

SUMMARY

Iraq emerged from its war with Iran as a superpower in the Persian Gulf. This had not been its original intent; it did not deliberately use the war to transform its strategic position or to impose its domination over the region. Iraq achieved regional superpower status through a series of escalatory steps that were required to repel Iran's Islamic fundamentalist crusade. Iraqi leaders mobilized a diverse population, strengthened Iraq's armed forces, and transformed its society to take the offensive and terminate the war with Iran.

The major change wrought by Iraq was mobilization of a million man army from a population of only 16 million. Iraq's General Staff trained recruits in the complex techniques of modern warfare and equipped them with the most up-to-date weaponry. Thus, they were able—at the decisive battle of Karbala V—to administer a crushing defeat to Iran, which since has ceased to exist as a military power in the Persian Gulf.

This report explains how the Iraqi army achieved this feat. It traces its progress through various phases of its development, and details the strategic, operational and tactical skills demonstrated in Iraq's final campaigns.

At the same time, however, the report draws a somber lesson from the conflict—long wars, particularly those that are as bitterly fought as this, exact a high price on the winners as well as the defeated. Iraq discovered after the war that it was regarded as a threat to regional stability; other states feared its supererogatory power. Even states that formerly had aided its fight against Iran refused to offer much needed post-war assistance.

As a result, Iraq could not pay the enormous debts that it had incurred to wage the war. It could not maintain the million man army which had become a source of national pride. It

foresaw disaster looming, unless it found a way out of its predicament. In the end, Iraq seems to have viewed the invasion of Kuwait as a possible solution, an act that has brought it the opprobrium of practically the entire world.

Iraq's gamble may yet pay off, although we doubt this. It seems, at this writing, to have dug itself into an abyss. Even more troubling, however, is the fate that has befallen the strategically crucial Persian Gulf region. Once an essential island of stability, the Gulf has become a maelstrom of conflicting forces. It is problematical whether peace can be restored to this area. Although separate from the war, the present crisis in Kuwait is an outgrowth of it, and we discuss this relation in the Epilogue.

Additional points of interest about the war include:

Political/Strategic Lessons.

- Iraq fields a "people's" army. The regime initiated a total call-up of available manpower in 1986. The response was good. No draft riots occurred; young men—even college students—reported without incident. The fact that the public answered the call tells us that Iraqis support their government.
- In Iraq it is no disgrace to be infantry. College students are enrolled in elite infantry brigades. These so-called Republican Guard units are constantly singled out for praise by the President. More so than units of this type elsewhere, they are honored and rewarded.
- Iraq's General Staff is not political. It most closely resembles the Turkish model. It is not interested in mixing in politics, and will not do so as long as the army's honor is upheld. One of the major changes wrought by the war was the weakening of political control over the army. Political commissars are still attached to major units, but they cannot countermand military orders. At the same time, officers who fail—egregiously—can be

put to death, and this certainly is an inhibitor against taking independent action.

- The literacy rate of Iraqi soldiers is relatively high; among Arab states it is quite high. This is because before the war broke out the regime strove for 100 percent literacy. Eighty-five percent of the army belongs to the sect of Shiism. The Kurds—the country's principal minority—do not serve; they consistently have resisted the draft.
- The army is accustomed to being well taken care of with all the equipment and perks it desires. During the war, the oil sheiks subsidized this. Now that the funding is cut off, problems may arise. We do not know how the Iraqi army would perform under an austerity program.
- Iraq tends to put excessively large forces into battle, which makes for some uneven quality. For example, the regime persisted in using Ba'thist militiamen—the so-called Popular Army—long after it was shown that they were not reliable.
- The army has high institutional self-esteem. Morale is good after the victory over Iran. The average soldier sees himself as the inheritor of an ancient tradition of warfighting—the Iraqis primarily spread the might of Islam in the 7th century. Officers are well trained and confident, and, as long as Saddam does nothing to impair the dignity of the army, they will back him to the hilt.

Operational Lessons.

- Iraq is superb on the defense. Its army is well equipped and trained to carry out mobile defense operations.
- Its modus operandi is to establish a deep, integrated fortified zone augmented with large quantities of artillery. This is supported by highly mobile, armor

heavy reserves. The latter are moved rapidly over specially constructed roads to relieve frontline troops in emergencies. Using these tactics, the Iraqis held back massive invasions of Iranians—sometimes 100,000 strong—along a 730-mile front for 8 years.

- The Iraqis have limited experience in projecting power. For most of the war Saddam Husayn held his army in check, restricting it largely to a static defense. Only after 1986 did the President loosen up and switch to mobile defense, at which time he surrendered a large measure of operational control to his generals. As a consequence, the generals are more comfortable reacting to enemy moves than initiating their own action. The final campaign of the war demonstrated their ability to penetrate deeply and sustain their forces for about a week.
- Iraqis have a well-practiced combined arms capability that is very effective against light infantry. Operationally they prefer the defense and are good at it, using fortifications effectively.
- On the offense they prefer high force ratios and very heavy fire support and use drills, mock-ups and rehearsals effectively. Despite their preference for well-planned and orchestrated operations, however, they are not inflexible. They are excellent problem solvers and will come back and do it right, or make strategic adaptations as needed.
- They have practiced the integrated use of chemical weapons to good effect; they correctly recognize that such weapons have good tactical utility. Preferred chemical targets are artillery, logistics and command elements.
- The brigade is their basic combat formation with a single division controlling a variable number of brigades. They are capable of conducting a system of successive

forward passages of units giving the effect of a rolling offensive to keep up pressure with relays of fresh troops.

In Appendix E we offer some thoughts on how the Iraqi army might be attacked. This is not an attempt to formulate a specific attack plan, but rather to provide an outline of Iraqi vulnerabilities vis-a-vis a Western army.

Priority Tasks for an Attack.

- We see our first priority strategic military task as the elimination of the Iraqi missile force. Inaccurate though it may be, it serves as a potential check against "allied" offensive actions by posing a perceived threat against both Riyadh and Tel Aviv.
- The first priority operational task is to secure air supremacy. The Iraqis have never been confronted with an efficient air power which, in conjunction with other systems, offers the opportunity to checkmate any Iraqi offensive action. It also reduces the chemical and fuel-air explosive threats as an adjunct.
- The first priority tactical task is to eliminate Iraqi fire support. While this task serves to negate the effect of the massive Iraqi artillery establishment, it simultaneously eliminates the bulk of the chemical threat to "allied" forces.

While we do not deal explicitly with the "center of gravity" as part of this report, the issue has achieved such prominence that we opine that, especially in any totalitarian system, communication between the leadership and the subordinate echelons is the key to disruption of the centralized command structure. In a strategic sense this means that if the leader can be isolated, paralysis may set in. We feel this report supports a conclusion that the operational and tactical command and control network is the center of gravity.

We offer one final note of caution. Although we have thrice mentioned specific tasks for air power, we do not believe that air power alone will suffice to bring a war with Iraq to an early or decisive conclusion. In the final analysis, ground forces will be required to confront the Iraqi Army and either dig or drive it out of Kuwait. The priorities indicated above have the ultimate purpose of making the land campaign a viable option with minimum casualties.