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**Iraq War Note: The Developing Battle of Baghdad and the Early Lessons of War**  
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US progress in entering Baghdad has been so rapid that there is a danger of both assuming that the rest of the battle will be equally easy and that the actual fight was easy.

**The Massive Impact of Airpower**

No one who studies this campaign can ignore the fact that some 15,000 precision guided weapons have been used to date, many directed at targets in the greater Baghdad area or the key forces the regime needed to defend it, plus some 750 cruise missiles. No power in the world other than the US could have suppressed Iraq's air defenses, or used a combination of stealth and cruise missiles in such attacks.

Moreover, the decision to sharply broaden the target list that could be attacked in Baghdad around April 1, and to increase the size of the weapons that could be used, undoubtedly had a major impact. There is no way at this point to know the details of this shift, or how air sorties or weapons were allocated, but the constant precision vertical attacks on the city and on the Republican Guards – its key defenders – began the battle of Baghdad on the first day and must have had the impact of an invasion by several Vietnam/Korean War vintage divisions.

The US also was able to use combat aircraft in urban close air support in ways no air force has ever been able to fight before. While the most highly vulnerable aircraft and helicopters still cannot be used, the US has been able to use UAVs, JSTARS, and other reconnaissance and targeting assets to get a level of transparency that has never existed before in urban combat. In spite of dense short-range AA gun and missile defenses, the US has also been able to operate with exceptional flexibility over the city, using A-10s and attack helicopters in the outskirts, and fixed wing fighters with precision weapons in the city center. While the weapons used are not yet clear, they seem to include 500 pound weapons, lighter air-to-ground missiles like Maverick, and pure kinetic weapons like concrete warheads with considerable success.

**The Role of Artillery and Long-Range Air-Land Battle**

The role of artillery has also made a major contribution, although the details are far from clear. From the start, the US was able to outrange Iraqi artillery and quickly break it up and suppress it – using a combination of counterbattery fire with precision fire control and counterbattery radars, attack helicopters, and aircraft. It could then use tube artillery with very precise targeting from UAVs and other sources against Iraqi targets far beyond line of sight ranges, while Iraq had no real long-range targeting capability. It could also use long-range area fire from the MLRS and ATACMS against Iraqi concentrations.

This combination of artillery and airpower put much of the land engagements between US and Iraqi forces outside visual range, and meant that Iraqi forces could not maneuver forward without taking major losses and could not shelter in the rear. While the details are still not clear,



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this combination also seems to have been effective enough so that Iraqi forces could not take advantage of the normal cover in built-up areas surrounding cities, and had no place to hide their armor and heavy weapons.

**The Inability of Iraq to Maneuver for Defense in depth and Deal with Close-In Combat**

When Iraqi forces did maneuver, they encountered US armor and anti-tank weapons with much better intelligence and situational awareness, thermal vision devices, armor and other protection, and ability to kill at ranges where Iraqi forces often could not engage. The use of irregulars, ambushes, and civilian shields could sometimes ambush small elements of US forces, but had no way to defeat them in any numbers of to survive beyond the initial moment of surprise. Vulnerable irregulars and raiding small elements tend to get one shot against far better protected US forces and then turn into a killing ground.

The sheer pace of the US land advance, and the destruction of much of the Republican Guards outside the city also had a key impact. Rather than “shock and awe,” US joint land-air operations unhinged the Iraqi defense in depth outside Baghdad and deprived it of the ability to retreat faster along interior lines of communication than US ground forces could advance. Rather than some “ring of steel,” many Iraqi forces broke up piecemeal outside the city, or had to maneuver against advancing US forces rather than fire from well prepared positions. The Iraqi forces never caught up with the US, and the Iraqi decision loop seems to have broken down long before the US reached the airport. There simply was no coherent direction of the city’s defense, and small elements were left to fight on their own.

**The Collapse on the Western Side, Disruption, the Absence of the Popular army, and the Limits of the Special Republican Guards and Security Forces**

This, in turn, left the city without coherent irregular and popular defenses. The exact situation is still very unclear, but there is little evidence anywhere that Iraq was prepared to blow bridges or create physical defenses on a timely basis. The Republican Guards seem to have largely collapsed in the south and southwest, and Iraq could not pull forces back from Ar Ramadi and the West before US forces seized the airport.

The Iraqis certainly had forces in the Western side of Baghdad, but again operating as scattered elements and without cohesion. They at best fought piecemeal and without coherent reinforcement from the rest of the city or the north. (Here airpower seems to have succeeded in discouraging any movement from forces in the north and sealing off the northern part of the city).

At this point, a critical weakness in Iraqi planning seems to have been exposed. While major arms caches have been found throughout the south, and there have been dedicated Baath Party and Fedayeen irregulars, there is no evidence of a meaningful role by the Popular Army. The so-called force of some 1-7 million simply has not emerged, even though weapons have been stockpiled for it. It certainly has not emerged in Baghdad in the massive numbers necessary to defend large areas and force street-by-street fighting. If anything, the regime has been forced to plan to cut off the Shi’ite area in Saddam City.



