

Looking beyond Iraqi Freedom

Future enemies won't roll over so easily

By retired Gen. Barry R. McCaffrey, U.S. Army

The 424,000 men and women deployed to Iraq by the U.S. Central Command achieved an enormous military victory. In 30 days of air-ground combat after they entered Iraq, they destroyed a 400,000-soldier enemy force equipped with more than 5,000 armored vehicles and 2,400 artillery pieces, ended one of the cruelest regimes in modern times and liberated the 24 million people of this long-suffering land.

The battle plan drawn up by commander Gen. Tommy Franks employed the air, land, sea and special operations forces assigned to him by the secretary of defense in a brilliant, deep-penetration surprise attack. It was spearheaded by Army, Marine, and British ground combat forces that accepted risk to their rear area and flank security in exchange for speed of maneuver and shock action.

The Central Command deception and psychological warfare concept achieved nearly total operational surprise. It attacked before the full ground-combat force arrived in the theater of operations, had the air campaign take place simultaneously with the ground-assault phase, and displayed operational flexibility in moving up the attack at the last moment to try to decapitate the senior enemy leadership by a stealth fighter-bomber strike on a regime command-and-control target of opportunity.

The blitzkrieg Army-Marine-British deep-penetration attack smashed 200 miles into Iraq in 36 hours and closed to within 60 miles of Baghdad. That allowed coalition forces to seize vital oil fields and reduce the vulnerability of the civilian Shia population to exploitation by 20,000 sadistic Saddam Fedayeen.

The fury and speed of the ground assault unraveled the shaky discipline of the Iraqi forces, causing the overwhelming majority of them to melt away as deserters. Seventeen Iraqi divisions abandoned hundreds of armored vehicles and artillery pieces in prepared defensive positions, left bridges standing and failed to position many obstacles in the coalition's path.

The six so-called "elite" Republican Guard divisions and the four brigades of the Special Republican Guard also turned in miserable performances in the face of the coalition's devastating air-ground joint campaign.

The failure of the Iraqis to prepare and employ chemical weapons — assuming they had them — might also be attributable to the shock action and speed of the ground assault that followed quickly on the heels of the initial air strikes.

Some 41,000 coalition air sorties from five carrier battle groups and airfields throughout the theater of operations pounded enemy forces within the carefully crafted constraints

of the campaign's rules of engagement. Their effectiveness and combined results were made all the more effective by 24-hour unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) reconnaissance and the pinpoint accuracy of 18,000 precision bombs (70 percent of the total released) and 800 Tomahawk cruise missiles launched from 35 U.S. Navy ships. This massive air campaign destroyed Iraqi main battle-force armor units, paralyzed Saddam Hussein's command-and-control mechanisms and preserved intact much of the vital civilian infrastructure that is being used to benefit Iraqi citizens.

Largely unnoticed, 10,000 special-operations forces — reinforced with conventional capabilities — infiltrated Iraq prior to the main battle-force's entry. Some of those elite forces took control of the western deserts, preventing a political disaster that might have ensued if Iraqi forces had been able to launch missile attacks against Israel. Others safeguarded oil fields from sabotage, led a Kurdish uprising and carried out strategic reconnaissance and direct attacks throughout Iraq.

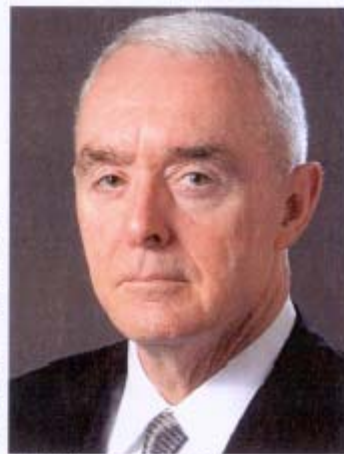
EXAMINING THE VICTORY

Beware the scavengers of victory. In the coming months, U.S. military analysts, the media and our political leadership in both Congress and the Bush administration will sift through the data and the anecdotes of war to find the truth — or to shape it to fit various preconceived agendas. At the end of the day, America's security policy will be fundamentally shaped by the wisdom or distortions derived from the outcomes of this debate. We must take account of the words of Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Gen. Richard Myers, who noted: "Joint war fighting is the key to greater things on the battlefield."

