

[mogadishu warning]

## Know Thy Enemy

The cakewalk brigade underestimates the peril of urban warfare.

By Michael C. Desch

HAWKS IN THE BUSH administration are confident that the Iraqi military will not fight, and some like Defense Policy Board Chairman Richard Perle even believe that elements of the Iraqi military will stage a *coup d'état* and oust Saddam for us. Such optimism leads the administration to believe that a U.S. ground force of only 80,000 to 150,000 troops—as part of a total U.S. deployment to the region of between 200,000 to 250,000 soldiers, sailors, marines, and airmen—will suffice.

While there can be little doubt that the United States will eventually win a war with Iraq, we need to understand that some Iraqi units are likely to fight, they have a strategy that can impose significant costs on us, and none is likely to do the job of ousting Saddam for us. Military operations in Iraq may require more forces than Pentagon planners think.

Despite the drubbing the Iraqi military took in the 1991 Gulf War and after a decade of sanctions, Iraq still fields a large military force comprising about 450,000 men deployed in 23 divisions. The 17 divisions of the regular Iraqi army, however, are under-manned, ill-equipped, and populated by conscript soldiers of questionable loyalty to Saddam's regime. They did not fight well in the Iran-Iraq War and hardly fought at all in the Gulf War.

The real core of Saddam's fighting power resides in the six divisions of his Republican Guard and the four brigades

of his Special Republican Guard, which total about 75,000 men combined. The Republican Guard is made up of highly-motivated and well-paid volunteers, who are reasonably well-armed and adequately trained. The Special Republican Guard is Saddam's praetorian guard composed of the most loyal Iraqis from the area around Saddam's home village of Takrit, commanded by very well-remunerated officers, some of whom are even related to him by marriage.

During the Iran-Iraq War, the regular Iraqi army did not distinguish itself on the battlefield. It was Republican Guard units that turned the tide against Iran in 1987-88 in battles at al-Basra, al-Faw, Fish Lake, and the Majnuh Islands. In the Gulf War, Republican Guard units withstood nearly 40 days of pounding from the air by coalition forces and then stood and fought against overwhelming odds while regular army units broke and ran or surrendered in the face of the U.S.-led ground operations.

Hawks might take comfort in the fact that even the Republican Guard proved no match for U.S. ground forces, as the lopsided outcome of the Gulf War Battle of 73 Easting showed. That optimism assumes, however, that this time Iraqi forces will again try to fight us toe-to-toe in the open desert.

While the bulk of the regular Iraqi army units will likely sit out the war or surrender in the event of a U.S. attack, there is a good chance that many of the remaining

Republican Guard or Special Republican Guard units will retreat into cities and seek to engage U.S. forces from there. Even a small number of Iraqi soldiers operating in cities could slow U.S. military operations and make them costly.

It is a well-established military rule that attacking forces need at least a 3-to-1 advantage to prevail in conventional combat. In urban combat, however, attacking forces need an even greater advantage because fighting in built-up areas is far more complicated and demanding than regular combat. The urban battlefield has more dimensions: in addition to fighting on ground level there may be combat underground or in upper floors of buildings. Urban operations also produce much higher rates of casualties (often in the realm of 30%) and require large numbers of soldiers to occupy territory and secure lines of communication. Finally, urban operations could nullify the United States's advantages in air power and artillery due to the danger of collateral damage to civilians.

To illustrate the challenge facing U.S. forces, in the Baghdad area alone there are between three divisions of the Republican Guard and the four brigades of the Special Republican Guards, approximately 45,000 troops who are likely to fight to defend Saddam's regime. Both the Republican Guard and the Special Republican Guard are trained in urban combat, and senior Iraqi officials have suggested

that retreating to cities will be Iraq's strategy in the event of a U.S. attack.

In order to achieve the necessary superiority over defending forces, establish a cordon around the city, and protect their lines of communication, U.S. forces could require around 250,000 soldiers on the ground (an overall 6-to-1 ratio) for operations just in and around Baghdad, a city with a population of over five million. Iraq has two other cities with populations of over one million—Mosul in the north and Basra in the south—which have additional concentrations of Republican Guard units close enough to retreat into them. Given our unfortunate experience in Mogudishu in 1993 and the Russians' debacle in Grozny in 1996, there is no reason to think that fighting in Baghdad and other Iraqi cities will be a cakewalk. All this suggests that a total U.S. force in the Gulf region of between 200,000 to 250,000—which includes not only ground combat forces but also a large number of support personnel—may be too few if we have to battle Saddam's elite forces in Iraq's major cities.

U.S. military planners have undoubtedly made similar calculations and that is why voices in the Bush administration now suggest that we may not have to fight at all because the Iraqi military may launch a coup to oust Saddam in the face of a U.S. attack. But there is little reason for confidence that this will happen.

To begin with, it is not clear which units are going to execute such a coup. The undermanned and ill-equipped regular army units may harbor critics of Saddam's regime and be unwilling to fight U.S. forces to defend it, but even if they wanted to oust Saddam, they are unlikely to prevail against the better-armed loyalists in the Republican Guard and the Special Republican Guard. Nor can we count on these elite units to turn on Saddam because they enjoy a privileged place in his regime, and they will likely be the first targets in any U.S. attack.

Moreover, while Iraq has experienced many coup-attempts in the last fifty years, there has not been a successful one since Saddam's Ba'ath Party took power in 1968. Since then, there have only been four coup attempts (1973, 1992, 1993, and most recently in 1995), none of which succeeded. Even in defeat, whether during the bleakest phases of the Iran-Iraq War or during the widespread uprisings after the Gulf War, the Iraqi military has not proved willing to challenge Saddam's rule.

To be sure, if the United States invades Iraq, as is increasingly likely, we can expect U.S. forces to prevail, but

not without cost. Rather than staging the coup of Richard Perle's imagination, the Republican Guard and the Special Republican Guard will likely fight, and by drawing us into cities could impose more casualties than they did during the Gulf War. Thus, "if we desire to defeat the enemy," as military theorist Karl von Clausewitz advises, "we must proportion our efforts to his powers of resistance" or, better yet, avoid this war all together. ■

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## Counterfeit Courage

Not all victims have equal propaganda value.

By Paul Gottfried

IN AC'S NOV. 18 ISSUE, Taki makes the observation about Daniel Goldhagen and the targets of Goldhagen's assaults that leftist, anti-Islamic author Salman Rushdie would have escaped ecclesiastical threats to his life had he "picked on Christianity in general and the Catholic Church in particular. Catholics will accept anything and everything including the libel that Pope Pius XII was "Hitler's Pope." As one who has written extensively on this Western state religion of masochism, it seems to me that Taki's complaint is true enough. But, more importantly, he is pointing to what has become a public virtue among public intellectuals: saying or doing something that the usual gang will hold up as feisty and bold. In an interview with the *Boston Globe*, for example, Goldhagen's dissertation advisor, and the perennially fashionable Harvard political scientist,

Stanley Hoffmann, breaks forth in adulation about his former student: "Danny is not somebody who takes prisoners, which I admire in him. With him, you don't get a lot of 'on the one hand but on the other hand.' He has a prosecutor's approach to what he deems morally scandalous." Because of his moral zeal, Danny had doggedly investigated the until recently suffocating German anti-Semitism that had made the Holocaust inevitable and (wouldn't you know it!) has now completed a similar criticism of Christianity and its destructive role in the same catastrophe.

Another profile in courage, it would seem from reading Richard Lingemann's review in the *Washington Post*, is Terry Teachout, a recent biographer of H.L. Mencken. According to Lingemann, an outstanding feature of Teachout's study is that he "devotes a comparatively large