

NATIONAL SOVEREIGNTY & UNIVERSAL CHALLENGES: CHOICES FOR THE WORLD AFTER IRAQ

BACKGROUND DOCUMENT

“IRAQ: THE MILITARY CAMPAIGN”

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The military campaign that President Bush launched against Iraq on 20 March 2003 – in America, given the name Operation Iraqi Freedom; in the UK, Operation Telic; and in Australia, Operation Falconer – has had no formal conclusion. Symbolic victory was achieved when the statue of Saddam Hussein was toppled by US forces in the centre of Baghdad on 9 April. Most of the military action was over by 14 April. On 1 May 2003, Bush declared that the major combat operations were complete after his high-profile arrival on the deck of the aircraft carrier USS Abraham Lincoln off the coast of California. However, he made it clear that the military operations in Iraq were not yet finished.¹

This article attempts to draw together some early military implications of a campaign whose intensive operations lasted barely a month. Deeper insights must await the passage of sufficient time for the post-operations reports to be written, detailed battle damage assessments to be made, and key decision-makers to record their thinking. At this stage, the present article aims to do no more than record the apparent sequence of events, make broad judgements about the strategic and tactical approaches of both the US and Iraqi forces, and highlight areas where further investigation may be useful to draw firmer conclusions. As far as is possible, it deals with the purely military aspects of the campaign. The political, diplomatic and economic aspects are covered only when they have implications for the way in which operations may have been conducted.

Past Experience

Since the end of the Cold War, a succession of military operations have taken place in which the use of overwhelming air power has replaced earlier traditions of ground attrition warfare. Technology to improve individual mission effectiveness has made air power the key aspect of war-fighting for US forces in high-intensity conflict. Public interest in the Iraq war of 2003 has focused mainly on the rapid ground operations, which provided the basis for much of the international media reporting. However, when the detailed analysis is available, it seems likely that the precision air-strike capability will be shown to have been of greater significance even than in the other major campaigns of the past decade.

When Iraq invaded Kuwait on 2 August 1990, the international community responded in near-unison. The UN authorized military action on the grounds of a self-evident breach of international law. Most of the regional states became part of the US-led coalition. Saudi Arabia, sharing borders with both countries, became the main mounting base for the military operation. The extraordinary coalition of 34 nations built up their air and ground forces over five months before launching a major air campaign on 17 January 1991.² The coalition air and missile attacks continued for nearly six weeks. Allied air supremacy was achieved, and the continual bombardment of Iraqi defensive positions led to a rout when the main ground operations started on 24 February. Just 100 hours of land operations were needed to expel Iraqi forces from Kuwait. Some 660,000 military personnel were deployed for the operation. The whole war had cost the coalition 340 deaths, of which a quarter were caused by ‘friendly fire’.³

From 1992 onwards, American, British and (until 1998) French military aircraft patrolled much of the sky over Iraq in the northern and southern ‘no-fly zones’. When the work of UN weapons inspectors

¹ US State Department, transcript of statement by President Bush, 1 May 2003

² The 34 nations were: Afghanistan, Argentina, Australia, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Canada, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, Egypt, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Honduras, Italy, Kuwait, Morocco, the Netherlands, Niger, Norway, Oman, Pakistan, Poland, Portugal, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, South Korea, Spain, Syria, Turkey, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom and United States.

³ Tony Mason, *Air power: a centennial appraisal* (London: Brassey's, 1994), p. 137.

became impossible in late 1998, they were withdrawn and Operation Desert Fox was mounted. American and British aircraft flew more than 650 strike and strike-support sorties. Some 415 cruise missiles attacked key targets in Iraq. Over a period of just 70 hours an intense air campaign was mounted to degrade Iraqi capabilities which might produce or deliver weapons of mass destruction.⁴

On 24 March 1999, NATO initiated an air campaign directed at stopping Serbian ethnic cleansing in Kosovo. Some 80 per cent of the offensive air effort was provided by the United States, and after 78 days the aim was achieved without any major ground operation. During this period 28,000 missiles and bombs were delivered by NATO air forces.⁵ It remains debatable whether the air attacks would have brought the campaign to a successful conclusion without diplomatic help, and many argued for the need for a ground force to be prepared to move into Kosovo.⁶

Following the al-Qaeda attacks on New York and Washington of 11 September 2001, the United States, with a number of allies, mounted a major offensive military operation against terrorist bases and the Taleban leadership in Afghanistan. The use of long-range air power from aircraft carriers and distant bases meant that this was a less intense bombardment than previous campaigns. Nevertheless, using air attacks, special forces and local forces, it proved possible to change the regime.

By the early hours of 20 March 2003, when the US launched the attack on Iraq, over a decade of operational experience had been accumulated on the use of precision weapons to shape the battlefield to achieve the military aim. Ground operations, when they were needed, could exploit opportunities that were provided by overwhelming air supremacy.

Diplomatic problems

While the detail of the diplomatic negotiations and problems that preceded the military operations in Iraq are beyond the direct scope of this article, they cannot be totally ignored. The acute problems both within the United Nations and also in the Middle East region had significant effects on the nature of the military plan. The freeing of Kuwait had produced UN authorization for military action and a coalition of 34 nations. The consequent benefits of basing rights, host nation support, overflying rights and military contributions were enormous. Not least, the financial contributions from a number of nations significantly reduced the cost to the UK and others.

From a purely military aspect, the US would have been able to conduct the 2003 Iraq war on its own, provided that it had a local mounting base. Kuwait provided that base. It was, however, more prudent to disperse assets, and, given Saudi sensitivities, the availability of Qatar for the CENTCOM headquarters was also important. The unwillingness of Turkey to provide a second mounting base to the north was a major upset to US planning. This reduced the immediately available forces for the operation, and also complicated arrangements, given the tensions between Kurds, Turks and the Iraqi regime over the semi-independent Kurdish enclave between Baghdad and the Turkish border.

