

Also in this Issue

The Institutional Regression of
the Palestinian Authority

Anat Kurz



Europe vs. Terror
Too Little, Too Late

Uzi Eilam



Egypt's Nuclear Dilemma

Emily B. Landau



The IAEA Additional Protocol:
Improving the International
Safeguards Regime

Ephraim Asculai

The Strike against Iraq: A Military Overview

Shlomo Brom

Iraq's Military Forces

Following the 1980-1988 Iraq-Iran War, the Iraqi military was the largest in the Middle East and the strongest in the Gulf. However, during the 1991 Gulf War, it lost nearly half of its inventory. In the more than 10 years since the war, it has continued to weaken due to the following factors:

- The sanctions imposed on Iraq have prevented a refurbishment of its military forces, comprised primarily of weapons systems that date from before the Gulf War. These limitations have also impeded Iraq from conducting training exercises important for the preservation of combat effectiveness.
- The Iraqi military continued to be engaged in limited combat over the intervening years. It suffered many U.S. and British aerial attacks through Operations Southern Watch and Northern Watch, and

was also sporadically engaged in military activity against Kurdish and Shiite groups. These engagements led to a further attrition of weapons systems, and ground air defense systems in particular were eroded due to frequent aerial strikes.

- The UN inspection teams, UNSCOM and the IAEA Action Team, destroyed a large portion of the surface-to-surface missiles and missile launchers, as well as much of Iraq's chemical and biological weaponry. The development and production capability of non-conventional weapons was also impaired.

Although the UN sanctions in effect since 1991 forbid supplying any military equipment to Iraq, Iraq has been able to forestall a total collapse of its military capability by illegal smuggling, using revenues gained

The Strike against Iraq: A Military Overview – cont.

from the illegal export of oil, outside of the “oil-for-food program” sanctioned by the UN. The arms smuggling, while not channeling a supply of new main weapons systems to Iraq, does furnish the military with spare parts, raw materials, and machinery essential for continued military industry in Iraq. This industry manufactures primarily ammunition and is incapable of producing major weapons systems, unless key structural components are imported from the outside.

The Iraqi military force of 2002 is still quite large. The standing forces number approximately 430,000 troops, a number nearly doubled if the reserves are mobilized. Nonetheless, its weaponry is old, and it would be hard pressed to match modern armies.

The Iraqi army has 23 divisions and 2 special forces groups organized in 5 corps, but more than half of its order of battle – 13 divisions – is comprised of infantry divisions whose armament and mobility are severely limited. Most of these divisions that belong to the regular army virtually dissolved upon first contact with the coalition forces in the 1991 Gulf War, and only the two infantry divisions of the Republican Guards showed some fighting capability. The condition of these forces has only worsened since then, as the Iraqi General Staff has opted to channel weapons to more elite units. These infantry divisions are also largely made up of soldiers from various ethnic groups whose loyalty to the regime is questionable, for

examples, the Shiites of southern Iraq.

The more powerful component of the Iraqi order of battle includes 6 armored divisions and 4 mechanized divisions; of these, 6 divisions belong to the standing army and 4 divisions to the Republican Guards. The latter are better equipped and are more loyal to the regime. Nevertheless, the armored and mechanized divisions are relatively weak, since during the Gulf War there was a large loss of

There is no
real cause for
concern that Saddam
will respond to an attack
on Iraq with a ground
assault on the
neighboring countries.

armored combat vehicles, and the divisions are now equipped with only slightly more than 50 percent of the armored combat vehicles that are in a standard division.

In all, the Iraqi army possesses about 2000 tanks, of which about 800 are the T-72 or its equivalent. These tanks were developed in the 1970s and they are increasingly outdated. The remaining tanks are even older Soviet or Chinese models – largely obsolete for modern warfare. The army has about 2000 additional armored vehicles of various types, and approximately 2000 artillery pieces, of which only 150 are self-

propelled. For the purpose of comparison, consider that even a small Middle Eastern country such as Jordan has approximately 1000 tanks, 1500 additional armored vehicles, and 800 artillery pieces, mostly self-propelled.

The Iraqi air force is in even more difficult straits, having lost most of its force in 1991. Many of the planes were destroyed in the air or on land, while more than 100 planes were diverted to Iran and confiscated. The Iraqi air force now has approximately 200 fighter planes in active service but with low serviceability levels. Of this inventory, only about 20 are advanced planes that have any ability to confront most of the planes possessed by the United States or Israel. The rest are old planes from the 1970s or even before.

