

## IRAQ 2003 (PART 3)<sup>1</sup>: THE ROAD TO ... NOWHERE?

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### **A new type of war?**

When he addressed the US Navy League's Sea Air Space Exposition in Washington DC just a few days after the fall of Baghdad, and again when he gave the 25<sup>th</sup> annual Ira C. Eaker Distinguished Lecture on May 1<sup>st</sup>, General Richard B. Myers, America's highest-ranking officer, chose a very interesting title for both his speeches: "The New American Way of War."<sup>3</sup> Both essentially had the same message. In them, he called "what we've done in Iraq dramatically different" to any previous war the US had been engaged in, including the Gulf War of 1991. He quoted the military historian Russell Weigly who, in his book *The American Way of War*,<sup>4</sup> "suggested" – as Myers summarised it – "that we won by destroying the enemy's army and driving at the heart of their nation." In Iraq, Myers said, "[w]e focused on achieving certain effects on the battlefield. We went after the Iraqi Regime and the pillars that supported it. It's for these reasons I think that we now conduct warfare much differently than we did in the past, even including Desert Storm."

Myers explained by referring to the fact that whereas in Desert Storm only 20% of the strike fighters could guide laser bombs, in Iraq Freedom it was 100%.

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<sup>1</sup> This is the third in a series of three articles. See *Scientia Militaria*, vol 32, no 1, 2004, as well as vol 32, no 2, 2004.

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<sup>3</sup> The full text is at [www.dtic.mil/jcs/chairman/new\\_american\\_way\\_of\\_war16apr03.htm](http://www.dtic.mil/jcs/chairman/new_american_way_of_war16apr03.htm) and [www.dtic.mil/jcs/chairman/myers\\_eaker\\_lecture\\_1may03.htm](http://www.dtic.mil/jcs/chairman/myers_eaker_lecture_1may03.htm). As the second speech covers exactly the same ground as the first without adding anything substantially, all quotations are from the first.

<sup>4</sup> Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1978.

Whereas the Marines then had to use old M60 tanks, now they had the Abrams tank with a gun that increased their range by 50%. Myers spoke of the important reconnaissance role of unmanned aerial vehicles, able to send back target photographs instantly, and have these sent within an hour or two to airborne F-14s and F-117s so they could have them in the cockpit. In 1991, the Air Tasking Order, a document of 800 pages, took five hours to print, and it had to be taken out by helicopter to the strike units. Now, the document was immediately available worldwide via the SIPRNET, the internal operational internet of the US forces.

In Desert Storm, “ground commanders still relied on maps, yellow stickees on their maps and plastic overlays and on tactical radio reports. Today, all components have a constant picture of the air, land and sea forces. And it’s available at a variety of levels. This shared picture not only shows that component commander to have better situational awareness on where his forces are, or her forces are, but also allows the other components the same situational awareness. With that knowledge, then you can begin to integrate joint operations much more closely.”

Myers said that General Tommy Franks, C-in-C of all the coalition forces in the theatre, was able to use “the intelligence], the command and control and precise combat power to see the enemy, to plan, to act and assess the situation – faster than any time before. We know that process to see, plan, act and assess as our decision cycle. And in history, we also know that the one that has the fastest decision cycle that can get inside his enemy’s decision loop will prevail.”

The benefits could be seen in three ways, he continued. “First, because of the ‘punch’ of our combat power, we could strike directly at the heart of the regime. That means we didn’t have to wade through the regular army to get to the center of power. Our first strike in March 19<sup>th</sup> in Iraq was on the regime’s senior leaders’ command bunker. As a result, it placed them in peril and not the Iraqi people. And our campaign has focused in the regime’s pillars of power. Its security forces, weapons of mass destruction, air defense network and elite Republican Guard forces. These things didn’t guard Iraqi citizens, they just protected the regime. So concentrating our combat power on them is a clear departure from the devastating way that Weigly described as our past approach to warfare.”

Secondly, Myers said, this meant “that we could make tremendous progress to minimize unintended consequences, like causing civilian casualties and destroying Iraq’s infrastructure. This mindset extended across the battlefield. ... This fact alone separates this operation from past conflicts. In fact, don’t think

there's been a war in history where one side went to such painstaking lengths to protect innocent life.”

In the third place, “what sets this conflict apart from the past is how we integrated this joint team. When folks write the after action reports they should pay close attention to the objectives of the separate service components. I think what they'll see is that in many cases, often, they shared objectives. These required them to integrate their capabilities into a close inter-connected joint operation.”

When you put all of this together, Myers said, “you realise that, in many cases, you don't need a larger force. Instead you know you have a decisive force that can be used deliberately. Today, we certainly have that in Iraq.” Summarising Myers' speech, one may, therefore, identify the following as the salient points of the “new American way of war”: The new technology of precision weapons allowed the US forces

- to strike at the pillars of the Iraqi regime, without having to physically destroy the Iraqi military forces in the field;
- to strike directly at the heart of the Iraqi regime;
- to do so without causing great destruction of the infrastructure and loss of civilian life;
- to cancel out the fog of war, to know the entire battlefield situation instantly;
- therefore, to act with tremendous speed in decision making, thereby contributing to the enemy's paralysis; and
- to integrate the battlefield conduct of the different arms like never before in history.

Certainly, these elements were revolutionary in quite a few different ways. But were they new *in principle*, or were they merely a further development, an impressive refinement of something that already existed? Was it a new way of war as such? It is the contention of this writer that it was not.

To begin with, it seems that Myers is exaggerating the effects of the new approach. While it is true that the Americans, true to the correct operational principles discussed below, did not seek to attack the enemy strengths but rather their weaknesses, they still had to defeat the Iraqi forces on the battlefield. How true this is, can be seen from the fact that a vast majority of the targets hit from the air – 15 592 or 82%, to be exact – were either Iraqi troops or military vehicles. Only 1

799 or less than 10% was related to the regime's leadership or the military command structure.<sup>5</sup> This shows that the enemy military forces were still the primary target of the coalition's efforts on the battlefield.

Secondly, the idea contained in Myers' new way of war was not that new at all. Look at the following quotation: "Characteristic of the armoured division is the integration of great firepower and high mobility on roads and the country. Its ability to move rests solely on machine power, the troops do not have to leave their vehicles for the battle. ... The purpose is to create a useful, manoeuvrable unit with great range, which can be deployed quickly and so secure the surprise with a spear-point. ... The centre of its warfighting is not the conduct of long battles, but to shorten it ... Its deployment rests on the ... concentration of the highest fighting power at the decisive point ... and, in particular, on the universal valid principle of surprise to prevent the enemy resistance from asserting itself."

These words, modern as they sound, are not a part of an analysis of Operation Iraqi Freedom. They were written in 1935 and appeared in a German military magazine, *Militär-Wochenblatt*.<sup>6</sup> They were part of a truly revolutionary new approach to warfare, namely the use of concentrated armour in conjunction with mechanised and motorised infantry and artillery, close air support and deep interdiction of enemy supply lines, making use of extreme speed to get into the enemy rear areas, thereby creating panic, paralysing his movement and decision making, and making sure of the collapse of even a considerable stronger enemy.

The first people thinking along these lines were Major General J.F.C. Fuller and Captain Sir Basil Liddell Hart in Britain during the twenties,<sup>7</sup> but they were prophets not honoured in their own country. They were, however, avidly studied by the Germans, who developed their ideas further into what eventually became known as the *Blitzkrieg*.<sup>8</sup> Speaking to Liddell Hart after the war, General Wilhelm Ritter von Thoma identified five main elements of the *Blitzkrieg*:

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<sup>5</sup> Lt Gen T. Michael Moseley: "Operation Iraqi Freedom – by the numbers", p. 5, at [www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/report/2003/uscentaf\\_oif\\_report\\_30apr2003.pdf](http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/report/2003/uscentaf_oif_report_30apr2003.pdf).

<sup>6</sup> Gen Walther K. Nehring: *Die Geschichte der Deutschen Panzerwaffe 1916-1945* (Stuttgart, Motorbuch Verlag, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, 2000), pp. 76-77.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Anthony John Trythall: *'Boney' Fuller. The intellectual General* (London, Cassell, 1970); Brian Bond: *Liddell Hart. A study of his military thought* (London, Cassell, 1976); Alex Danchev: *Alchemist of war. The life of Basil Liddell Hart* (London, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1998).

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Jehuda L. Wallach: *Das Dogma der Vernichtungsschlacht. Die Lehren von Clausewitz und Schlieffen und ihre Wirkungen in zwei Weltkriegen* (Frankfurt, Bernard & Graefe, 1967), p.

- “The concentration of all forces on the point of penetration in co-operation with bombers;
- Exploiting the success of the movement on the roads during the *night* – as a result, we often gained success by surprise deep in, and behind, the enemy’s front;
- Insufficient anti-tank defence on the enemy’s part, and our own superiority in the air;
- The fact that the armoured division itself carried enough petrol for 150-200 kilometres – supplemented, if necessary, with supply of petrol to the armoured spearheads by air, dropped in containers by parachute;
- Carrying rations sufficient for three days in the tanks, for three more days in the regimental supply column, and three more days in the divisional supply column.”<sup>9</sup>

An early, but very astute analyst of the *Blitzkrieg* was a Czech officer, Lieutenant Colonel F.O. Miksche, who – in a book published in 1941 – identified three principles of this new method:

- *Surprise*, which may take three forms, strategic, technical and tactical. “Strategic surprise is gained mainly by concentration and by movement towards action (*Aufmarsch*) carried out in such a way that the attacker strikes on a certain front with a force considerably superior to that of the defence. Technical surprise derives from the use in battle of an unknown weapon or means of movement. Tactical surprise derives normally from technical surprise, and in modern war is achieved through the use of new tactics that are more suitable than the old for the new weapons and material. ... The main tactical surprise of this war has been the use of parachutists, airborne troops, tanks and motorised infantry – new weapons and material – in new forms by the German armies.”
- *Speed*, Miksche says, “is the necessary complement to surprise. Surprise only gains a temporary success, unless exploited by speed. If surprise is not followed by speed, the opponent rallies his forces and has the time to make new dispositions to contain the attacker. ... It is an essential feature of the German technique of attack that the attacking forces must never

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340; Heinz Guderian: *Erinnerungen eines Soldaten* (Heidelberg, Kurt Vowinkel, 1951), p. 15; Maj Gen F.W. von Mellenthin: *Panzer Battles 1939-1945. A study in the employment of armour in the Second World War* (London, Cassell, 1955), p. xv.

<sup>9</sup> B.H. Liddell Hart: *The other side of the hill* (London, Pan, 1950), p. 126.

allow themselves to be robbed of the initiative. They must overwhelm the defence with a flood of superior force. By the speed, with which this superior force is kept in movement and action, the countermeasures of the opponent are rendered valueless; the situation is always developing too quickly for these countermeasures to be effective.”

- *Material superiority* is the third principle, “which shows itself on the battlefield in the form of fire. Superiority in weapons, ammunition, and other material must be ensured throughout an action. The will to fight of the defending forces can only definitely be broken by a superiority that is not only great but obvious. And without this superiority movement is difficult or ceases. Fire-power should therefore be considered the driving force behind manoeuvre, the force that makes movement possible.”

