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**Iraq War Note: Breaking the Hornet's Nest: The Battle for Baghdad**  
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It is still too early to discount serious clashes in Baghdad. However, as more details emerge about the fighting on Saturday, it seems likely that the Iraqi regime would have to substantially regroup to survive for more than a week even if the US and UK are slow to move into the city.

The fact that a US armored advance was able to kill some 2,000 and 3,000 Iraqi fighters and move some 25 miles through the southwestern part of the city on Saturday indicates that Iraqi forces are not well trained and organized for urban combat. US forces did move through a largely industrial section of Baghdad, rather than crowded residential areas, and did not stay long enough for Iraqi forces to fully react. Nevertheless, an armored force of what USCENTCOM says were more than three-dozen tanks and armored vehicles emerged relatively unscathed and U.S. casualties were light.

While full details are still unclear, the US advance is also said to have taken two task forces of the 3rd Infantry Division from the southern outskirts of the city past Baghdad University and near the banks of the Tigris River, then back to the western outskirts of the city to the airport. The wording of press reports is unclear. The university is at the tip of the peninsula on the eastern side of the city that juts out into the Tigris. It is not clear whether one task force actually crossed the Tigris from East to West. It is clear that one task force got very near to the New Presidential Palace Compound.

The nature of the opposing Iraqi force is also somewhat unclear. Reports talk about elements of the Republican Guard and irregular forces, but not the Special Republican Guard. It is clear that the Marines were also able to seize the Republican Guards Second Corps (South Corps) headquarters at Salman Pak. According to press reports, Marines of the 3rd Battalion, 7th Marines overran the headquarters of the Republican Guard's Second Corps some 20 miles southeast of Baghdad along the Tigris River.

This Corps Headquarters was the key facility the Republican guards used to support operations defending the southern and eastern parts of the city before the war. Regardless of whether it had a terrorist training camp, it also was long suspected to be a key area for any storage of chemical weapons that might be used in defense of the city. The fact that a relatively small element of the Marines could use an artillery barrage and air strikes by planes and helicopters, to drive into the complex using tanks and night vision systems is a tribute to the Marines but also a sign that the Republican Guards really have lost the ability to defend the southern part of the city and could not maintain any kind of organized perimeter defense.

A Marine battalion also overran one of Saddam Hussein's palaces south of the city, although there is no confirmation of reports on Saturday that they entered Rasheed Air Base, which is practically the major military facility in Baghdad per se.



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Moreover, the US has surprising freedom of action in the air, with little sign so far that pulling surface-to-air missiles back into the city has given Iraq any real capability to interfere with US strikes or urban close air support.

There are limits to the use of such air support, as the fighting in Basra and Karbala has shown. Some of the key fighting in Karbala had to revert to artillery because it was impossible to get a laser lock on buildings on a timely basis in a hostile environment, and because fighter aircraft could not pick up the laser spot in urban dust. Angles of attack were often too low even in a city with few high buildings because the buildings were too close together.

On the other hand, both laser guided and GPS guided 500-pound bombs have proved to be very effective against fixed targets in known buildings. There also are other air options.

Predator and Global Hawk (and tactical UAVs) can be used for visual reconnaissance, and can work at night. Improved ELINT platforms like Rivet Joint are now far more accurate in locating and characterizing radio emitters, and the processing of such data now approaches near real time. The J-8 JSTARS can also be used to locate any armor moving in relatively open areas or reinforcing from the north.

One expert on urban warfare notes that, "Urban CAS is useful to be sure (especially in the more open venues you've described), but you've correctly described the attack helicopters as more responsive and their weapons more directly applicable. Hellfire, for example, is line of sight weapon, so it can hit portions of buildings not accessible to aircraft. The Hellfire warhead is also 5 pounds -- generally smallest aircraft munition is 500 pounds -- so collateral damage is not as big a concern. Artillery is not terribly useful now (largely indiscriminate, and takes time); mortars are more responsive and have useful high angle of fire, but unless fires are observed, it too is indiscriminate."

It is important to remember that even a few days of pausing outside a city has sometimes given shattered defenders time to organize and dig-in. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry and 1 MEF forces have also been moving and fighting for two weeks under extremely tiring conditions and would normally need time to recover and rest -- being replaced by other units.

There is something of a dilemma in urban warfare -- a Hobson's choice between rapid action before the defense organizes and action that is too rapid. The facts are far from clear. However, it is possible that the British may have been too cautious in Basra and given the Iraqis time to organize during the critical initial hours of the invasion.

Air Marshal Brian Burridge, the commander of UK forces in the Gulf, feels the two-week delay before today's operation to take Basra was necessary to "shape the battle space" in the coalition's favor and to ensure that civilian casualties were minimized.

