Conduct of the Military Campaign Against Iraq

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This paper attempts to synthesize the publicly-available information on several dimensions of the increasingly-probable U.S. military campaign against Iraq: (1) the identification of the principal factors that will determine whether the campaign is deemed a success or failure; (2) a review of how the campaign plan evolved; (3) a brief description of the military buildup in the Persian Gulf; and (4) an analysis of how the military campaign is likely to unfold. The strategic implications of the current showdown over Iraq have clearly grown in recent weeks – it is both a defining moment for the Bush Administration and a strategic inflection point for the United States and its role in international affairs. Much depends on how well the military campaign goes for the United States. That it will be a campaign unlike any other is beyond doubt: General Richard B. Myers, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, commented at a press breakfast on 3/4/03: “It’s not going be like 1991. If your template is…a 38-day air campaign and a four-day ground campaign [the phased campaign the U.S. waged in the first Gulf war] – all I can say is, it’ll be a lot different from that” (The Washington Post or WP). This paper relies entirely on unclassified sources and provides one observer’s speculative analysis of how the military campaign might unfold.

Winning easily vs. winning ugly. Although the possible scenarios for a war against Iraq are many, the key factors that will drive the historical assessments of whether the campaign went badly or well for the United States are relatively few:

- **Will the Iraqis fight?** Iraqi military capabilities have declined markedly since the 1991 Persian Gulf war. Its much touted air-defense network shot down 38 aircraft during the Gulf War, but is now believed to be only 10 to 15 percent as capable as it was before the 1991 campaign (2/27/03, The Washington Times or WT). Once numbering over a million, Iraq now has 350,000 ground forces, with 2,200 tanks and 2,300 artillery pieces, at greatly varying stages of readiness (8/26/02, The New York Times or NYT). The six Republican Guard divisions, consisting of 60,000 to 80,000 men, are not as formidable as they were in 1991, but, most analysts believe, they will fight, unlike the regular forces. This is particularly true of the 15,000-man Special Republican Guard division (organized into four brigades and led by Saddam Hussein’s youngest son, Qusay), which is responsible for the inner defense of Baghdad and Tikrit (the home town of Saddam Hussein and a political center of gravity for the regime) and the security of Iraq’s weapons of mass destruction (WMD). (See Barry R. McCaffery, 10/16/02, The Wall Street Journal or WSJ.)
- **Will the regime collapse?** According to The Washington Post (10/6/02, WP), senior intelligence officials believe that, when faced with an imminent invasion by overwhelming U.S. forces, Saddam Hussein would be ousted in a coup staged by military leaders anxious to avoid both a disastrous war and Saddam’s fate.
Others believe that the Iraqi people, described by Secretary Rumsfeld as “hostages to a small group of dictatorial, repressive government officials,” (9/24/02, WSJ) eagerly await liberation and will rise up against their oppressors as soon as the war begins. Skeptics note that many expected Saddam Hussein to be ousted in the wake of the disastrous 1991 war and argue that he, in part by embracing Islam and the cause of the Palestinians, has stronger popular support, despite the deprivation the Iraqis have endured for the last decade. There is little doubt that U.S. forces will attempt to capture or kill Saddam Hussein from the get-go, but the campaign’s success will not be predicated on accomplishing this task. As will be discussed shortly, a principal focus of the planned campaign against Iraq will be driving a wedge between Saddam and his clique and the rest of the country, including the military and security forces.