It is the combination of “motorization as method of transport, mechanisation as method of break-through, air action as method of support, protection, and communication,” noted Miksche, “that gives the warfare of to-day a character entirely different from that of the last World War.”<sup>10</sup>

Perhaps the supreme example of a successful application of the *Blitzkrieg* method was the invasion of France and the Low Countries on May 10<sup>th</sup>, 1940. In arguably his most influential book, *Strategy – the Indirect Approach*, Liddell Hart succinctly explained the reasons for the stupendous success of the operation. By baiting the French and British through invading the Netherlands and Belgium, the Germans “managed to lure the Allies out of their defences on the Belgian frontier. Then, when they had advanced deep into Belgium, their march being deliberately unimpeded by the German air force, it struck in behind them – with a thrust at the uncovered hinge of the French advance.

“This deadly thrust was delivered by a striking force that formed only a small fraction of the total German army, but was composed of armoured divisions. The German Command had been shrewd enough to realise that, for any chance of quick success, it must rely on mechanics rather than on mass. ... The tactics of the German forces corresponded to their strategy – avoiding head-on assaults, and always seeking to find ‘soft spots’ through which they could infiltrate along the line of least resistance. ... While the Allied commanders thought in terms of battle, the new German commanders sought to eliminate it by producing the strategic paralysis

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<sup>10</sup> F.O. Miksche: *Blitzkrieg* (London, Faber & Faber, 1941), pp. 29-31

of their opponents, using their tanks, dive-bombers, and parachutists to spread confusion and dislocate communications.”<sup>11</sup>

In these analyses of the *Blitzkrieg*, all of the elements of General Myers’ “New American Way of War” were present – sometimes explicitly, sometimes only by implication, sometimes very embryonic. But they were there. Through the new weapons and precision technology the German *Blitzkrieg* – brilliantly taken over by the Israeli’s – were further developed, refined and made much more efficient. But the *principles* were essentially the same.

It was, therefore, no new way of war as such. According to a knowledgeable observer such as Anthony Cordesman, it wasn’t even a new *American* way of war. The “new way,” he writes, “is solidly built on the past” that derive “in large part from military thinking that took place long before Secretary Rumsfeld became Secretary of Defense.” He continues: “Even seen from the perspective of the Gulf and Afghan Wars, the Iraq War was more an evolution than a revolution.”<sup>12</sup>

### **The operational differences between Gulf I and Gulf II**

If one wants to understand the essence of the Iraq War and what *did* make it different from previous wars, the best way is probably to compare it with the Gulf War of 1991. Some differences have already been noted in General Myers’ speech above – for instance, the fact that in 1991 only a relatively small percentage of the aerial weapons used were “smart”, while in 2003 only a relatively small percentage were old-fashioned “dumb” bombs. This obviously made a decisive difference in the numbers of aircraft needed. After all, with a “smart” bomb which has an almost 99% chance of hitting and destroying the target, only one or two aircraft are needed, whereas with “dumb” bombs many more have to be employed, simply because so many bombs will miss.

This principle also applies to ground warfare. If you know that a tank or anti-tank weapon will hit – and destroy – the enemy tanks almost every time, you will need less of them to begin with. You will need less artillery. And you will need fewer soldiers. This is certainly one of the reasons why no less than fifteen divisions

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<sup>11</sup> B.H. Liddell Hart: *Strategy – the indirect approach* (New York, Frederick A. Praeger, n.d.), pp. 232-234.

<sup>12</sup> Cited in Anthony Cordesman: *The “instant lessons” of the Iraq war: main report, eighth working draft, May 14, 2003*, pp. 122-123, at [www.csis.org/features/iraq\\_instantlessons.pdf](http://www.csis.org/features/iraq_instantlessons.pdf).

and 3 614 aircraft (US only<sup>13</sup>) were needed in 1991 to vanquish the Iraqi forces, while in 2003 only four divisions and 1 801 aircraft were adequate to do the same job.

In the second place, in 1991 speed was not of the same essence as in 2003. What the allies did then, was first to take out the “eyes” and “ears” of the Iraqi forces in a 39 days’ air campaign. They did this by destroying all the Iraqi electronic sensors – such as radar and radio intercept equipment – and the Iraqis’ ability to communicate between the units in Kuwait and their headquarters. Thus, when the ground war started, the Iraqis didn’t have the foggiest idea of what was going on.

Then, during the last few days before the start of the ground offensive, the allies moved the bulk of their assault troops – three armoured divisions, two mechanised infantry divisions, two airborne divisions and one light armoured division – to a point north of where the border between Kuwait and Iraq intersects the Saudi border, but still inside Saudi Arabia. When the advance started, therefore, it became a “left hook” whereby the allied VII Corps not only smashed through the Republican Guard along the Kuwaiti-Iraqi border, but essentially threatened to cut the Iraqi forces in Kuwait off from their hinterland. (That strong remnants of the Republican Guard escaped after all through the Basra Gap, was because of President George Bush senior’s premature command to stop VII Corps’ eastwards advance.)<sup>14</sup>

This was, therefore, a classic flanking or encircling movement, strongly reminiscent of German operational methods since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, which emphasised mobility, an aversion of frontal attacks, and flank and/or encircling movements.<sup>15</sup> At the same time, although the air war was much heavier in 1991, it was equally decisive in 2003. No Iraqi aircraft rose to challenge the coalition mastery of the air; those that Iraq had retained after 1991, were either hidden or even buried.<sup>16</sup>

In the war of 2003 a grand flank march was impossible. Geography dictated the coalition operational plan. There was, obviously, no chance of Iran,

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<sup>13</sup> Stan Morse (ed.): *Gulf air war debrief* (London, Aerospace, 1991), p.188.

<sup>14</sup> See Rick Atkinson: *Crusade. The untold story of the Gulf War* (London, HarperCollins, 1994).

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Gunther E. Rothenberg: “Moltke, Schlieffen, and the doctrine of strategic envelopment”, in Peter Paret: *Makers of modern strategy from Machiavelli to the nuclear age* (Oxford, Clarendon, 1986), ch. 10.

<sup>16</sup> Michael R. Gordon: “Lifestyles of the rich and infamous” (*The New York Times*, 22.4.2003).

Iraq's eastern neighbour, allowing its territory to be used for an invasion of Iraq. Though the governments of Jordan and Saudi-Arabia, Iraq's western neighbours, were quite friendly towards the United States, for political reasons they also could not be seen to participate in the attack. Taking into account the Turkish parliament's refusal to allow the 4<sup>th</sup> Mechanised Infantry Division access in order to invade Iraq from the north, a simple invasion from Kuwait in the south-east was all that remained. Given that Baghdad was seen from the beginning as the only possible target of the invading forces, as the centre of gravity, any fool was able to predict that the coalition invasion would have to proceed from the Kuwaiti border more or less in a northwesterly direction, and more or less parallel to the famous twin rivers, the Tigris and Euphrates, and that at least the latter would have to be crossed somewhere along the way.

Therefore, there was no sense in trying to encircle or outflank the Iraqis on a similar scale as in 1991. However, there was a way of dislocating them, of undermining their ability to resist no less than twelve years previously, namely speed. The Americans had to advance at a blistering pace, taking the Iraqis by surprise, creating havoc in their rear areas and supply lines, coming inside the Iraqi decision loop so that by the time they decided on a reaction, the situation would already have developed so much that their reaction would be totally outdated and therefore irrelevant. Obviously, the paralysis created by this furious pace could be greatly augmented by an unrelenting and sustained air assault. This is exactly what happened. And that, in a nutshell, is the main difference between Gulf I and Gulf II.

### **Operational principles**

If we want to analyse and judge the operational decisions made on both sides, we need a yardstick by which to measure it. That yardstick is provided by the accepted principles of operational art. If one reads the Prussian military philosopher Carl von Clausewitz fully and properly, he has an interesting idea about what the purpose of warfighting should be. Although different aims are scattered throughout the text of this unfinished and unpolished work (Clausewitz died before it could be perfected), the very first one he identifies is this: The "true aim of warfare" (in theory), he says, is to "render the enemy powerless."<sup>17</sup> Obviously, having written with his experiences from the Napoleonic wars as point of departure, Clausewitz'

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<sup>17</sup> Carl von Clausewitz: *On war* (edited & translated by Michael Howard & Peter Paret, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1976), I/1, p. 75.

ideas do not have much relevance for modern operational conditions, so we will have to look elsewhere for more guidance on this.

Some of the most fundamental theoretical work has been done by Sir Basil Liddell Hart and Robert Leonhard, who developed Liddell Hart's ideas further. What should be the purpose of strategy?, is the question Liddell Hart asks himself. (Bear in mind that he uses the word *strategy* in an obsolete sense, meaning what is nowadays called *operational art*.) The question was more important than one might think. To him, it was primarily motivated by his experience as an infantry captain in the trenches on the Western Front in France during the First World War, when millions of troops on both sides were thrown in senseless, brutal frontal attacks on strong fortified positions – and massacred in their tens and even hundreds of thousands. Seeking for a way to lessen the casualties, Liddell Hart after the war made a study of history, which led him to his famous *indirect approach*.

His basic point of departure, he explained near the end of his life, was never to launch an offensive or attack “along the line of natural expectation.” To do that would be “to consolidate the opponent's equilibrium, and by stiffening it to augment his resisting power.” Based on this, he came to two conclusions, one negative, the other positive: “The first is that in the face of the overwhelming evidence of history no general is justified in launching his troops to a direct attack upon an enemy firmly in position. The second, that instead of seeking to upset the enemy's equilibrium *by* one's attack, it must be upset *before* a real attack is, or can be successfully, launched ...”<sup>18</sup>

Explaining more fully in arguably his most influential book, he denied that the purpose of strategy [operational art] was the destruction of the enemy, as German theorists since Clausewitz had claimed. “Strategy [operational art] has not to overcome resistance, except from nature. *Its purpose is to diminish the possibility of resistance*, and it seeks to fulfil this purpose by exploiting the elements of *movement and surprise*.” Somewhat further on he clarifies the above: “Let us assume that a strategist is empowered to seek a military decision. His responsibility is to seek it under the most advantageous circumstances in order to produce the most profitable result. Hence *his true aim is not so much to seek battle as to seek a strategic [operational] situation so advantageous that if it does not of itself produce the decision, its continuation by battle is sure to achieve this*. In other words, *dislocation* is the *aim* of strategy [operations]; its *sequel* may be either the enemy's

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<sup>18</sup> B.H. Liddell Hart: *Memoirs*, I (London, Cassell, 1965), p. 163.

dissolution or his easier disruption in battle.” In fact, Liddell Hart says, the perfection of operational art would be “to produce a decision *without* any serious fighting.”<sup>19</sup> (Indeed, the ancient Chinese military philosopher Sun Tzu wrote, “For to win one hundred victories in one hundred battles is not the acme of skill. To subdue the enemy without fighting is the supreme excellence. ... Thus, those skilled in war subdue the enemy’s army without battle.”<sup>20</sup>)

Elsewhere, Liddell Hart also wrote that the true target in warfare should not be so much the enemy troops themselves, but the spirit of the enemy commander. The only reason one operates against the enemy troops, is because they form an extension of the spirit and will of the enemy commander.<sup>21</sup> (This dovetails perfectly with Clausewitz’ aim of rendering the enemy powerless.) Developing these thoughts further, Robert Leonhard<sup>22</sup> expounded on Liddell Hart’s dictum that the enemy’s dislocation should be the aim. “Dislocation,” he writes, “is the art of rendering the enemy’s strength irrelevant. Instead of having to fight or confront the hostile force on its terms, the friendly force avoids any combat in which the enemy can bring his might to bear.”

