



U.S. Army War College

Strategic Studies Institute

Iraq and the Future of Warfare

Implications for Army and Defense Policy

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Agenda



- Research Question
- Sources
- Contrasting Views
- Evidence and Analysis
- A Different View
- Conclusions and Implications

Research Question

- Explain OIF outcome – Saddam toppled with:
 - Low US losses
 - No scorched earth
 - No WMD use
 - Moderate collateral damage
- Focus is on high-intensity operations, 19 March to 9 April
- Scope limited to military cause and effect, implications for defense policy

Sources

- 176 Interviews
 - Army, USMC, UK, SOF, USAF, Iraqi EPWs; E-5 to O-9
 - Baghdad/Basra/Hillah/UmQasr Iraq
 - Camp Doha/Arifjan Kuwait
 - Pentagon/Ft. Carson/Fallon NAS/Carlisle Barracks
- Terrain inspection
 - OBJ Montgomery
 - OBJ Saints
 - Baghdad
- Primary-source written documentation, CFLCC
- Published secondary sources



Findings

- Early accounts have often emphasized:
 - Speed
 - Precision and situation awareness
 - Jointness
 - Coalition skill
 - Iraqi shortcomings
 - Luck
- Evidence suggests:
 - Speed and luck played smaller roles than early accounts imply
 - Jointness was valuable, important, but not a necessary precondition for low-cost victory
 - Key determinant: synergy between advanced Coalition technology and major Coalition-Iraqi skill imbalance

Speed

- Accounts seeing speed as decisive and the need for mass as declining usually hold:
 - Iraqis unable to track fast-moving, unpredictable Coalition movements
 - Iraqis unable to communicate well enough to respond
 - Speed of advance demoralized defenders; helped avert a “Fortress Baghdad”
 - Iraqi scorched earth, WMD use preempted by rapid Coalition advance
- Was this so?

Speed and Iraqi C4ISR

- Iraqis used low-tech means to assemble picture sufficient to move paramilitaries, multiple RG divisions in ways that imply timely knowledge of our whereabouts
 - Scouts in civilian clothes reconnoitred US positions continuously; reported via cell/sat phones, landlines, couriers
 - Reporting apparently reached high command but compartmented narrowly
 - Division commanders and below have no situation awareness beyond immediate environs – several captured in inadvertent contact with US formations
 - Corps commanders and above have clearer picture; use it to orchestrate response
 - RG redeployed elements of 4 divisions directly across V Corps axis of advance; blocking movement completed 1-2 days before US contact
 - Hammurabi div moved from NW of Baghdad to S and W of city
 - Adnan brigade moves NW along Hwy 6 from Al Kut to SE of Baghdad
 - Nebuchadnezzar elements move > 250 km from Green Line opposite Kurds to OBJ Murray S of Baghdad
 - Medina div shifts west to concentrate vs. 3 ID, I MEF
 - Paramilitary Reinforcement of Najaf, Nasiriyah
 - 10,000 Fedayeen moved south from Baghdad after G-day via undefended routes
 - Najaf: threaded needle via sole undefended route into city; little/no accidental contact with US blocking forces – combat was overwhelmingly deliberate assaults from within city, not accidental contact with Iraqis trying to infiltrate
 - Nasiriyah: USMC captures detailed, accurate sandtable of US positions

Speed and Iraqi Morale

- Speed does not appear central in Iraqi morale breakdown
- RA morale largely broken before G-day; SRG, paramilitary resistance continues long into the war
 - Baghdad: SRG, paramilitary resistance did not collapse when 3 ID arrived at outskirts; broken only by defeat via close combat in urban center
 - ♦ Apr. 5, 2 BCT “Thunder Run:” every vehicle hit by RPG fire
 - ♦ Apr. 7, 2 BCT advance from BIAP to Tigris: heavy fire from all directions; Iraqis reoccupy destroyed positions behind US advance; emergency resupply must fight through to advance position after nightfall, losing 2 fuel, 1 ammo truck, 2 KIA, 30 WIA en route
 - ♦ Not clear that “Fortress Baghdad” would have been much more formidable if encountered later, reached more slowly
 - Basra: paramilitary resistance continues for two weeks; broken only by defeat via close combat in urban center
 - Nasiriyah, Najaf, Samawah: Iraqi resistance continued long after Coalition forces bypassed cities; broken only by defeat via close combat in urban centers