President Bush claimed to have put together a coalition of more than 40 nations for this operation,⁷ and that this was more than had been marshalled for the Gulf War twelve years earlier. The list of coalition members was very curious. Turkey, while causing major military difficulties, was shown as a member, yet Qatar, which hosted as the main military headquarters, CENTCOM, was absent. Nor were many impressed by the potential contribution from states such as Micronesia or the Solomon Islands. From a direct military force aspect, the only major contributors were the US with 424,000, the UK with

⁴ Department of Defense news briefing by Secretary of Defense William S. Cohen, 19 Dec. 1998.

⁵ For a full description of the campaign, see Benjamin S. Lambeth, *NATO's air war for Kosovo* (Santa Monica, RAND, 2001).

⁶ Including the author: Timothy Garden, 'Can we win from the air?', *Independent*, 29 March 1999.

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⁷ President Bush, daily press conference, 20 March 2003. The list of 44 coalition supporters given by the White House later that day was: Afghanistan, Angola, Albania, Australia, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Colombia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Eritrea, Estonia, Ethiopia, Georgia, Honduras, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Japan, Kuwait, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, Marshall Islands, Micronesia, Mongolia, Netherlands, Nicaragua, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Rwanda, Singapore, Slovakia, Solomon Islands, South Korea, Spain, Turkey, Uganda, United Kingdom, United States, Uzbekistan.

41,000, Australia with a further 2000,⁸ and a small number of Polish troops.⁹ Some other nations provided personnel for support units. This was, by any objective measure, a much less well-supported coalition operation than that of 1990-1.

Concept of operations

The detailed concept of operations for the military campaign is not yet available in the public domain. There are a number of indicators that, whatever the original planning concept, it required extensive modification in the light of events. This should cause no surprise. The military axiom that 'no plan survives contact with the enemy' was much bandied about, and had long been one of the legendary Rumsfeld Rules.¹⁰ On balance, it appears likely that the concept which became widely known as 'shock and awe' was at the heart of the initial planning. The phrase was drawn from the title of a book written in 1996 for the US National Defense University.¹¹ The authors brought together classic military strategy and recent experience of operations using new technologies to suggest how the will of the adversary might be more effectively destroyed. It was not a strategy for massive aerial attack to destroy morale, as it was sometimes characterized. As they explain:

Perhaps for the first time in years, the confluence of strategy, technology, and the genuine quest for innovation has the potential for revolutionary change. We envisage Rapid Dominance as the possible military expression, vanguard, and extension of this potential for revolutionary change. The strategic centers of gravity on which Rapid Dominance concentrates, modified by the uniquely American ability to integrate all this, are these junctures of strategy, technology, and innovation which are focused on the goal of affecting and shaping the will of the adversary. The goal of Rapid Dominance will be to destroy or so confound the will to resist that an adversary will have no alternative except to accept our strategic aims and military objectives. To achieve this outcome, Rapid Dominance must control the operational environment and through that dominance, control what the adversary perceives, understands, and knows, as well as control or regulate what is not perceived, understood, or known.

In Rapid Dominance, it is an absolutely necessary and vital condition to be able to defeat, disarm, or neutralize an adversary's military power. We still must maintain the capacity for the physical and forceful occupation of territory should there prove to be no alternative to deploying sufficient numbers of personnel and equipment on the ground to accomplish that objective. Should this goal of applying our resources to controlling, affecting, and breaking the will of an adversary to resist remain elusive, we believe that Rapid Dominance can still provide a variety of options and choices for dealing with the operational demands of war and conflict.¹²

In his more terse way, Defense Secretary Rumsfeld warned on the first day that: 'What will follow will not be a repeat of any other conflict. It will be of a force and scope and scale that has been beyond what has been seen before.'¹³

The basic concept appears to have required large-scale simultaneous precision attacks against the Iraqi regime infrastructure, military centres and communication systems. At the same time, a rapid advance on the ground from both the north and the south towards Baghdad would take advantage of the aerial disruption to the centre of power. Subsidiary actions to secure western Iraq to keep Israel out of the war, and to secure oil facilities against destruction would be mounted at the same time. The original plan seems also to have assumed that coalition forces would be welcomed by the Shias in the south of the country and Kurds in the north. The plan assumed rapid establishment of air superiority and high usage of precision weapons. Ground troop numbers were less than half those available for the relief of Kuwait in 1991, presumably reflecting an expectation of rapid progress.

It is not at this stage clear how well the coalition had prepared for the Iraqi defence concept. The Commander of US V Corps, Lt-Gen. William S. Wallace, was quoted as saying the resistance by Iraqi paramilitaries was unexpected.¹⁴ This is surprising. The unclassified CSIS report on Iraqi armed forces

⁸ 'Operation Iraqi Freedom – by the numbers', USCENAF report dated 30 April 2003, gives the breakdown of personnel deployed: 91% of the force was US.

⁹ As President Bush indicated in his speech from the USS *Abraham Lincoln* on 1 May 2003.

¹⁰ Donald Rumsfeld, 'Rumsfeld's Rules: advice on government, business and life', *Wall Street Journal*, 29th Jan 2001.

¹¹ Harlan K. Ullman and James P. Wade, *Shock and awe: achieving rapid dominance* (Washington DC: NDU Press, 1996).

¹² *Ibid.*, prologue.

¹³ Department of Defense, daily brief 20 March 2003; http://www.defenselink.inil/news/Mar2003/to3202003_to320sd.html.