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Furthermore, the regime has clearly failed so far to assemble or move Popular army forces in the southwestern part of the city – perhaps because the regime lied to the people about the military situation and denied the US advance. It might also be because much of the area is industrialized or too “upper class” to be willing to fight, and perhaps because palaces and monuments create so much space. There has been some stiff fighting during US probes and reconnaissance into the western half of the city, but it have been badly organized and piecemeal, and again has generally had to rush towards the advancing US forces, rather than fight from prepared defenses. As a result, it has lost much of the advantage it might have gained from well-prepared defenses and encounter far superior US forces in terms of training and technology.

One other key element of the battle is that Iraq’s Special Republican Guards and security and intelligence services have never been able to mount any coherent prepared defenses. They seem to have fought in a number of clashes, but largely as small elements rushing into battle. Speculatively, they may also be far more bureaucratic loyalists than fighters, and the regime may have emphasized loyalty over real-world fighting capability. Only about one-third of the Special Republican Guard structure really seems to be combat elements and the “combat” forces of the SSO, Mukhabarat and Ba’ath Party are designed largely to control the Iraqi people and deal with minor resistance efforts rather than fight. Their numbers are potentially impressive, but they may prove far less impressive in practice than has previously been estimated.

### **Before We Count Iraq Out and the Eastern Bank**

The US has clearly advanced to the point on the West Bank of the Tigris where it can enter the city, conduct regular reconnaissance patrols, and even occupy some high visibility points. A raid by some 76 tanks and 60 Bradley fighting vehicles made a second push into the city, and went to a palace, the al Rashid Hotel and Information Ministry. American tanks are on the grounds of Saddam Hussein’s main palace in Baghdad. Coalition troops surround other major Baghdad landmarks and have destroyed a statue of Saddam Hussein on a horse in Baghdad’s parade grounds

General Pace put this as follows in an interview with CNN:

“I know that the forces on the ground have conducted a couple of armored raids in which they have taken significant numbers of coalition tanks and armored personnel carriers and driven through portions of the city, destroying all of the enemy vehicles and personnel with whom they've come in contact. So the military would be conducting what we would call armored raids right now.

“... Well, one of the points is to destroy the enemy that we found, and the last two raids have been very, very successful at doing that. Another point is to give the Iraqi armed forces that may still be there the opportunity to see that we are equally effective in and around the city as we are on the open battlefield.



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“...And we do not take pleasure in destroying them, their equipment, or their people. We want them to understand that we have a mission to complete, that we will complete this mission. But we also want to demonstrate to them how efficient we can be, so that, again, as I've mentioned, the Iraqi individual soldiers and their leaders can surrender and become part of Iraq's future.”

USCETCOM has said, however, that roughly one-third of those Iraqi Republican Guards forces that made it into the Baghdad area still survive. It also is not fully clear how many men still exist from the Fedayeen, Special Republican Guards, or security forces and whether any meaningful cadres of the Popular army will emerge.

The Marines on the East Bank are across the Dyala River, and Marines from the 3rd Battalion 4th Marine have crossed into the city, but are still fighting against significant resistance. They are across the last major water barrier before the center of the city and evidently are finishing bridging operations to deal with a blown bridge or establish a crossing point where Iraqi forces are not prepared.

Scattered Iraqi forces still exist around the airport and in the West Bank area, particularly in the suburbs. ABC reports that hard-core Iraqi forces take refuge in schools and other buildings during the day and then emerge at night. There are no lines as such in the West Bank, and Iraqi forces still exist to the west of the airport.

It may be much harder to fight into the old city on the East Bank than it was into the West Bank. The city is filled with dispersed weapons, complex tunnel systems, and it may be possible to create a more cohesive static defense if Iraqi forces have time.

There is still the possibility of some last ditch urban use of chemical weapons – such as detonating rounds on streets to block a US advance – and the ability to either infiltrate reinforcements from the north or flee to Tikrit in spite of the screening defenses to the north is still unclear. Reuters says that Army 3rd Infantry Division, 1st Brigade holds the airport and the west of Baghdad, the 2nd Brigade is securing the south, the 3rd Brigade is holding the northwest and the Marines are in the northeast.

The Army controls a porous semi-circle around Baghdad extending from the Tigris in the north to where the river leaves the capital in the south. The 3rd Infantry Division's Second Brigade controlled the southern end of the river. The Third Brigade held the western bank of the Tigris in the north. The Marines do not, however, yet seem to fully control all of the roads north, and both the Army and Marine encirclement has gaps. The US air and helicopter forces, and ranger/SOF elements do screen all movement, but cannot control movement by civilian vehicles or movement by small infantry elements.

Officers said the marines were moving on Baghdad from east of the Tigris and hoped to have the city surrounded by the end of Sunday. A marine, requesting anonymity, said that on their side, Marines were encountering resistance from irregulars.



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What seems doubtful at this point is that Saddam's regime can do anything other than prolong the agony and force the division of Baghdad into a limited defensive area where the US cannot go without major physical destruction. Even here, the more the city is segmented, the more UAVs and high resolution sensors the US can bring to bear and the more use it can make of airpower, helicopters, and other precision strike systems. As Basra, Najaf, and Karbala have shown, loyalist cadres cannot really defend a city, only complicate and prolong its defeat.