

DEFEATING SADDAM HUSSEIN'S STRATEGY

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Should war break out between Iraq and the United States, Saddam Hussein will likely adopt a strategy designed to undermine the prestige of the United States and turn the Arab World against the West. A war culminating in a titanic battle for Baghdad would provide Saddam Hussein with the prestige and respect he seeks from the Arab World. His military advisers have likely informed him that urban combat will deprive U.S.-led coalition forces of their technological advantage and result in considerable attrition. He would likely welcome extensive collateral damage to portray the United States as a brutal bully and he, the defiant victim and martyr. For his strategy to work, time and extensive collateral damage is his recipe for strategic victory despite a tactical defeat. The more Saddam Hussein can frustrate the coalition and force it to use excessive force, the greater his chances of splintering the coalition and expelling the United States from the Middle East.

For the upcoming campaign against Iraq, a number of assumptions are relevant. After token resistance, the Iraqi army, with the center of gravity resting on the seven Republican Guard divisions, will turn Baghdad into a fortified city as a means of neutralizing the technological edge of coalition forces. Iraq's immediate goal will be to cause heavy casualties of coalition forces through urban combat and draw out the campaign for months. Subsequent goals will be to entice coalition forces to create collateral damage within Baghdad through Allied air strikes and indirect fire systems. Iraqi propaganda efforts will center on exposing the collateral damage to the international community to excite the sensibilities of America's friends and allies and to garner sympathy among Arab states. Saddam Hussein will seek to turn the Arab world against the United States, which may present opportunities for him to exploit and perhaps prevail.

To stymie Iraq's goals, limit the amount of collateral damage to Baghdad, and minimize coalition casualties, the U.S. strategy must seek to deprive Saddam Hussein the climatic battle he seeks.

Besieging Vice Assaulting

The coalition need not assault Baghdad immediately upon closing on and isolating it. An alternative tactic is to surround the city on three sides while leaving one side open. This is the type of tactic that the Chinese military theorist, Sun Tzu, proposed and has many attractive features which the coalition can exploit. As a matter of illustration, the U.S.-led coalition forces would surround Baghdad from the north, east, and west, but keep the southern egress route open. With such an outlet, noncombatants and deserters, already disposed to escape the battlefield, can depart the city along a safe route and surrender to coalition forces. The actual numbers seeking to escape cannot be determined beforehand, but providing an escape route provides a powerful incentive. A well-known military adage states that soldiers will not fight desperately for a dead city, so the fewer civilians present, the more morale declines, even among elite units. The ability of the loyal military and police units to stem the tide of refugees and deserters will become problematic for the Iraqi government as the siege progresses.

The intentional pause in combat activity deprives Saddam Hussein of the spot light he needs. Admittedly, the coalition temporarily yields the tactical initiative but gains a significant strategic initiative. A pause does not suggest that little or no urban combat will occur; on the contrary, the coalition should not wince from conducting an aggressive assault on Baghdad, but it should do so on its own terms and not Saddam Hussein's. The initial task should be to implement an electronic warfare operation to jam signals emanating from Baghdad, thereby neutralizing Iraqi propaganda. Baghdad becomes isolated both physically and politically and the exigency of time no longer becomes a primary factor. Coalition forces earmarked for the decisive assault on Baghdad can use this time to their advantage. Since urban combat is one of the most difficult missions, preparation and combined arms training among the principal ground combat units are essential.

To gain sufficient mass for the assault on Baghdad, part of the coalition must assume the economy of force role as an isolating force. The coalition defensive sectors would require sufficient dispersion and distance from Baghdad to prevent Iraqi artillery from placing effective fires on defensive positions, and the defensive measures must be adequate to repulse any Iraqi raids or attacks. Realistically, any Iraqi attacks would have the added bonus of weakening Iraqi units prior to the coalition assault on Baghdad.