¹⁴ 'The enemy we're fighting is a bit different than the one we war-gamed against, because of these paramilitary

was published six weeks before operations began. Among its many prescient estimates, it said: 'A number of experts have also suggested that Saddam will put large cadres of intelligence, security, and Republican Guard personnel into urban areas in civilian dress and intermingle them with popular forces to both ensure that the popular forces will fight and make it impossible for US and British forces.'¹⁵

A less surprisingly unexpected setback was the need to change plans to accommodate Ankara's prohibition on US ground forces using Turkey as a mounting base. The original plans had envisaged perhaps as many as 80,000 US forces operating out of Turkey. A subsequent proposal for the basing of up to 62,000 US troops, 255 warplanes and 65 helicopters narrowly failed to gain the necessary majority in the Turkish parliament on 2 March 2003.

It may be that the coalition composition also required plans to be adjusted. While the UK was publicly an enthusiastic supporter of US operations, it has a reputation for punctilious observation of the laws of armed conflict. Suggestions have been made that the scale of the original missile and bomb attacks was reduced because of UK concern about excessive civilian casualties.

The campaign

As the diplomatic theatre was played out at the UN in New York, military preparations for Iraq accelerated. Announcements about troop moves came with increasing frequency through the months leading up to hostilities. The UK had particular political sensitivities about appearing to make military deployments which might compromise diplomatic options. In a succession of announcements starting in December 2002, the defence secretary Geoff Hoon announced precautionary measures, including booking sea transport and warning reservists, followed by deployment of advance parties, reserve call-ups and the deployment of naval forces, and finally deployment of ground and air units. In the US, the build-up of forces continued in parallel. There were continuing air operations over the two no-fly zones. These had involved an increased use of offensive munitions by the US and UK since the middle of 2002. The targets attacked remained for the most part installations related to air defence.

Hostilities began in the early hours of 20 March 2003,¹⁶ with the launch of a limited missile strike against a target of opportunity close to Baghdad. Some 40 cruise missiles were launched from US ships in the Gulf and the Red Sea against a target where the Iraqi leadership was believed to be meeting.¹⁷ The missile attack was followed up by air-delivered precision-guided bombs. The White House acknowledged that the start of the campaign had been initiated ahead of the main plan after intelligence information had offered the possibility of a decapitating strike against the Iraqi regime.¹⁸ Whether this strike had any significant effect is not yet clear. It certainly failed to destroy the Iraqi ability at that time to mount defensive operations. Iraq fired two unsuccessful surface-to-surface missiles at Kuwait.

The main campaign began the next day, with air attacks by cruise missiles and precision-guided bombs on key military and government targets in Baghdad and other regional centres. The earlier than planned start to operations appears to have tempered the scale of the first mass air strikes. The advance elements

forces,' General Wallace said. 'We knew they were here, but we did not know how they would fight.' *New York Times*, 28 March 2003.

¹⁵ Anthony H. Cordesman, *Iraqi armed forces on the edge of war* (Washington DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 7 Feb. 2003), p. 3.

¹⁶ Defence Secretary Geoff Hoon, statement to House of Commons, 20 March 2003: 'President Bush announced at 3.15 this morning on behalf of the coalition that operations had begun with attacks on selected targets of military importance. Those attacks were carried out by coalition aircraft and cruise missiles on more than one target in the vicinity of Baghdad, following information relating to the whereabouts of very senior members of the Iraqi leadership.' *Hansard*, Commons, col. 1087.

¹⁷ 'How to watch the war', *New York Times*, 21 March 2003.

¹⁸ Ari Fleischer, White House daily briefing, 21 March 2003: 'Q: The initial idea, of course, "shock and awe", was to sort of hit the whole country and to shock and awe the military, as well as those loyal to Saddam. Instead, what we've done – because of the opportunity earlier this week – was to sort of start from a top-down to work on Saddam, and then on those who are most loyal to him. Is that the kind of decision the President was involved in? Would he have been engaged in discussions about whether or not there was a shift in strategy here?

'Mr Fleischer: Well, clearly – and I think that's been made very plain to everybody here – is that as a result of a meeting that took place on Wednesday, there was new information received and it was acted upon. And I think what you're seeing is in many ways something similar to what you saw in Afghani-stan – with the United States ability not only to be effective, to be accurate, but to be nimble. And this is the part of the transformation of the military; this is a part of the 21st century thinking about how to be effective in the conduct of military affairs.'

of the US 3rd Infantry Division pushed some 150 kilometres into Iraq towards Nasiriyah, UK and US forces advanced towards Basra, and some oilfields and the oil terminal at Umm Qasr were secured. The ground war had started.

Just three days into the campaign, some US ground forces were within 160 kilometres of Baghdad. Massive but very selective air attacks were taking place against government buildings, military headquarters, air defence centres, and command and control facilities. Air superiority had been achieved, which gave coalition aircraft and helicopters freedom to operate across the country. Small-arms fire and shoulder-launched air defence missiles remained an operating hazard, but did not inhibit air operations.

In the empty desert region of western Iraq, special forces carried out covert operations, and secured two airfields at a relatively early stage. This reassured Israel that the threat from any long-range Scud missiles was significantly reduced. To the north of Baghdad, 1,000 US paratroops were dropped on to an already secure airfield within the Kurdish enclave.¹⁹ That they had flown from Italy to be dropped emphasized the tactical inconvenience of Turkey's prohibition on US operations from its territory.