- **Will Iraq use WMD?** Although why Iraq did not use chemical weapons during the Persian Gulf war is much debated, few doubt that Saddam Hussein’s incentive to use CW or BW against U.S. forces and allies, and, perhaps, even the U.S. homeland will be higher because the United States would not end its campaign against Iraq until either he had been incarcerated or killed. Moreover, Iraq is certainly capable of using WMD -- the U.K. estimated that the Iraq military could use CW or BW within 45 minutes of receiving an order to use them (9/25/02, NYT). As a consequence, the United States has focused on deterring those who would actually execute the order. President George W. Bush warned that if Saddam Hussein ordered “cruel and desperate measures,” his “generals would be well advised to refuse those orders” because “all war criminals will be pursued and punished” (10/8/02, WP). President Bush was even more pointed a few days later: “The generals in Iraq must understand clearly there will be consequences for their behavior. Should they choose...to behave in a way that endangers the lives of their own citizens, as well as citizens in the neighborhood, there will be a consequence. They will be held to account.” (10/10/02, NYT) Concern over possible Iraqi “scorched earth” tactics (ranging from flooding large portions of southern Iraq to setting its 1,500 oil wells on fire) has led to repeated warnings from Administration spokesmen that any Iraqi officer complicit in such acts will be tried for human rights violations. President Bush could not have been more explicit than he was on 1/22/03: “Should any Iraqi officer or soldier receive an order [to use WMD] from Saddam Hussein, or his sons, or any of the killers who occupy the high levels of their government, my advice is don’t follow that order. Because if you choose to do so, when Iraq is liberated, you will be treated, tried and persecuted as a war criminal” (1/23/03, WP). U.S. plans for an intensive information campaign aimed at deterring Iraqi officers from using WMD, including massive leafleting of Iraqi military positions, were leaked in late September, but military experts reportedly disagreed on whether it would work (9/30/02, WP). In its latest signal to the Iraqi military, the Defense Department released (on 2/28/03) a draft list of crimes subject to prosecution in military tribunals that included the use of “poison or analogous weapons” (3/1/03, WP).

- **Will U.S. forces find WMD in Iraq?** This issue has gained importance as it seems increasingly likely that the U.S. effort to win U.N. Security Council approval of a second resolution will fail in the face of stout resistance from France, Germany
and Russia who insist that U.N. inspections are working and they must be given more time. Early discovery of Iraqi caches of WMD would validate the American and British position that Saddam Hussein had not complied with U.N. Resolution 1441 and undercut those who believed that Saddam Hussein could be disarmed by peaceful means. The unwavering confidence displayed by President Bush and, in particular, Prime Minister Tony Blair may reflect their certainty, perhaps based on extremely sensitive intelligence, that the “smoking guns” proving Iraqi noncompliance will be revealed. On 3/4/03, General Myers acknowledged that U.S. forces would quickly move to locate and secure Iraq’s WMD: “At that point, he said, the ‘giant shell game’ played by the Iraqi government to conceal its weapons “would come to a halt,” and instead ‘people would come forward and say, ‘Here’s where this is; here’s where that is’” (3/5/03, WP).

• **Will Israel respond to Iraqi attacks?** Few doubt that Iraq will try again to draw Israel into the conflict in the hope of converting a U.S.-Iraq war into a U.S./Israeli versus Arab one. In 1991, Israel stayed out of the war despite 39 attacks from Scud missiles with conventional warheads. Although Israel has promised to coordinate closely with the United States, it has indicated that it would definitely respond if attacked by CW or BW (10/16/02, WT). The United States told the Israelis that they would be given advanced notice of an imminent attack and that the U.S. would give high priority to Iraqi assets (missiles, aircraft and unmanned aerial vehicles or UAVs) threatening Israel (10/9/02, DefenseNews.com). The United States also said that its efforts to suppress Scud attacks would include deploying Special Operations Forces into western Iraq at the start of any war (10/28/02, WP) followed by the rapid seizure of Iraqi territory by U.S. ground forces (11/10/02, WP). Subsequently, the United States gave Israel unprecedented access to its missile warning system, including a direct feed from U.S. satellites to Israel’s Arrow missile-defense system, and General Tommy Franks, the Central Command combat commander, established a sub-command for hunting Scuds (3/3/03, WSJ).

