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Date: Thu, 6 Mar 2003 11:46:20 -0500  
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Subject: Geopolitics Special Report: Iraq: 300 Miles To Baghdad;

Iraq: On the Diplomatic Front

We reported on Monday that the US would tolerate a couple more weeks of diplomacy if that is what Britain's Tony Blair desperately needed (MGA 3/3/03: "Speedbumps Won't Stop Tanks") before the shooting starts. Stiffened determination by France, Russia and Germany to prevent the US/UK war resolution from ever facing a vote, and continued reticence by Hans Blix to declare the inspections glass either half-empty or half-full, has so far denied Washington the nine votes it needs for passage. So London is floating a "compromise" to incorporate an ultimatum into a resolution that would leave open a very narrow window -- measured in days, not weeks -- for Saddam to fully comply with disarmament obligations before force would be used.

This would not be an extension of inspections, diplomats say, and this compromise would in no way dilute the core of the US/UK resolution: that Iraq has blown its final opportunity to disarm. And diplomats say it stands little chance of swaying France from its entrenched opposition to war. But the target of the compromise is not Paris, but Chile, Mexico, Pakistan and other wavering nonpermanent members of the Council. The US/UK strategy is still to nail down nine votes and force a vote that would put France, and to a lesser extent, Russia, on the line with their veto power. And with a Council majority in hand, the US and UK would not be daunted by any potential veto. The US and UK have long since passed the point of no return.

Intensive diplomacy will continue through Blix's briefing tomorrow into closed Security Council deliberations to follow; decisions on when to schedule a vote next week depend on those talks and weekend diplomacy. A vote late next week, coupled with a sudden death ultimatum, points toward a start of military action in the second half of March. Failure to secure a compromise would forestall any vote at all, keeping the risk of a swifter start firmly on the table.

MEDLEY GLOBAL ADVISORS  
Geopolitics Special Report

Iraq: 300 Miles To Baghdad

March 6, 2003

Arguing that the first part of this month remains the "optimal time" to launch an aerial and land attack on Iraq, Pentagon sources warn that the "very edge of the optimal military window is being pushed" by moving the timetable for war deeper into March, though this ironically may serve the needs of the last-gasp diplomatic endgame to nail down a UN second resolution. "The force in Kuwait will start to lose its 'edge' if kept there much longer," asserts one military source.

The order by President Bush to go to war is still highly likely to come any time between this weekend and the end of March, administration sources insist, despite the standoff with Ankara that has left nearly two dozen ships off the Turkish coast with the armored equipment of the Fourth Mechanized Infantry Division. But contrary to the press reports of some 250,000 "troops" in the theater (that number actually includes all Navy, Air Force, and non-combat support personnel in the wider region), the Army is chafing that delays in deployment orders means their ground forces in the field are still less than the ideal strength laid out in the war

planning approved by the White House and the Department of Defense. That, military sources tell us, points to either a start date later in the month, or to a swifter start that deviates from the favored coordinated air-ground strategy -- a move that could lengthen the conflict itself by relying on a longer initial aerial component.

The fully deployed ground forces in Kuwait still only amount to roughly four divisions: the Third Mechanized Infantry Division, the First Marine Expeditionary Division, the 173rd Airborne brigade, two more brigades from the 82nd Airborne and 101st Air Assault divisions, and the British First Armored Division. A large chunk of the US Army's most powerful armored forces, the First Armored Division, the Third Armored Cavalry Regiment, and the Second Armored Cavalry Regiment all due for Kuwait, and the First Cavalry Division, originally slated in as "follow on forces" to the Fourth in Turkey, are still in the pipeline, since they did not receive their orders to deploy to theater from bases in Germany and the US until after the rejection of the US land forces by the Turkish parliament.

War timing, risks, and contingencies

The timing and magnitude of those additional deployments may prove to be crucial as much to the post-war environment as it does the outcome of the actual war itself. "It is about 300 miles from the Kuwaiti border to Baghdad," says one military source. "And we want to get there within a week. That timeframe is not so much a variable as is the casualty rate on either side. The war cannot be allowed to drag out for any reason, and once this starts, it won't stop until it is won. So it would be nice to have those additional deployments ready."