Speed and Scorched Earth

- Little evidence that speed preempted an imminent scorched earth campaign
 - Rumaila Oil Field
 - ♦ Of 250 total oil wells, only 22 actually prepared for demolition – of these, only 9 detonated, creating 7 fires
 - ♦ No GOSPs, pumping stations, pipelines prepared for demolition
 - ♦ No evidence of ongoing preparations for additional demolitions
 - ♦ Field not secured until 1500Z, D+2; Iraqis had ample time to destroy entire field if actually prepared for detonation
 - Kirkuk Oil Field
 - ♦ Iraqis held field for 3 weeks after hostilities initiated; no wells destroyed
 - ♦ No evidence of preparations for demolition uncovered when Coalition took control of field
- Scorched earth threat as bluff for deterrent effect?
 - Evidence is consistent with thesis that Iraqis meant to create credible threat to deter us from invading but with no intent of mass destruction
 - Little positive evidence that slower advance would have yielded significant increase in damage

Speed and Iraqi WMD non-use

- Unlikely that speed preempted Iraqi WMD use
 - No Iraqi WMD located close enough to delivery systems for near-term employment
 - No hard evidence that Iraqis were within days or weeks of effective WMD use; little evidence that slower Coalition advance would have made a difference here

Luck

- Implies that with different breaks, Iraqis could have hurt us much more gravely
- Yet plausible “what ifs” had been anticipated and planned against – few seem likely to have caused serious, strategic-level setbacks
- Where breaks favored Iraqis, their tactical shortcomings prevented exploitation



– OBJ Montgomery, Apr. 4:

- ♦ RG reinforced tank battalion in prepared positions on ground of own choosing eluded air attack, met US ground advance at full strength
 - ♦ Apache Trp, 3-7 Cav advanced directly into prepared kill sack
 - ♦ Iraqis engaged from flanks at 800-1000m range, fired >16 125mm rounds: none hit
 - ♦ US return fire annihilated the battalion
- If Iraqis’ poor training left them unable to take advantage of breaks, not clear that more breaks would have made a decisive difference

Jointness

- For jointness to be *necessary* condition for low-cost victory implies that without it, cost would have been much higher
- Yet in 1991, less-joint Coalition offensive with smaller technology edge defeated Iraqis at *lower* loss rate
 - Coalition forces were larger in 1991, but local assaults at parity or worse still annihilated dug-in, actively-resisting RG opposition at very low cost
 - 73 Easting: 2 US Cav troops annihilated RG brigade without loss to enemy fire
 - Wadi al Batin: US battalion annihilated RG brigade in frontal assault, killed 160 Iraqi AFVs losing only 6
 - Medina Ridge: US brigade annihilated RG brigade in frontal assault, suffered no casualties
- In 2003, Coalition ground forces sometimes fought without tightly integrated CAS, yet still prevailed at very low cost
 - Through D+3, few CAS sorties flown, yet 3 ID, I MEF advance up to 350 km, fight through stiff resistance at Talil, Samawah, OBJ Rams
 - OBJ Montgomery, Apr. 4: single Cav troop decimates dug-in RG battalion by direct fire without loss
- Jointness clearly strengthened Coalition forces in 2003 – and could be decisive advantage in future warfare – but little evidence that OIF low-cost victory is attributable to a significant increase in jointness

Skill-Technology Synergy

- Technological sophistication enabled a skilled Coalition force to punish Iraqi errors with unprecedented severity
 - To survive vs. modern weapons requires very high tactical proficiency, ability to exploit complex terrain
 - Iraqis very poorly trained and led
 - Resulting mistakes, ill-prepared fighting positions, poor marksmanship, flawed dispositions left them fatally exposed to Coalition technology
 - Enabled relatively small Coalition force to prevail in short, relatively low-cost campaign
- If Iraqis' poor skills were necessary for our technology to produce these results, then dangerous to assume we can obtain similar results against better-skilled enemies

Iraqi Ineptitude

- Extremely Poor Marksmanship
 - Most Iraqis fired little/no live ammunition in past year:
 - ♦ Baghdad RG div: 1 live fire exercise/year, 10 rds each
 - ♦ 2nd div RA: zero live fire in past 12 mos
 - ♦ 3rd div RA: 1 live fire exercise/year, 4 rds each
 - Vs. 3BCT, Baghdad: RPG hit rate < 10% at ranges of 100-500m
 - Vs. 3-7 Cav at OBJ Montgomery: 16 125mm rounds, ranges of 800-1000m, zero hits; nearest miss falls 25m short
- Self-defeating tactics
 - Repeated, exposed, frontal assaults by paramilitaries in NTVs
 - Sought out Coalition combat forces; avoided soft targets, LOC interdiction
- Poor leadership
 - Officers abandoned troops in heat of battle
 - Radical, mutual, mistrust between leaders and led
- Poor equipment maintenance:
 - 10% ORR for Iraqi HETTs on 3BCT front
- Poor fighting position preparation
 - Some success at concealment, but limited ability to provide cover
 - No ability to combine cover, concealment, field of fire