• **What will happen in Iraq after the U.S. wins?** Although the war itself, the focus of this paper, could result in an easy victory for the U.S.-led forces, it would be deemed a failure by many if a post-Saddam Iraq disintegrated into a war among Shi’ites, Kurds and Sunnis. The refusal of the Turkish parliament to allow the U.S. to deploy forces, including the heavy 4th Infantry Division, in Turkey adds to the uncertainty in northern Iraq. The U.S. will open a northern front – General Myers said on 3/4/03 that while “[w]e continue to work with Turkey,…there will be a northern option, with or without Turkey” (WP) – but it will be a smaller, lighter force less capable of imposing restraint on the Turks, Kurds and Iranians (the Shi’ite-based Badr Brigade has moved into the Kurdish-controlled portion of Iraq). On 3/6/03, General Tommy Franks, fresh from briefing President Bush on his campaign plan, acknowledged his concern about possible clashes: “I wouldn’t be willing to predict what might happen up there” (WP). On the other hand, as President Bush envisioned on 2/26/03, a democratic, stable Iraq could prove to be a dynamic force for change throughout the region and spark the geopolitical transformation of the region.
That the United States would win a war against Iraq is not in doubt; while it might not be the “cakewalk” that some, particularly those who believe that the Iraqi people yearn for liberation, believe, the U.S. campaign will be quick and decisive. The differences in the post-conflict impact of winning easily (low casualties and collateral damage, little urban warfare, little if any WMD use, Israel stands aside, etc.) and winning ugly (high casualties and collateral damage, extensive urban warfare and WMD use, Israeli involvement, etc.) are profound and will shape the future role of the U.S., both in the region and in world affairs. As mentioned before, this is a defining moment for the United States, the Western alliance, the United Nations and the Middle East. Although “winning easily” is no longer enough – over time, the post-conflict ramifications of the second Gulf war will dwarf the ease with which the U.S. achieved military victory. U.S. planning for the coming war in Iraq is driven by the attempt to elicit favorable (to the United States) answers to the questions outlined above.

Evolution of war planning. U.S. (and U.K.) planning and preparations for a possible military campaign against the Iraqi regime of Saddam Hussein clearly have evolved since the first two-month old “war plan” was leaked to the press in early July (7/5/02, NYT). Despite Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld’s angry disclaimer that “people that are talking to the media are, by definition, people who don’t know anything” (9/24/02, USA Today), the quite public debate over how a military campaign to oust Saddam Hussein should be conducted provides many insights into how the United States might actually conduct said campaign. This debate apparently ended in early November when both The Washington Post and The New York Times reported (on 11/10/02) that the Bush Administration had decided (in a victory for Central Command commander General Franks) on a campaign plan requiring a total force of about 250,000 troops for land, sea and air operations.

The Washington Post’s Tom Ricks has been particularly skilled at chronicling the tension between the senior civilian leadership and the uniformed military on the risks associated with a war in Iraq and how best to conduct the campaign (see 7/28/02 and 8/1/02, WP). Opposition in the top ranks of the uniformed military both about the need to go to war and civilian-backed ideas for how to fight the campaign probably led to the public airing of this civil-military dispute. The early debate (during the spring and early summer of 2002) centered around three principal options:

- “Afghan War Redux” – In a replay of the high-tech/low-tech campaign that ousted the Taliban regime, the Afghan model envisioned U.S. air power, leveraged by U.S. paramilitary forces on the ground (Special Forces and CIA) and Iraqi rebels (largely the Kurds and Shiites), conducting an extended operation against the Iraqi regime. Reportedly pushed hard by retired Army General (and former SOCOM commander) Wayne Downing, then the NSC special assistant for counterterrorism, and Richard Perle, a Rumsfeld confidante and chairman of the Defense Policy Board, the Afghan model lost favor even with its adherents, in part because of lessons learned in Afghanistan (e.g., Bin Ladin’s apparent escape from Tora Bora because of the unreliability of indigenous forces).
• “Gulf War Lite” – As initially developed by Central Command and the Joint Staff, this option envisioned a Desert Storm-like campaign conducted by a 250,000-man force launching attacks from the north (Turkey), south (Kuwait) and west (Jordan). Briefed to the president on June 19 (7/5/02, NYT), this approach was criticized by senior civilian officials as too conservative (that is, requiring excessive forces to achieve success and too much time to prepare) and not sufficiently innovative (that is, failing to leverage recent advances in warfare).

• “Inside Out” or “Baghdad First” – In part driven by frustration with the “Gulf War Lite” approach, senior civilian officials came to support combining a massive air campaign with a deep rapid strike by a 75,000-80,000-man ground force aimed at decapitating the Iraqi regime and preempting any Iraqi use of WMD (7/15/02, WSJ; 7/29/02, NYT; 8/7/02, WP). This and other options were briefed to the president on August 5, although a consensus had formed among the president’s national security team that neither covert action (minus an imminent U.S.-led invasion) nor the Afghan approach would bring an end to the Hussein regime (8/7/02, WP).

Although senior officials insisted that “[n]o decision has been made” and “there is still no timetable for a decision” (Idem), the Joint Chiefs of Staff reportedly had reached a consensus in early August fully backing the use of force to oust Saddam Hussein (7/7/02, WT). War planning appeared to coalesce around a much more robust version of the “Inside Out” option – a force large enough (about 250,000) to conduct a Gulf War-like campaign, but one that would operate very differently – that was briefed to the president in mid-September (9/22/02, WP).

