

CSIS

**Center for Strategic and International Studies
1800 K Street N.W.
Washington, DC 20006
(202) 775-3270
(To comment: Acordesman@aol.com
For Updates see CSIS.ORG, “Military Balance”)**

**The Iraq War:
Can We Guess at the First Day?**

**Anthony H. Cordesman
Arleigh A. Burke Chair for Strategy
Center for Strategic and International Studies**

March 7, 2003

No one outside government can do more than guess at the allied war plan. At the same time, it may be useful to consider what the US, UK, and Australia may do and begin on the first day.

The Air and Missile War

We have been told that some 3,000 precision air and cruise missile strikes will take place during the first day. This is an incredible number of such strikes in terms of any past war – particularly since we used a little over 5,000 precision guided bombs of all kinds inside the entire Gulf War, and only 6-8% of the 222,000 bombs and missiles of any kind that were used during the war were precision weapons of any kind.

We need to remember that the scope of these strikes will be national, although they will be concentrated in key cities like Baghdad. They also will often be so precise that they can hit near religious buildings, populated areas, etc.

The US, UK, and Australia also will not be re-fighting any past war and they will be complex, simultaneous, and synchronized, and not a few dominant themes attacked and destroyed in neat sequential phases. Think three-dimensional chess, with moves at 1/100th of a second intervals, not Duke Nukem!

What will the targets be?

1. **The Iraqi air defense system:** The recent air strikes on Iraq's air defense systems have greatly used the need for suppression of enemy air defense (SEAD), but have not reached into the Basra area, Mosul, or the center of the country. There will still be a major need for such missions, hoping to give the US near total air supremacy, the ability to strike deeply into Baghdad and every key urban area, and to fly air combat patrol missions throughout the country to protect US/UK helicopter and airlift operations and block any Iraqi fighter, UAV, and helicopter operations.
2. **Communications facilities and networks** The US will seek to paralyze Iraqi regime control and military control as much as possible. (Some will survive). Like leadership targets, these are key targets for new systems like the High Powered Microwave weapons (e-bombs). At the same time, this is not the place for experimental technologies. In most cases, the US will have to either use physical destruction or try and e-bomb and re-strike with hard target weapons the moment the target emits or shows activity. These will often be key B-2 stealth, cruise missile, and F-117 targets.
3. **Key leadership targets:** Not just the ones we know, but the range of dispersal sheltered facilities we have detected. These may sometimes be hit by e-bombs, but most are likely to be hard kills. The use of really massive earth penetrators and systems like the MOAB may come later, however, because delivery systems like a C-130 are vulnerable. These will often be key B-2 stealth, cruise missile, and F-117 targets. We may well see some deliberate "shock and awe" destruction of palaces and high visibility symbols of the regime in urban areas where this can

have a political effect without risk to civilians, historical or religious sites, or key civilian facilities.

4. **Key instruments of the regime's power:** The Special Republican Guards, Republican Guard headquarters and command centers, intelligence services like the SSO, Baath Party offices (many security offices). Many – perhaps most – of these targets will be new ones and not on any existing map. Iraq will have tried to covertly disperse. We will have tried to target. There will be an ongoing duel between our effort to use UAVs, satellites, and other ISR assets to find them and Iraqi decoys, use of human shields, deception, and dispersal.
5. **Key Ground unit headquarters and facilities:** In the last Gulf War, the US sought to kill 50% of the heavy weapons in the Iraqi forces in the KTO and only after it suppressed the Iraqi air force and SAM system. During this conflict, the US will begin killing key Republican Guards and regular army headquarters and facilities on day one. The primary goal, however, will probably be to hit enough Republican Guards targets to deprive them of cohesion while carrying out a softer mix of strikes around regular army units designed to paralyze them. The key aim will be to lock the Iraqi army and air force down in place, showing that what moves gets destroyed, rather than killing everything in sight. It will also be to encourage defections and prevent the Iraqi defense from retreating inwards on Baghdad.
6. **Opening Up The Battlefield: Basra, Kirkuk, Mosul and the West:** “Shock and awe” must do more than simply carry out strategic and interdiction missions. There will be joint air-helicopter-armor-special forces strikes from the start. The US may also go to kill boxes and movement suppression at the tactical level from hour one in critical areas like the oil fields, Basra, Kirkuk, etc.
 - The one Iraq mechanized division near Basra and the approaches to Basra out of Kuwait need immediate air-ground operations to secure the main routes and bridges as much as possible.
 - The 5th corps and other forces near Mosul (1 mech and 1 infantry Republican Guards unit and 1 mech and 1 infantry regular army division each could be key targets.
 - So could the 1st Corps (1 mechanized and 4 infantry regular army divisions) in the area near Kirkuk. (The US may seek to open up Kirkuk to rapid US heliborne and Special Forces operations to save the oil fields and keep the Kurds and Arabs separate.
 - So could any scattered Iraqi formations and the air bases in the desert areas west of Ar Ramadi. The US wants these bases, wants to deny the area to Scuds, and could use this area as a springboard for a major “Hail Mary” play by elements of the 101st airborne and/or 82nd.
7. **Key links to infrastructure:** The US and UK will minimize attacks on key civilian facilities like generating plants, water, etc. Selective “effects-based” precision strikes and weapons like carbon fiber warheads will be used to paralyze or knock out power grids affecting military centers.

