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**The Iraq War:
Iraq’s Warfighting Strategy**

Working Draft

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No one can read Saddam Hussein's mind or be sure of Iraqi tactics and strategy. If war does come, however, Iraq does have options in spite of the military advantages of the US and Britain. These options almost certainly cannot save Saddam, but Iraq will probably use a mix of the following tactics and strategies.

The Battle of Baghdad

The battle of Baghdad will be the key element of Iraqi tactics and strategy. It is clear that Iraq already has a two-layer defense of the greater Baghdad area and probably a defense in depth consisting of a much wider ring of forces that will retreat inwards towards Baghdad -- if they can.

The regular army will probably be used to try to hold positions in the outermost ring -- taking casualties with the force least likely to remain loyal. It will be supported by popular forces in some areas that are expendable.

The Republican Guards will probably try to hold key strong points and lines of communication in the broad area from Ar Ramadi, Bayji, north of Kut, and north of Karbala. In some areas, bridges and viaducts will be blown, there will be oil-filled trenches, use of earthen barriers and a mix of short and long-range surface-to-air missiles and AA guns to deal with US assault helicopters as well as the fixed wing air threat.

Work by Colonel John Olsen, a Norwegian Air Force analyst, indicates that, the defense of the northern approaches through Bayji may be a line near Saddam's palace in the Jabal Makhul Mountains just north of the city, and the oil refineries that surround it.

A defense of the Western approaches could begin at Fallujah, but is more likely to begin at Ar Ramadi. This is an area with a key palace complex and which potentially could try to hold the area between the main lakes west of Baghdad. It would also defend the key air bases around Fallujah.

Unless Turkey does allow the US to base the 4th Infantry Division in time to support a major line of attack from the north, the main line of US and British armored advance will come from the south and southwest, and the Southern Corps of the Republican Guard will probably either fall back from defensive strong points in cities and towns the area of Hilla-Suweira-Kut or have the regular army forces move to these lines and then use the Republican Guards either as a reserve or to defend positions further to the rear where they have a higher probability of retreating intact into the outskirts of Baghdad.

There will be a natural winnowing out process during such a defense. Only the loyal regular forces and Republican Guards will actively retreat in the face of US air power and attacks. Contrary to some reports, Iraqi forces have also been given some freedom of action operate independently if communications and central command breakdown. There also are four independent regional commands, plus new options for command by governate, city, and town if Baghdad can't exercise detailed control.

The last major defensive positions are being placed around Baghdad, although they may include Tikrit. Tikrit is the center of Saddam's tribe and broader tribal support. A defensive "ring" reaching out to Tikrit would have to go too far to be cohesive, however, and Tikrit is not a good place to try to defend in depth. It is more a place for martyrdom than for last ditch survival.

Much will depend on how realistic Iraq is about US and British ability to bypass any broad defensive line, and the Iraqi need to provide dispersed defense in depth, rather than hold a perimeter defense. Iraq will be easiest to defeat if it tries to hold Baghdad with a broad circle. The US can use helicopter mobile forces, armor, and air strikes to crush key points in such defenses and it can move more rapidly than the Iraqis.

Iraq may, however, use a different approach. It may man the forward parts of the inner defenses of Baghdad with a mix of its popular army and regular army – stiffened by the Republican Guards, and Special Republican Guards units to delay US and British forces at the edge of the city. At the same time, it would keep its core of Republican Guards, maneuver units, and urban warfare units sheltered in the city and then use them to defend against the key lines of US and British advance once these lines of attack are clearly defined.

Opinions differ as to how the defense will take place once US and British forces are inside the city. There is a massive Presidential Palace complex in the center and a similar al-Radwaniyah complex in the western suburbs. These are both defended by the Special Republican Guard battalions and the rest of the security organizations. Some analysts believe these will be to last key defensive areas.

However, there are many other small compounds and headquarters inside the city -- some 50 to 70. Defending the most predictable areas, which are all in large, open compounds with no cultural or historical significance, and that can be hit by artillery and from the air, may not be the best approach. If Saddam chooses to retreat into more densely populated areas, he will make it much harder for the US to use armor, air, and helicopter mobility, and he can make much more use of the forces like the Popular Army and the young thugs in Saddam's Fedayeen.

It will be very difficult for Iraq to take advantage of urban warfare, like fighting house-to-house battles, if it remains in the large open compounds where most Iraqi security forces and facilities are located in peacetime.