If and when the order for war is given, the current plans call for a massive and intensive highly targeted aerial bombardment coupled with new techniques of psychological warfare to break the military chain of command and the will of the Iraqi leadership to fight, or at least the will of its military to execute orders. In addition, plans call for a parallel insertion of special forces and airborne units to seize control of as much of the oil fields as possible and to locate weapons of mass destruction, quickly followed by the main multi-front, fast-moving armored ground invasion converging on Baghdad within a week.

Most of the military sources we spoke to in recent days exude confidence and assert the forces are ready to receive the order any day. They tend to believe the war will be far less demanding or risky than all the doomsday scenarios that have been presented in the media in the last few weeks. Countless contingencies have been endlessly assessed, and counter-contingencies planned to extreme detail. Military planners in Kuwait and Qatar seem to be more concerned over the cost and extent of the post-war occupation period than they are winning the war quickly.

An important aspect of the war effort is that "setbacks" in the eyes of the market or media such as the use of chemical weapons in the battle field, destruction of the bridges over the Euphrates, or delays in use of the port facilities of Umm Qasr and Basra due to chemical attacks are all already factored into Centcom's contingencies. There will be periods of dislocation in the markets when they react to news headlines, while the military itself will be shrugging their shoulders asserting the war plans are perfectly on track.

That said, among those risks that would serve as a useful guide or provide signposts indicating the relative success or setbacks to the war effort are:

\*\* One of the riskiest aspects of the current war plan is the early establishment of "air heads" in the western desert region and the oil

fields of the north around Mosul and Kirkuk. Once these light forces are airlanded, they will be very vulnerable to any Iraqi heavy force commander who launches a determined counterattack and be completely dependent on air power for fire support until a "link-up" with ground forces coming up from the south. It could be quite a while;

\*\* Failure to quickly seize control of the southern oil fields around Basra, in particular, the giant Rumaila oil field that accounts for nearly two-thirds of Iraq's oil output, would mark the failure of a key strategic objective for the First Marine Expeditionary and British forces;

\*\* If the order is given to mount the ground invasion with the current force size, it would entail a greater risk in lengthening the war by relying too heavily on air power nearly by itself for bringing the Iraqi regime to its knees, insist Army sources, who in any case would hardly be keen to see air power alone delivering victory. But they argue aerial bombing campaigns, even with highly targeted smart weapons, could in turn mean more "collateral damage" to civilians, complicating the post-war security outlook;

\*\* The recently confirmed redeployment of some elements of the northern Iraqi Republican Guard division from their base camps at al-Taji and al-Rashedi to Tikrit and the suburbs of Baghdad suggests a higher risk that at least some forces of the Iraqi military will dig in for a fight to defend Baghdad. "A Baghdad siege may be somewhat more likely given movement of Iraqi mobile units toward Baghdad and the undoubted fact that once the air war starts there will no way they can move around without being destroyed," notes one military source. Any such siege, he adds, does not mean derailment in the war objectives, since it could only cause "a few days" of delay, but it might sharply escalate the casualty count on both sides;

\*\* Another risk to the immediate war effort would be a successful Iraqi attack on Israel by either missile or terrorist act that might draw the Israelis directly into the war. That, US planners fear, could complicate the already complicated political context of the war to such an extent it potentially causes a pause in the push into Baghdad to force a quick surrender.

But for the most part, US war planners remain confident in the likely success of their so called "shock and awe" strategy to bring the war to a close within a week to ten days. The risk they see is less to do with winning the war than how it is won, namely too many civilian casualties may make the post-war environment more costly than the war itself. There is concern US troops could find themselves mired in an "asymmetric low intensity" guerilla war that nevertheless tallies up to a rising number of US troop casualties, and there is, in fact, immense tension behind the scenes between the Army and the leadership of the Pentagon and the administration over the lack of details on the post-war occupation plans.

