

Challenges To US National Security

How A War Might Unfold

General Barry R. McCaffrey, USA-Ret

Armies do not make war – countries make war. Iraq is a giant army backed by 23 million impoverished people, and ruled by a minority, murderous clique. They menace the region with what continues to be one of the most powerful military forces in the world. They are equipped with chemical and biological weapons of fearsome potential. Within five years, the Iraqis will likely possess tactical nuclear weapons in small numbers.

Iraq has largely broken the United Nations economic embargo and has explosively increased illegal oil sales through Syria, Turkey and Iran. Iraq has now achieved annual sales in excess of \$3 billion dollars. Much of this money has found its way to the Iraqi military forces, creating a capability that is formidable but not unbeatable. In my judgment, a U.S. military campaign against Saddam's regime will be brutal, but relatively short. The outcome is not in doubt: We will achieve the destruction of the Iraqi regime and the Republican Guard forces that sustain it. The challenge lies in how we handle the aftermath.

THE REPUBLICAN GUARD

Saddam Hussein's life and his power rest completely in the hands of the 80,000 men of the Republican Guard's six divisions (RGFC), the 15,000 troops of the Special Republican Guard's four brigades (SRG), and the separate intelligence services. These armed formations are extremely dangerous, experienced volunteers who receive good training and the best fighting equipment available, not to mention bonuses, new cars and subsidized housing.

Saddam uses the Republican Guard as his principal tool to retain power. He also fears them as the potential agent of his own destruction. Normally, only the SRG is allowed in Baghdad or near Saddam himself. This personal SRG security force, known as the Golden Division, is largely recruited from Saddam's Al-Bu Nasir tribe and its supporting factions.

The SRG moves Saddam among his presidential sites, provides the ultimate personal coercive tool for the dictator against the leadership of his armed forces, and provides physical security for the stockpiles and development programs that encompass weapons of mass destruction (WMD). This force reports personally to Qusay Hussein, Saddam's youngest son. The SRG is not only

a security force, but also a well-equipped combined arms team with armor, artillery and air-defense systems.

The seven divisions of the RGFC – along with their 800 modern tanks, 1,100 other armored vehicles and 500 artillery pieces – are the crucial foundation of Saddam's power. They are the equivalent of Hitler's SS divisions. If they are neutralized, then Saddam dies or flees along with his senior criminal leadership. The RGFC force is organized into three tank divisions, one mechanized infantry division, three infantry divisions and 15 special forces or commando brigades. Qusay Hussein directly commands the force.

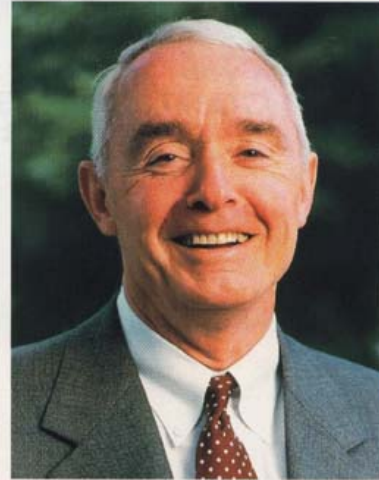
The RGFC demonstrated during the Iran-Iraq War that they will fight even when they sustain heavy casualties. During the Gulf War the RGFC Tawalkana Division was heavily pounded by U.S. air power, but stood its ground and tried unsuccessfully to fight U.S. Army armored forces. In August 1996, the RGFC rapidly put together a violently successful multidivision offensive against forces of the Kurdish Patriot Union of Kurdistan party.

The heart and soul of the RGFC are the three tank divisions – Hammurabi, Al Nida and Medina – now held as a strategic reserve around Baghdad. These units are equipped with Soviet T72 tanks complete with night-vision equipment, French self-propelled artillery and Austrian howitzers. There is good reason for Iraq's own people and her neighbors to dread these dangerous men. These units were largely responsible for the rape, murder and pillaging in Kuwait in 1990.

The key operational challenge facing any allied attack to end the WMD capabilities of Iraq rests on the morale, discipline and training of the RGFC. Will they go down fighting as SS Nazi formations did in 1945? Will the urban population rally to the RGFC and sustain a block-by-block battle in the streets of Baghdad and Mosul, just as the terrified Berlin Germans did against Russian infantry in the closing days of WWII?

THE U.S. STRATEGY

In my judgment, if the United States employs a significant air-ground-sea military assault launched from pre-attack positions in Kuwait, Turkey, Qatar and Saudi Arabia, then the RGFC will unravel within the first three weeks of a determined blitzkrieg attack.