He differentiates between two methods, namely *positional* and *functional* dislocation. As far as the first is concerned, he says, “[t]he most obvious way to render an enemy force irrelevant is to remove it from the decisive point, whether in a theater, an area of operations, or on a battlefield. This form of dislocation can mean the physical removal of the enemy from the decisive point, or it can mean the removal of the decisive point from the enemy force. An example of the first would be to use a feint in order to draw the enemy’s reserve. An example of the latter would be to manoeuvre away from the enemy’s force and seek a decision in the enemy’s rear area or against a portion of the enemy’s forces that cannot be reinforced in time.”

As far as *functional* dislocation is concerned, the objective is again “to render the enemy’s strength irrelevant, but through different means. Rather than forcing or luring the enemy out of position, functional dislocation simply causes the enemy’s strength to be neutralized or inappropriated. This effect is generally

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<sup>19</sup> B.H. Liddell Hart: *Strategy – the indirect approach*, pp. 337-339.

<sup>20</sup> Sun Tzu: *The art of war* (Herefordshire, Wordsworth Classics, 1998), p. 25

<sup>21</sup> Quoted in Jehuda L. Wallach: *Kriegstheorien. Ihre Entwicklung im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (Frankfurt, Bernard & Graefe, 1972), p. 234.

<sup>22</sup> Robert Leonhard: *The art of manoeuvre. Manoeuvre-warfare theory and air land battle* (Novato, Presidio, 1991), pp. 66-69.

achieved through technology or tactics or a combination of the two.” By way of analogy, Leonhard refers to the fight between David and Goliath. Goliath’s strengths were in his physical power, his body armour, his shield, his sword, and his spear. None of these were, however, permitted to enter into the conflict. David “would not try to match strength for strength. Instead, he intended to use his sling to functionally dislocate (i.e., render irrelevant) the Philistine’s weapons and defenses.”

One conclusion that stands out from these quotations is that there is nothing honourable about warfare. If you want to win, you have to lie and cheat, to have to point to a non-existent threat behind your enemy’s back and then kick him between the legs, you have to make him believe that you are coming from the front, and then stick a knife in his back. Render him impotent *before* you attack him.

### **The key operational decisions**

With these insights, one may now identify and discuss those key operational decisions made by the coalition forces and the Iraqis which influenced the course of the war decisively. The *first* decision was to invade and depose the Saddam regime while destroying as little as possible of the Iraqi army or the country. After all, the whole campaign plan was built around the desire to destroy as little as possible. The end – Saddam’s removal – was what mattered, not destruction. The purpose with this was twofold: first, the Americans realised that the task to rebuild every bridge, every power station, every building they destroyed, would be theirs – and that they would have to pay for it too. Secondly, destroying the country in the process of liberating it would not be the best way of winning the hearts and minds of the Iraqi people for liberal democracy and being thankful to the Americans for liberating them. This decision was decisive in influencing the whole course of the campaign. One is reminded of Sun Tzu’s very subtle idea that the best policy in war “is to take a state intact; to ruin it is inferior to this.”<sup>23</sup>

The *second* decision was to invade Iraq with far fewer troops than the army wanted in the first place. In the second part of this analysis the story was told of the strife between the Secretary of Defence, Donald Rumsfeld, and most of his Generals about the operational plan. No less than six drafts were vetoed by Rumsfeld because he felt the invading force contained too many heavy units. This, of course, was part of the power struggle between them about Rumsfeld’s envisaged transformation of the American military to a light, mobile and technologically

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<sup>23</sup> Sun Tzu: *The art of war*, p. 25 (ch. 3).

highly advanced force. A compromise was reached, namely to start the fight with two heavy mechanised infantry divisions, a medium heavy Marine division, a light air assault division, and a heavy but obsolescent UK armoured division. In the event, because of the Turkish position, this force shrank even further by a heavy mechanised infantry division. And because the British armoured force was destined to take care of Basra only (essentially a backwater), the main march to Baghdad was undertaken only by three divisions, of which only one was heavy, one light, and one medium heavy.

Martin van Crefeld makes the interesting point that modern warfare swallows far less troops than previously. He writes that “in 1941 the German invasion of the USSR – the largest single military operation of all time – made use of 144 divisions out of the approximately 209 that the *Wehrmacht* possessed; the forces later employed on the Eastern front by both sides, particularly the Soviets, were even larger. By contrast, since 1945 there had probably not been even one case in which any state has used over twenty full-size divisions on any single campaign, and the numbers are still going nowhere but down. In 1991, a coalition that included three out of five [permanent] members in the UN Security Council brought some five hundred thousand troops to bear against Iraq; that was only a third of what Germany used – counting field forces only – to invade France as long ago as 1914.”<sup>24</sup>

The decision to use much less forces than was originally planned, therefore, fits very nicely into modern tendencies. Provided that they retain the same firepower, or even more, this cannot in itself be faulted. In the end, as they say, the proof of the pudding lies in the eating: The decisive victory, ending in the capture of Baghdad and Tikrit, shows that even this much lighter force was up to the task. The desired effect was, after all, *momentum*, which mathematically equals by *mass* times *velocity*. Theoretically, in other words, one may lessen the mass (= numbers of troops and units), provided that the velocity (= speed of advance) is increased – up to a point, of course.

Sun Tzu saw something along these lines long ago when he wrote, “In war, numbers alone confer no advantage. It is sufficient if you do not advance relying on sheer military power. If you estimate the enemy situation correctly, and

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<sup>24</sup> Martin van Crefeld: “Through a glass, darkly” (*NWC Review*, Autumn 2000), at [www.nwc.navy.mil/press/Review/2000/autumn/art2-a00.htm](http://www.nwc.navy.mil/press/Review/2000/autumn/art2-a00.htm).

then concentrate your strength to overcome the enemy, there is no more to it than this.”<sup>25</sup>

The question is, of course, whether this smaller force would have been adequate against a more determined foe. As a retired UK officer told a defence weekly: “It does help to fight a totally incompetent enemy.”<sup>26</sup> This question will be fully discussed later.

The *third* operational decision was to forego the northern invasion and attack only from the south. Of course, the Turks left the coalition with no other option; the southern route was all that remained. Nevertheless, by leaving the equipment of the 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry on ships near the Turkish shores until after the southern invasion started, the coalition took a calculated risk of not having enough forces available to defeat the Iraqis decisively in the short time that was dictated by politics.

After the war, however, *Newsweek* reported how the US transformed this risk brilliantly into a strategic asset. “Until it was too late,” the magazine wrote, “Saddam was led to believe that the Americans would attack from the north, through Turkey. The ruler of Baghdad was informed by secret agents that the Turks’ refusal in early March to allow the Americans to unload in their ports was all bluff – that at the last minute the Turks would change their minds and let the Americans use Turkey as a jumping-off point.”<sup>27</sup> After the war, General Franks also gave some credence to this assertion by stating: “We believed we could through intelligence means have some influence on the regime through information warfare and deception, and we wanted the regime to believe that force would be introduced in the north, and that the timing of that introduction might be discussed with the Turks. We wanted some uncertainty in the mind of Saddam Hussein about whether the Turks were planning to permit the landing of the force, so I kept the force waiting long past the point where I knew it would not be introduced in the north.”<sup>28</sup> Also, the Iraqi deputy prime minister, Tariq Aziz, apparently told his coalition captors

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<sup>25</sup> Sun Tzu: *The art of war*, p. 41 (ch. 9).

<sup>26</sup> David Mulholland: “Luck or good judgement?” (*Jane’s Defence Weekly*, 15.4.2003).

<sup>27</sup> Evan Thomas & Martha Brant: “The education of Tommy Franks” (*Newsweek*, 19.5.2003).

<sup>28</sup> Joseph L. Galloway: “General Tommy Franks discussed conducting the war in Iraq” (*Knight Ridder*, 19.6.2003). Cf. also Paul Martin: “Rumsfeld fires up U.S. forces in Qatar” (*Washington Times*, 29.4.2003).

after the war that Saddam viewed the offensive from the south as a ruse, and that he therefore refused to countenance a counteroffensive.<sup>29</sup>

One is reminded of the Sun Tzu's famous words, which are supremely applicable here: "All warfare is based on deception. Therefore, when capable of attacking, feign incapacity; when active in moving troops, feign inactivity. ... Strike the enemy when he is in disorder."<sup>30</sup>

Now think back to the early Iraqi order of battle, according to which fourteen divisions (Franks talks of eleven<sup>31</sup>) were stationed in the north to ward off an attack from that direction, three in the centre and six in the south. Of the six Republican Guard divisions, only three were placed to the south of Baghdad and the other three to the north.<sup>32</sup> In other words, the Iraqi placement of forces was, especially after the Turkish pull-out, completely skewed, and that was the direct result of a magnificent piece of strategic deception. Against this background, the decision to delay the transport of the 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry's equipment to Kuwait and of the troops from their base at Fort Knox, Texas, seems justified, even though this left the invading force rather thin on the ground. One hates to think what would have happened had the Iraqis been less incompetent than they actually were.

At the same time, after the war it was disclosed that US special forces had bribed some key Iraqi senior officers not to fight. This could partly explain why the regular forces, both army and Republican Guard, mostly fought so badly or even not at all, and why the vital bridges over the Euphrates were not destroyed before the Americans crossed them. When this became known, John Pike, director of the military research group GlobalSecurity.com, explained that this was a very good move: "It certainly strikes me as this is part of the mix. I don't think there is any way of discerning how big a part of the mix it is ... but it is part of the very long queue of very interesting questions for which we do not yet have definitive answers."<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Steve Coll: "Hussein was sure of own survival" (*Washington Post*, 3.11.2003).

<sup>30</sup> Sun Tzu: *The art of war*, p. 22 (ch. 1).

<sup>31</sup> Joseph L. Galloway: "General Tommy Franks discussed conducting the war in Iraq" (*Knight Ridder*, 19.6.2003).

<sup>32</sup> Anthony H. Cordman: *If we fight Iraq: Iraq and the conventional military balance* (Center for Strategic and International Studies, 28.6.2002), pp. 3-4, at [www.csis.org/burke/mb/fightiraq\\_mb.pdf](http://www.csis.org/burke/mb/fightiraq_mb.pdf).

<sup>33</sup> Andrew Buncombe: "Why the Iraqis didn't fight: they were bribed" (*Sunday Independent*, 25.5.2003).

A week or so later, Agence France Presse sent out an undoubtedly related report, based on what they heard from “ex-regime officials”, that Saddam was betrayed by three of his cousins, senior military officers, and a former cabinet minister, all of whom ordered troops not to fight against the Americans. One of the spokesmen, speaking on condition of anonymity, said: “The head of the Republican Guard Sufian al-Tikriti, who was considered the shadow of Saddam, told the troops not to fight when US forces entered Baghdad on April 8. The verbal order was confirmed by the head of intelligence, Taher Jalil al-Harbush al-Tikriti, as well as military officer Hussein Rashid al-Tikriti whose son headed the office of Saddam’s youngest son Qusay.” Also, a cabinet minister spread the rumour that Saddam was killed in the attempt on his life on April 7<sup>th</sup>. “This minister was then evacuated by American troops along with his family and now lives in a European country.” The three Generals were also evacuated by military aircraft following the fall of Baghdad, according to the source.<sup>34</sup>

It is clear that these steps, the deception and the bribery, amounted to a perfect example of Leonhard’s idea of positional dislocation. It rendered the greater part of the Iraqi regular forces, about two-thirds, for all practical intents and purposes irrelevant to the fighting.