Another factor in the perceptions of the war is that, while its outcome is clear -- the US will "win" and Saddam will be removed from power -- there have been such huge expectations built into a quick and decisive US victory, that any success by the Iraqis to muster a respectable fight, or to cause even a limited amount of delay or pain to the US forces will be seen as a major setback to the US ambitions. This is especially true against the political and diplomatic backdrop of the perceived arrogance of key Bush Administration officials that has won over few allies or popular opinion around the world.

#### The War: Initial Phase

If and when war breaks out, it will surely be the most pre-reported, armchaired conflicts ever; about the only tactical question still providing the US military planners with an element of surprise is the actual start to war. Once the order is given, however, there will be days -- not weeks -- of an intensive air war of smart weaponry targeting all military facilities, barracks, armor concentrations, and the chain of command,

communications and control system between Saddam and his very senior officials and officers in Baghdad and the commanders in the field. The wider Baghdad area includes one of the denser surface to air missile defense systems in the world not seen by US pilots since the Hanoi-Haiphong corridor during the Vietnam war, and the SAM sites and a rebuilt optical fiber command, control and communications intelligence battlefield management system will be among the first air targets of the US and Allied pilots.

One factor that will feature in the air campaign is the limits placed on the number and range of targets authorized to the Air Force planners who are always keen to show the extensive reach of the high-tech air power and the ability to nearly win a modern war by air power alone. The Air Force planners, however, were overruled by Washington, which is keen to keep as much of the civilian infrastructure and most of the Iraqi regular army -- as opposed to Saddam's crack Republican Guards -- intact after the war to help with the post-war transition.

Another concern is the recent indications that some of the targets for aerial assault may have been "laced over" with chemical and biological agents that would disperse into the open air if bombed and thus potentially cause collateral casualties among both civilians and US troops. "The place might be highly toxic." Much of the air power utilizing the precision targeting of the smart weapons will thus be used for close air-to-ground support for the fast advancing US armor and mechanized infantry. "The airpower is just another form of artillery," quips one Army source.

The ongoing US and British enforcement of the northern and especially the southern no fly zones has also allowed the US to diminish the Iraqi air defenses outside the central Baghdad area and prevent any concentrated armored deployment in the south. The "enhanced" enforcement of the southern no fly zone in turn will allow for the early or parallel deployment of Special Forces or units of the 101st, 173rd, and 82nd Airborne units to seize control of the key oil fields in the south, as well as fast ground campaigns in the less densely populated areas of the south or in the Shia populated areas around Basra. Sources tell us extensive contacts have already been made with Shia resistance militias who will be put in charge of security in the Shia villages as the US forces go in to crush Iraqi forces positioned in the south and along the Iranian border.

The southern main thrust

The primary thrust in the US-led invasion of Iraq will be led by the Third Infantry Division out of Kuwait straight north to cut off the highway between Baghdad and Az-Zubayr south of the Euphrates. If the war start is delayed for their deployment, a tight flanking force will be provided by the First Cavalry Armored Division that will fan to the west and advance quickly toward An-Nasiriyah and the bridges across the Euphrates. The main body of the US Army forces is likely to cross the Euphrates at An-Nasiriyah and further north at As-Samawah. While Army intelligence indicates no signs the Iraqis are planning to detonate the bridges -- it is actually hard to blow up a bridge -- the Army has its own temporary bridges ready just in case. "Once established across the Euphrates, whatever gets in our path will be crushed," asserts one US military source.

To the east, the First Marine Expeditionary Force and the British First Armored Division including an Air Assault brigade will be taking the Fao Peninsula, probably including an amphibious landing, with the objective to seize the port facilities of Umm Qasr intact and to then move quickly north to take Basra and relieve air dropped forces securing the oil fields. Securing the port facilities of these two cities as well as quickly taking control of the southern oil fields is considered a key strategic objective. In a touch of historical irony, the Marine and British forces will pretty

much follow the same route as the British forces in 1914 when they fought their way up the Tigris to Kut and onto Baghdad against the Ottomans.