Al Qaeda, Afghanistan



Republican Guard, Iraq



Iraqi Ineptitude, cont'd

- Iraqis systematically unable to exploit potential of urban terrain
 - Only SRG given any conventional MOUT training – RA, RG totally untrained in MOUT; paramilitaries given little/no conventional military training of any kind
 - RG, RA denied access to city centers; deployed in rural areas, urban outskirts
 - Paramilitaries in urban areas sortied into open; prior to Apr. 5, Iraqis on tactical offense in most urban fighting
 - No interior building prep
 - Prepared fighting positions typically outdoors, exposed
 - No obstacles, mines, barriers
 - Disaffection of Iraqi public with Ba'athist regime facilitated SOF targeting of otherwise concealed urban assets



Iraqi Ineptitude: Consequences

- RG, SRG, RA exposed to LRPE
- Lightly-armed paramilitaries exposed to overwhelming direct fire from armored vehicles
- Paramilitary command, support infrastructure targetable even when concealed
- Coalition able to fight mounted in cities, engage exposed urban defenders from standoff
- Poor Iraqi marksmanship, fire control, vehicle/weapon maintenance left them unable to exploit (rare) opportunities
- Result:
 - Maximum scope for US technological advantages to affect outcome
 - Combination of 21st c. technology and Iraqi exposure yields radical lethality – enabling small, well-trained Coalition force to succeed at very low losses
 - *But requires advanced technology and skill mismatch: either alone insufficient*

Counterfactual: What if Iraqis had been skilled?

- Actual Iraqis forfeited most advantages of urban terrain; skilled urban defense would negate important US technological advantages
 - Many fewer exposed targets for LRPE
 - Much harder to avoid dismounted assault to clear properly-prepared buildings
 - Higher rate of larger-caliber Iraqi hits vs weaker US side, rear, roof, floor armor
 - 1:1 LER not implausible in MOUT vs skilled defenders – possible US losses of multiple thousands
- Actual Iraqis avoided LOC interdiction; skilled partisan warfare would've required large US troop diversion to support MOUT campaign, reducing MOUT force ratio and increasing losses
- US could besiege cities rather than assault them, but:
 - Lacked troops to invest multiple urban areas while defending 500 km LOC – important parts of country would have to be left under Ba'athist control
 - A motivated, prepared opponent could hold out under prolonged siege: Milosevic held out under 78 days of bombing in 1999
 - Survival of Baathist control apparatus would inhibit civilian HUMINT assistance, reduce Coalition's ability to find concealed urban command, logistical targets
 - Barring decapitation via lucky shot, could be very long war; political pressure for eventual assault would be difficult to resist
 - Hard to rule out eventual requirement for direct assault

Conclusions

- Central finding: synergistic interaction between advanced technology and Iraqi ineptitude was necessary and sufficient for low-cost victory
 - Without 2003 precision, situation awareness, survivability, even inept Iraqis could have inflicted much heavier casualties
 - Without Iraqi ineptitude, even 2003 technology could not have enabled a force this size to prevail at this cost
 - 2003 technology punishes ineptitude very severely, but cannot guarantee similar results vs. adept enemies
- Can speed, precision, information now substitute for mass?
 - In Iraq, speed less important than precision, information
 - Effects of precision, information critically dependent on Iraqi exposure – against less-exposed opponent, results could be very different

Strategy and Policy Implications

- To assume that precision and information will always permit small forces to succeed would be high risk
- But to assume that precision and information will never again permit small forces to succeed would be over-conservative
- Campaign planners must be able to tell the difference – in advance – between skilled and exposed enemies
 - Routine worst-case campaign planning is unsustainable
 - To do better requires knowledge we don't have today: explaining the determinants of skill is a critical national research requirement
 - Civil-military relations as promising avenue
- Title 10 force providers must ensure preparedness for skilled enemies – would be dangerous to assume Iraqi-style scenarios as the future norm