After these early advances, the ground campaign slowed down from 25 March for nearly a week. The official word from the CENTCOM briefers was that there was no pause, but it was clear that there was a need to resupply and consolidate. Resistance in the south had been relatively fierce on occasion. It was proving difficult to provide total security of lines of communication as small groups of Iraqis used guerrilla-style tactics to disrupt the stretched supply lines. There was also the problem of poor weather during this period. The raging sandstorms made the provision of close air support, particularly from attack helicopters, impossible. A suicide bomber attack at a US checkpoint further complicated relationships with civilians.

During this period of little advance on the ground, air strikes continued. The Iraqi Republican Guard divisions which surrounded Baghdad were expected to be more difficult to break through than the defences in the south. Air attacks were directed day and night against their defensive positions. Some elements of the Iraqi forces to the north of Baghdad were deployed to reinforce the southern defences. At this stage, it appears that the Iraq military command was functioning sufficiently well to redeploy forces at divisional level. However, US air attacks on communications centres during this period may have been successful in breaking links between the military leadership and its troops. By 1 April, the US 173rd Airborne Brigade had completed its deployment in northern Iraq. After 3 April, there is little indication of response from Iraqi units to any central direction. The outer defences of Baghdad crumbled as soldiers fled back home, leaving their equipment and uniforms behind.

On 4 April, the US forces occupied Baghdad airport. With control of such a convenient airhead, the problem of extended supply routes was much reduced. Attack helicopters and close air support aircraft could respond to ground problems in minutes. The resistance inside Baghdad was incoherent and sporadic. Instead of the expected confrontations with the highly trained elite units, most firefights were with small elements of Saddam Hussein loyalists using urban warfare techniques. The coalition's ability to destroy armoured fighting vehicles from the air made traditional forms of defence untenable.

Although sporadic exchanges of fire continued for some days, the symbolic end of the regime came on 9 April 2003 with the televised pictures of the toppling of Saddam Hussein's statue in Baghdad. It was another day before the Kurds had taken Kirkuk in the north, and there was plenty of violence throughout the country as elements of the old regime fought on, looters moved in and future candidates for power jockeyed for position. On 14 April US Marines entered Tikrit, Saddam Hussein's home town, and secured the presidential palace. Subsequent operations throughout the country became more localized and directed at remaining pockets of resistance.

For the second half of April, the problem for coalition forces was managing the transition to peace. Widespread looting and damage to public infrastructure compounded the humanitarian problem. Questions were raised about the adequacy of troop numbers to manage the country. On 1 May President Bush declared the major military operations to be at an end.

¹⁹ USCENTAF report, 30 April 2003, p. 8 shows 954 out of 1,000 paratroops arriving safely on the ground

Air power

The public was made much less aware of the aims, scale and impact of coalition air operations than had been the case for the previous operations in the 1991 Gulf War, in Kosovo in 1999 and to an extent in Afghanistan in 2001. The arrangements for media involvement are dealt with later in this article, but they have led to a less than complete early picture of the air campaign. Official postwar reports will fill in the detail in due course, but it is already possible to draw some early lessons. It is relatively easy to cover the Iraqi air operations, since it appears that none were mounted throughout the operation.

Offensive air operations were conducted by surface- and air-launched cruise missiles, air-delivered precision-guided bombs and free-fall ballistic bombs. The current best estimate of total bombs and missiles expended is 29,199:²⁰ about the same number as in the Kosovo air campaign, which lasted for three times as long. Yet Iraq is 17 times as large as the combined area of Serbia, Montenegro and Kosovo. It appears that daily strike rates averaged around 1000,²¹ which is of the same order of magnitude as in the 1991 Gulf War.²² The significant difference for this operation was that the majority (68 per cent)²³ of weapons used were precision guided, and it is likely that evidence will be provided to show the much greater effectiveness of these missiles.

There is a possibility that the unplanned early start to operations caused some difficulty in adjusting the air tasking order rapidly. The normal cycle time of 72 hours is seen as a limitation on flexibility. USCENTAF reports that a special capability to find, fix, track, engage and assess the most important targets had been developed.²⁴ These were known as Time Sensitive Targets (TST) and were divided into three categories: leadership, weapons of mass destruction and terrorism. Out of more than 30,000 designated targets only 156 were TSTs. It is not clear whether the low number reflects lack of intelligence, lack of capability or a genuine lack of need for more.

The primary missions in the campaign included the suppression and ultimate destruction of Iraqi air defence systems. These had been softened up before hostilities began through the intensified no fly zone operations. The large-scale availability of precision weapons meant that it was also possible to target the regime leadership and communication nodes at the same time. The strategy was to disconnect the regime leadership from its military commanders, and those commanders from their fighting units. Air superiority was achieved from the start. However, the resistance experienced by the initial ground operations in the south meant that air power effort had also to be directed to supporting the ground advance.

The integration of ground and air operations made it possible for offensive strike aircraft to be used at times in more direct support of ground forces. A particular worry was the Iraqi defence line to the south of Baghdad, where three Republican Guard divisions were deployed. At the end of March, US forces were unable to continue their rapid progress northwards. Sandstorms hampered normal close air support missions, but Iraqi defensive positions were repeatedly attacked with a range of munitions. One A10 squadron reported a non-standard high usage of cluster bombs during this period when pinpoint targets were obscured.²⁵

Once the weather cleared, the Republican Guard defences became the focus of offensive air operations. The capture of Tallil airfield outside Nasiriyah provided a refuelling and rearming facility for close air support operations. Strike aircraft with unused munitions from missions elsewhere were authorized to attack the Republican Guard on their return flights. By 4 April, the Medina Division of the Republican Guard was estimated to be at less than 18 per cent of full strength, and the Hammurabi Division was rated as below 44 per cent.²⁶

²⁰ Ibid., p. 11. It also reports 16,901 rounds of 20mm and 311,597 rounds of 30mm fired by coalition aircraft

²¹ In the first 11 days, 700 cruise missiles and 9,000 precision bombs were dropped, according to Donald Rumsfeld at his 1 April 2003 press briefing.