The Iraqi military forces in the south comprise two Army Corps, the Third Army Corp, which is headquartered in Nasiriyah and is the first line of defense against an attack from the south, deploying one of the Army's few armored divisions, the 6th Armored division near Al Nashwa and the 51st Mechanized Division is deployed at Zubair while the 11th Infantry Division is in Al Nasyeria; the Fourth Army Corp is based at al-Amara, and it is mostly aligned along the border with Iran, including the 10th Armored Division and two infantry divisions. Perhaps surprisingly, Umm Qasr and Basra in the Fao Peninsula -- scene of some horrific battles between the Iraqis and Iranians in the 1980s -- are lightly defended.

Even if the war opens with the existing deployments in Kuwait, US planners are not expecting major resistance in the opening phase of the land operations on the way to Baghdad -- or at least not more than one major fight. "At some point, somewhere along the road to Baghdad, there will be at least one major fight. And it is very important that when this happens, they must be made to lose, to lose quickly, and to lose a lot. We may have to take casualties, but they will be made to take many more. If there is resistance, it has to be crushed very quickly with whatever force is necessary."

An "airhead" in the west and the northern options

Supporting the main southern thrust is an "air head" to be established in the western Desert by a brigade of the 82nd Airborne Division supported by elements of the 101st Airborne. Those forces, after securing an airfield along the old Iraqi Petroleum Company road to Jordan, will then fan out across the "Scud box" area of the western desert. Most of the forces will come in by helicopter from Kuwait, refueling with Chinooks carrying huge "rubber bladders" of fuel, which they will just lay down in the desert and bring the helicopters in next to the bladders to refuel. Once the air head is secure, there will be a massive airlift of supplies, munitions, light armor and artillery. There will be additional support through use of an airbase being established in the Jordanian desert about 160 kilometers east of Amman, which was recently "spruced up" by US military personnel.

The nearest Iraqi deployment in the West is the Fifth Corp based in Mosul and faces the Syrian border areas, comprising one mechanized and three infantry divisions. In the north, the First Army Corp is headquartered in Kirkuk, which includes only the Fifth Mechanized Division at Shuwan, and three Infantry Divisions scattered across the north to keep an eye on the Kurds and to guard the northern oil fields.

In the north, the original plan called for units of the 82nd and Special Forces to be air dropped in to seize control of the key oil facilities in the north. These lighter forces were to be reinforced quickly by the Fourth Mechanized Infantry Division coming south from Turkey, but the political delay with Ankara is likely to put the entire plan on hold. One option being weighed is to use the western desert airhead for "island hopping" across the sparsely populated desert areas of Iraq, that are also far away enough from any concentrated Iraqi armor to support a major air head in the north. But the risk of a "Market Garden" situation, where an airhead is established just a little too far ahead of relieving armored ground forces, is likely to be deemed too high to make it worthwhile. "This might tempt an Iraqi officer looking for an easy pick off -- not because he seriously thinks the Iraqi Army can turn the war around, but to win even a little one to salvage military pride." This would not reverse the war's outcome, but it could result in high US losses.

Already burdened by long supply line and poor logistics of the Turkish

northern front, military sources tell us the alternative plan is the insertion of more special forces into the Northern regions who, in a scaled down version of the Afghan war model, will work with Kurdish Peshmerga fighters and Shia militias, to force the Iraqis to keep a fair degree of their troops deployed in the north. "The likely removal of the Turkish land route to the northern oil fields will mean a much, much smaller force of perhaps a few hundred special forces at the very most and a more tactical engagement to pin down Iraqi troops rather than an outright seizure and control of the northern oil fields," a military source tells us. US Special Forces have been canvassing Iraqi Kurdistan in the past couple of months, helping Kurdish militias prepare airstrips that can handle huge US supply aircraft.