A horseshoe siege eliminates the level of desperation normally associated with besieged armies. The coalition should try to entice as much of the Iraqi army to depart Baghdad as possible. A breakout attempt of any part of the Republican Guard to the south would be most propitious. The Iraqi units would be forced to assemble within the confines of the city before making the attempt. Because of the vehicle congestion and the compartmentalized nature of urban terrain, any attack becomes splintered, diminishing the cohesion for concerted action. To increase the level of consternation among the attacking units, coalition ground forces establish a demarcation line with signs warning that all armored vehicles beyond this point will be attacked by coalition aircraft. The *pièce de résistance* to crushing an Iraqi sortie would center on two tactical joint task forces poised to intercept and destroy the Iraqi army piecemeal in the open desert. The combination of joint air attacks followed by a mailed mechanized fist would shred the Iraqi army rapidly and decisively. Admittedly, the Republican Guard is likely to remain in Baghdad to the end, but the coalition should be in a position to capitalize on Iraqi imprudence.

Coalition allies can provide an essential service without the need for close military cooperation which characterizes most offensive operations by occupying the majority of defensive sectors surrounding Baghdad. Such cooperation releases U.S. forces and specific allies for the on-call interception mission and for the decisive assaults into Baghdad.

Avoiding Humanitarian Crisis

The coalition should establish two major processing camps about ten miles from Baghdad stemming from the escape route and marked for noncombatants and deserters to follow. One camp would be for the processing of noncombatants and the other for enemy prisoners of war/deserters. Military, government, international, and non-government organizations would organize and run the camps once the coalition closes on Baghdad. As the number of displaced persons is apt to be high, a bus system is required to transport processed civilians to centers in

cities to reduce the burden on the camps. These organizations would also need to recon and prepare designated cities for the influx of refugees. This task will be enormous and requires the most robust cooperation and effort among agencies and organizations. Anticipating and preparing for this humanitarian effort is far better than hoping civilians will weather the combat in Baghdad. Additionally, the processing system should catch a number of Iraqi military and government officials attempting to abscond from the country.

Once the coalition forces are disposed around Baghdad, extensive psychological operations can begin to induce Iraqi civilians and soldiers to surrender. Leaflets, radio and television intrusive broadcasts, and loud speakers can remind the Iraqis of their decisive defeat during Desert Storm, and can provide surrender instructions and the route to the processing camps.

To limit the amount of collateral damage, coalition air forces avoid air attacks on Iraqi positions and remain clear of Iraqi air defense and similar weapon systems, which likely will be located near or in mosques, schools, hospitals and the like in the hope of soliciting an air strike. The political consequences would cancel any tactical value related to eliminating a position. Historically, bombardments create extensive rubble out of structures, which in turn permits the defenders to transform into formidable strong points. In fact, rubble hinders movement of coalition forces significantly and offers greater protection, even with frequent bombing, to defending soldiers. Although Allied air power has proven adept at avoiding Iraqi air defense fire in the past, there is no need to risk aircraft. Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAV) can provide the essential reconnaissance and early warning needs for the attack. Hence, rather than focusing on Baghdad itself, coalition air power should be reserved for destroying ground forces in the open desert and assisting threatened coalition forces outside of Baghdad.

The Initial Assault

Coalition ground forces can accelerate the abandonment of Baghdad by launching a limited attack from the east and west for the purpose of making the Iraqi defense in northern Baghdad untenable. Such an attack will likely cause severe consternation among Iraqi soldiers and cause a certain amount of panic and increased desertions. The benefit of assaults from these directions is three fold: first, artillery and mortar positions from the north can support the assaults by firing parallel to the front line trace thereby minimizing the danger of fratricide; second, forward observers can call for fires and direct them on specific targets rather than indiscriminant fires. Coupled with the precision direct fires of tanks and small arms, the amount of collateral damage is minimized; third, the attacks split the city, forcing the Iraqi defenders to either abandon the northern sector, or face defeat in detail.