The paucity of troops did become a drawback, a strategic one, once the fighting was over. Then it became clear that the Americans had too few boots on the ground to prevent the large-scale looting and lawlessness which characterised the period after the fall of the Iraqi dictatorship. This, in turn, led to a rising feeling of frustration and enmity amongst the Iraqis towards the United States (and the liberal-style democracy the Americans were pushing).<sup>35</sup> More than a year after the end of the war, it remained an open question whether the coalition forces in Iraq were strong enough to stifle the gathering guerrilla war. As such it must be seen as contributing to a possible political failure.

The *fourth* decision was to weaken the invading force even further by leaving the British 1 Armoured Division to the investment and occupation of Basra. This decision also seems justified. The fact is that the present US Army is technologically a quantum jump ahead of the Brits. Whereas the co-operation in 1991 in a single army corps was already difficult, in 2003 it would have created huge problems. Their doctrines differed. They could not talk to each other securely

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<sup>34</sup> News report sent out by AFP to the media, 26.5.2003.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Alissa J. Rubin: “US struggles in quicksand of Iraq” (*Los Angeles Times*, 5.5.2003).

by radio, the Brits still having communication equipment from the seventies. Their ammunition and fuel differed, necessitating a separate logistic apparatus.<sup>36</sup> Even their contribution to the air campaign of 1999 in Kosovo, without any ground combat troops being involved, created huge problems.<sup>37</sup>

In the *fifth* place there was the decision to hasten the invasion with some 24 hours because of the information that Saddam Hussein would be at a certain place at a certain time. As a result, “bunker busters” were dropped by two F-117 Stealth fighter-bombers in an attempt to decapitate the Iraqi government, to paralyse their decision-making even before the real ground invasion started.

Interestingly enough, this attempt dovetailed neatly with something written just after World War I. In his famous “Plan 1919”, calling for an all-tank army, Major General J.F.C. Fuller, the earliest visionary calling for mechanised warfare, wrote: “The fighting power of an army lies in its organisation, which can be destroyed either by wearing it down or by rendering it inoperative. The first comprises killing, wounding, and capturing the enemy’s soldiers – body warfare; the second in rendering inoperative his power of command – brain warfare. ... As our present theory is to destroy personnel, our new theory should be to destroy command.”<sup>38</sup>

Fuller did, of course, not go as far as to advocate the assassination of an enemy head of state. One may, of course, pose questions about the morality of doing that. Purely *militarily*, at least, it made some sense. If it had been successful, it would have been a heavy blow to the Iraqis, possibly even leading to their collapse in the field very early on. In such a case, many lives – on both sides – could have been spared. It is also an open question whether a dictator like Saddam, who was much more than a civilian of state and who was known to have directed military operations in the war against Iran and again in 1991, should not be seen as a soldier, and therefore a legitimate target for killing. One may remind the reader here that the Allies tried repeatedly to assassinate Adolf Hitler during the Second World War.

The *sixth* decision was not to “prepare” the Iraqi forces in the south with a bombing campaign before the start of the invasion. Originally, a preparatory air assault of 20 days was envisaged, which was then brought down to 10 and finally 5

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<sup>36</sup> Cf. for instance Wesley Clark: “Brits brilliant but short in resources” (*The Times*, 17.4.2003).

<sup>37</sup> See Leopold & Ingrid Scholtz: “Pirrhieste oorwinning: Die oorlog in Kosovo” (*Scientia Militaria*, 29/1999, pp. 80-112).

<sup>38</sup> J.F.C. Fuller: *The conduct of war 1789-1961* (London, Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1961), p. 243.

days.<sup>39</sup> In actual fact, the aerial bombings started at the same time as the ground assault, the reason being intelligence that the Iraqis were planning to torch the oil wells in the south, and the fact that the coalition was loath to give them advance warning of the invasion.<sup>40</sup>

In the event, this decision did not make things more difficult for the invaders on the ground; the Iraqis – with notable exceptions – did not put up much of a fight to begin with. And the fact that only nine wells were indeed put on fire,<sup>41</sup> tends to vindicate the decision not to prepare the battlefield by air attacks.

The *seventh* operational decision was to conduct the ground advance with a maximum of speed. We have seen that the march, especially of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division, to Najaf was the fastest contested armoured advance in all of military history. Also, when the troops resumed their march to Baghdad after the operational pause, the emphasis was again on speed. In the process, speed almost became a religious mantra. “Speed kills – the enemy”, and “speed, speed and more speed,” was the slogan hammered into the officers at every turn.<sup>42</sup>

This not a new principle, on the contrary, it has been recognised for as long as there were people thinking about the best way to wage war. “Speed is the essence of war,” Sun Tzu wrote long ago. “Take advantage of the enemy’s unpreparedness, make your way by unexpected routes, and attack him where he has taken no precautions.”<sup>43</sup>

Writing about General Heinz Guderian’s panzer march from the Meuse to the Canal near Abbéville in May, 1940, a move that was decisive in the comprehensive defeat of the French and British, Major General J.F.C. Fuller wrote: “It was to employ mobility as a psychological weapon: not to kill but to move; not to move to kill but to move to terrify, to bewilder, to perplex, to cause consternation, doubt and confusion in the rear of the enemy, which rumour would magnify until panic became monstrous. In short, its aim was to paralyse not only the enemy’s

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<sup>39</sup> Rowan Scarborough: “ ‘Decisive force’ now measured by speed” (*The Washington Times*, 7.5.2003).

<sup>40</sup> Peter Baker: “Overtaken by events, the battle plans are tossed aside” (*Washington Post*, 21.3.2003).

<sup>41</sup> Daily briefing of Brig Gen Vincent Brooks, 23.3.2003, at [www.centcom.mil/CENTCOMNews/Transcripts/20030323a.htm](http://www.centcom.mil/CENTCOMNews/Transcripts/20030323a.htm).

<sup>42</sup> See Jack Kelly: “How the bold run to Baghdad paid off” (*Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, 13.4.2003).

<sup>43</sup> Sun Tzu: *The art of war*, p. 46 (ch. 11).

command but also his government, and paralysis would be in direct proportion to velocity. To paraphrase Danton: ‘Speed, and still more speed, and always speed’ was the secret, and that demanded ‘*de l’audace, et encore de l’audace, et toujours de l’audace*’.<sup>44</sup>

It is almost impossible to characterise the dash to Baghdad better than in these words, written so many years before the fact. Having established that geography made a grand flank march in the tradition of Gulf I impossible, speed became the best instrument with which to attain Liddell Hart’s and Leonhard’s goals, namely to *dislocate* the enemy and undermine his capacity to resist *before* the decisive battle(s) took place. Even though geography forced the following of the general line of expectation – from Kuwait to Baghdad – its enormous speed (and the disruption and paralysis that went with it) more than cancelled out this disadvantage. Also, the overwhelming support of the coalition air forces made it extremely difficult for the Iraqis to manoeuvre; every time they tried to move their mechanised forces in an organised way, they were almost wiped out.

The emphasis on speed had the advantage that it enabled the attackers to “get inside the enemy’s decision loop,” in the American military parlance. In an interview, General Wallace said that it “continually took Iraqi forces a long time – somewhere in the order of 24 hours – to react to anything we did. By the time the enemy realized what we were doing, got the word out to his commanders and they actually did something as a result, we had already moved on to doing something different. For a commander, that’s a pretty good thing – fighting an enemy who can’t really react to you.”<sup>45</sup>

Then, in the *eighth* place, came the decision to halt for a few days. US spokesmen denied that there was an operational pause, and in a certain sense they were right, because this did not mean that all fighting stopped. On the contrary, while the ground troops replenished and rested, the aircraft – of the Air Force, Navy and Marines – continued attacking the Iraqis with redoubled vigour, thereby reducing the Republican Guard’s capability to fight and resist to a great extent, and not allowing them to regain their equilibrium. As a result, the resumed advance which followed – the *ninth* decision – was made much easier. Here again, speed was regarded as of the essence.

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<sup>44</sup> Fuller: *The conduct of war 1789-1961*, pp. 256-257.

<sup>45</sup> Cited in Anthony Cordesman: *The “instant” lessons” of the Iraq war: main report, eighth working draft, May 14, 2003*, p. 131, at [www.csis.org/features/iraq\\_instantlessons.pdf](http://www.csis.org/features/iraq_instantlessons.pdf).

The fierce nature of the Iraqi irregulars' attacks did produce some doubts amongst the American Generals about the wisdom to press on to Baghdad as soon as the sand storms ended and the replenishment was complete.<sup>46</sup> However, the decision to continue was wise. The example of Guderian's march to the sea, as well as the Israeli race to the Suez Canal in 1967, showed that the paralysis brought about by the rapidity of the advance is usually enough to neutralise any threat to your flanks and supply lines, especially when fighting an incompetent enemy like the French, the Egyptians – or the Iraqis. It is a question of having strong nerves.

*Finally*, it was decided not to adhere to the original plan of investing Baghdad (like the Brits did with Basra), but to take it all at once. Seeing the disorganised state in which the Iraqi defences clearly were, the decision was basically to keep on stunning and paralysing them by not giving them a single second to draw their breath, thereby preventing them from consolidating and reorganising their defence. Therefore, a concerted assault from all sides by most available troops was made on the capital. While this did produce some fierce fighting in places, the enemy proved to be completely disorganised and unable to resist in any co-ordinated way.

Not fighting Saddam's war in the streets of Baghdad – and, for that matter, the other cities – was wise. Not for nothing Sun Tzu wrote thousands of years ago, "the worst policy is to attack cities."<sup>47</sup>

What about the Iraqi operations? Saddam made only three operational decisions, namely to lure the coalition forces deep into his country and then decimate them in urban warfare, to place most of his troops north of Basra, and to decentralise the command and control over the irregular *fedayeen* and militia.

As far as the first is concerned, this had both advantages and disadvantages. He could not foresee how quickly his conventional forces would disintegrate under the combination of a lightning advance and massive aerial attacks, and he banked on the possibility of having strong forces left with which to fight the Americans block by block, street by street, building by building and even floor by floor. From his point of view, this gave him a good chance of dragging out the war, to create a lot of civilian bloodshed on the world's television sets, and to drum up

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<sup>46</sup> Cf. Rick Atkinson et al: "Confused start, decisive end" (*Washington Post*, 13.3.2003).

<sup>47</sup> Sun Tzu: *The art of war*, p. 25 (ch. 3).

international pressure on the USA to withdraw and leave him in power. On the other hand, by not fighting seriously on the Kuwaiti border, he gave the Americans the chance to use his country's geographic space inland to conduct exactly the lightning campaign that induced a general collapse. It is difficult to decide what would be best. Both options were intrinsically bad; the Americans would most probably have mauled his forces whatever choice he took.

Saddam's second decision was to station most of his forces in the north. This, we have seen, was a direct result of a brilliant piece of strategic deception, for which he fell hook, line and sinker. This made the southern march to Baghdad that much easier by keeping the bulk of the Iraqi forces essentially neutralised and *hors de combat*. And when he saw his mistake and started moving the Republican Guard divisions southwards, they had to come out into the open – and were decimated from the air.

