flee in this direction. Others may go to the northwest or west.

Tikrit is in the center of a number of towns "loyal" to Saddam in the sense they have had immense benefits, but whether these benefits buy a willingness to die for Saddam is highly questionable. The key ones are Samarra, Ad Dawr, and Bayji. If there is any area with broad tribal and ethnic links to Saddam it is here.



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Yet, nothing about the history of the clans and tribes in the area indicates they have ever been particularly willing to die for a failed leader, and this is not part of Iraqi political history or culture. US Special Forces had enough freedom of action in the area between Bayji and Tikrit on April 10th so they could range through the countryside, and destroy five camouflaged light aircraft that the leadership may have reserved for flight from Iraq.

Few Forces to Defend the City

General Myers and USCENTCOM said on April 8th that the Republican Guards had lost virtually all of their tanks and artillery. Moreover, if as Myers said, there is only one Republican Guards Brigade of the Adnan Division to defend Tikrit, this is scarcely a significant force. Even before some 22 days of bombing and attack, the Adnan Division only had mediocre quality by Guards standards and a brigade would only have around 50-60 tanks even at full strength.

Possible Elements of the Special Republican Guards

Tikrit has elements of the Special Republican Guards, although these may now have no more strength than the equivalent of a few battalions. There do not seem to be indications that the heavy fourth brigade deployed its armor to Tikrit from Baghdad but some reinforcement is possible.

Other elements of the Special Republican Guards that might be in the city could include:

- **Survivors from the Second Brigade** was normally headquartered at the Al Rashid military base, and had combat elements outside Baghdad and in the Mosul area. *Three battalions – the 11th, 14th, and 15th seem reasonably well suited for urban fighting, and a few elements some may have moved towards Tikrit.* It is unclear whether any engaged the US 3rd Infantry Division when it seized the airport on April 3rd/4th or the 1st Marine Division on the fighting of 4th/5th. It may have taken serious losses. All forces have been hit hard from the air. Probably has lost most major facilities and at least 70-80% of effectiveness.
 - The Fourth Battalion is a significant combat unit that protected Saddam's palace in Makhool in the Bayji area that is north of Baghdad.
 - The Sixth Battalion protected the palaces in the Mosul area.
 - **The Eleventh Battalion** guarded the approaches to Baghdad from the direction of Taji.
 - **The Fourteenth Battalion** guarded the approaches to Baghdad from the direction of Salam Pak and Kut.
 - **The Fifteenth Battalion** was part of the western defenses of Baghdad.



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The Third Brigade **was headquartered at Taji and had four combat battalions to defend Taji and the approaches to Baghdad.** All forces have been hit hard from the air. Probably has lost most major facilities and at least 70-80% of effectiveness.

- The Third Battalion was a rapid reaction combat force.
- The Ninth Battalion protected the palaces and road approaches in the Tharthar area.
- The Tenth Battalion was a combat unit in Taji that protects Baghdad from the direction of the north and northwest.

A Poor City to Defend after Weeks of Bombing

Tikrit has a number of bunkers, and may or may not have a tunnel network. At the same time, it has been steadily bombed for some 18 days, and it has poor urban geography to defend.

- It is long and narrow, with little defensive depth.
- It has been given so much money that streets are often wide and open.
- The main palace complex is totally outside the city with no defensive shield in terms of civilian areas. The palaces inside the city are wide open.
- There are three airports on the outskirts that have to be defended.
- It has many major equipment and storage centers, and command and control facilities but these have been hit from the air for some 19 days.
- There are many major routes into the city or just north and south of it, and a bridge crosses the Tigris from the east in its center while two roads go up and easily bridgeable Tigris on either side of the river.
- A major four-lane bypass goes by the city on the west, allowing easy movement without entering the city.
- The terrain is relatively trafficable off-road all around the city.
- No population in Iraq can arouse less sympathy. This is the center of the families that have supported the regime, manned its security services and profited from it.



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No city in Iraq is more of a free fire zone for attack. Minimizing collateral damage and civilian casualties may be a major consideration in every other part of the country. Tikritis, however, are broadly unpopular even with the Sunnis. Humanitarian consideration and the laws of war still apply, but there are no monuments or shrines of any value, and few Iraqis outside the fallen power structure is likely to mourn a dead Tikriti.

The Remaining Regular Forces in the North

As for the regular divisions in the north, one of the great mysteries of the war is why Saddam left so many forces in place rather than rushed them south the moment it was clear the 4th US Army Infantry Division was not coming through Turkey, These divisions are place near the Kurdish area and Iranian border and they too have been hit hard for 19 days.

The regular army forces were hit hard from the air during the initial weeks of the war, Kirkuk and Irbil are liberated, and Mosul has surrendered.