An important aspect of the assaults is the criticality of tank-infantry teams. Tanks dominate the streets and intersections, making it much more difficult for the defenders to reinforce or re-supply threatened sectors. Infantry units lead the advance with tanks following approximately one city block behind. Once the infantry encounters enemy strong-pointed buildings, bunkers, and so forth, guides lead their attached tanks to good support-by-fire positions to eliminate the targets and create breach points in walls and buildings. The infantry in turn protects the tanks from enemy anti-tank weapons and infantry close assaults. Tanks not only bring a significant psychological boost to coalition infantry, but also have a corresponding

negative impact on enemy morale. Once the defenders realize there is no refuge from tank rounds, they will yield. The net effect of such combined arms teamwork is less collateral damage and a greater chance to collapse enemy resistance rapidly.

Normalization and Finale

The United States can take measures to make Saddam Hussein's government irrelevant. The interim government can be established in Basra and begin governing while Baghdad is completely isolated from the rest of the country. In this manner, the political and economic recovery of Iraq begins immediately with the siege of Baghdad relegated to a side show. As Saddam Hussein is expected to order the destruction of oil wells, specialists can begin repairs almost immediately. Coalition Special Operating Forces can be employed throughout the country to hunt for suspected military and political criminals as well as providing strategic intelligence. Allied units can provide security for the camps and for the oil well specialists, as well as garrisoning numerous cities, thereby permitting the United States to mass sufficient forces against Baghdad.

The final assault on Baghdad should almost become anti-climatic. The majority of civilians and soldiers not willing to die for a lost cause will have already abandoned Baghdad. The forces left will be greatly debilitated through combat stress, lack of supplies, and the absence of other amenities resulting from the siege. Because the coalition forces can pick the time and location of various assault points, the defenders will be kept off balance until the final assault and capitulation. The culminating assault will likely result in extensive damage, but since it will be localized, the majority of Baghdad will remain relatively undamaged and available for immediate occupation by its inhabitants once cleared for booby traps.

Conclusion

The adoption of this strategy avoids many of the pitfalls associated with conventional urban combat and counters Saddam Hussein's likely strategy. The horseshoe siege avoids extensive, initial combat and provides a conduit for combatants and noncombatants to surrender. The extensive use of psychological warfare induces the Iraqis to abandon the city. Although in theory the Iraqi army could prevent desertions, in reality stemming such an exodus is far more difficult because the army cannot focus on defensive preparations and vigilance simultaneously. Instituting a siege in the initial phase and isolating Baghdad parries Saddam Hussein's greatest weapons--the lime light and propaganda.

Perhaps most significant to this strategy is the rapid establishment of an interim government and the shrouding of Saddam Hussein's government into irrelevancy. As the interim government gains legitimacy and returns Iraq to normalcy, events in Baghdad will become a secondary theater instead of the central point Saddam Hussein seeks. Normalcy will also permit more countries to contribute to the full recovery of Iraq even before Baghdad falls.

Having the luxury of time and position, the coalition forces can assault Baghdad at various points without suffering heavy casualties and force the abandonment of significant urban sectors by making affected defense positions untenable. Avoiding excessive rubble with aerial

and artillery fires and effecting good infantry-armor cooperation will permit successful assaults without exorbitant casualties and damage.

Establishing processing camps run by various organizations prevents the humanitarian disaster Saddam Hussein seeks. Such an investment in these valuable resources dispels the image that the United States is a brutal and arrogant power. The successful execution of this effort will also permit the transition to normality once the conflict is concluded.

If the United States decides to assault Baghdad outright, casualties will likely be significant initially. Saddam Hussein will get the climatic battle he seeks and the unintended consequences will be difficult to manage. Immediate operations in Baghdad will absorb the attention and resources of the coalition, likely giving short shrift to humanitarian efforts and the interim government. The resultant, extensive collateral damage and induced poverty will delay the normalization of Iraq for months, perhaps years.

The United States has a great opportunity to use finesse vice brute force in the next conflict. The coalition can astound the world not just by its astute use of force, but also by its decisiveness. Rather than play Saddam Hussein's game, the United States needs to rewrite the rules of future conflict.