The third decision was the best one he took. The Iraqi army, like that of the Soviet Union on which it was modelled, operated with a very rigid command and control, and with very few possibilities for local initiative on the ground. The irregular forces, however, clearly operated independently and not under the control of the army. This they did with great tenacity and – it should be said – bravery, if not with great military wisdom. Nevertheless, by their operational and tactical independence they were able to shake the Americans considerably for a while. The Pentagon did expect irregulars in Baghdad, but were surprised when these showed themselves in some strength in the south.<sup>48</sup> On the other hand, there being no real co-ordination behind their attacks, these diminished in importance. In the end they degenerated into mere suicide attacks, at times dangerous and very scary for the American soldiers involved, but no real threat to the success of the campaign.

## Observations

No analysis of the Iraq War would be complete without looking at the implications it has for warfare in general. The American defence force has indeed immediately after the cessation of hostilities appointed Admiral Edward Giambastiani and his staff at the Joint Forces Command to investigate the lessons of the war.<sup>49</sup> This is probably too early to establish credibly what these lessons are. One

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<sup>48</sup> John H. Cushman jr. & Thom Shanker: "A nation at war: combat technology" (*The New York Times*, 10.4.2003).

<sup>49</sup> Robert Schlesinger: "Pentagon aims to implement war lessons quickly" (*The Boston Globe*, 26.4.2003); Michael P. Noonan: "The military lessons of Operation Iraqi Freedom" (*Foreign*

can, however, discuss some of the military developments brought to the fore and make some observations about what the military implications of the war could be.

The *first* is in connection with the very topical question of who was right: Secretary Donald Rumsfeld or the Generals? It will be recalled that Rumsfeld sent the campaign plan, drawn up by the Generals, five times back to them before he approved it. At the time, he was embroiled in a bitter fight with the uniforms about his wish for a downsized, light and agile force which would to a large extent depend on high technology, precision weapons and air support. The officers wanted to retain the heavy weapons and formations, and therefore wanted to send in a overwhelming force with several armoured and mechanised divisions.

So, who won? Well, certainly vice president Dick Cheney came out on the side of his colleague. On the day of Baghdad's collapse, he said the victory was "proof positive of the success of our efforts to transform the military", and "[w]ith less than half of the ground forces and two thirds of the air assets used 12 years ago in Desert Storm, Secretary Rumsfeld and General Franks have achieved a far more difficult objective."<sup>50</sup>

That simple it is not. It is true that mass often in history has not been the decisive factor. To cite a slightly absurd example, to have sent in an army of a million untrained soldiers and armed only with slingshots into Iraq, would not have brought victory. The decisive factor, more often than not, is not numbers, but *firepower* and *mobility*. And this, of course, is very much connected to technology, precision weapons, and the like. In other words, a smallish force, extremely mobile, highly trained and well-led, equipped with precision weapons with devastating power, would easily overcome a large, unwieldy, badly led, immobile force equipped with obsolete and inaccurate weapons.

Nevertheless, this is so only up to a point which is, it is true, difficult to pin down exactly. To be slightly absurd again, one cannot invade a country as large as Iraq with only a platoon of soldiers, however devastating their weapons, however mobile and well-led they may be, and however incompetent the enemy may be. There has to be enough troops to physically occupy a large territory and guard the

<sup>50</sup> Toby Harnden: " 'Fight light, fight fast' theory advances" (*The Telegraph*, 14.4.2003).

lines of communication. Mass is by far not everything, but it is not nothing either. A battle between two forces, equally well equipped, trained and led, would invariably be won by the numerically stronger one, especially if the difference is substantial.

To bring the point home: Rumsfeld and the Generals were both right and wrong. Rumsfeld probably expected too much of the new weapons. These might be a force multiplier of enormous value, but in the end you still need enough boots on the ground. At the same time, you do not need as many boots as you did even a few years ago. In this case, the force of three strengthened US divisions, supported by Air Force, Navy and Marine aircraft, proved to be up to the task of defeating the Iraqi army rather comfortably. But the invasion force was, at times, thinly spread. Had the Iraqis been a less incompetent enemy, the Americans could have been in great trouble – as they got into after the war, when some Iraqis took their recourse to guerrilla tactics. The trick is not to let a power struggle, like the one between Rumsfeld and the Generals, influence the matter. The Americans were lucky that the compromise finally reached were just about right for the conventional part of the conflict. It could easily have been otherwise.

Part of this debate was also about the future of tanks. Rumsfeld placed considerably less value on these primordial, heavily armoured and armed, but unwieldy, fuel-guzzling behemoths than the Generals. And seeing that it is about time to start thinking about a successor to the Abrams, which was conceived already in the seventies, there was pressure to phase main battle tanks out and replace them with a faster, lighter armoured and armed vehicle, possibly even wheeled instead of tracked.

The debate, it seems, has more or less been won by the tank enthusiasts. The Abrams had an excellent record in Iraq. According to one source, basing its information on “photographic and written reports by open-source media” a grand total of only twelve were immobilised or destroyed by the Iraqis.<sup>51</sup> Another source, attesting to the unbelievable toughness of the Abrams, says that altogether 151 tanks were hit. Most were repaired and continued the fight. Three took catastrophic hits by Russian-supplied AT-14 anti-tank missiles, while 12 others were so badly damaged they ended up in the junkyard.<sup>52</sup> In one case, a Marine Abrams was found with six

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<sup>51</sup> “Documented coalition losses in the II Persian Gulf War”, at [orbit.com/site/agtwpopen/iraq-equipment\\_losses.html](http://orbit.com/site/agtwpopen/iraq-equipment_losses.html).

<sup>52</sup> Col John Hackworth at [www.military.com/Resources/ResourceFileView?file=Hackworth\\_052103.htm](http://www.military.com/Resources/ResourceFileView?file=Hackworth_052103.htm).

dents made by RPG rounds, three of which had scorch marks, indicating that the rounds had exploded. The tank remained operational.<sup>53</sup>

Nevertheless, the way in which the tanks enabled the 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry as well as the 1<sup>st</sup> Marines to punch through all the way to Baghdad, and that with unprecedented speed, augurs well for the retaining of tanks in the US army and Marine force. Also, after the debacle of Mogadishu in 1993, the US Army started experimenting with armour in urban warfare, and implemented the lessons for the first time in Iraq. Abrams and Bradleys were very much instrumental in reducing Iraqi resistance in several towns and cities, including Baghdad. The toughness and indestructibility of the Abrams especially seem to have been the key here, although, as elsewhere, good co-operation with infantry remained a prerequisite for success. In fact, the official report of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry categorically states: "This war was won in large measure because the enemy could not achieve effects against our armored fighting vehicles. ... US armored combat systems enabled the division to close with and destroy heavily armored and fanatically determined enemy forces with impunity, often within urban terrain."<sup>54</sup> Rumsfeld, it now seems, will go with some sort of heavy armour for the future.<sup>55</sup>

Elsewhere in the world the outcome of this debate was being watched with great interest. In Germany, where the *Bundeswehr* faces dramatic cutbacks, including the decimation of their panzer force, General Gert Gudera, army chief of staff, opined that tanks still have a future. The army, he said, continues to require a "mechanised backbone" suited to "fighting with combined arms."<sup>56</sup>

The *second* aspect is not so much a new one, as an age-old lesson which was repeated for the umpteenth time. Deception of the enemy is one of the most important goals an operational or strategic commander has to aspire to. This enabled the Allies in World War II, for instance, to draw away the bulk of the German forces defending France in the summer of 1944 away from the intended point of invasion

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<sup>53</sup> Patrick O'Connor: "Revolutionary tank tactics alter Iraqi conflict, future of urban warfare" (*The Hill*, 21.5.2003), at [www.globalsecurity.org/news/2003/030521-tank-tactics01.htm](http://www.globalsecurity.org/news/2003/030521-tank-tactics01.htm).

<sup>54</sup> Third Infantry Division (mechanized) after action report, p. 22, at [www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/report/2003/3id-aar-jul03.pdf](http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/report/2003/3id-aar-jul03.pdf).

<sup>55</sup> Michael A. Lindenberger: "War may affect decision over replacing current tanks" (*The Courier-Journal*, 7.4.2003); Lance Gay: "Battle tank still rolling" (*Scripps Howard News Service*, 17.4.2003). Cf. also Anthony Cordesman: *The "instant" lessons of the Iraq war: main report, eighth working draft, May 14, 2003*, pp. 190-191, at [www.csis.org/features/iraq\\_instantlessons.pdf](http://www.csis.org/features/iraq_instantlessons.pdf).

<sup>56</sup> "Wie die US-Armee in die Irak-Krieg triumphierte" (*Der Spiegel*, 14.4.2003).

in Normandy to the Pas de Calais, where they wanted the Germans to believe that the invasion would come.<sup>57</sup> By deceiving Saddam Hussein as to the direction from whence the main offensive would come, winning the war was made so much easier.

In the *third* place – and this is also not new – speed remains one of the most cardinal attributes a commander should aspire to. All great captains, from Alexander the Great to Frederick the Great and Napoleon, lay great emphasis on speed. And in modern times, Colonel General Heinz Guderian, father of the *Blitzkrieg*, already before the Second World War wrote in a German military journal, “Everything is therefore dependent on this: to be able to move faster than has hitherto been done: to keep moving despite the enemy’s defensive fire and thus to make it harder for him to build up fresh defensive positions: and finally to carry the attack deep into the enemy’s defences.”<sup>58</sup> And the legendary Desert Fox himself, Field Marshal Erwin Rommel, wrote during the war, “Speed of movement and the organisational cohesion of one’s own forces are decisive factors and require particular attention. Any sign of dislocation must be dealt with as quickly as possible ...”<sup>59</sup> The Iraq war once again proves this principle superbly.

*Fourthly*, speed still has its limits – for the time being, anyway. As long as soldiers are human beings who get tired, as long as their equipment wear out, as long as vehicles need to be serviced and refuelled, as long as extreme weather conditions cannot as a matter of course be mastered, so long speed can be kept up only for a certain time, after which a pause becomes necessary. This was proved by the fact that the fastest contested advance in all of history ran out of steam after three days – three days in which there was no time to sleep, vehicles broke down and had to be left behind, food, ammunition and fuel ran out. Besides, just then a furious sand storm broke out. And although the air campaign was not affected, the ground forces were completely immobilised until it was over. In other words, although the envelope may now be pushed further than before, there are still limits. As technology progresses, one supposes, the envelope will be pushed ever further. But even then, certain limits will remain.

Speed is, therefore, decisively important, but not just in the pure physical sense. It remains important also in the realm of *reaction* to events, of *decision-*

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<sup>57</sup> David Fraser: *Knight’s cross. A life of Field Marshal Erwin Rommel* (London, HarpersCollins, 1994), pp. 491-492.

<sup>58</sup> Heinz Guderian: *Panzer leader* (London, Michael Joseph, 1952), p. 40.

<sup>59</sup> Erwin Rommel: “Rules of desert warfare” in B.H. Liddell Hart (ed.): *The Rommel papers* (New York, Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1953), p. 200.

*making*. And what is here supremely important, is information warfare. A commander simply has to know what is happening on the battlefield faster and more comprehensively than the enemy. We are, in other words, talking about the digitalisation of the battlefield to enable a commander to know, through GPS, exactly where all his units are; to know, through unmanned aerial vehicles, exactly where the enemy are and in what state they are; and to be able to communicate instantly and securely with his subordinate commanders.

