



Modern images of propaganda

# Iraqi military a hollow threat

NOTE: THIS WAS ORIGINALLY WRITTEN BEFORE THE BEGINNING OF THE ALLIED GROUND OFFENSIVE BUT WAS MODIFIED ON MON. FEB. 25 IN ORDER TO BE MORE RELEVANT. THUS ANY SPECULATIONS FOUND WITHIN WERE MADE BEFOREHAND WITHOUT THE KNOWLEDGE THAT HAS NATURALLY COME WITH THE BEGINNING OF THE GROUND OFFENSIVE.

by Chris Honke

I am tired of hearing about the threat posed by Hussein's "million man army." For the most part, the only danger posed by Iraq's second-rate army is in the imaginations of journalists who have little or no conception of such military affairs.

True, the Iraqi army has extensive combat experience from having recently fought Iran, but the Iranian army is even worse off: ill-trained, ill-equipped and ill-led. This time, the Iraqi army is up against the United States armed forces — unsurpassed in training, equipment and leadership.

Compared to Hussein's million or so soldiers, the allied forces have mustered some 600,000. But these numbers by themselves by no means tell the whole story. For example, Hussein must station substantial forces to the north and east Iraqi borders to safeguard against possible Turkish or Iranian involvement.

Much more significantly, well over half of Hussein's "million men" are politically-unreliable draftees, many of them undoubtedly do not want to be involved in fighting what Iraqi propaganda has taught them to fear most: the American "infidels." In the absence of a ground offensive, deprived of food and medicine by the allied air campaign, over 1500 Iraqi soldiers had already defected. The allied command has believed, with good reason, that tens-of-thousands more would throw down their arms when the Allied Ground Forces moved north. (By Feb. 25, the Allies have claimed nearly 20,000 Iraqi prisoners taken.)

The fact that Hussein has placed these "second category" troops up front in Kuwait is a clear indication that he considers them expendable. By contrast, all US troops (composing the vast majority of allied forces in the Gulf) are highly motivated volunteers. How many US service people (or Canadian, British and French) have deserted or will desert? Categorically, I say none.

But Hussein does possess a hardened and politically-reliable force which he is holding in Southern Iraq as a reserve counter-attack force: the much-vaunted Republican Guards. Only these dedicated forces pose a serious challenge to allied advances but, as we will soon see, even this threat will prove largely illusory. It was

no accident that the Guards were positioned behind the draftees; they were there to "police" the forward areas in Kuwait, shooting deserters who failed to make the perilous run to allied lines.

Altogether, allied forces have no more than 300,000 troops on the ground, with another 300,000 in support positions (e.g., airforce, naval, logistical and medical personnel). Allied forces on the ground are probably outnumbered by about 2-to-1. But Iran always outnumbered Iraq in manpower during their war, sometimes by as much as 5-to-1, and Iraq was able to hold its ground using relatively superior technology and tactics.

Same situation now, except the roles are reversed. American equipment and train-

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ing is unquestionable superior in most areas to that of Iraq. For example, the American M1 Abrams tank, of which 2000 are deployed, outclasses any armor the Iraqis possess.

Another key element, which in fact was missing from the Iraqi equations during its war with Iran, is the overwhelmingly (primarily American) air power. The Iraqi Air Force, relatively ill-trained and unmotivated to fight air battles they cannot possibly win, has been largely decimated or chased into Iran. The Allied Air Force now has unquestioned air supremacy of the airspace over both Iraq and occupied Kuwait.

With such strategic targets as rail and road junctions, fuel and munition stores, major air surveillance and command/control facilities either retarded or destroyed, the Iraqi army has been substantially reduced in its ability to wage an effective prolonged resistance. More recently, allied air forces have been concentrating more upon forward Iraqi military formations themselves, further degrading and demoralizing them.

Much has been said and written about the high casualty figures that allied forces would suffer when they attacked the Iraqi fortifications in southern Kuwait. This is both unfounded and militarily naive. Allied forces are designed and trained to

employ a combination of mobility and firepower. Allied generals clearly understand that the Iraqi fortifications are among Hussein's strong point; they will attack hardest where he is weakest. To take advantage of Iraq's severe lack of night-fighting equipment and training, the allies will attack at night and already have.

Multiple narrow areas of the fortifications will be (and have been) saturation bombed and cleared of mines. At a few of these pre-selected areas, hard hitting armored columns, supported by tactical aircraft, will be (and have been) injected to strike in behind these static Iraqi fortifications, surrounding and isolating them from the support of the Republican Guards and other reinforcements or resupply.

Huge armored flanking columns (as it turns out, the US 7th Armored Corps) will sweep around the western Kuwait border in a vast flanking maneuver to link up with penetrating armor and move north to contest the Iraqi counterattacks by the Guards. Marine amphibious units will strike on the eastern Kuwaiti coast. Air-

Republican Guards which represent Hussein's only change of possibly maintaining the internal cohesion of his "government," will probably be withdrawn to south-central Iraq and a truce with UN forces will be sought.

What role will chemical or biological weapons play? Far less than the media naively forecasts. Biological weapons are utterly uncontrollable once delivered and would probably threaten the entire Middle East (along with Hussein's own troops). Not even Hussein is likely to risk the wrath of the Arab world which represents his only appreciable base of support.

Chemical weapons, whether delivered by missiles or artillery, are most effective against slow moving and static formations. But the battle will be (and is) an extremely fluid, quick moving, sharp and violent affair. Chemical weapons on the battlefield will be largely ineffective against the fast-moving, mechanized allied forces and would, in any case, be quickly dispersed in the desert winds. Initial chemical attacks may in fact be launched against rear echelon allied elements, such

as field hospitals and airfields but, as southern Kuwait is quickly overrun, most Iraqi artillery which is not destroyed or captured will be forced back out of their range.

Chemical attacks launched by longer-range Iraqi missiles will probably be intercepted and destroyed in the air by US Patriot missiles and other air defense systems. But Hussein will gain little, politically or militarily, by using either chemical or biological weapons and so I do not believe he will use them.

At the battle's beginning, Kuwaiti partisan units, led by US and other allied Special Forces elements, which were probably air-dropped in Kuwait last fall, will disrupt and harass Iraqi troop movements and resupply.

Count on upwards of 100,000 Iraqis to surrender in a battle that should take no longer than 15-20 days to liberate Kuwait. Allied forces will do their utmost to minimize casualties by shortening and successfully concluding the battle as soon as possible. But much depends on how desperately Hussein wants to hold onto sovereign Kuwait.

Despite the "play by play" aspect to the conflict, the allies are deadly serious. The sooner Hussein acquiesces to the inevitable, the fewer people need die on both sides.

By this time, what remains of the