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
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 apparat 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.