He told the BBC Radio 4 program, The World This Weekend, that, "We had to set the conditions, so that it would be appropriate for us to go into Basra in the way we have done today, without risking inordinately the lives of the population of Basra - knowing where the irregulars are,



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knowing where the militia are and being in a position to deal with them with as much precision as possible."

He confirmed reports that people who appeared to be part of the Baathist leadership within Basra had made efforts to contact the Coalition to negotiate the surrender of the city. But he indicated that the regime's representatives in the town appeared to have fled or hidden rather than handing themselves over to UK troops.

"We are constantly in contact with people whose position, shall we say, is ambiguous...Once they realized that for them there is no future - and we have to bear in mind these are not people driven by ideology, these people are driven by the fact that they have lived above the law and now they are going to be caught out - they had two choices. They either try to co-operate in some ambiguous way or they melt into the background, and I think we have seen rather more of the latter."

The US almost certainly failed to allocate the forces that might have probed deep into cities on arrival in each urban area, and then taken out much of the regime's centers of power in each city.

It may prove over time that the UK and US initially were too optimistic about popular support in the south, and then were over-cautious (or lacking in the properly trained specialists necessary to rapidly characterize and locate the pro-Saddam resistance and target their centers of power).

Very often, the fog of war is densest in urban environments where complex mixes of regular and irregular forces operate in a complex and uncertain political environment. The same expert on urban warfare notes that,

"The dash into Baghdad was effective, but if there will be more effective resistance, we need to avoid being too cocky. Grozny for example is illustrative of what happens when forces rush in without proper intelligence and planning. On the other hand, I worry that high level decision-makers may urge caution that costs us momentum and opportunities.

"Gen Myers' speech that we don't need to go into Baghdad is a case in point; even worse was Rumsfeld's use of the term 'siege.' If I was forward, I'd be screaming for Intel to tell me where the Regime leadership was held up -- if we can kill 'the head of the snake,' the rest may be moot."

The answer in Baghdad may be to split the difference. US forces have already said that they plan to conduct more raids to show Baghdad's defenders that they can enter at any time. A combination of raids and airpower may deny Iraq the ability to create any kind of cohesive "hornet's nest."

Moreover, as the US develops clear intelligence on regime activity, it does not have to occupy the city if it denies the regime any strong points or safe areas and seizes symbolic points inside the city that Saddam's regime simply does not have the forces to defend.



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The US can either divide the city and drive the Iraqi forces into areas where the regime can exercise only the most tenuous control over the country, or simply take out every visible individual center of regime power, denying the regime the ability to use radio and TV and putting US forces in areas they can secure like some of the open palace compounds and parks in the city center.

The US ability to move the marines up the eastern side of the city, drive 3rd Infantry Division forces up the Western side of the city and use some brigades to seal off the north at a time and place of US choosing may also allow the US to let people flee the city while denying it resupply and reinforcement.

If Reuters is correct, the 3rd brigade of the 3rd Infantry Division, also used a force of more than 50 tanks and around 70 Bradley fighting vehicles, as well as combat engineering forces, to take strategic points in the northwest of Baghdad on Sunday. These points were about four to five km (two to three miles) from the city outskirts. This would give the brigade control territory on and around both Highway 1 leading north out of Baghdad and Highway 10 leading west out of the city. It would shut the main road to Tikrit, and severely reduce Iraqi capability to reinforce the city while opening up yet another major line of roads into Baghdad.

Historically, modern cities have been extremely difficult to defend without at least one resupply corridor, although cities can sustain military operations for weeks out of the stored food and supplies found in virtually every modern city, and sieges like Leningrad show the some cities can hold out with very limited resupply.

If the regular forces and Republican Guard forces outside Baghdad are shattered, the US can also rush in reinforcements piecemeal in company to battalion size, without waiting for full brigades to form. Units like the 4th Infantry can reinforce US forces around Baghdad more quickly. Moreover, as the south and north are secure, the US can virtually saturate the controllable air space over Baghdad with "urban close air support."

The fact that, British armored units moved into downtown Basra on Sunday, and seem to have consolidated the defeat of many of the regular Iraqi army divisions in the south, could free up more forces. So could the fact that the battles in the urban areas along the 3rd Infantry Division supply lines along the Euphrates seem to have died down and the 1st Marine division has not reported similar battles along its line of supply.

In short, Sunday's fighting does not mean that there is no "hornet's nest" left in Baghdad. It does indicate that there may be far fewer hornets with any sting that many feared, and the US has both the tactical advantage and the ability to reinforce much more effectively with land and air forces than Iraq can infiltrate in reinforcements from the north.