²² *Gulf War air power survey*, vol. II (Washington DC: US Government, 1993), part 2, p. 269, fig. 29.

²³ USCENTAF report, 30 April 2003, p. 11.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ops officer of 190th Fighter Squadron, quoted in Bradley Graham and Vernon Loeb, 'An air war of might, coordination and risks', *Washington Post*, 27 April 2003, p. A01.

²⁶ Bradley and Loeb, 'An air war of might'.

Throughout the campaign, strategic attacks continued against selected targets in Baghdad. The use of penetration bombs to attack a telecommunications tower suggests that the communication nodes were a high priority. The apparent lack of cohesion of the Iraqi defences may in part be attributable to a lack of communications from higher authority. It also appears that risks of civilian casualties limited some targeting. The target selection differed from the earlier Iraq campaign. On this occasion, bridges and major routes were not struck as the coalition forces were making rapid ground progress. Perhaps more surprisingly, the electricity facilities were largely left undamaged. This may have been because of concerns about longer-term humanitarian problems, or the need to keep the administrative infrastructure in place to help post-conflict reconstruction.

Despite their relatively low public profile, the air power operations appear to have been the key to the rapid degradation of Iraqi defences, and hence the relative ease with which ground troops took over the country. The lack of any Iraqi air operations made little difference as any aircraft attempting to fly would have been rapidly destroyed. Over 1,800 aircraft were involved, 802 cruise missiles were fired, and enough fuel was transferred in the air to keep a 737 airliner flying for nearly twelve years.²⁷ It is not clear yet how important a role uninhabited air vehicles played, but it was the first time that four Predator drones had been flown simultaneously in support of combat operations.²⁸

Ground operations and special forces

The ground operations can be thought of as having a number of components. In the very early stages, special forces were deployed to secure key targets, provide intelligence and reconnaissance to optimize air strikes, and for traditional disruption tasks. One informed commentator has described these operations as more impressive than the early part of the air campaign.²⁹ He claims that dozens of small special operations teams were deploying throughout Iraq before President Bush's 48-hour deadline expired. Reliable information about such activities is always difficult to obtain. However, the Australian military contributed strongly in this area, and confirmed that they had 500 special forces operating in western and north-western Iraq.³⁰ Their task was to reduce the threat of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) being launched towards Israel. They also secured Al Isad, the second largest airfield in Iraq. It can be safely assumed that US and UK special forces were carrying out similar tasks. The rapid securing of oil facilities was an urgent priority, and seems to have been achieved at an early stage.³¹

While the west of Iraq was secured mainly by special forces, the plans for the north of the country had to be amended in the light of Turkish unwillingness to allow coalition forces to operate through Turkey. It had been intended to mount a major second front from Turkey towards Baghdad. Equipment was kept at sea in the Mediterranean while diplomatic negotiations continued. Had it been possible to deploy forces by this route, it is likely that some 60,000 troops would have rapidly moved to the outskirts of Baghdad through the largely supportive areas held by the Kurds. In the event, apart from any special forces only 954 paratroops were available in the north, having been flown in from a base in Italy. These troops worked with Kurdish forces to hold territory, and to supervise the taking of Mosul and Kirkuk in the latter stages of the campaign.

The south-east of Iraq was secured mainly by the UK forces who were able to provide safe port access at Umm Qasr at an early stage. The main UK combat efforts were directed at securing the city of Basra, and ensuring that Iraqi forces were unable to use it as a safe haven from which to mount operations against the main advance by US forces towards Baghdad.

The US forces for the main advance consisted of 3rd Mechanized Infantry Division, 1st Marine Expeditionary Force and 101st Air Assault Division. The plan appears to have been to move rapidly north to take on Iraqi Republican Guard forces defending Baghdad. Where possible, major towns would be by-passed. The early resistance from Iraqi irregulars and paramilitary forces caused some concern among observers. General Barry R. McCaffrey, who commanded the 24th Mechanized

²⁷ USCENTAF report, 30 April 2003, p. 8.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

²⁹ Michael E. O'Hanlon, 'Was the strategy brilliant?', *Brookings Daily War Report*, 9 April 2003.

³⁰ Australian Department of Defence media release 30302/03, dated 2 May 2003, given by Brigadier Mike Hannan.

³¹ Air Marshal Brian BurrIDGE reported on 27 March 2003 that UK forces had secured the Rumaylah oilfields.

Infantry Division during the 1991 Gulf War, said: 'In my judgment, there should have been a minimum of two heavy divisions and an armored cavalry regiment on the ground – that's how our doctrine reads.'³² As noted earlier,³³ the senior commander for ground forces, Lt-Gen. Wallace, appears to have shared some of these concerns. Nevertheless, the use of rapid response precision air power appears to have recovered the situation.

The apportionment of air effort shows the intensity of firepower used to support ground operations. Latest analysis calculates that 79 per cent of targets struck were what is classified as Killbox Interdiction/Close Air Support (KI/CAS).³⁴ This is a surprisingly high figure and may have implications for the effort to be devoted to direct land unit support in the future. Informal soundings have suggested that there will be some review of what close air support training is needed.

The final phase of the ground operation met considerably less resistance than expected. The latter stages of securing Baghdad and other major cities involved little of the sustained urban warfare that had been predicted.³⁵ Exchanges of fire were more often with paramilitaries than with formed military units. The main defensive positions had largely either been destroyed from the air or abandoned by Iraqi soldiers. With the securing of airfields, armed helicopter and close air support aircraft could achieve continuous operations in support of US ground forces. Had the resistance been stronger, US forces could have waited for the reinforcements which were already in transit from the US.

