

CSIS

**Center for Strategic and International Studies
1800 K Street N.W.
Washington, DC 20006
(202) 775-3270
Acordesman@aol.com**

**Introductory Remarks to
“Iraq’s Military Capabilities in 2002”**

**Anthony H. Cordesman
Arleigh A. Burke Chair in Strategy**

September 12, 2002

First, let me say thank you. This is a day with many news priorities and I appreciate your coming.

Let me also begin with a word of introduction. The publication we are announcing is a military analysis, not a set of policy recommendations. If you want my view of what we should do, I would reluctantly say we are being forced to act.

I would also say that there are six conditions we need to meet to be successful.

1. Make our case as solidly and broadly as possible. This book, IISS, UNSCOM is starts. US has, however, come late, done badly, and today's White Paper is not enough. Neither is the draft missile paper, or the Blair paper.
2. Reduce the tensions over the Second Intifada.
3. Prepare the Congress and the American people.
4. Fully support the US military in using decisive force, and be prepared to act quickly and decisively and not relay on hope and the opposition.
5. Have a clear national building and conflict termination plan.
6. Consult our allies and the UN as much as possible, show flexibility on inspection. Do not wait on consensus, but seek acceptance.

As for the Iraqi military threat, I would like to stress a point raised again and again in my book. This is not a strong or unified military or nation. An operation could prove to be relatively easy and blood free. It is not likely that Iraqi will be highly effective.

But, one does not go to war based on best or the most probable case if one can do so, and there are grave uncertainties about Iraq's weapons of mass destruction.

We should never be paralyzed by possibilities or intangibles, but we should consider them. The key issues involve are:

Uncertainties and Intangibles

Wars and battles are rarely decided by "tangible" factors, like manpower and equipment numbers, quantifiable aspects of sustainability, or other measures of effectiveness. One historical case after another, shows the real world outcome of war has been determined by "intangibles," where various experts differ sharply over the relative capability of each side.

Today, some experts find it very easy to assert that Iraq's major combat units will fight with loyalty and determination because of their privileges, dependence on the regime, and

nationalism. Others find it equally easy to assert that Iraqi forces they will rapidly collapse or defect because the regime is an unpopular tyranny.

In practice, Iraq's performance in past wars has shown that many aspects of its military behavior cannot be predicted until a war starts, and that these uncertainties interact with the uncertainties affecting any predictions about the military performance of Iraq's opponents.

The following "intangibles" and uncertainties regarding Iraqi warfighting capability affect any dynamic net assessment of Iraq:

- Real world popularity and unpopularity of the regime among the various elements of the armed forces and in areas of military operations. Loyalty may vary across different force elements, such as Republican Guards, Special Republican Guards, regular army with regular manning, and regular army with largely conscript manning.
- Real-world impact of repression and tyranny versus incentives, nationalism, and propaganda in determining popular support for the regime or active opposition. The impact of issues like ethnic divisions, UN sanctions and the oil for food program, and backlash from the Second Intifada.
- Willingness of various Kurdish factions to participate in a conflict or ride one out; loyalty of various Shi'ite elements versus uprisings and resistance.
- Efficacy of the regime's bribes and incentives in buying loyalty.
- Impact by combat element of more than 10 years without open access to world arms market, along with limited discretionary funding for force maintenance and modernization; and limitation on ability past ability to smuggle in parts, weapons, and munitions.
- Uncertain sustainability of current stock of munitions and spare parts.
- Quality of training, and leadership experience by unit and force element.
- Reliance on a rigid logistic system, emphasizing "flood forward" techniques to make up for a lack of response to the needs of commanders and the tactical situation, by moving supplies forward in large amounts, regardless of the immediate need.
- Progress in reducing the past rigidities and over-centralization of the command system, and its failure to allow for independence of action.
- Real-world ability to execute urban warfare and military operations in built up areas; also, the ability to shelter in populated areas, and use human shields, without popular uprisings or action. Impact of ethnic divisions, tribal loyalties, etc. in given areas.
- Level of improvement in air operations and in ability to conduct effective air-to-air and air-to-ground combat using dispersed forces capable of independent operations.