The military buildup. The pace and scope of the military buildup in the Gulf has been driven by both military and political factors, as the prolonged diplomatic campaign centered on the U.N. Security Council has allowed the U.S., the U.K. and Australia to deploy many more forces into the theater than earlier war plans had envisioned. By the time U.S.-led forces actually invade Iraq – most likely in mid to late March – the buildup preceding the 2003 Gulf War will be almost as long as the five-month buildup preceding the 1991 Gulf War.

In early January 2003, U.S. deployments appeared to be aimed at giving the president the option of invading Iraq in early February with a 100,000-plus force of 3-4 heavy Army divisions, a Marine expeditionary force, Special Operations forces, 3-4 carriers and an Air Force armada of as many as 500 combat aircraft (1/6/03, WP; 1/7/03, WT). By mid-January, press reports suggested that the U.S.-led force would rise to 150,000 soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines that would be prepared to attack Iraq in mid-February (1/12/03, WP; 1/12/03). The U.K. announced it would deploy 30,000 troops (a 20,000 armored force, aircraft and a helicopter carrier), which, by some estimates, constitute about a third of Britain’s combat capability (1/13/03, London Times or LT). By late January, press reports suggested that the invasion forces were mounting more slowly than expected and the 200,000-plus force (once expected deployment orders for the 101st Airborne Division and the First Cavalry Division were issued) would not be ready until early March (1/25/03, WP; 1/23/03, NYT). Australia also announced it would
be sending about 2,000 troops (soldiers, Special Forces, helicopters and combat aircraft) to the Gulf (1/27/03, NYT). On 2/27/03, the buildup of U.S. forces in the Persian Gulf officially topped 200,000, as the Pentagon announced that B-2s would deploy forward to the U.K. and Diego Garcia, and that the Navy would sustain its five-carrier force in the region by sending a sixth carrier to relieve the USS Abraham Lincoln (2/28/03, WP). By March 1, 2003, over 200,000 U.S. troops and 25,000 British forces had deployed to the Persian Gulf with other forces (especially the 101st Airborne and 4th Infantry) on the way (3/2/03, WP). 700 Air Force, Navy and Marine combat aircraft had deployed to the theater with B-52 bombers in Britain and B-1 and B-2 bombers at Diego Garcia (3/6/03, NYT). While it had once been envisioned as a campaign that could be launched before all the forces had been deployed into the theater – a senior military official told The Washington Post on 10/5/02: “I think you’ll probably see a rolling start. It won’t be getting everything there and spending two or three months getting comfortable.” It now appears that the United States, as it did in 1990, will have time to deploy its forces into the theater before the fighting really starts. General Franks said after he briefed the president on 3/5/03, “If the president of the United States decides to undertake action, we are in a position to provide a military option” (3/6/03, NYT). On 3/6/03, Washington Post columnist Jim Hoagland concluded that Bush’s military commanders were “[r]eluctant last summer, resigned for most of the winter” and are “now determined to get the war underway and finished as soon as possible,” because they have “reluctantly” concluded that “[a]t this point, the human, financial and political costs of packing up and coming home would outweigh the costs of going ahead” (WP). Motivation aside, the U.S. military is clearly cocked and ready to go.

The extended haggling with the new Turkish government over the terms and conditions of U.S. deployments undoubtedly contributed to pushing the probable date for an invasion into mid-March. U.S. ships were stacking up in the eastern Mediterranean as increasingly tense negotiations finally yielded (on 2/25/03) Turkey’s agreement to allow more than 60,000 U.S. troops and 300 planes and helicopters (there are now 50 aircraft at Incirlik that enforce the northern no-fly zone in Iraq) to use Turkish bases and airspace (2/26/03, NYT). The Parliament, however, voted (on 3/1/03) not to support the Turkish government’s arrangement with the United States, a decision that may be re-visited by Ankara but one likely to lead the United States to redeploy forces headed for Turkey to Kuwait. The Washington Post’s Tom Ricks reported (on 3/2/03) that U.S. planners had believed that a minimum of 20,000 troops (a division, plus specialized reinforcements) would be needed for a second front. If the Turkish parliament fails to reverse this decision, the U.S. will open a northern front, but, as mentioned earlier, it is likely to be a smaller, lighter force than it had intended.