This has a major impact on the regular army forces that remain:

- **The 1st Corps is headquartered at Kirkuk and the 5th Corps at Mosul.** They normally 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.
 - Headquarters and key command, control, communications, and intelligence (C3I) facilities of both Corps, and division/brigade headquarters were hard from the air.
- **The 1st Corps: 1 Mechanized 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 1st Corps forces were under significant air attack from D+3 on and then under pressure because of US deployments in the north.**
 - **Most units believed to have broken up and disbanded by April 9th. Full status unknown.**
- **The 5th Corps: 1 Mechanized 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.
 - **The 5th Corps forces were under significant air attack from D+3 on and then under pressure because of US deployments in the north.**



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- **Surrendered on April 11th. Most units believed to have broken up and disbanded. Full status unknown.**
- **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.
 - **They have been under significant air attack and recently under limited pressure because of US deployments in the north.**
 - **Believed to have had some units retreat and others disband. Status unknown.**

referred to in many reports includes the heads of all of the security services and a senior member of the Special Republican Guards. It might well have further undermined the already weak control of the battle nationwide and in Baghdad.

2. Command and Control

It is clear from USCENTCOM briefings that the fighting capabilities of the Iraqi forces are seriously inhibited by a lack of coordination and central control at every level.

Iraq can compensate in part by giving standard orders and broad instructions, but this presents major problems in a country with so many layered and rival military and security elements. USCENTCOM talks about mixes of Republican Guards, Special Republican Guards, and irregulars – with more substantial forces in East Baghdad than in the west – but it is clear that they so far lack coordination, and none have any experience in fighting together and reinforcing each other's strengths while compensating for the other's weaknesses.

Rushing toward the latest US probe and swarming into combat is the worst possible defensive tactic in virtually any kind of warfare. Loyalty is also no substitute for battle management, although it can prolong the war for some time.

3. Baghdad

USCENTCOM notes there are still significant forces in the Baghdad area, and that Special Republican Guards units, and probably elements of the Republican Guards with T-72s, are fighting.

Jack McWhethy reports, however, that the Pentagon has said that the Republican Guard has been "effectively destroyed" as an armored force. Elements of three divisions are fighting in small units scattered at the fringes of Baghdad.

Of the 850 tanks they started with, they now have 19. Of the 550 artillery pieces, they now have 40. These numbers seem over-precise, and possibly overoptimistic. If true, however, they mean



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that Iraq not only cannot mount a prolonged armored response in Baghdad, but Saddam has no survivable refuges in the rest of the country.

The fact the marines have now taken Rasheed Military Airport and the Rasheed prison next to it in southeastern part of the city opens up East Baghdad to the same kind of probes as in the rest of the city, and potentially allows the Marines to move along the Army Canal to cut off Saddam City. Much of this area is open and allows the Marines to move around the densely packed Old City without entering it.

Some probes by 3rd ID (positions on the Jumhuriya bridge) indicate they may be planning to cross the bridges to try to join up with the Marines and cut off the southern part of the city.

4. Tikrit

General Brooks said for the first time that Tikrit no longer had substantial military forces in the area. He discussed major strikes on its command and control facilities. This may rule out Tikrit as any last refuge for the regime.

5. The Fighting in the North

The fighting in the north still seems to have left many regular army units as organized combat forces. USCENTCOM indicates, however, that they either are not moving or cannot move to reinforce Baghdad, and that SOF elements are operating around Kirkuk and Irbil. The 173rd Airborne seems to be expanding its area of control and tying down forces in the north but avoiding aggressive action.

6. The Fighting in the West

There is little evidence of advances in this area to move from H-2/H-3 through Ar Ramadi and Fallujah to the airport and Baghdad. This may no longer be a priority, although it is still unclear. SOF elements remain in the Hadithah Dam area and involved in hunts for missile deployments.

7. The Future of the 101st

The future commitment of the 101st Air Mobile Division remains a major issue. A drive to the north of Baghdad remains a logical possibility.

8. Urban Fighting in the South

The US still has significant urban combat problems in Az Zubair, As Samawah, An Najaf, and Karbala. There is little reporting about rear area security in the Tigris-Euphrates area, although there are still combat elements. The Iraqi 10th Armored Division seemed to have engaged Marine forces near Al Kut on April 7th.

9. Role of Airpower



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The total air activity as of April 6th was:

- 30,000 sorties flown
- About 12,000 strike missions since G Day
- 14,500 precision guided weapons dropped
- More than 750 Tomahawk cruise missiles fired from Navy ships
- 70% of all bombs dropped precision guided
- About 6,200 tanker missions
- About 5,700 airlift missions
- More than 2,000 command, control, intel, surveillance & recon missions
- 37 million gallons of fuel pumped into planes on refueling missions (thru 4/5)
- 40,000 short tons of cargo moved by aircraft (thru 4/5)
- 55,000 passengers moved (since 10/02 -- thru 4/5)
- 36 million leaflets dropped (since October -- thru 4/5)

The air activity on April 7th was:

- 1,500 total missions flown total
- 500 attack missions
- 350 air refueling tanker missions
- 400 cargo airlift missions
- 175 command, control, intel, surveillance & recon missions
- Main focus was on "killbox interdiction" -- continually bombing ground targets close air support, command, control, intel, surveillance & recon missions.
- Intel flights focused largely on Baghdad to enable near-real-time strikes on emerging targets. Nearly 20% of the strikes focused on "ensuring the Iraqi military was unable to launch military aircraft."

This raises major reporting issues and problems in analyzing the war because there are no battle damage assessment data on where and how 15,000 precision guided weapons and 750+ cruise missiles have impacted on the war.