The Iraqis possess about 350 helicopters, of which 100 are armed helicopters. Their serviceability level is not known, but it is safe to assume that it is low, since helicopter maintenance is more difficult than that of winged aircraft and is particularly problematic when there are difficulties in obtaining spare parts.

The Iraqi ground air defense inventory consists of some 60 surface-to-air missile batteries of the SA-2 and SA-3 models (whose mobility is limited) and 10 mobile surface-to-air missile batteries of the SA-6 and SA-8 models. In addition, they possess lighter surface-to-air missiles of various Western and Eastern models, and approximately 2000 anti-aircraft guns. This is indeed a substantial

order of battle, yet largely outdated and worn thin due to more than 10 years of air bombardments carried out by the U.S. and Britain – and during which Iraq registered no achievements, failing to shoot down even one enemy aircraft.

The air force and ground air defense system have a C³I system whose communication components have, with Chinese assistance, been improved, but which is based on radar systems that are severely eroded because of U.S. and British strikes during the Gulf War and thereafter.

The Iraqi navy was wiped out in the Gulf War and for all practical purposes it no longer exists.

From this survey the following conclusions emerge:

- The Iraqi army lacks any real offensive capabilities, even towards smaller countries such as Jordan. In the absence of external interference, it is capable of confronting the militias of the Kurds and the Shiites, and the armed forces of a diminutive country like Kuwait, but not more than that. There is no real cause for concern that Saddam will respond to an attack on Iraq with a ground assault on the neighboring countries or that he poses a real threat to them, even if the U.S. attack is not preceded by a large concentration of U.S. ground forces in the region. The only qualification to this is that Kuwait and the Kurds are likely to require some ground reinforcements by U.S. ground forces.
- In a war against Iraq, U.S. forces

will enjoy total air supremacy from the outset. This translates into unrestricted activity in Iraqi skies and the capacity to strike any priority target.

- In a war against Iraq, U.S. forces will also enjoy total naval supremacy. This translates into an ability to assemble a naval force of any size in the Persian Gulf not far from Iraq, and from there to

The air and naval superiority enjoyed by the United States affords it optimal intelligence gathering potential without any Iraqi capability of interference.

operate aircraft carriers without difficulty. It also affords some compensation for the difficulty in finding ground bases close to Iraq.

U.S. Military Challenges

From the Gulf War and through the fighting in the Balkans and Afghanistan, American forces demonstrated a new form of waging war, consisting of a preparatory albeit relatively extended stage of massive strikes with Precision Guided Munitions (PGMs) launched from aircraft and naval vessels to paralyze the command and control system, destroy the logistics infrastructure, and wipe out enemy forces. Only later

were ground troops deployed, able to attain their operational objectives with relative ease against the enemy's wasted formations. A central question is how will Iraq's military forces, who in their present state are already unfit to fight in simpler, more classic forms of warfare, struggle with a scenario of this nature.

To manage a war of this sort successfully, the United States requires the ability to attain information superiority, that is, to obtain excellent intelligence in real time regarding the enemy and to strip the enemy of any ability to gather information. The air and naval superiority enjoyed by the United States, combined with its assets in neighboring states, affords it optimal intelligence gathering potential without any Iraqi capability of interference, and prevents Iraqi intelligence gathering as well. The only recourse open to the Iraqis is passive deceit and concealment activities – planting decoys, dispersing their forces, and hiding them under the cover of the terrain's physical features. However, unlike in Kosovo, where the Serbs scored some measure of success using these tactics, the terrain in Iraq lends itself less to deception, and scattered troops become more vulnerable to a ground attack. In addition, Iraq is less able than the Serbs to interfere with the information gathering measures of the United States.

The second offensive capability required is the ability to strike selected enemy targets using a large quantity of PGMs. The absolute air and naval

supremacy of the United States will deny Iraq any wherewithal to obstruct this capability, and the U.S. indeed has the ability to launch a much larger number of PGMs than it did during the Gulf War.

Critical to the U.S. is the logistical means to transport the required forces to the area and to guarantee them adequate supplies, and therefore the U.S. has been engaged in building a logistical infrastructure in the area. Iraq's limited offensive capability has fostered a situation whereby the U.S. logistical system enjoys free operating capacity to transport forces and supplies, and there is no reason to fear Iraqi interference.