8. **Activity in terms of Lines of Communication, Resupply, and Petroleum-Oil-Lubricants (POL):** Once again, rather than mass destruction, the US and UK will use tactical aircraft to paralyze movement, resupply, and movement of POL – creating a climate in which Iraq cannot sustain its forces.
9. **CBRN and Missile Targets:** Suspected Scud, other missile, key strike aircraft, UAV delivery systems that can be used for CB weapons delivery. Key WMD and missile research and production sites. Mobile Scud and CBW systems. Known depots and locations of CB warheads and tactical weapons. Systems like thermobaric weapons may be used to ensure the destruction of the chemical and biological agents released by such strikes.
10. **Psyops and Counter-Iraqi Media Strikes:** The US will probably support its air strikes with massive leaflet drops, destroy Iraqi radio and TV coverage (possibly knocking out most other media in the process) and using Special Forces aircraft to take over the radio and TV broadcasts in Iraq by jamming or replacing them,
11. **Targeting and strikes will evolve in near real time.** Assets like Rivet Joint, SIGINT satellites, etc. will constantly monitor, characterize, and locate SIGINT and ELINT emissions to develop new targets as the Iraqis communicate or use their radars and other sensors. The US will attempt to vastly speed up battle damage assessment. The strikes will roll out during the first two days from known to active targets bringing in more and more tactical aircraft as the Iraqi air defense system collapses.
12. **Weapons, air packages, UAVs, UCAVs, and intelligence assets will be fluid and mission dedicated to maximize effect while minimizing civilian casualties and collateral damage.** The mix of formations, use of stealth aircraft and cruise missiles, mix of aircraft and helicopters, and choice of air to ground munitions will probably be much more innovative, mission dedicated, and designed to hit specific targets with the best weapon than in any previous war. Rather than being JDAM dominated, or GPS dominated, systems like the “bugsplat” system will be used to choose the best munition for the desired mix of stand-off, reliability, accuracy, damage, and lack of collateral damage. This war will not bomb by the numbers.

The Land War

Any talk of major land action is much more speculative, particularly given the uncertainty affecting Turkey and the full closure of US and British land forces. Assuming we begin the war before ground troops can move into Turkey, the following options are possible.

1. **Coming Out of the Closet in Barzanistan and Talibanistan:** We have two SOG groups mixing CIA and Special forces in the Kurdish enclave. One each with Barzani and Talibani. They will probably be quietly reinforced before the bombing begins. Rapid entry and occupation by Special Forces C-130s and helicopters could take place on the first night, occupying the air strips at Barmani, Harir, and Bakrajo.

2. **Insertion near oilfields and Kirkuk:** Other operations in areas still held by Iraqi forces seem risky on day one, but Special Forces scouts and targeters may go into the oil field areas and Kirkuk, laying the ground work for follow-on operations and giving us the ability to use airpower to stop Iraqi action.
3. **Leapfrogging in the Desert:** The US may well leapfrog airborne/assault helicopter forces into the Western desert areas west of Baghdad, isolating and then seizing Iraq forces west of Rutbah or even Muhammadiyat. Alternatively or additionally, striking near Samawah, or between Karbala and Najaf. Attack helicopters, gunships, and other systems may create a new kind of firebase in areas that are not heavily defended almost from day one.
4. **Seizing bases in the Western Desert:** Special Forces and ranger units may stage out of western Jordan and overfly Israel and Jordan to seize airbases in the Western desert, and minimize the risk of Scud strikes out of the area.
5. **Jump the Kuwaiti Border towards Basra and the West:** The British 1st Armored Division and Marine Corps Land forces may strike north immediately to seize Safwan, surviving bridges, and move towards the Basra area and cut it off from the rest of the Iraq 3rd Corps, while opening up the routes along the Tigris or through Hay. A fluid spring board operation supported by Marine and Army assault helicopter forces could take Umm Qasr, seize bridges, and even penetrate into friendly Shi'ite towns that do not have main force Iraqi units.
6. **Hit west from Kuwait along the routes on the Euphrates:** It seems that the 3rd Mechanized, supported by helicopter and other forces, could strike out of Kuwait early on and hit towards Samawah or Narsiryah without facing major opposition or water barriers. This would open up the best road through the desert, and might be supported by some kind of assault helicopter seizure of the air facility south of Nasiryah (or even south of Najaf) to open up the route.