Iraqi strategy and tactics

Iraqi forces before the conflict were of significant size, but their equipment had been degraded by the years of sanctions. Assessed by CSIS as 'the most effective military power in the Gulf',³⁶ they included 389,000 full-time active duty personnel, of whom 100,000 were reservists who had been called up. They had between 2,200 and 2,600 main battle tanks, 3,700 other armoured vehicles and 2,400 major artillery weapons. Although the Iraqi air force might have had 300 combat aircraft, it was not believed to have any effective combat capability against modern air forces. Of greater concern were the ground-based air defence systems, with 850 missile launchers and 3,000 anti-aircraft gun systems. In the event, 1,224 anti-aircraft gun attacks and 1,660 air defence missile launches were reported.³⁷ The Iraqi navy had only nine small combat ships with an offensive mining capability. Chemical munitions were expected to be available to defending forces.³⁸ There was also a capability to mobilize significantly larger numbers of combatants: the reserve pool of 650,000 could theoretically have been supplemented from 3.4 million men of military service age.

The use of paramilitary forces (Saddam's Fedayeen) in concert with civilian security and intelligence services resulted in a stiffer defensive force in the Shia southern area of the country than might have been expected. The defensive layers of Republican Guard divisions around Baghdad were less successful, and the expected hard resistance from elite units in the capital and in Tikrit never materialized. Although major routes to Baghdad were mined at river crossings, no bridge was demolished by retreating Iraqi forces. This appears to be because of a combination of destruction of command and control by coalition air power, and very rapid advances by US ground forces. The lack of any ability to operate in the air was a major drawback for Iraqi forces.

Intelligence

It is difficult to make even a tentative assessment of coalition intelligence achievements at this stage. In the field of strategic intelligence, the continuing criticism of the failure to find any weapons of mass destruction leaves questions to be answered. The apparent misassessment of the effectiveness of paramilitaries in the opening days of the campaign was surprising as the academic community had

³² Vernon Loeb and Thomas E. Ricks, 'Questions raised about invasion force', *Washington Post*, 24 March 2003

³³ See note 14 above.

³⁴ USCENAF report, 30 April 2003, p. 5. KI/CAS targets are air attacks in direct support of ground troops.

³⁵ Iraqi Foreign Minister Tariq Aziz, in comparing an Iraq war to the Vietnam War, said that the cities would be Iraq's swamps and the buildings their jungles. See Toby Dodge and Steven Simon, *Iraq at the crossroads*, Adelphi Paper 354 (London: IISS, 2003), p. 59.

³⁶ Cordesman, *Iraqi armed forces on the edge of war*.

³⁷ USCENAF report, 30 April 2003, p. 3.

³⁸ In his foreword to 'Iraq's weapons of mass destruction: the assessment of the British government', Prime Minister Tony Blair claimed that some WMD could be deployed at 45 minutes' notice.

predicted such Iraqi tactics. However, the success in targeting command and control nodes suggests that the tactical intelligence was of a high quality. Some 1,000 sorties were devoted by 80 specialist aircraft to the intelligence task, yielding 42,000 battlefield images and 2,400 hours of signal intelligence flying.³⁹ Control of space assets was given to the Combined Forces Air Component Commander for the first time. There have also been suggestions that human intelligence resources were helpful in targeting the leadership with precision weapons.

Psychological operations

The coalition attached considerable importance to the use of psy-ops in fulfilling its aim of bringing a rapid end to hostilities. A total of 158 air missions dropped 31,800,000 leaflets. The US analysis equates this to 120,454 rolls of toilet paper,⁴⁰ which may be an early indication of how effective this technique was seen to be. Sorties providing radio and television broadcasts were also flown, but assessment of their utility will have to wait for further analysis.

Public relations

Since the first Gulf war, public relations strategy has assumed much greater importance in military planning. It was a key aspect of the 'shock and awe' approach to convince the Iraqi military that resistance to overwhelming force was futile. Information strategy had a part to play in this. There was also a clear domestic political need to reassure critical publics that the operation was being completed competently with minimum casualties and infrastructure destruction. CENTCOM established a modern media centre in Qatar, and provided daily briefings of journalists. International journalists were embedded with combat units and were able to report back in real time by satellite video communications. Some journalists operated out of Baghdad under Iraqi supervision. In addition, the coalition governments provided regular media briefings.

The tensions between operational security and public information were no greater than usual. There did, however, appear to be a policy of holding back information at the CENTCOM level for fear that it would undermine Pentagon briefings.⁴¹ This meant that the briefers in Qatar were often less than helpful in putting reports from embedded journalists in the overall strategic context. This may have led to unnecessary swings in the public mood about the progress of the operation. The brevity of the operation made this effect less important than it might have been in a more challenging scenario.

The UK military contribution

The UK provided a significant national contribution to the operation. At a maximum strength of over 40,000 service personnel,⁴² the force appeared to be larger than the government had planned to make available in the Strategic Defence Review.⁴³ Certainly there was no possibility of sustaining such a force for very long, and this must have had implications for the planned start time of the campaign. The UK contribution included a naval force of 29 Royal Navy and Royal Fleet Auxiliary vessels, including the aircraft carrier HMS Ark Royal and the helicopter carrier HMS Ocean.⁴⁴ The land force was led by Headquarters 1 (UK) Armoured Division, which included 3 Commando Brigade Royal Marines, 16 Air Assault Brigade, 7th Armoured Brigade and 102 Logistics Brigade. The air force component was about 100 fixed-wing aircraft and 27 helicopters.