- Efficiency of dispersal techniques and human shields, plus decoys and deception, in limiting the efficacy of US intelligence and strategic reconnaissance (ISR), targeting, and air strike capabilities.
- Ability to make effective use of water barriers and earth barriers; ability to tie combat engineering to real world military tactics in the face of US airpower and helicopter mobility.
- Ability to effectively deploy and concentrate air defense assets for tactical purposes, versus exploit largely fixed SA-2/ SA-3, and SA-6 system.
- Short and medium-term wartime survivability of heavy surface-to-air missile defenses.
- Current status of joint warfare and combined arms expertise, and improvement in such expertise, if any.
- Cohesive maneuvering capability and ability to use helicopters to overcome water barriers and to reinforce.
- Since 1991, improvements in artillery tactics and methods to acquire long-range targeting capabilities and manage and switch fires.
- Planning and real-world capability to execute asymmetric warfare, covert warfare, and use terrorist proxies.
- Effectiveness of the security and paramilitary forces in the face of any serious popular opposition.
- Size and effectiveness of Iraqi opposition forces, if any.
- Size and effectiveness of current holdings of chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear (CBRN) weapons and missiles, and other delivery systems. Possible possession of a biological or nuclear weapon so lethal that it could inflict massive damage or casualties and make a major change in the level of deterrence or war fighting capability
- Existence of preplanned launch on warning (LOW), launch under attack (LUA), and retaliatory strike capability to deliver CBRN forces; deployment of covert and terrorist proxy capabilities.

It is easy to guess at -- or to assert -- some judgment about Iraqi capability in any of the above areas. It is certainly true that little about Iraqi military behavior since 1991 implies that Iraq will suddenly achieve dramatic degrees of surprise and innovation in military operations, however this can scarcely be ruled out, and the key issue in war fighting is often one of marginal or relative efficiency.

In a contingency, like a US-led invasion to overthrow Saddam, Iraq *may* have enough war fighting capability to require a very significant US and allied response. In many other contingencies, the weaknesses in Iraqi forces may not be critical relative to similar or different weaknesses in Iranian and other Gulf forces.

We also face a massive policy problem in terms of launching a preemptive war:

Many who oppose or question hitting at Iraq are calling for evidence of imminent danger. Talking to US intelligence and WMD experts, I think they share my view that this demand is impossible. Short of a major HUMINT breakthrough, we have no way to determine how lethal Iraqi biological weapons are or to deal with the possible use of infectious agents like smallpox. Iraq has no way of mass testing such weapons. It will not know the lethality of what it uses until it uses it. The same will be true of its level of improvement in VX chemical agents, and the IISS paper grossly understates the uncertainties involved in knowing whether Iraq has stolen fissile material or weapons (you can't disprove a negative) and in tracking any access to radiological weapons.

The case for preemption is ultimately "proximate" damage. It is more than two decades of Iraqi effort in WMD, eight years of UNSCOM discoveries that Iraqi proliferation continued, ongoing imports of technology, and the growing risks Iraq will make major advances over time. There is no magic deadline.

The problem is that Saddam is achieving a steadily more dangerous momentum and more threatening levels of uncertainty that will probably exist with and without UN inspection. To me, this is an important argument. To those calling for instant war, they have to puff the urgency of this threat. To those opposing action, it is an excuse to make impossible demands.

We will really only discover how dangerous Iraq really is once it uses its weapons and once again, it will be using delivery systems with little or minimal real world testing (which it did when it launched its first extended range Scuds on Iran and made its first use of nerve gas bombs and mustard gas sprayers. Both Iraq and its targets will learn about accuracy, reliability, etc. the hard way.

We don't know the Iraqi advances in warhead and bomb design since 1992, and weaponization methods can affect the real-world lethality of biological agents by several orders of magnitude, but the Iraq will large have to guess since it can run large tests. We don't know if they have dry, storage biological agents, new strains, better binary chemical bombs and warheads, etc. We do know that months and years give them the opportunity to create for more lethal weapons.

Another caution. The Iraqi defectors to date show little real understanding of weapons effects. They are scientists and engineers with little credible military understanding of the weaponization of the devices they worked on or weapons effects. The same is true of many US voices that focus on the worst-case effects of WMD for arms control or political purposes. They give point estimates and snap judgments, not ranges of uncertainty.

The IISS study, which I worked on, however, had the opposite problem of drawing on weapons inspectors who were trained to look for production capabilities but not possible new Iraqi innovations.

Our great dilemma here is that no one can know when Iraq will truly become a massive lethal threat. There is no predictable date, no time of "imminent danger," and no clear line in the sand.