Number *five*: If a campaign is to be successfully fought, the teamwork between different arms – armour, infantry and artillery, ground and air forces – becomes more important than ever. On the one hand, it is true that the destructive power of modern weapons is greater than ever before. But this means nothing if that power cannot accurately be brought to bear on the enemy, or – even worse – it is brought to bear on you own forces, which is known as friendly fire. The benefits of close co-operation have grown considerably, but the disadvantages of this co-operation breaking down (as it will inevitably from time to time) also.

The *sixth* conclusion is this: For the first time, the Americans practised a true decentralisation of command like the Germans have done for considerably more than a century. The Germans call this *Auftragstaktik*. Robert Leonhard summarises the essence of this, saying that it “describes a method of command in which the commander (company, division, army group, etc.) communicates his intent with regard to the enemy as well as the mission of the friendly unit involved. He adds what details are absolutely necessary to facilitate the co-ordinated actions of his subordinates, but he refrains from telling them how to go about accomplishing the task. Rather, he lets them use their expertise, their more intimate knowledge of their own men and equipment, and their greater familiarity with the terrain to develop their own methods. Their only constraint is that they must stay within the commander’s intent.” In other words, a rigid central control is out. This is explained elsewhere through an analogy: “Basically, the idea is that an attack in war should follow the pattern of flowing water. As water proceeds downhill, it naturally avoids strong surfaces. Instead, it flows about seeking weak points and gaps through which the water begins to trickle. When such gaps are found, the whole body of water rush toward it, speeds through it, and then expands on the other side.”<sup>60</sup> In other words, the commander should let the water find the weak spots without a rigid control, the way the Russians traditionally fight.

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<sup>60</sup> Leonhard: *The art of maneuver warfare*, pp. 113, 50.

Indeed, Sun Tzu says an army “may be likened to water, for just as flowing water avoids the heights and hastens to the lowlands, so an army should avoid strength and strike weakness. And as water shapes its flow in accordance with the ground, so an army manages its victory in accordance with the situation of the enemy.”<sup>61</sup>

It is, therefore, striking to read in an informed American news magazine that “[t]he American war plan ... is meant to be fluid. ‘Like water,’ said one senior military official, who described a relentless wave that flows around all obstacles in its path to inexorably drown Saddam in his hole.”<sup>62</sup> A week later, the same magazine reported: “Franks’ ground commanders were given extraordinary latitude to make their own decisions. Invasions have historically been highly synchronized and orchestrated affairs. The fabled ‘left hook’ in Operation Desert Storm to liberate Kuwait in 1991 was actually a ponderous advance, moving at the speed of a bicycle (less than 10 mph [16 km/h]) on average. A better model for Operation Iraqi Freedom was the German *Blitzkrieg* across northern France in 1940. The Panzer divisions were not told to march 25 miles and stop for the night, like armies of old. They were simply commanded to head west until they reached the sea. By the same token, the Third Infantry Division and the I Marine Expeditionary Force were told, in effect, to head for Baghdad and get there as fast as possible, any way they could.”<sup>63</sup>

Yet another aspect, number *seven*, is a direct result of the technological advances in precision weapons. Comparatively few people died in this war. On the coalition side 105 American and 30 British soldiers were killed. There were 11 Americans missing, 399 wounded and 7 were taken prisoner by the Iraqis. The Brits lost 74 dead and wounded. On the other side, exact figures do not exist and will probably never be compiled. According to authoritative estimates, 2 320 Iraqi soldiers died in combat, while 9 000 were taken prisoner by the coalition forces. Among the Iraqi civilians, about 1 400 died, 5 103 were wounded or injured.<sup>64</sup>

As wars generally go, this is a very low number. In World War I, about 8 million soldiers died. But as material for comparison this is worthless, because that war lasted for four years and the Iraqi War only three weeks. However, even during the German invasion of France in 1940, which lasted about six weeks, the Germans

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<sup>61</sup> Sun Tzu: *The art of war*, p. 33 (ch. 6).

<sup>62</sup> Kavin Peraino & Evan Thomas: “The grunts’ war” (*Newsweek*, 14.4.2003).

<sup>63</sup> Evan Thomas and Martha Brant: “The secret war” (*Newsweek*, 21.4.2003).

<sup>64</sup> “Counting the cost” (*The Guardian*, 12.4.2003).

lost a full 27 074 soldiers killed, 111 034 wounded and 18 384 missing. French losses are estimated to be in the region of 90 000 dead, 200 000 wounded and 1,9 million in prisoners and missing. British total casualties were 68 111, those of Belgium 23 350 and of the Dutch 9 779.<sup>65</sup>

The low casualties, certainly among the Americans, was – among other things – the result of the body armour worn by all soldiers in the field. The vast majority of the wounded were injured in the limbs, not the torso, suggesting that the armour did what was hoped of it.<sup>66</sup>

The last observation, number *eight*, is a caution: When looking at the Iraq War, one should, of course, avoid the pitfall of necessarily extrapolating the conclusions of this particular war to warfare in general. One always has to take the unique features of each war into account. Otherwise one would, as frequently happened in the past, prepare to fight the last war, instead of the next one.

This was probably the most “pure” *Blitzkrieg* campaign ever. All the elements of the Iraqi campaign – a blistering pace, made possible by mechanisation, without worrying too much about your flanks, supported by large-scale air attacks, everything being aimed at the demoralisation and paralysis of the enemy – were also present in General Heinz Guderian’s dash from the Meuse to the English Channel in May 1940 and the Israeli march in the Sinai to the Suez Canal in June 1967. However, the instruments (tanks, infantry fighting vehicles, artillery, aircraft and ammunition) were a quantum leap ahead of those of the forties and sixties.

General Ewald von Kleist’s *Panzergruppe*, of which Guderian’s panzer corps was a part, represented only a small portion of the German forces invading the Netherlands, Belgium and France. The rest consisted largely of infantry divisions, marching mostly on foot and horse-drawn cart, and with a resultant slow pace. In other words, the mechanised forces continually lost touch with the infantry who were necessary to mop up the pockets of resistance which the tanks had by-passed. Also, their vehicles were not by far as robust as the present ones. All of this meant that Guderian’s instruments were barely able to do what he wanted them to do.

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<sup>65</sup> Alistair Horne: *To lose a battle. France 1940* (London, Macmillan, 1969), pp. 509-510.

<sup>66</sup> David Brown: “US troops’ injuries in Iraq showed body armor’s value” (*Washington Post*, 4.5.2003).

In 1967, the Israelis were much better off, their tanks being able to move rapidly without too many breaking down, and the infantry in tracked vehicles, and therefore able to keep up with the spear-points. Nevertheless, also in this case, the instruments were not yet 100%. That point will, of course, probably never be reached. And yet the US weapons systems came to as near to perfect as one could humanly expect. The only real problem was the enormous logistic apparatus needed to support the advancing armoured columns. Especially the Abrams main battle tank is notorious for the huge amounts of fuel it needs. While this campaign conclusively proved that the tank is still – and for the foreseeable future will remain – the king of the battlefield, the sustainability of an advance will be dramatically improved if the vehicles need less logistical support.

However that may be, the point is that a *Blitzkrieg* campaign like this would not necessarily succeed in all circumstances. That is why we wrote a few paragraphs above that the particular circumstances of this specific war should be taken into account and that the war should not be extrapolated to cover all wars. For a *Blitzkrieg* to succeed, it has to meet certain conditions. For instance, the terrain has to be right; it will be much more difficult, of not impossible, in jungle or mountains. Command of the air is a prerequisite. And, perhaps most importantly, the enemy has to be incompetent. This is, after all, what happened in 1940, 1941 and again in 1967. This is what happened again in Iraq in 2003. The fact is that the Iraqis on all levels showed a level of incompetence far beyond anything most observers expected before the war started.

The question has to be asked: Would Rumsfeld's insistence on a lighter, more agile force and speed have worked in adverse circumstances? Against a well-prepared, well-trained, well-equipped and well-led enemy who, let's say, aggressively challenged the American command of the air, and who did not lose their heads when the Americans penetrated fast and deep into their country, but resolutely attacked their lines of communication?

After all, the Germans did try a repeat of their early *Blitzkrieg* successes in June 1941, when they invaded the Soviet Union. In spite of dramatic early successes, they ultimately failed, because Russia was, simply put, too large, its economic base too big and robust, and the fighting spirit of its people too implacable for the Germans to succeed.<sup>67</sup> They tried it again in December 1944, when they

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<sup>67</sup> Cf. Paul Carell: *Unternehmen Barbarossa. Der Marsch nach Russland* (Frankfurt, Ullstein, 1963).

surprised the Americans in the Ardennes offensive. During the first days, with heavy fog preventing the US Army Air Force from taking to the skies, and with the initial momentum behind them, they penetrated some tens of kilometres. But the Americans were a totally different proposition from the French in 1940 and the Russians in 1941, and fought back with a tenacity that surprised even themselves. Also, after the fog lifted, their planes swooped down in swarms on anything German that looked like moving, and had a field day, destroying thousands of tanks and other vehicles, making a further advance impossible.<sup>68</sup> Under these circumstances, *Blitzkrieg* did not work. Nor would it under any circumstances that did not meet the conditions spelt out above.

The conclusion is, therefore, simple: Yes, speed and velocity remain important assets in any theatre of operations, especially if this can be combined with precision weapons and air support. But in the face of a really competent enemy one would, however, have to think of alternatives. A repeat of the dash to Baghdad would, in all probability, not work.

As Loren Thompson, a military analyst with the Lexington Institute in the US, says, “The lessons that we derive from this campaign depend upon how closely we think Saddam’s Iraq resembles our future enemies. This campaign plan will work real well if we fight another corrupt dictator with no air force, but if we face a technologically proficient adversary, we’ll be real sorry we took some of these chances. Ever since the collapse of communism, the US has faced a series of incompetent adversaries who provide no serious test of our war-fighting skills. Iraq was less capable than the Soviets, the Serbs were less capable than Iraq and the Taliban was less capable than the Serbs.”<sup>69</sup>

A similar conclusion, though more to the point, was reached by Major General Julian Thompson, who commanded the British ground forces in the Falklands War. He says straight out: “The Iraqi army was lamentable. ... The poor quality of their troops and ubiquitous US air power forced the Iraqis to fight an upside-down war. There was no resolute defence of a series of key areas the US could not afford to bypass, bridges and other river crossings. There was no use of obstacles to slow down the advance. Not one key bridge was blown, although several were prepared for demolition. If the Iraqis had fought in a way that forced the US to stop and launch a series of set-piece attacks, American vehicles would

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<sup>68</sup> Cf. Charles B. MacDonald: *The battle of the Bulge* (London, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1984).