The air component and special forces operated throughout the theatre. UK land forces were deployed on operations in the south-east of the country, mainly in the securing of Basra. There were some indications that this represented a change in plan from earlier proposals that would have had some of

³⁹ USCENTAF report, 30 April 2003, p. 3.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

⁴¹ Comments received by the author from journalists in Qatar during the conflict.

⁴² The British Ministry of Defence claims a total of 45,000 personnel involved. US sources log a contribution of 40,906. The difference is explained by support personnel not in theatre.

⁴³ *The Strategic Defence Review*, Cm 3999 (London: Stationery Office, July 1998), para. 89, specifies the maximum scale as of the same order as the 1991 Gulf War operation (an armoured division, 26 major warships and 80 combat aircraft). It assumes no other commitments apart from Northern Ireland at the same time. In fact, this operation coincided with a requirement for 19,000 service personnel to be available to meet the demands of a strike by firemen in the UK.

⁴⁴ Hansard, Commons, 20 March 2003, col. 1088.

them moving further north with US forces. This may reflect the greater resistance experienced in the opening stages of the ground operations. Despite early concerns about the availability of particular items of equipment, UK operations were conducted without major equipment problems. The experience of Northern Ireland and the Balkans helped in handling the securing of urban areas.

Technology

While much was made of the possible introduction by US forces of new technologies to help win this war, in the event there were few surprises. What have changed in the past few years are the availability, cost and scale of precision attack capability. While the 1991 Gulf War had seen some use of precision attack, over three-quarters of munitions dispensed were unguided 'dumb bombs'. Moreover, most precision attacks in the past had required laser designation, either from the air or from the ground. This made them vulnerable to poor visibility conditions and incorrect release or designation errors. The advent of cheap precision guidance from GPS satellites for all the large stocks of dumb bombs changed the nature of this operation. The Joint Direct Attack Munitions (JDAM) added a cost of just \$18,000 per bomb.⁴⁵ By comparison, the cost of Tomahawk cruise missiles approaches \$1 million per shot. Some 6,542 JDAMs were used by US forces, compared with 802 TLAM cruise missiles.⁴⁶ The intensity of such attacks meant that stocks of both missiles and bomb kits were in urgent need of replenishment by the end of the war.

Detailed analysis of improvements in the field of network-centric capabilities will have to await the official post-conflict reports. However, it was the first time that an uninhabited air vehicle, Global Hawk, has been used in the strike coordination and reconnaissance role. Network-centric capabilities integrate all aspects of warfare, and reduce the time between tasking and offensive action.⁴⁷ The evidence so far suggests that there is still much to be done in this field. Attacks on even the most important strategic targets, involving the Iraqi leadership, appear to have suffered lag times measured in hours rather than minutes, and the allocation of time sensitive targets was, as noted above, very low.

Casualties

The question of the expected scale of casualties was particularly politically sensitive for this operation. Particularly in view of both international disagreements over the early use of military force and domestic concerns in all the coalition states, there was a wish to minimize Iraqi civilian casualties as well as those to coalition forces. The exact numbers of deaths and injuries will take time to collate. However, the early tallies suggest that the coalition forces took very light casualties from enemy action, but suffered relatively badly from accidents and friendly fire incidents. Of 34 UK deaths in theatre, only 10 appear to be the result of direct enemy action.⁴⁸ For the US, by mid-April the figures had risen to 123 deaths.⁴⁹ It appears that 95 of these were due to direct enemy action.⁵⁰ Civilian Iraqi deaths from military action have been reported as between 5,425 and 7,041.⁵¹ These figures, even if accurate, can be expected to rise as deaths from unexploded munitions take their toll in the months ahead. No reliable estimate of Iraqi military casualties is available, and there appears to be no concerted effort to collate data.

The level of coalition deaths from all causes at around 160 represents a remarkably low attrition rate for a major land and air campaign. Twenty aircraft were lost, but only seven of those losses were the result of enemy action.⁵² There are questions to be answered about the number of friendly fire incidents both in the air and on the ground, and these will require full investigation. Similar levels of unnecessary casualties from accidents and misidentifications were experienced in the 1991 Gulf War, and it had been expected that remedial action would have been implemented. The relatively short duration of the

⁴⁵ Arnaud de Borchgrave, 'War by remote control', Washington Times, 28 April 2003.

⁴⁶ USCENTAF report, 30 April 2003, p. 11.

⁴⁷ The British government's view on the importance to future operations is outlined in *The SDR: a new chapter*, Cm 5566, vol. 1 (London: Stationery Office, July 2002), p. 15.

⁴⁸ Figures extracted from MOD website casualty list at <http://www.operations.mod.uk/telic/casualties.htm>.

⁴⁹ 'List of casualties in war in Iraq', Boston Globe, 14 April 2003.

⁵⁰ These figures have been collated from individual casualty reports and are not official.

⁵¹ <http://www.iraqbodycount.org> as at 28 May 2003. Official coalition spokesmen put the figure at under 3,000.

⁵² USCENTAF report, 30 April 2003, p. 3.

campaign prevented the Iraqi deaths, both civilian and military, from becoming a major political issue. The precision air strikes were targeted on points where civilian casualties would be minimized.