The convergence on Baghdad

An interesting aspect of the US offensive plan and the Iraqi defensive movements is that both call for the main battle to be over Baghdad. At the capital's gates, the two strategies, or rather their outcome, diverges, with much of the media speculating there could be a Stalingrad-like "siege of Baghdad" or, as the US military believes, the war will mostly be over.

The Iraqi forces arrayed around Baghdad and the central region are built around two Republican Guard Corps, split into seven divisions between them. The northern Republican Guard include a well manned Al-Madina armored division, one mechanized and three infantry divisions, including one based in Mosul. The Southern Republican Guard Corps are headquartered just south of Baghdad at Al Hafreia and includes an armored Al Neda division in Deyla, the Hammurabi mechanized division in Al Wahdi, and an infantry division in Kut. There are also four brigades of Special Republican Guards who are arrayed as an inner circle of defense around Baghdad itself, including one armored brigade. In addition, mostly to the east of Baghdad lies the Second Army Corp headquartered near Deyala to defend the eastern central border with Iran, which is built around the Third Armored Division, based near Jalawia, and includes two Infantry Divisions.

But Allied military intelligence has seen no evidence of the Iraqis digging in around Baghdad, and there is great skepticism toward the rumors circulating about a week ago of defensive "chemical belts" being prepared around the suburbs of the city to make entry more costly. In fact, military planners note that the layout of the city, with its wide boulevards and numerous parks and fairly flat architecture hardly makes for ideal close-in street fighting. The only truly dense part of the city is the old quarter north of the Euphrates, which is mostly Shia and sources have told us there has already been extensive communication with Shia contacts in Baghdad who are working with the US. "It will not be like Stalingrad with the Soviets fighting tooth and nail with their backs to the wall, or even Hue because the Iraqis are not the Vietnamese," argues one military source. "I still think that by the time we get to Baghdad, it will probably be all over."

The recent deployment of the northern Republican Guard closer to Tikrit and the northern reaches of Baghdad, however, did raise some eyebrows among US war planners. The Iraqi re-deployments -- and more are now expected -- indicates the Iraqi military command is indeed preparing its forces for war because they know once it starts, it will be next to impossible to move their armored and mechanized forces around, even under the protection of the central region's extensive air defense system. "Every time they try to move, the Air Force will destroy the units involved with platforms such as the JSTARS, which are big transport jets fitted with side looking airborne radar and which can look down and see (in the dark) all ground movements of vehicles and guide in fighters or AC-130 gunships to destroy them with JDAMS and other instruments of the devil," explains one US military source. "They may still think they can move, but they will quickly find they cannot."

Nevertheless, the redeployment of the Republican Guard last week is now expected to be followed by further, similar redeployments to entrenched positions well within the air defense curtain that might be better able to protect the bulk of Iraqi heavy forces from the initial air assault. This raises the odds somewhat on a possible major fight near or inside Baghdad. "Some in the US still seem to think we will be greeted by teenaged girls scattering roses before our troops, and that is unlikely to be the case, at least initially." And that is another reason US war planners want to make sure their heaviest armored units are in fully in place before the start of any military campaign.

Will the Iraqis fight?

Teenage girls aside, the single most important calculation in the war, or at least its cost in casualty terms, is whether the Iraqi military command or the mid-level officers have the political will to fight at all by issuing or executing orders. One well placed Washington source, for instance, tells us one of the "pysch-ops" to be used during the war will literally entail calling senior Iraqi officers and leadership at home or their cell phones to tell them "we know who you are, and where you are, so don't execute or follow that order and there is a future for you in the post-Saddam Iraq."

But Army sources who know the Iraqi military well believe that even with their depleted capabilities, the Iraqi army is likely to put up a fight. "Iraqi officers were educated in the military academy at Baghdad, are quite disciplined and imbued with the spirit of Iraqi nationalism and a belief in the historic mission of Mesopotamia to be the leader of the Arab World," one military source tells us. "They have all fought in Kurdistan over the years and against the Iranians in the decade-long war against that country. So while you can be sure that they are absolutely terrified at the thought of fighting our armed forces again, it is horseshit to assume the Iraqis will not put up a fight." This is all the more true for Special Republican Guard units drawn from Sunni clans that have propped up the Iraqi regime, as these units might prefer to stand and fight than wait for retribution from their countrymen in a post-Saddam Iraq.