There should be broad agreement about some fundamental conclusions that stand out from Operation Iraqi Freedom.

■ America is immeasurably safer from terrorist dangers today because of this victory. The architect of this military success was President Bush. Our triumph was a direct result of his political courage, his belief that inaction during the coming years would intensify the dangers to America from Iraqi weapons of mass destruction or those of Iraq's terrorist surrogates, and his unwillingness to submit our national security interests to the uncertain manipulation of the United Nations and the international debate.

■ From a war-fighting perspective, the threats posed by Iraqi conventional weapons and weapons of mass destruction to the United States and Iraq's regional neighbors have been dramatically eliminated for a decade or



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longer. From the perspective of those who value the peaceful resolution of threats to the vital security interests of the United States, our military, economic and diplomatic deterrent credibility has been enhanced by several orders of magnitude. To Cuba, to Syria, to North Korea, to Libya, to the Sudan and to Iraq, the message is clear. There is a limit. We will act. If you are planning our destruction, we will come at you with overwhelming military power and kill you before you can strike.

■ This war was not won only by advanced technology or by brilliant generals and admirals or by revolutionary military doctrine and strategy. The victory was the outcome of the valor, leadership, training and sacrifice of the armed forces at battalion, squadron and ship level. We trained these superb young sailors, airmen, soldiers, Marines and Coast Guardsmen produced by America's families and schools using dedicated sergeants and petty officers whom we created in our noncommissioned officer education system. America's universities and the service academies gave us lieutenants and ensigns with creativity, resolve and physical energy.

The U.S. military training system generates continuous leader development through both a formal schooling system as well as the practical training experience gained at the Army National Training Center at Fort Irwin, Calif., and the Marine Corps' Twenty-ninth Palms Air Ground Combat Center, Calif., and also during Air Force Red Flag-Blue Flag exercises and through the instrumented sea-air training of the Navy.

■ This victory comes from the scientific and engineering creativity of a free market economy and the enterprise and investment of America's 283 million people. We could have won this war or the previous Operation Desert Storm campaign against Saddam with the same blinding speed even if we had traded equipment with the Iraqis. However, our military's high-technology equipment and associated training systems allow us to win battles

with minimal loss of American lives. During this campaign, the coalition suffered losses of approximately 690 U.S. and British service members killed or wounded in battle. In Desert Storm, there were about 649 U.S. and British battle losses. Iraqi losses are not definitively known in either campaign, but are believed to number many thousands.

SOME CAUTIONARY NOTES

In the November issue of AFJ, I outlined my views on "How a war might unfold." During the war, I added a strong note of concern in an April 1 Op Ed piece in the Wall Street Journal. I continue to stand by both articles.

As Gen. Myers points out, the goal of military strategy is to "get to a level of joint war fighting where there is trust and confidence between the Army and the Air Force, the Navy and Marines, the Coast Guard." Air power can play a major tactical role in the ground battle.

There is no question but that strategic Air Force bombers such as the B-1, B-52, and B-2, armed with Joint Direct Attack Munitions and guided by intelligence collected by Global Hawk and Predator UAVs, can put crushing fires on enemy forces in close-in tactical ground battles. Army Tactical Missile System long-range missiles and precision fires from 155 mm self-propelled artillery can suppress enemy air-defense systems during joint Air Force A-10 or AC-130 air strikes coordinated with Army Apache helicopters. Joint fighting doctrines will dominate future U.S. military operations.

The Joint Forces Command After-Action Review process, chaired by Adm. Ed Giambastiani, will explore these many potential force structure and doctrinal synergies.

The joint force structure in 2015 should no doubt reflect sweeping changes that capitalize on the complementary power among our services that are inherent in our brilliant new technologies. Precision weapons, digital communications tied to satellites and computer-generated, information-management systems, UAVs, stealth technology, modern armor, night-vision capabilities, cruise-missile technology, anti-ballistic missile technology and Global Positioning Systems, in all their glorious manifestations, and many other combat enablers will change how we fight in fundamental ways.