In little-noted developments, Jordan reportedly is hosting about 2,000 U.S. forces (Patriot anti-missile batteries, six F-16s and Special Forces units) and Saudi Arabia agreed to allow expanded use of its military facilities, possibly including bombing missions as long as they remain low profile (2/25/03, The Boston Globe or BG; 2/26/03, WP). As the coming campaign against Iraq appears more inevitable, regional cooperation (except in Turkey) appears to be rising, as Iraq’s neighbors start to position themselves for the post-Saddam era.
The campaign has already started. In several important respects, the U.S.-led campaign against the Iraqi regime of Saddam Hussein is already well underway:

- **Enforcement of no-fly zones.** Iraqi efforts to shoot down U.S. and U.K. aircraft patrolling the no-fly zones have increased as the Iraqi crisis has intensified. Prior to early November 2002, U.S. aircraft would retaliate to Iraqi attacks, which numbered more than 130 since mid-September, by attacking Iraqi mobile anti-aircraft systems. Secretary Rumsfeld responded by authorizing attacks against an expanded set of command and control centers, communications relay stations and other stationary targets, all measures that would degrade Iraq’s entire air defense network (11/3/02, *NYT*). On 11/11/02, U.S. and British aircraft attacked five targets, including an air defense command site at Tallil, 170 miles southeast of Baghdad, in the heaviest day of bombing in at least a year (11/15/02, *WP*). U.S. planners also acknowledged that in October they had used an attack in the northern no-fly zone to justify a retaliatory strike in the south (Idem). In a further expansion of the no-fly zone campaign on 2/11/03, U.S. planes attacked an Iraqi ballistic missile system in the southern zone that Central Command said had moved within range of U.S. forces deploying to Kuwait (2/12/03, *WT*). On 2/24/03, U.S. forces attacked surface-to-surface missile systems in the north and surface-to-air missile systems in the south (2/26/03, *WP*). On 3/5/03, DoD disclosed that the number of air patrols over southern Iraq had more than doubled; a defense official told *The Washington Post* this was done for two purposes: “There are a lot of new aircraft, and they need to fly to get ready. But we also want to establish different looks, different flight patterns, in order to preserve some element of tactical surprise” (3/6/03, *WP*).

- **Insertion of Special Forces.** On 1/5/03, *The Boston Globe* reported that about 100 U.S. Special Forces and more than 50 C.I.A. officers had been operating inside Iraq for at least four months in a variety of missions (designating targets in the no-fly zones, searching for Scud missiles, monitoring developments and working with the Kurds in the north). Small numbers of Jordanian, British and Australian operatives were also said to be inside Iraq (Idem). Special Forces units are reported to be positioning themselves to seize airfields, oil wells and other targets early in the campaign (2/2/03, *NYT*). *The Washington Post* reported on 2/13/03 that two Special Operations Task Forces with an undetermined number of personnel had been operating in Iraq for over a month to lay the groundwork for conventional forces to quickly seize large portions of Iraq. This is “intelligence preparation of the battlefield” up close and personal.

- **Intensification of the psychological operations campaign.** By mid-February, the U.S. had dropped more than 8 million leaflets over Iraq in an effort to persuade Iraqi forces and the general population not to side with the Iraqi regime and oppose U.S.-led forces (2/19/03, *Miami Herald*; 2/13/03, *WP*). *The New York Times*, however, reported on 2/24/03 that the American information-warfare campaign, which included e-mail assaults
on leadership targets, calls to the cell phones of selected officials and radio broadcasts, was far more sophisticated than preceding efforts and was aimed at breaking the leadership’s hold on the people. One of the most influential planners of the 1991 air campaign indicated to this analyst that the Iraqi regime survived that war because the U.S. mounted an inept and desultory strategic psyops campaign. Although U.S. planners are certainly not counting on an information-warfare induced collapse of Hussein’s regime – the sheer magnitude of the U.S. military buildup certainly suggests otherwise – the new breed of information warriors appear to have an opportunity to show what they can do.

As retired Marine General Paul van Riper told *The Washington Post* (2/13/02), “[t]he strategic war has already begun.”