A case in point was during the Gulf War, when despite the media portrayal of the war as a cakewalk, the Iraqi forces did fight hard several times. For instance, the Second Marine Division was holding Kuwait airport when it was under a fierce Iraqi counterattack as the main body of Iraqi forces were withdrawing from the Burgan oil fields area to the south. The lead tanks of the Iraqi 14th Infantry Division and First Mechanized Divisions got within 500 meters of the Marine advanced Command Post and were only repulsed only after an intense and concentrated "Time on Target" fire by the US forces of artillery, helicopter-launched missiles, and Abram tanks destroyed within minutes the front sixty Iraqi tanks advancing toward the command post.

"The point is not so much that they lost, but that they attacked under extraordinary conditions and got as far as they did," says one US military source. "One cannot assume they will quickly surrender, military honor and pride suggests they will put up a fight. That is why we have to show up with such overwhelming force that it gives them enough military honor to surrender." Army planners, therefore envision even under the best case scenario, there will be at least one major battle put up by the Iraqis, and one the US land forces and air power are determined to win decisively.

But perhaps even more threatening to the Army war plans is not so much a dug in firefight with the main elements of the Iraqi army or Republican Guard is a sustained civilian or guerrilla-like, small militia resistance, especially in harassing supply lines between the south and Baghdad, or more

likely, in the subsequent months during the post-war occupation after the war is over. "There will be some dancing in the streets, but it will mostly be sullen resignation, which is fine, as long as they do not pick up weapons," says one military planner. "But it is a little alarming is that the Iraqi military has been trucking down small arms and AK-47s to distribute to the civilian militias in a lot of villages. The assumption is that the regime is hated, but they sure are acting pretty confident in giving them weapons that they would have a hell of a hard time getting back."

Risks, but chances still of a coup

But for the most part, every indication is that while there is going to be some serious fighting and loss of life, and there are the various risks as there always is in war once the shooting starts, the US military is still expecting a substantial and fairly quick military victory. There is also a probability to at least some degree that an officer or officers in the Iraqi military command will take it into their own hands to shorten the war or refuse orders.

That is one reason why a story that surfaced a few weeks ago that the Iraqi defense minister, General Mohammed al-Sultan, was under a house arrest of some sort intrigued a number of US military observers. While the story appears to have been yet another concoction of the vivid imagination of the Iraqi opposition sipping lattes in London and working up a British journalist, al-Sultan is an interesting figure who has in fact caught the eye of US intelligence.

During the surrender ceremony at the end of the First Gulf War, a young American intelligence analyst serving as the translator for General Schwarzkopf was sent down the small walkway from the tent where the signing would take place and where General Schwarzkopf awaited the arrival of his Iraqi counterpart. When the Iraqi car pulled up to the gate, an Iraqi military intelligence officer acting as the liaison to the Iraqi army chief of staff recognized his American intelligence counterpart from when they worked together as "allies" during the Iran-Iraq war a few years before.

After the American intelligence officer formally asked the Iraqis to remove their pistols as part of the ceremony before joining Schwarzkopf in the tent, he too recognized his Iraqi counterpart and broke into a smile, then asking if he and his family were OK. With Schwarzkopf looking down at the three and wondering what the delay was, the Iraqi Army Chief of Staff paused for a second in disbelief for what seemed like minutes, finally asking incredulously "you two know each other?" When they both said yes, the Iraqi shook his head in disbelief, muttering under his breath "this is one fucked-up war" in perfect English as he walked up the path toward the victorious Schwarzkopf.

The Iraqi Chief of Staff was al-Sultan, and that kind of attitude suggests someone with whom the US will hope to work with in the immediate post-war period.

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