Many sources report that the Special Republican Guard, Saddam's Fedayeen, and security forces like the SSO and Amn al-Khass are training heavily for urban warfare. The Republican Guard has some training in urban fighting, but it is limited and often more misleading than helpful, since it is based on experience drawn from dealing with Kurdish and Shi'ite resistance, the battles in the Iran-Iraq War, and the Second Intifada. The Iraqis will know the ground, but be poorly trained to deal with the speed of reaction and technology of US forces.

Military Loyalty

The Republican Guards and security forces may well remain loyal until the last, although some localized defections or surrenders seem almost inevitable. Their loyalty may still be a major issue, however, particularly if Popular Army forces collapse and run, or if the US and Britain can cut off key loyalist units in compounds, isolate them, and go for the core of Saddam's regime.

Popular Forces, Defenders, and Stiffeners

Iraq claims to have up to one million armed personnel in its popular forces and it has at least 12,000 and 25,000 core loyalists in the intelligence branches, security services, Baath Party, government, and Special Republican Guards. Many have little future if the regime falls and various cultural and tribal reasons to be loyalty. While the combat value of many is very limited, they may be able to disperse into the Popular Forces and other mobilized units and act as "commissars" who enforce loyalty.

This may explain why some sources report that the Popular Army and Saddam's Fedayeen are being stiffened by men from these forces and that some plan to operate in civilian dress to ensure the loyalty of such units or carry out attacks where the US and Britain cannot tell military from civilian.

Dispersal, deception, and Decoys

Iraq lacks high-tech solutions to coping with the US and British mix of command and control assets, intelligence and sensor systems, speed of maneuver, and precision strike capability. It does, however, have low-tech countermeasures -- many that worked for Serbia in the Kosovo fighting. Dispersal and the equivalent of a shell game in which key Iraqi forces constantly move from one area to another is the key. The US and Britain will find it hardest to hit what is well dispersed and concealed or what is moving.

Decoys can include buildings. They can be false or interim communications and command centers that appear to be the dispersed site. They can be spoofing by appearing to over-rely on a concentrated peacetime facility.

Dispersal Means More than Baghdad

Iraq will concentrate key forces around the defense of the greater Baghdad, Tikrit, Ar Ramadi areas. It may well abandon the defense of the southern and western desert areas, and shift main force units away from Mosul and Kirkuk. Saddam has nothing to gain, however, from making life easy for us, and making us fighting at least some kind of battles for major cities, bases, and roads forces us to disperse assets and takes time.

Saddam also has far more forces than he has loyalists and killing them off in forward battles is not a loss. He also cannot use all of his intelligence and security forces cadres,

which can be used to put up at least a minimal popular or area defense in areas like Basra, etc. It may not be major urban warfare, but even if we have to bypass a good road junction or city, it is still useful. If he can lock the US and Britain into any serious fighting outside his main power centers, this will be a major tactical victory.

Population Centers, Sensitive Sites, and Human Shields

Iraq can try to counter the US and British advantage in conventional forces by colocating or dispersing his forces and equipment into densely populated areas, placing equipment in shrines and museums, and deliberately covering military activity with civilians.

Stay Behind Spotters and Attackers

Iraq will lack air cover, have little reconnaissance, and generally lack the technology to provide intelligence. It even generally lacks modern artillery radars and fire control systems. A man with a cell phone, however, can provide extensive intelligence coverage in the areas the US and British occupy, and covert or terrorist operations can be extremely disruptive and require the US and Britain to devote far more men to securing reader areas than we want. Infiltrating into Kuwait should also be easier for forward deployed agents once the waves of US troops are moving forward and refugees complicate the problem.

Air Strikes and Helicopter Use

Saddam can use his fixed wing air power and helicopters in desperate one-way strike missions, for symbolism in showing his will to defend, or to try to complicate and disrupt US and British air operations. The result will be massive Iraqi losses, but it will have some military effect. Assad did something similar in 1982, even at the cost of similar losses.

Air Defense Dispersal and Deception

Iraq is constantly moving its ground-based air defenses, dispersing them, and practicing jamming tactics and pop-on radar tactics. These are unlikely to be effective, but it would be surprising if Iraq did not surprise us with some new force locations, tactics, and technology. There also is little incentive to concentrate such forces. Overlapping coverage from different weapons and sensors, and defense in depth is the key to success.

Tactical Use of Chemical and Biological Weapons

Iraq could use any chemical and biological weapons it still possesses at any point during the war. It faces a "use or lose" situation if its does not fire any forward-dispersed artillery rockets and rounds, and any bombs or Scuds dispersed into areas where the US is advancing. US rear areas in Kuwait will be most vulnerable while some US and British forces are still concentrated or static, and allied armor will be most vulnerable while it is

still concentrated in the area around Basra, or during times it pauses near Iraqi forces (unlikely).