**How the campaign will unfold.** In an October 11 op-ed in *The Wall Street Journal*, Retired Air Force Lt. General Thomas McInerny outlined a concept of operations (CONOPS) for what he called “blitz warfare”:

This is an intensive (24-7), precision, air-centric campaign supported by small fast-moving ground forces composed of a mixture of heavy armored, medium Marine, light-air mobile, and special covert operations to include opposition forces. Our forces will use effects-based operations for the target set and correlate their timing of attacks to achieve rapid dominance of those Iraqi forces that have not either defected or elected to remain neutralized.

General McInerney believed an air campaign involving over 1,000 aircraft using precision-guided munitions for 90 percent of their attacks would enable “the attacking ground forces to be one-tenth the size of the defenders” (as opposed to the old ratio of the attacker being three to five times larger than the defender) because “the speed of our ground forces is more important than their size in blitz warfare” (*Idem*). CENTCOM will be considerably more conservative than this unabashed advocate of airpower – its initial attacking ground force of Army and Marine units is likely to number well over 100,000 with the rapid movement of follow-on forces into Iraq – but the coming campaign against Iraq will be, as General McInerney described it, “air-centric.” As one war planner told *The Washington Post* (9/22/02), “[o]ur interest is to get there very quickly, decapitate the regime, and open up the place, demonstrating that we’re there to liberate, not to occupy.”

This campaign is intended to topple the Iraqi regime as quickly as possible, hopefully before Iraq uses WMD or brings Israel into the conflict, and with as little damage as possible to the Iraqi people and the Iraqi infrastructure (9/21/02, *NYT*; 9/22/02, *WP*). This campaign will be quite different from Operation Desert Storm:

- The campaign will focus almost exclusively on “regime targets” – that is, the people and institutions that keep Saddam Hussein in power: command and control centers, personal security forces, Republican Guard divisions (especially the Special Republican Guard division), and the presidential palaces. The
opening attacks will also focus on Iraqi air defenses to acquire air dominance and Iraqi missiles in Western Iraq to prevent Iraqi attacks on Israel.

- The U.S.-led invasion will begin with the mass use of precision guided munitions (PGMs): *The New York Times* reported on 2/2/03 that 3,000 precision-guided bombs and missiles would be used in the first 48 hours in “an effort intended to stagger and isolate the Iraqi military and quickly pave the way for a ground attack to topple a government in shock.” Air power enthusiasts have argued that the “shock and awe” caused by such a massive, rapid application of precision-based strikes could lead to the swift collapse of the Iraqi regime (1/30/03, *Christian Science Monitor*). At the 3/4/03 press breakfast, JCS Chairman Myers explicitly embraced this strategy: “What you would like to do is have it be a short conflict. And the best way to do that would be to have such a shock on the system the Iraqi regime would have to assume early on that the end is inevitable” (3/6/03, *WT*). The U.S. armada of more than 500 land-based attack aircraft and bombers, 5 carriers (each with 50 attack aircraft) and missile-carrying ships and subs will have the opportunity to test whether “shock and awe” can work.