<sup>69</sup> Toby Harnden: “‘Fight light, fight fast’ theory advances” (*The Telegraph*, 14.4.2003).

have folded back on the main supply routes, giving the militia the opportunity to chop ‘the snake’ while its head was engaged with regular forces. As most of the Iraqi army ran away, the militias were left both to delay the advance and attack the supply lines.” Thompson concluded: “Would Rumsfeld’s doctrine work against a first-class enemy? He might argue that there are none left fitting that description. But the North Koreans and Chinese, for example, while not in the same technological league as the Americans, might give them a harder fight than the Iraqis – especially if they could keep their air forces operational.”<sup>70</sup>

And the Israeli Colonel (ret.) Gal Luft, who commanded Israeli forces in the West Bank during the nineties, said the key to the US’ success, besides “the superb performance of US forces”, was “the poor preparedness and lack of organization of the Iraqis.”<sup>71</sup>

One question still remains unanswered. What does all of this mean for the South African National Defence Force? No doubt more competent South African military observers will deal with this more comprehensively, but perhaps one may be permitted a few short, preliminary ideas:

- Our military leaders will have to do more to revamp the SANDF. To put it bluntly, the ordinary soldiers are getting too old and fat. A journalist who observed exercises of members of 1 Parachute Battalion – supposed to be one of the elite units in the Army – with their French counterparts, remarked on the fitness and professionalism which the Frenchmen exuded, compared with the somewhat jaded flabbiness of the South Africans.<sup>72</sup> If anything stood out from the Iraqi War on grassroots level, it was the endurance expected from the GIs and Grunts.
- At the same time, the war will have to be studied in great detail so that the correct strategic, operational and tactical deductions may be drawn, both for the benefit of the high-level planners and for the training of officers.
- It is also clear that digitalisation will be the name of the game in the future. If the SANDF wants to keep up with the technological advances of modern war, if it wants to stand a chance on a modern battlefield, it will

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<sup>70</sup> Julian Thompson: “Air power was devastating and Iraqi forces lamentable” (*The Observer*, 13.4.2003).

<sup>71</sup> Thomas E. Ricks: “What counted: people, plan, inept enemy” (*Washington Post*, 10.4.2003). Cf. also commentary “War and peace: triumph on the battlefield” (*The New York Times*, 12.4.2003).

<sup>72</sup> Erika Gibson: “SA Weermag nie op Eerstewêreld-vlak” (*Die Burger*, 15.4.2003).

have to follow the American example. We are, of course, fairly far advanced already. One is told that the South African company CyberSim has not only developed computer programmes for the digitalisation of the battlefield (and civil disaster scenarios), but that they are in certain respects even in front of the Americans. However, the Americans are further advanced in the practical application. This aspect will have to be pursued in South Africa with great vigour.

- The Defence Force will have to look again at certain weapons systems. In the light of the crucial role played by tanks in Iraq, it would be a momentous mistake to phase out tanks in this country, as some high-level planners wanted to do a few years back. The upgrading of some Olifant mk 1A tanks to mk 1B are proceeding, but it is an open question whether enough are involved. South Africa probably needs enough tanks to put at least a mechanised infantry division – with four or five tank battalions – in the field, should the need arise. At present there is no chance of that. Ideally, the Olifant should be replaced with modern tanks like the Challenger 2 or the German Leopard 2, but this is probably not financially feasible. As even the Olifant mk 1B would be fairly vulnerable on a modern battlefield where tanks like the Abrams, Challenger 2, Leopard 2, the French Leclerc or the Russian T-80 are involved, the SANDF should probably concentrate only on the local region, where the most advanced tanks are Russian T-55s. Also, the politicians would be wise not to declare war on the Americans!
- Also, the SANDF needs a better strategic airlift and sealift capacity. As things stand now, it would be extremely difficult to transport Ratel infantry fighting vehicles or Rooikat armoured cars (let alone tanks) to – say – the DRC for participation in peacekeeping or peace enforcement. More transport aircraft (it has been reported that the SAAF has evinced interest in the new Airbus A400M<sup>73</sup>) is a must, as is the case with specialised Landing Platform Docks.
- The Air Force will have to follow the American military debates about the future of their helicopter gunships and the tactics governing the use of these weapons closely. The American Apaches were badly mauled when they tried to attack the Republican Guard Medina Division. According to reports, this was because they tried to do too much by themselves. When, later on, other gunships were used, it was in co-operation with fixed-wing fighter-bombers and ground artillery. Obviously, attack helicopters are

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<sup>73</sup> News report by AFP, 27.5.2003, as sent out to the media.

more vulnerable than previously thought. In its official report, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division stated that deep attack operations for attack helicopters, which still form the current doctrine, are “not the best use for the division attack helicopter battalion.” Instead, this battalion “is best employed in conducting shaping operations between the division co-ordinated fire line and the division forward boundary.”<sup>74</sup> In other words, it is recommended that attack helicopters not be used without direct support from other arms in the air and on the ground.

- The SANDF will furthermore have to take cognisance of the US military’s reliance on its Reserve Force and National Guard. In total, 10 686 members of the Army Reserve were committed to the operation, as well as 8 866 in the Army National Guard, 2 056 in the Navy Reserve, 9 051 in the Marine Corps Reserve, 2 084 in the Air Force Reserve, and 7 207 in the Air National Guard. This translated to 40 400 reservists out of a total of 423 988 military personnel committed to Operation Iraqi Freedom, or 9,5%.<sup>75</sup> If even the greatest military power on earth places that much reliance on its reserves, it clearly shows that a much smaller country like South Africa will have to husband its Reserve Force very carefully indeed. Given that the Reserve Force has been allowed to dwindle to the point of virtual extinction, this is an acute problem that will have to be addressed urgently.
- Finally, from a completely different angle, the problems created by the Iraqi militia in the Americans’ rear areas is relevant. The South African government has – mainly for political reasons – taken a decision to phase out the commandos. Now although the main operational activity of the commandos in recent years was to assist the Police in anti-crime operations, and the SANDF wants to relinquish this task, this was not the original idea behind this force. Originally it was to have a rear area defence force. In the light of what happened in Iraq one should not underestimate the value of such a rear area force. The Iraqi militia failed, inter alia, because they were badly trained, led and equipped. Think what a well prepared area defence force could be capable of. Anthony Cordesman makes the point that, had the Iraqis prepared their militia better, they would have been able to “conduct far more successful asymmetric

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<sup>74</sup> Third Infantry Division (mechanized) after action report, p. 36, at [www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/report/2003/3id-aar-jul03.pdf](http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/report/2003/3id-aar-jul03.pdf).

<sup>75</sup> Cited in Anthony Cordesman: *The “instant” lessons of the Iraq war: main report, eighth working draft, May 14, 2003*, pp. 137-138, at [www.csis.org/features/iraq\\_instantlessons.pdf](http://www.csis.org/features/iraq_instantlessons.pdf).

fighting.”<sup>76</sup> Obviously, the chance of South Africa being invaded is very small indeed. But if one takes this as your only point of departure, if the whole idea of deterrence, an insurance, is not heeded, then one could just as soon abolish the entire SANDF. The Iraqi war, therefore, shows that South Africa should not relinquish the principle of rear area defence units, whatever one may choose to call them.

## Propaganda

The Iraq War was a conflict in which a most interesting experiment was made, namely to “embed” journalists with certain units. The idea was that these journalists would move and live with their unit, get to know the officers and soldiers, and report on whatever it was that they were doing, thinking and feeling.<sup>77</sup> As one officer explained to the military historian Rick Atkinson, writing for the *Washington Post*: “Our attitude is that information should be released and that there should be a good reason for not releasing it rather than that it should be suppressed until someone finds a good reason for letting it out.”<sup>78</sup>

Did it succeed? Well, it is a fact that the transcripts of the official daily media conferences at the HQ of CENTCOM in Qatar, led by Brigadier General Vincent Brooks,<sup>79</sup> turned out to be practically useless as a historical source for this description and analysis of the war. The conferences consisted chiefly of propaganda or non-committal utterances, and one strongly gets the impression that Brooks and his fellow spokesmen tried to divulge as little as possible. The reports by the embedded journalists, however, were loaded with highly readable and very useful material. It seems that no historian of the war will be able to write about events without building on these reports. Indeed, this writer has depended on these sources to a very large extent.

The reporters were given a rudimentary military training beforehand, so that they more or less knew what to do in certain circumstances and to recognise things when they saw it. The Pentagon forbade reports of live action without the permission of the unit CO. There would also be strict prohibitions on the reporting of future operations or postponed or cancelled operations. The date, time and place

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<sup>76</sup> Anthony Cordesman: *The “instant” lessons” of the Iraq war: main report, eighth working draft, May 14, 2003*, p. 16, at [www.csis.org/features/iraq\\_instantlessons.pdf](http://www.csis.org/features/iraq_instantlessons.pdf).

<sup>77</sup> Cf. Josh Getlin: “Public would get a closer look at war” (*Los Angeles Times*, 11.3.2003).

<sup>78</sup> Rick Atkinson: *In the company of soldiers* (New York, Henry Holt, 2004), p. 16.

<sup>79</sup> They are all at [www.centcom.mil/operations/Iraqi%20Freedom/iraqifreedom.asp](http://www.centcom.mil/operations/Iraqi%20Freedom/iraqifreedom.asp).

of military action observed, as well as the outcomes of mission results, could only be described in general terms,<sup>80</sup> obviously to keep the enemy from getting good intelligence on the coalition forces.

The idea of letting journalists accompanying military forces report on what they see is not new. In the past, these reporters, however, largely became an extension of the home propaganda effort, and the journalists were expected to disseminate what the authorities wanted as part of their patriotic duty to their country. The problem was that societies, especially during the sixties in the West, became more critical of their governments. In the Vietnam War this developed into a highly critical attitude about the war effort as such. The media reflected this, and the media and the government started diverging. This resulted in a highly tense relationship between the media and the military. During Gulf I this eased somewhat, when the most important commanders, such as General Norman Schwarzkopf, saw the importance of being as honest as possible to the media as a method to induce public support for the war effort.<sup>81</sup> This was now taken a step forward.

The embedding had advantages as well as disadvantages. One reporter, David Zucchino of the *Los Angeles Times*, wrote a long and thoughtful piece about his experiences,<sup>82</sup> saying that the journalists could be “bent and manipulated by commander and reporter, often to the benefit of neither. It can also provide an exhilarating, if terrifying, window on the unscripted world of men under stress and fire.” During seven weeks, he writes, “I slept in fighting holes and armored vehicles, on a rooftop, a garage floor and in lumbering troop trucks. For days at a time, I didn’t sleep. I ate with the troops, choking down processed meals of ‘meat, chunked and formed’ that came out of plastic brown bags. I rode with them in loud, claustrophobic and disorienting Bradley fighting vehicles. I complained with them about the choking dust, the lack of water, our foul-smelling bodies and our scaly, rotting feet. ... I saw what the soldiers saw. And, like most of them, I emerged filthy, exhausted and aware of what Winston Churchill meant when he said that ‘nothing in life is so exhilarating as to be shot at without effect’.”

The most important, however, was that “I wrote stories I could not have produced had I not been embedded – on the pivotal battle for Baghdad; the

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<sup>80</sup> Ralph Blumental & Jim Rutenberg: “Journalists are assigned to accompany US troops” (*The New York Times*, 18.2.2003).

<sup>81</sup> Cf. Leopold Scholtz: “The media and the military – allies or adversaries” (*Scientia Militaria*, 28(2), 1998).

<sup>82</sup> David Zucchino: “The war, up close and very personal” (*Los Angeles Times*, 3.5.2003).

performance of US soldiers in combat; the crass opulence of Hussein's palaces; US airstrikes on an office tower in central Baghdad ...” Yet, he concedes, “that same access could be suffocating and blinding. Often I was too close or confined to comprehend the war's broad sweep. I could not interview survivors of Iraqi civilians killed by US soldiers or speak to Iraqi fighters trying to kill Americans. I was not present when Americans died at the hands of fellow soldiers in what the military calls ‘frat’, for fratricide. I had no idea what ordinary Iraqis were experiencing. I was ignorant of Iraqi government decisions and US command strategy.”

