

Drawing the Enemy to Baghdad

Author: Maj.
Gen.

Saddam Hussein is seeking to pull American and British forces into guerrilla warfare and street-to-street fighting.

Saddam Hussein has built his entire military strategy around one goal: to stay in power. All Iraq's revenue and all its institutions, military and civilian, are directed toward that purpose.

In this war for survival, Saddam's strategy is quite unique. Conventional military strategy is to defend ground, but Saddam's plan is to leave the North and the South of his country in order to defend himself in Baghdad.

By establishing the pockets of resistance we have seen in the South, Saddam is trying to wear down American and British forces so they arrive weakened at Baghdad.

I believe the allies will succeed in getting rid of Saddam if their strategy is continuous bombardment of Baghdad. But it will be a catastrophe if they try to enter Baghdad by force. The 1991 uprising destroyed approximately 10 per cent of the infrastructure of the South. Imagine what the destruction to Baghdad would be in 2003.

In this first phase of the war, the push across southern Iraq, American and British forces are hoping that ordinary Iraqis will rise up against the regime as they did in 1991 after Saddam was defeated in Kuwait. But I am advising against this - as is Dawa, the strongest of the Shia opposition groups.

In 1991 we rose up because we thought Saddam's regime had collapsed. The Americans had promised they would help us, but they didn't. When Saddam sent armoured cars to crush the people, American planes were flying above. They watched as our people were killed.

The Iraqi people no longer trust the Americans.

In the South today, the regular army is putting up almost no resistance. But pockets of Republican Guards are fighting - reinforced, according to our sources, by the Fedayeen, elite commandos under the command of Saddam's oldest son Odey.

As they advance towards Baghdad, American and British forces will encounter other special units - most significantly, in the South and West, a section of the Republican Guards named al-Fath al-Mubeen, or Certain Victory, and in the East, the Mujahadeen Khalq, the Iranian dissidents who helped put down the 1991 uprising in southern Iraq. Our information is that the Mujahadeen Khalq have been told their duty in 2003 is to defend Saddam on Baghdad's eastern flank, east of the Tigris, by killing anyone who rises up there.

Iraq's defences are structured so that Ba'ath party militiamen and the Jerusalem Army, a popular militia of more than a million men, support the regular army in the cities. The regular army supports the elite Republican Guards, and the Republican Guards support the Special Republican Guards who protect Saddam around Baghdad.

British and American troops cannot enter Baghdad. It would be a crime. Their strategy must be to bombard Baghdad continuously until Saddam is killed or the regime collapses.

This strategy can succeed. If the Americans surround Baghdad, Iraqis may rise against the regime. But they will not move before that: this time they are demanding proof that America is serious, that it will not let them down as it did 12 years ago.

There are indications, to those who know the regime well, that it was significantly damaged by the first bombardments of Baghdad. We saw on television that the first communiqué read out by the Defense Minister, Sultan Ahmad Hashim, was hand-written on a scrappy piece of paper. This means there was, in that moment at least, no infrastructure.

Once Baghdad is surrounded, Saddam may ask for negotiations. If this is refused, I am afraid he will use weapons of mass destruction - perhaps including chemical weapons. Saddam has always warned that anyone trying to take Iraq from him would inherit an empty land. If weapons of mass destruction are used, America will respond as it sees fit - and the Iraqi people will be the victims.

If this is to be avoided, this war may boil down to two things - one bullet and one man. This war may yet end with Saddam being killed by an aide. No one in the armed forces, anywhere in Iraq, wants him. Not even the Republican Guard.

Maj. Gen. Abd al-Ameer Abaees is a former staff officer in the Iraqi army and a former Iraqi envoy to the Arab League. He led the popular uprising in the Diwaniya area of southern Iraq in 1991.

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