

Utopians' War Plan Goes Awry in Iraq

by Carl Osgood

"The base commander's plan of action must achieve adequate protection to ensure accomplishment of missions by base elements with as small a force as necessary, since any drain of time and personnel from operational activities will adversely affect the accomplishment of their mission." That sound advice comes from the U.S. Army's base defense manual of 1970, and is quoted in its current tactics manual, called FM 3-90. The utopian vision for a U.S. invasion of Iraq, however, envisioned a rapid advance north across the desert from Kuwait to strike quickly at the heart of the Ba'ath Party regime in Baghdad, take it out, and "liberate" Iraq. As a result, the initial invasion force that drove into Iraq on March 20, appears to have consisted only of about 35,000 troops, made up of the U.S. Army's 3rd Infantry Division, the 1st Marine Division, and the British 7th Armoured Brigade. While the 3rd Infantry Division was able to quickly drive to within 50 miles of Baghdad, it became apparent that it did so at the risk of long, unprotected supply lines that were vulnerable to the guerrilla-style tactics adopted by various Iraqi stay-behind elements. This problem became apparent when, on March 23, an Army supply convoy was ambushed by irregulars, well behind the 3rd Division, suffering six soldiers killed and at least five taken prisoner. Since then, both the Army and the Marines have had to devote considerable resources to protecting their convoy routes, proving the truth of the above quotation.

The developments of the invasion's first two weeks led to much public criticism of Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld. A number of retired military officers accused him of charging into war without sufficient ground troops to actually occupy the country. Retired General Barry McCaffrey, who commanded the Army's 24th Mechanized Division in the 1991 Gulf War, told the *Washington Post* "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."

Plan Was Rotten Compromise

There is much evidence, including from reporters embedded with the troops in Iraq, that considerable rethinking of the battle plan is under way. Most obvious is the dispatching of the 4th Infantry Division from Fort Hood, Texas to Kuwait. The 4th was originally to be the lead element of a 37,000 troop task force, dubbed Task Force Iron Horse, that was to invade Iraq from Turkey. When the Turkish Parliament refused per-

mission for the 35 cargo ships carrying the 4th's equipment to unload, the ships headed towards Kuwait, instead, with the first expected to arrive on April 1. It will take two to three weeks before the soldiers of Task Force Iron Horse are ready for combat.

The plan now being hastily rewritten was the result of a compromise between Rumsfeld and the chicken-hawks, on the one side, and the military professionals on the other. From the time he took office, Rumsfeld has been the number one proponent of "military transformation," which, he apparently believed, was validated by the war in Afghanistan between October 2001 and March 2002. On more than one occasion, he pointed to the scene of U.S. special forces troops, on horseback, calling in satellite-guided bombs, dropped by 40-year-old B-52s, as proof of the concepts that he has been promoting.

In contrast, the professional military officers in the Army were calling for a very large ground force, of up to 250,000 troops, if, indeed, there was to be a war in Iraq. U.S. Central Command chief Gen. Tommy Franks was often named in news reports as the leading voice for such a large ground force. Army Chief of Staff Gen. Eric Shinseki told the Senate Armed Services Committee on Feb. 25, that "something on the order of several hundred thousand soldiers" would be required for an occupation of Iraq. Rumsfeld hit the roof, saying a couple of days later, "The fact of the matter is the answer to the question that was posed to him is not knowable. . . . However, I will say this; what is, I think, reasonably certain is the idea that it would take several hundred thousand U.S. forces . . . is far from the mark." Shinseki, however, stuck to his guns. In testifying to the House Armed Services Committee on March 12, Shinseki stood by the number he had given a couple of weeks earlier, and when he was asked whether the Army had the force structure to carry out such a commitment, he said, "I have been consistent about describing the Army as smaller than the mission profiles that it has carried. That continues to be true today."

The result of the battle between the utopian vision of the chicken-hawks, with emphasis on fast moving, light ground forces, special operations, and precision-strike air power, and the professional military officers, was the force that went into Iraq on March 20—light enough to get to within 50 miles of Baghdad within three days; heavy enough to dominate direct confrontations with Iraqi military formations; but stretched too thin, over a front of 250 miles, to secure its own rear area and its supply convoys.

No one knows, of course, how long Iraq will be able to hold out against the invasion of its territory, but the fierceness of Iraqi resistance, unexpected to some, has given rise to warnings from serving and retired military officers, including McCaffrey, that it could now drag on for months. With Rumsfeld and the chicken-hawks working to refashion nuclear weapons for battlefield employment, it is not to be excluded that the "logic" of the situation could result in the use of such weapons.