Iraq can try to enhance the perimeter defense of any town or city by using chemical and biological weapons, and it might risk considerable damage to civilians -- particularly if they are Shi'ite. Saddam will have little to use in political or propaganda terms, and little real risk of US escalation.

The Arab world probably does not care about any lies in this area, or use if it is directed against US and British forces. The only history Saddam cares about will be written by Arabs and Islamists, the US cannot afford to strike massively at Iraq cities or population centers, and outlying Iraqi forces and military facilities will already have been lost.

Sabotage and Terrorism

If Iraq is to use sabotage and terrorism it probably already has the teams and materials in place, knowing they have to be almost perfectly covert or any exposure would be a cause for war. The most logical targets are ones Arab peoples might support: These include US, UK, Israel, and Kuwait. Any sabotage or covert attack on US and allied forces in an Arab state would meet this test, however, such rules, including ports, airports, rear areas, supply, etc.

Another type of target would be the desalination plants and power plants on the Gulf coast. Damaging these would not produce mass casualties but could affect whole populations and industrial areas. Iraq also has an option other than covert or proxy attacks. A mass release of crude from its oil terminals in the Gulf might create a massive spill that would move towards such facilities.

Sabotage and Terrorism Using Weapons of Mass Destruction

There is no way to know if Saddam would see a successful terrorist attack with WMD as possibly halting a war or as a desperate last attack to show he was not defeated. Such tactics are already possible and the timing and political rationale is a matter of guesswork.

Attack Israel

From Saddam Hussein's viewpoint, he may have little to lose by attacking Israel as long as he does not provoke a nuclear response. He will lose virtually all of his military assets in any case. If his missiles are intercepted by the Arrow or Patriot ballistic missile defenses, he has shown the Arab world he is not afraid. If Israel rides out the attack, it is a kind of victory. If Israel attacks population centers or the Iraqi economy, it is a propaganda and historical victory, and complicates US and British operations.

Conventional Oil Interruptions

It is not clear that Iraq has any meaningful conventional missile or air capability to attack the oil fields or major export and downstream facilities in the Gulf. Most are too large and redundant for simple covert raids. It is possible that systematic "inside job" acts of sabotage might affect one or two facilities, but it is very unclear that Iraq has such a capability or outside support.

Burning Iraq's Oilfields/Destroying Key Facilities

There are convincing reports that Saddam has prepared explosives for the destruction of some of Iraqis oil wells and key facilities. There may be little the US/UK can do if Iraq has already preset explosives at its oil wells and/or key facilities. Iraq can create fires and smoke by setting charges at the wellhead and it can force major redrilling by setting the charges deep inside wells. It could achieve at least some prolonged damage by deliberate water flooding and more by injecting salt water in the south. US, British, and Australian Special Forces cannot move faster than an Iraqi can flip a switch.

The question will be will the Iraqis do it, and why? The one military argument for burning oil wells is that the oil smoke would paralyze or limit US operations. It wouldn't. We do not rely on lasers anymore, and oil smoke does not affect weapons with GPS. US combat aircraft and attack helicopters can simply fly around such smoke, or launch GPS weapons in support of ground forces, and most fires would be in the wrong area with little tactical impact. Iraq might do more to inhibit its own operations and anger its own population than hurt the US. The "act of martyrdom" rationale is harder to deal with. It is unclear that Saddam really wants to go into martyrdom having destroyed his country, but he may well see such an act as poisoning any US/UK victory and an act of "historical" defiance.

Floods and the Dams

Iraq is filled with dams and waterways. The government can easily widen many water barriers and create a limited flood plain in many areas in the south. There are also four to five dams where blowing the dam might produce a major increase in the flood plain around Baghdad, and significant flooding in the south. This is a tactic, however, that needs to be kept in perspective. It really isn't clear that even the most destructive blowing of key dams could have more than a temporary affect on combat operations. The US and UK could maneuver around most such barriers by going west through the desert. In many cases, any flooding would impair Iraqi land movement more than US/UK movement, particularly because the US and UK will have major helicopter and air assets and Iraq will have virtually none.

Once again, such actions might reflect an "act of martyrdom" rationale or some twisted effort to punish the Shi'ite for disloyalty or an uprising. It is again unclear that Saddam really wants to go into martyrdom having destroyed his country, but he may well see such an act as poisoning any US/UK victory and an act of "historical" defiance.