

## **The Iraq War: War Without Allies or Coalition of the Unwilling?**

### **Anthony H. Cordesman**

The debate over UN votes risks disguising some even more serious problems for the US. At this point in time, the US is planning to fight a war that is remarkably unpopular with the peoples of even its closest allies. It may even lose such allies to the point where its warfighting capability is severely compromised.

British popular opinion is hardening against the war. The Times of London just published a survey saying that 62 percent of respondents did not believe that Britain and the United States had put forward a convincing case for war. This compares with 57 percent a month ago. The Times survey also showed that antiwar sentiment was building among Labor voters, although supporters of the Conservative Party were becoming more supportive of war with Iraq. The only potentially good news for Blair is that other surveys suggest that a new United Nations resolution would swing public opinion behind him. Blair must now rely on the Conservatives for a majority in going to war, and has been unable to discipline even open opponents to the war in his own cabinet like Clare Short.

It is all very well for Rumsfeld to suggest that "What will ultimately be decided is unclear as to their role — that is to say, their role in the event that a decision is made to use force," and indicate that the US cannot fight without Britain. Losing our only remaining major European ally, however, is not a minor incident and British forces are supposed to lead the two Marine Task Forces in attacking towards Basra.

The British role in what Britain calls Operation Telic includes slightly over 45,000 men. These will include 26,000 men in the army in the Headquarters 1 (UK) Armoured Division with support from 7th Armoured Brigade, 16 Air Assault Brigade and 102 Logistics Brigade. Its equipment will include 120 Challenger 2 Main Battle Tanks, 150 Warrior Armoured Personnel Carriers, 32 AS 90 Self-Propelled Guns, 18 Light Guns, and a number of reconnaissance and other vehicles.

The Royal Air Force already maintained a significant presence in the Middle East region, routinely involving around 25 aircraft and 1,000 personnel. The British are sending an additional 100 fixed-wing aircraft supported by around 7,000 personnel, including members of the Royal Auxiliary Air Force. This will be a balanced force, including E3D Sentry aircraft for airborne command and control; Jaguar and Tornado aircraft in the reconnaissance role; VC10 and Tristar air-to-air refuelling aircraft; Hercules transport aircraft; Tornado F3 aircraft with the newly integrated ASRAAM missile providing an air defence capability; and Tornado GR4 and Harrier GR7 aircraft providing an offensive capability should it be required, including precision-guided weapons. The RAF Regiment will protect the deployed forces. In addition, the Royal Air Force element of the Joint Helicopter Command will deploy a very substantial proportion of its equipment and personnel, providing helicopter support to other deployed forces. Its contribution will consist of 27 Puma and Chinook helicopters and about 1,100 personnel. This raises

the total of British aircraft that will be involved in the fighting from 25 to 152, and produces total air manning of 8,000 men and women.

The British naval task group has been expanded to include 2,000 more men and women, a carrier group including the Ark Royal, the helicopter carrier Ocean, three Type-42 destroyers, a Type-23 frigate, two mine warfare ships, and a number of other vessels. The UK will also deploy an amphibious unit called 3 Commando Brigade, with around 4,000 personnel including the 40 and 42 Royal Marine Commandos, and their supporting elements.

While the Iraqi Kurds are only a minor ally, the fact that Kurdish soldiers armed with artillery, rocket launchers and heavy machine guns are moving into positions along Iraq's border with Turkey – after Turkey moved a large military convoy to the border area – is also scarcely reassuring.

What is more serious is that the US still does not have approval to use Turkish air bases or airspace for an attack on Iraq. Well over 70% of Turks oppose the war, and Turkey's new Prime Minister, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, seems to have adopted stalling tactics to see how the UN vote comes out.

It now seems unlikely that any second vote will allow the US 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division and 3<sup>rd</sup> Armored Cavalry Regiment into Turkey only on a timely basis, if at all. This means we will be short roughly 25% of the heavy armor we had planned upon, and potentially reinforcement of some 225 combat aircraft and 57 helicopters.

It also could place new limits on the US fighters based at Incirlik Air Base. Some 50 American and British jets use Incirlik, to patrol the northern no-flight zone in Iraq. In theory, the planes fly defensive missions, and only retaliate when fired upon from the ground, but they have been hitting Iraqi air defenses in ways that prepare for the war. There would also be problems for the nearly 100 combat planes aboard the two aircraft carriers in the eastern Mediterranean. If the naval aircraft were not allowed to fly into Iraq from southern Turkey, the US could only use the far more sensitive route of flying over Israel and Jordan to strike at Iraq.

Australia is providing special forces and some 2,000 men and women, and Prime Minister John Howard has just had a senior intelligence official, Andrew Wilkie, resign in protest over the war. Paul Keating a former prime minister who has long advocated Australian security ties with Asia, rather than sole reliance on the US, has also attacked Howard as have most opposition parties, Public opinion polls are sharply anti-war and Australia has had protests of up to 500,000 participants – the largest since the Vietnam War.

Australian forces may be small, but they are a significant force for a nation with limited military forces. Australia calls the war Operation Bastille. The Army contribution is called Army Crest. It includes a Special Forces Task Group, including a Special Air Service squadron, with CH-47 transport helicopters and personnel from 5th Aviation Regiment.

Other Special Forces support elements include troops from the newly established Incident Response Regiment (IRR), and a quick reaction support force drawn from the 4th Battalion Royal Australian Regiment (Commando) unit. The Special Air Service squadron is capable of providing long-range, small-group reconnaissance capability, and can also conduct limited direct-action offensive operations. The IRR is a specialized unit for response to chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear or explosive incidents. It includes intelligence, signals, medical, nursing, ordnance, transport, electrical and mechanical engineers, scientists and catering officers. It has no offensive capability. The 4th Battalion Royal Australian Regiment (Commando) is trained to operate in air, ground and maritime environments, and also has counterterrorism training.

Australian air units include a squadron of 14 F/A-18 Hornet fighter aircraft, three C-130 Hercules transports and a Air Forward Command Element responsible for coordinating air operations. A small air force reconnaissance team was already in the Middle East to prepare for the F/A-18 deployments.

The naval force is called Navy Crest and includes a sea transport ship HMAS Kanimbla, carrying about 350 sailors and soldiers, a Sea King helicopter, Army landing craft, an Army air defense detachment and a specialist explosives ordnance team. It joins the frigates HMAS Anzac and Darwin, which are already in the Persian Gulf, and Australia is sending a Navy clearance diver team capable of locating, rendering safe and disposing of mines.

Perhaps the crowing irony is that it is now only the Southern Gulf states – under unelected rulers – that will clearly support the US in the war. Moreover, it is Saudi Arabia – an ally that has been based in the US media ever since September 2001 – is allowing the US to use the CAOC to manage the air battle, allowing overflights and refueling, allow offensive strikes by the US and British aircraft enforcing the Southern No Fly Zone, and guaranteeing to increase oil production in the face of any loss of Iraqi exports. The populations of the Gulf states – with the exception of Kuwait – are also antiwar, but this has only a limited impact on the actions of local leaders.

In short, the war has clearly become a coalition of the unwilling in terms of foreign public opinion. Worse, it could become a coalition where the US loses military support from its key allies outside the Gulf.