An additional essential component is a C³I system that operates unhindered. The Iraqis do not have the ability to obstruct the American C³I system based on ground components in neighboring countries (such as Bahrain) and airborne control systems.

In the end, however, a foothold on the ground is also necessary – ground forces to quash what remains of Iraqi ground troops and to capture the area. Given the state of the Iraqi military, it is clear that this time it will be possible to accomplish these objectives with significantly smaller forces than those deployed in the Gulf War. These forces are likely to be reinforced by the Kurds as well as by regiments less loyal to Saddam, who might be encouraged to shift allegiance.

This analysis indicates that in the first stage of the war, Iraqi forces will likely be viewed primarily as targets. Their capacity to strike the attacking

U.S. planes or ships is even lower than the minimal resistance they demonstrated in 1991. Passive defense tactics of dispersal, concealment, and placement of decoys may impact on the length of time it takes the U.S. forces to achieve their objectives, but will not prevent an ultimate victory. Furthermore, unlike the setting in Afghanistan that was “target-poor,” the Iraqi environment affords

**Iraq's WMD
capability is much
diminished compared to
its potential during the
1991 Gulf War.**

numerous important targets. One ramification is that sufficient time is required to attack all these targets. A second consequence is that it is easier to achieve a significant effect using PGMs when the adversary's power encompasses many rich targets that are easily struck.

During the ground phase of the operation, a concentration of Iraqi forces assembled to repel the armies of the United States and its allies will become a particularly vulnerable target for American PGMs. Iraqi forces that enter the war in a position of weakness and are already struck in the initial phase of the operation will not be able to withstand prolonged

direct combat. Instead, they may attempt to steer clear of combat conditions that are favorable to the U.S. and deploy in urban areas in the hope that in such an environment U.S. forces will find it more difficult to exploit their advantages. In turn, such a development could lead to two different consequences: One is that Iraq's military forces will collapse quickly in the wake of the fall of Saddam's security network. The other is that strong pockets of resistance will remain within the armed forces – especially the Republican Guard divisions – and will fight stubbornly among populated areas. Even the latter case, however, will fall far short of an Iraqi “Stalingrad.”

Ballistic Missiles and Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD)

Most Western intelligence estimates that although the UN inspection teams were somewhat effective during the first years following the 1991 Gulf War and destroyed numerous components of Iraq's WMD projects, the Iraqis successfully covered up some of their assets and capabilities. Most probably, Iraq has concealed 5-10 surface-to-surface missile launchers, up to 30 missiles with a 650 km range, and some chemical and biological warheads for these missiles as well. It is also possible that the Iraqis possess a small number of chemical, biological, and radiological bombs that can be dropped from aircraft.

Iraq's WMD capability is much diminished compared to its potential

during the 1991 Gulf War: the inventory of missiles and launchers is smaller, and the air force is much weaker. The latter can probably be prevented from dropping ordinance from the air altogether. On the other hand, some of the missiles launched may reach their targets in Israel and in the Gulf States where U.S. forces will be deployed – or at least the vicinity of these targets – despite the large improvement in Israel's anti-missile defense system and the more limited improvement in the U.S. anti-missile capability.

The Israeli population is well equipped with chemical and biological protective gear, but in the Gulf States the civilian population is completely exposed with no means of

passive protection, and a small number of missiles there might cause a considerable number of casualties. However, the military forces of all the parties involved are well equipped

The inferior condition of Iraq's military forces enables an effective attack with PGMs, bolstered by fewer ground troops than the number employed during the Gulf War.

with protective gear and trained to operate in chemical and biological warfare environments, although usually under such conditions the tempo of operations slows down. This is a consideration for the U.S. when it selects the timing for the Iraqi campaign. Infantry troops can operate

better with protective suits when it is cooler; therefore, the United States might well prefer to fight Iraq during the winter.

Conclusion

The inferior condition of Iraq's military forces enables an effective attack with PGMs, bolstered by fewer ground troops than the number employed during the Gulf War. The principal operational

challenge is to neutralize Iraq's capacity to deploy surface-to-surface missiles and weapons of mass destruction. While this capacity is also limited, the damage that Iraq can cause through the use of these weapons is considerable.

The Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies
expresses its deep gratitude to

Marcia Riklis (New York)

for the support she provided to the Center's Outreach Program,
in the framework of which *Strategic Assessment* is published.