Weapons of mass destruction

The declared cause of the war had been the lack of transparency which the Iraqi regime had shown over WMD programmes. It might have been expected that finding these weapons would have been a priority for the coalition war plans. However, there has been little evidence that they were uppermost in the concept of operations. British Defence Secretary Geoff Hoon claimed that the most important campaign objective was to deny Iraq use of its WMD. In order to do this, 'our efforts have centred on disabling the command and control facilities through which the Iraqi regime would order the use of such weapons.'⁵³ This was the same strategy as required to win the ground war. While there were a number of false alarms concerning the putative discovery of chemical weapons, no finds were made during the period of the campaign. There were also some concerns about the possible use of chemical weapons against coalition troops or Iraqi civilians. Again, none of these fears were realized. The proportion of air targets categorized as designed to suppress Iraqi WMD delivery systems and infrastructure was 10.7 per cent of the total approved targets.⁵⁴

The coalition forces had to be prepared for operations in chemical conditions. While the protective clothing that they had would have provided adequate defence, wearing it in combat increases fatigue, particularly in hot temperatures. It is not yet clear what policy was adopted for the wearing of full protective clothing, with respirators immediately ready for donning. Media reports indicated that readiness varied over both time and location. In this respect intelligence was of key importance, and there will be lessons to be learned for the future.

Lessons to be learned, questions to be asked

Every military exercise and every operation is followed by reports on the lessons that were learned. The Iraq campaign of 2003 will be no exception, and it will take many months for the data to be collected, collated and distilled. This article cannot second-guess the outcome of the painstaking work that lies ahead for those tasked with writing the internal and external reports. However, even at this stage it is already possible to identify some of the questions that will need to be addressed. All military campaigns are different, and there are dangers inherent in extrapolating from one to another. One American leader writer has suggested that 'A searching and independent assessment will be needed to determine whether the defeat of the Iraqi military was a landmark in warfare or simply a lopsided fight.'⁵⁵ Nevertheless, some experiences even in this short war may help shape future thinking on warfare. The following ten questions are formulated to help focus attention on key lessons which should emerge from this war.

Question 1: Has the nature of warfare changed?

At the strategic level, planners will wish to use this short war as evidence for changes in the nature of modern warfare. The case for network-centric capabilities may be supported by rapid reaction times achieved against key target sets. However, there will need to be evidence to show how the integrated battlefield worked across the range of very different operational problems. In particular, the lead times implicit in the current air tasking order system will need to be reviewed.

Question 2: Does technology replace troops?

The strategic approach to this war was characterized by a reliance on lighter, more flexible troop deployments on the ground than in the past. The analysis will need to look at the risks implicit in extended lines of communication with thinly spread defences. The ability to keep the enemy disorientated is a great advantage of rapidly moving forces, but could a more disciplined enemy take advantage of new vulnerabilities?

⁵³ Hansard, Commons, 26 March 2003, col. 292.

⁵⁴ USCENTAF report, 30 April 2003, p. 5.

⁵⁵ 'Triumph on the battlefield', International Herald Tribune, 17 April 2003.

Question 3: Can air power now eliminate the power of armies to defend?

It is likely that the detailed analysis of the air operations will show that they proved effective in cutting the links between the command and control nodes and the defending forces. The analysis will need to examine how much of this was possible because of the unique circumstances in Iraq, and whether this technique will be more generally applicable. Iraq had been under constant surveillance for over a decade, and was constrained in the modernization of its capabilities by sanctions.

Question 4: Do logistics still constrain rates of advance?

The logistics lessons are often the most important, but can then be forgotten in preparations for future operations. The new mobile form of warfare made the logistics more complex, and there will be much to be learned from the reports in this area.

Question 5: Are special forces assuming greater importance for future warfare?

Although reports remain sketchy, special operations appear to have had a more important role in this campaign than in the past. Future investment in special forces and elite units will need to be reviewed objectively. The balance between such forces and traditional formed units is difficult to judge. If special forces are to remain 'special', it is likely that their numbers will have to remain limited. It may be that there can be a transfer of techniques to more traditional ground forces.

Question 6: Is the platform/weapons balance of investment right?

All post-conflict reports seek to confirm or adjust future equipment procurement decisions. This process carries with it the danger of preparing to fight the last war rather than the next one. The effectiveness of all weapons systems used will need to be assessed and measured against their opportunity costs. It may be that older systems, like main battle tanks, will have found a new lease of life. Certainly, the cost-effectiveness of new-generation precision air-delivered weapons will be a major investment issue. Once a clear assessment of weapon effectiveness has been made, it may point towards the possibility of using smaller bombs with precision guidance, which would allow more targets to be attacked on each mission.

Question 7: Did the coalition get its media strategy right?

Governments and the military are arguably the least well placed to make objective judgements about the success or otherwise of media strategy. Nevertheless, this is an increasingly important aspect of modern operations. The precedent for 'embedded' journalists giving real time operational reports means that headquarters staff will need to respond more quickly to media demands.

Question 8: How accurate was intelligence?

From the prewar intelligence reports about WMD to the reactions of the Iraqi civilian population in the early stages, there appear to have been some intelligence difficulties. Learning lessons in this area will require a careful look to be taken at the strategic and tactical intelligence provided. For the new form of warfare to work, intelligence needs to be timely and accurate. The lessons of this campaign should help to determine future organization and equipment procurement.

Question 9: How important are allies?

Despite the apparently large political coalition of nations supporting the Iraq operation, useful military allies were in short supply. Lessons for the future will need to be learned in terms of how to operate without such support. Lack of overflying rights may have implications for future equipment procurement.

Question 10: What are the combat implications of the need to rebuild a nation after a conflict?

There is a tendency to examine military lessons as they apply to the combat phase. It is already clear that the post-conflict work is just as important as the fighting. Any lessons from this campaign will need to address both aspects. While smaller troop numbers may be right for manoeuvre warfare, they may be insufficient for securing the peace at the end of hostilities. Targeting policy will be affected by the desired end-state from which to begin rapid rebuilding of essential services. This war may be the time to extend the military doctrine from fighting to rebuilding the nation, and determining the optimum approach.