This general offensive would be preceded by sustained psychological operations and a covert special operations campaign designed to: freeze the Iraqi regular army in place; cause the RGFC troops to desert their officers; encourage the defection of WMD personnel; and encourage the Shia Arab majority population in the south and the Kurds in the north to cooperate with allied special forces who will infiltrate the country and arm the people to help in their own liberation.

FROM NEAR AND FAR

A serious and powerful U.S.-British air-ground assault will nail the RGFC like a bunch of tethered goats, with minimal allied military losses. The Iraqis simply cannot handle the ferocity of U.S. firepower, speed, night capability and depth of simultaneous operations. U.S. air power will employ thousands of aircraft sorties, some 90 percent of them with smart munitions. These aircraft will fly off as many as six naval carrier battle groups, from dozens of bases throughout surrounding nations as well as from the island of Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean and from NATO bases in Germany.

A U.S. Army Corps of three tank-mechanized divisions, an air-mobile division and an armored cavalry regiment are capable of smashing the RGFC within 21 days. A U.S. Marine division will pinch off and seize the southern oil fields. Army Special Ops forces will penetrate throughout Iraq in night operations, targeting WMD sites and the Iraqi leadership. The cities, including Baghdad, are largely populated by Shia, who despise Saddam and his oppression. Thousands of 9 mm pistols and hand grenades should be parachuted to this suffering population, as we did with occupied France in World War II. The people will turn on the Republican Guard leadership with murderous vengeance.

Viewpoint



An Iraqi truck-mounted missile, believed to be an S-A3, is launched at a coalition aircraft in July 2001.



An Iraqi missile heads in the direction of a coalition aircraft in July 2001.

(DOD photos released September 30, 2002.)

After 72 hours of confused, bitter ground combat, the RGFC divisions will begin to fall apart, take off their uniforms and try to blend in with populations in the cities. However, the Special Republican Guard will fight to the end. In urban combat, U.S. and British forces will kill the majority of these fanatics. The allies will rapidly subdue pockets of urban SRG resistance by massive employment of direct-fire artillery and tanks backed up by armored bulldozers. U.S. Ranger and airborne infantry will seize the roofs of major buildings by night air-mobile

assault to control intersections and key terrain. However, however, the essential aspect of the air-ground assault on Iraq will be a gigantic and simultaneous civil affairs/economic relief operation supported by Saudi Arabia and Turkey, which must bring rapid and huge concentrations of humanitarian aid to the Iraqi civil population.

THE END WILL BE THE BEGINNING

The allied military campaign will be short, brutal and marked by some terrible surprises and miscalculations. The allies will blockade the coast, sever the Iraq-Syrian

pipeline, seize the southern oil fields, drop the bridges across the Euphrates and inside Baghdad, and try to destroy every RGFC and SRG command post during the first 72 hours of the war. Then the U.S. armor will roll and the Rangers, airborne and Marines will go deep. Our top priority will be to kill or capture Saddam's leadership and seize Iraqi chemical-biological-radiological-nuclear materials.

A dangerous and unknown factor is Iraq's probable possession of as much as 300 metric tons of VX nerve agent and 200 metric tons of mustard gas. The Iraqis may also have produced and retained as much as 8,500 liters of anthrax and 19,000 liters of botulinum.

The Iraqis will actually try to employ air-delivered chemical agents against the allied sea and air ports of debarkation in the theater. They will also attempt to go after the Israelis, and possibly the Saudi capital, using chemical agents delivered by the 20-plus Scud missiles they may still possess. If they have a radiological bomb device, they may well blow it on the southern approaches to Baghdad to try to contaminate the environment that's likely to be traversed by attacking U.S. armored forces. The Iraqis will, I hope, be deterred from using biological agents by the fear of contaminating their own population and possibly inviting a tactical nuclear response.

The employment of Iraqi chemical weapons against U.S. and allied forces will cause enormous misery and some terror but only light military casualties. It will have only a negligible effect on our offensive operations.

It will be vital to equip the entire friendly Kuwaiti civilian population living in target areas with protective masks and chemical over-garments. Civil authorities will also need to evacuate nonessential civilian personnel to open areas of refuge.

The destruction of the Iraqi regime and the Republican Guard forces that sustain it are without question rapidly achievable objectives by U.S. and allied forces. It will not be pretty, but we can do it quickly. However, the first day of the end of war must mark the start of a 10-year international effort to create an Iraqi state at peace with its neighbors. Iraqi oil reserves must pay for the war and the reconstruction effort.

This postwar phase will be the most complex and demanding aspect of the entire campaign. We must be prepared to immediately implement a nation-building strategy following victory - this is how history will judge us. The casualties we will sustain will have been worth the sacrifice if the allies win the larger war of reconstruction and, in the process, create a democratic, nonthreatening Iraqi state. ■