But we must not ignore the lessons and enormous battle experience of the Army's combined-arms warfare team. The U.S. ground combat force that attacked Iraq was unbalanced. The Army V Corps and the I Marine Expeditionary Force ground-attack echelons should have included two armored cavalry regiments to provide flank and rear protection and reconnaissance. Also needed were five or more military police battalions to set up traffic-control points, to provide security along



GETTY IMAGES

U.S. Marines helped Iraqis pull down this statue of Saddam Hussein in the center of Baghdad on April 9.

logistical lines of communication and at critical sites such as suspected weapons of mass destruction locations, and to control civilian populations and access to those critical sites in the immediate aftermath of combat.

There also would have been inadequate artillery in the event of serious and determined Iraqi resistance. Air-delivered precision munitions cannot substitute for the immediate responsiveness of artillery fire employing multiple types of munitions. Frequently, U.S. artillery units are used in attempts to locate enemy positions (by drawing return fire or scattering the defenders) so we can engage those enemy forces with overwhelming fire and maneuver to their flank.

In many cases, precision is less important than volume, rapidity of response, the ability to engage targets in "danger-close" conditions to ground combat units, or to achieve concealment of friendly forces by smoke or white phosphorous rounds. Ground combat is an art, not a science. An essential element of the education of every joint-force officer should be an understanding of the classic battle work, "This Kind Of War" by T.R. Fehrenbach.

The ground-attack force also accepted unnecessary risk by being too small. A four-division force — two U.S. Army, one U.S. Marine, one British — lacked adequate combat power to smash the Iraqi military if it had fought effectively, seize the country, suppress the Baath leadership, find weapons of mass destruction, enter Baghdad (if it had been defended like Nasiriyah), and guard crucial government sites.

There was never a question of whether we could beat the Republican Guard in air-ground combat. But there was an argument against going to the gates of Baghdad with two divisions and then, if required, deploying more combat

forces from the United States. Ratcheting up military force is a "McNamara solution" that risks gradual escalation of violence and loss of political-military momentum.

We did not need to fight "Desert Storm Revisited." We also did not need to accept the level of risk that we assumed.

In Desert Storm, we probably used an excessive force of nine U.S. Army and Marine divisions. In Iraqi Freedom, we used only three U.S. divisions to go a comparable distance (between the V Corps attack to the outskirts of Baghdad this year and the 1991 attack by the XVIII Airborne Corps to the outskirts of Basra). The three U.S. divisions of Gulf War II, however, fought for 30 days — not four days — suffered a comparable level of battle casualties and encountered an enemy force with 60 percent or less of the capabilities of the '91 Iraqi Army and which lacked any serious naval or air force capability.

Our challenge is to imagine future U.S. forces, doctrine and technology on a battlefield, but one that's not a

"Gulf War III." Facing a similar situation, the North Vietnamese would not have quit like the Iraqis did. And the North Koreans wouldn't quit — they would be dug into fortified tunnels with 11,000 artillery pieces. And they actually would use chemical weapons and, maybe, nukes. We must do a sensitivity analysis of the lessons learned from fighting the Iraqis that takes into account anticipated differences on future battlefields.

LOOKING AHEAD

The coming years of the follow-on phase in Iraq will not be easy. We must be patient. If the mission takes 100,000 U.S. troops five years to accomplish, then we should pay the price for our military victory. But the coalition must also get assistance from the United Nations to jump-start the economy, provide emergency humanitarian aid, create a police force, get the oil industry working to benefit the people, create a free press, disarm and isolate the leaders of the criminal Baath regime, find and destroy weapons of mass destruction, and build the initial mechanism of an accountable Iraqi government.

There have been and will be missteps; however, we should pause to thank the president, the men and women of the armed forces and the industrial creativity of the American people who produced this great victory. We have not yet won the peace, but Operation Iraqi Freedom does mark the beginning of a new era of security — one built upon American determination and courage. ■

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