- Unlike the phased campaign in 1991 (a 39-day air campaign followed by a 100-hour combined-arms operation), U.S. ground forces will be introduced very quickly in an effort to rapidly disrupt and defeat Iraqi forces defending Baghdad and Tikrit and to suppress Scuds in western and southern Iraq. Not only is this consistent with recent military thinking on the shock effect of “Rapid Decisive Operations,” a CONOPS much admired in the joint community, it also supports the campaign objective of preventing Iraqi use of WMD. *Time* magazine reported on 1/20/03 that CENTCOM Commander Tommy Franks wanted to pound Iraq from the air for 10 to 14 days before starting the ground war, but that Secretary Rumsfeld cut the air-only phase to 7 days or less. Although press reports continue to describe a week-long air campaign (2/2/03, *NYT*; 2/13/03, *WP*), this analyst believes that substantial numbers of U.S. ground forces, not just SOF teams, will be employed very early in the campaign in an effort to both preempt Iraqi “scorched earth” tactics, such as igniting the oil wells, and to convince Iraqi commanders that “resistance is futile.” The latter, of course, is aimed at persuading Iraqi forces that it makes little sense to use WMD against forces they are about to surrender to. For example, if Republican Guard divisions surrounding Baghdad were engaged on the ground within 48 hours of the opening of the campaign, the Special Republican Guard forces inside Baghdad could lose the will to fight. U.S. forces invading from the north and south could seize as much as 75 percent of Iraqi territory very quickly, leaving Saddam Hussein in control of only the Baghdad-Tikrit corridor, a region less than 50 miles wide and about 150 miles long (2/13/03, *WP*). In his most recent overview of the U.S. war plan, *The Washington Post*’s Tom Ricks describes it as “an unusual approach that envisions simultaneous air and ground operations combining the U.S. advantages in firepower, speed and precision” (3/2/03, *WP*). While the simultaneity of ground and air operations has been a doctrinal cornerstone since the 1960s, the dramatic increase during the 1990s of U.S. military capabilities will, indeed, make the coming campaign against Iraq “unusual.”
Although the opportunity for strategic surprise has long passed, the United States will try to achieve tactical surprise by mounting its attack before the Iraqis expect it, perhaps even before the diplomatic endgame has completely played out. The massive use of precision strikes at the outset of the campaign and the rapid introduction of ground forces are intended to prevent Iraqi use of WMD, attacks on Israel and “scorched earth” tactics (burning oil wells, blowing up dams, etc.). Once Saddam Hussein is convinced that war is imminent, despite the success that his diplomatic campaign has enjoyed so far, he may preempt if only to ensure that the U.S. victory will be an ugly one. As a result, the U.S. will want to surprise Saddam Hussein – that is, attack while the Iraqi leader still believes that there is some chance, however slim, that he can keep his WMD and avoid war – in order to preempt possible Iraqi preemption. The risk that Saddam Hussein might preempt creates a difficult political dilemma for the United States with respect to the U.N. inspectors now inside Iraq. As it did before Operation Desert Fox, the United States might warn the inspectors to vacate Iraq by a certain date, but this could trigger Iraqi preemptive attacks because Saddam Hussein is under no illusion about whether he and his regime will survive this war. The U.S. may decide that the less risky course of action is to seek tactical surprise on the timing of the attack and focus on spiriting (by clandestine means) the U.N. inspectors out of the country once hostilities have begun.

The U.S. will fight in urban areas, because that is where most of the regime targets are, and it will rely heavily on its Special Forces, both for urban warfare and Scud-hunting in Western Iraq. In fact, U.S. ground forces, particularly the Marines, will be more SOF-like in their approach with an emphasis on small-unit operations, speed and stealth. Because of the density of Iraqi air defenses around Baghdad and Tikrit, the effectiveness of U.S. precision-guided munitions will depend greatly, as they did in Afghanistan, on spotters on the ground.

New weapons and new tactics will be used to surprising effects. Recent U.S. military operations, particularly Operations Allied Force and Enduring Freedom, have been notable for their battlefield innovation (e.g., the use of Predators in both campaigns, the real-time integration of sensor date and targeting information, the use of Global Hawks in Enduring Freedom, and so on). The coming campaign in Iraq is likely to be no different. Air Force General Gregory “Speedy” Martin, commander of U.S. Air Forces in Europe, told Aviation Week and Space Technology (9/23/02): “We always want to be able to exploit developmental systems. We’ll use all techniques possible.” The campaign in Iraq has already seen significant strides in information warfare and will likely advance the art of electronic warfare (e.g., using high power RF or microwave devices, the so-called “e-bomb” to destroy electronic components). U.S. planners for urban warfare talk of “multidimensional surveillance” to identify key political and military targets and opening an urban campaign with a “wall of electronic jamming” to isolate the leadership (10/22/02, NYT). Not everything will work, but some of it will.

The U.S.-led campaign against the Hussein regime will be fast and furious, lasting no more than two to three weeks but possibly even shorter. Whether it will be fast enough
and furious enough to result in an easy victory with limited casualties and little, if any, WMD use depends both on how well the U.S. executes its strategy and the extent of Iraqi resistance. On the eve of the Gulf War, many analysts greatly overestimated Iraqi capabilities – most Iraqi forces simply didn’t fight and, when they did, they were outclassed – and underestimated U.S. capabilities. On the eve of another probable war with Iraq, few will underestimate U.S. capabilities, given recent military successes in Kosovo and Afghanistan. While Iraqi forces are capable of inflicting some very nasty surprises, including the likely use of chemical weapons, this analyst believes that a militarily weaker Iraq will not fight any better than it did in 1991. U.S. forces will achieve a relatively easy victory – not a cakewalk, to be sure, but a victory in which the gains are believed by most to significantly outweigh the costs.

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