The journalist's independence, his/her most prized possession, became compromised: “Embedded reporters were entirely dependent on the military for food, water, power and transportation. And ultimately, we depended on them for something more fundamental: access. We were placed in a potentially compromised position long before the fighting began, and we knew it. ... For journalists, the greatest enemy was ourselves – our ingrained human tendency to identify with those beside us. Bombarded with drama and emotions, it was impossible to step back, or to report every story with absolute detachment. We didn't just cover the war – we were part of it.”

Zucchini concludes: “Reports from embedded reporters did not dominate newspaper war coverage. They were part of it, giving an intimate look at the 250 000 US troops in the Gulf. But the raw reporting emerging from embeds was weighed and balanced by editors against information from other reporters spread far and wide. In that context, embedding provided a valuable contribution.”

Another famous reporter, Rick Atkinson, a reporter veteran from Gulf I – he later brought out an excellent book about that war – wrote, “In 20 years of writing about the military – including two previous stints as an embedded reporter, in Bosnia and Somalia – I have never seen a more intimate arrangement between journalists and soldiers. In the 1991 Persian Gulf War, a handful of reporters accompanied military units. Their copy, videotapes and recordings were ‘pooled’ and made available to all journalists in the theater, but in many cases they were kept at arm's length, subject to censorship, and beset with enormous logistical and communications difficulties. ... In the recent war, censorship was essentially self-regulated and mostly limited to operational details that would help the Iraqis figure out the Americans' next move.”

His final conclusion: “The US military in general, and the US army in particular, took a calculated risk in permitting more than 600 journalists to see the

war in ways not possible for a generation. They clearly believed they had a compelling story to share with the American public, which is the ultimate proprietor of that Army. It was a fair gamble, for both sides.”<sup>83</sup>

William M. Arkin, a military analyst, after studying the reports from embedded journalists with the 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry, came to a similar conclusion. “These firsthand reports,” he writes, “will one day be a treasure trove for historians. And they give the lie to the notion that the embeds were censored or that they lost objectivity by getting too close to individual soldiers and units.” Then he makes an important observation: “What is clear, however, is that the embedded journalists did not shy away from reporting things that the US military was doing its best to ignore. Most notably, Iraqi casualties. Fearful of public reaction, senior US officials in the region and in Washington steadfastly refused to discuss how many Iraqi soldiers and others were dying as a result of the coalition’s overwhelming firepower. Not so the embeds.”

In general it is clear that the practice of embedding journalists with military units in wartime was, on balance, a success. In its official report, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry calls it “an unqualified success.”<sup>84</sup> Reporters did find it difficult to retain their independence from people they came to know so well, and on whom they became so dependent. But by and large they realised the pitfalls themselves and worked hard to keep their distance and objectivity. From a journalistic point of view (and do not forget that the author of this analysis is a journalist as well as a military historian!) it had more positive than negative points. It is true that the individual reporters described only what they saw, and that was like looking through a keyhole. But put together, and with editing and cross-checking by those back home, it enabled the public to a much larger extent than ever before to get a birds-eye view of what was going on in the war zone.

This was undoubtedly important, not only for the public, but also for the governments. No government in a modern democracy can properly fight a war where soldiers may die if the public is overwhelmingly against it. (That is to say, no government who wants to survive the next election in power!) Given the very critical view electorates nowadays take of those who govern them, giving out official propaganda will not do the trick, simply because it will not have the

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<sup>83</sup> Mary Beth Sheridan, Rick Atkinson et al: “Embedded in Iraq: was it worth it?” (*Washington Post*, 4.5.2003).

<sup>84</sup> Third Infantry (mechanized) after action report, p. 44, at [www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/report/2003/3id-aar-jul03.pdf](http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/report/2003/3id-aar-jul03.pdf).

necessary credibility. Chances are good that people will simply disbelieve what they are told. And if one looks at the propaganda spewed by officers at the official briefing sessions in Qatar, one can see why.

Allowing the independent media to be embedded may have been an attempt to co-opt them in a subtle state propaganda campaign. If so, it failed, because the journalists, by and large, kept their professionalism and reported mostly objectively, including writing or saying things that were unflattering to their hosts. But in the larger scheme of things, this helped the war effort among the public, simply because their opinions were formed by information from credible sources – the independent media. In this respect, *independence* and *credibility* were two sides of the same coin.

Illustrating this point beautifully, there was one instance in which the US military did manipulate the media, and had their own credibility seriously tarnished in the process. The raid by US Special Forces to rescue private Jessica Lynch in Nassiriya was announced with a great hullabaloo as a great and heroic feat. TV images were even sent out, and millions of people saw it. After the war, a BBC investigation concluded that the raid was launched *after* all Iraqi forces had left the hospital where Lynch was kept, that she was not, as alleged, maltreated by her captors at all, and that she was not stabbed or shot.<sup>85</sup> Having said all that, embedding is a practice the South African government may also favourably consider when sending SANDF military personnel to other parts of the world, such as peace-keeping or peace-enforcing operations in Burundi or the Democratic Republic of Congo.

## Conclusion

Any strategic evaluation of the war will have to revolve around two questions. Firstly, did the coalition succeed in its war aims? And second, is the world a more peaceful and stable place because of the war? Obviously, some time will have to elapse before these questions can authoritatively be answered, and any attempt to do so here will have to be very preliminary indeed.

It was the Prussian military philosopher Carl von Clausewitz who coined the phrase that war is a continuation of policy by other means. What does this mean? Clausewitz continually emphasises that the true nature of war is its political identity.

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<sup>85</sup> Cf. [news/bbc.co.uk/2/hi/programmes/correspondent/3028585.stm](http://news/bbc.co.uk/2/hi/programmes/correspondent/3028585.stm).

It is the government (policy) who decides what it wants to achieve; it uses war as an instrument to achieve that. War therefore is “an act of force to compel our enemy to do our will.” War in itself does not suspend the political intercourse between states or change its nature into something completely different. It remains politics. In a telling expression, he asks, “[i]s war not just another expression of their [people’s and governments’] thoughts, another form of speech or writing? Its grammar, indeed, may be its own, but not its logic.”

If this is so, Clausewitz continues – and this is of fundamental importance for this analysis – “then war cannot be divorced from political life; and whenever this occurs in our think about war ... we are left with something pointless and devoid of sense.”<sup>86</sup> It is therefore quite clear that one cannot judge a military campaign or war purely on the military level, as a tactical or operational act. Battles and campaigns have to be judged in a political context. In other words, they have to be judged according to the question to what extent they facilitate the success of the political war aim.

Liddell Hart also makes an important point, which follows logically from Clausewitz’ general observation. “Victory in the true sense,” he writes, “implies that the state of peace, and of one’s people, is better after the war than before.”<sup>87</sup> This may be a moral observation, but nevertheless true. War is, at best (even in this age of precision weapons), a bloody and dirty business which is much better suited to destruction than building and development. It is very often also in the victor’s interest to aim for a better state after the war, if only to preserve or develop export markets for his own industries.

It is probably too early to tell whether the coalition succeeded in its war aims. Saddam’s regime was toppled, but months after the fall of Baghdad, his supporters, allegedly together with a number of Muslim fundamentalists from elsewhere in the world, were still conducting a guerrilla war. This was severe enough to cause considerable headaches in Washington. At the time of writing it also was much too early to see whether Iraq would be democratised in the Western sense of the word, let alone whether this would have a domino effect on the rest of the Arab world.

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<sup>86</sup> Clausewitz: *On War* I/1, p. 75, and III/6, pp. 603-605.

<sup>87</sup> Liddell Hart: *Strategy – the indirect approach*, p. 370.

Now where does this all leave the world? That the American/British invasion of Iraq was a shining operational success, is a fact. But did the war leave the world a better place? Did the advantages of removing Saddam Hussein's undisputably barbaric regime outweigh the disadvantages? Did the war leave America in a better position for its self-proclaimed role as the protector of freedom and democracy world-wide?

Firstly, the fact that the purported Iraqi weapons of mass destruction, one of the most important reasons for going to war, had not been found several months after the shooting stopped, dented the coalition's credibility. Coalition leaders wriggled furiously to explain this. Tony Blair persisted that the weapons did exist and would be found.<sup>88</sup> Donald Rumsfeld thought that the weapons possibly had been destroyed before the war and they would not be found at all.<sup>89</sup> For his part, George Bush said that such weapons had indeed been found, and cited an alleged (empty) mobile laboratory.<sup>90</sup> The straightest answer was given by the CO of the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Expeditionary Force in Iraq, who bluntly said US intelligence was "simply wrong."<sup>91</sup>

Whatever the case, according to media exposés, the information gathered by intelligence services were later somewhat embellished to make a better political *casus belli*.<sup>92</sup> No wonder then, that Paul Wolfowitz, probably the strongest advocate of the war, downplayed the issue of weapons of mass destruction as a reason for going to war. "For bureaucratic reasons, we settled on one issue, weapons of mass destruction, because it was the one reason that everyone could agree on," he said.<sup>93</sup>

These words are very loaded indeed. What Wolfowitz is actually saying here, is that there was intense disagreement within the Bush Administration about the war, and that, for want of a better reason, the weapons was settled on as the only

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<sup>88</sup> Gaby Hinsliff et al: "Blair: I have secret proof of weapons" (*The Observer*, 1.6.2003).

<sup>89</sup> Karen DeYoung & Walter Pincus: "US hedges on finding Iraqi weapons" (*Washington Post*, 29.5.2003).

<sup>90</sup> Mike Allen: "Bush: 'we found' banned weapons" (*Washington Post*, 31.5.2003).

<sup>91</sup> Greg Miller: "Analysis of Iraqi weapons 'wrong' " (*Los Angeles Times*, 31.5.2003). Obviously, these weapons may be found after the writing of this piece. But the fact remains that – at least some weeks after the war – the US' credibility was badly dented.

<sup>92</sup> Peter Beaumont & Gaby Hinsliff: "When spies meet spin ..." (*The Observer*, 1.6.2003); Jochen Bittner & Frank Drieschner: "Im Zweifel für den Krieg" (*Die Zeit*, 5.6.2003).

<sup>93</sup> Cf. Bill Sammon: "White House stands by banned-weapons war rationale" (*The Washington Times*, 30.5.2003).

thing everybody could agree upon. It did not mean that the weapons were the main reason for going to war at all.

In the second place, in 1987 the Irish-American historian Paul Kennedy published a book<sup>94</sup> in which he developed a theoretical model, explaining how great powers' rise and decline more or less followed their economic rise and decline (relative to other states' economic strength) by a few decades. These powers become strong economically first, he said, and developed political and military strength afterwards. To protect their newly found interests, they were then forced to divert too much of their economic strength into their military, becoming overstretched in the process ("imperial overstretch," he called it), and went into decline again. On the basis of this model, and writing before the end of the Cold War, he predicted that the US would, in time, just like all the previous examples, become overstretched and would, after a while, decline again.

Obviously, the end of the Cold War and the crumbling of the USSR made nonsense of these predictions, at any rate in the short term. The US remained the only superpower in the world, with an economy enormously strong, buttressed by an unprecedented economic boom during the nineties. However, it is not impossible that Kennedy may yet ultimately be proved right. With the war against terrorism after 9/11 and the war in Iraq, with various role-players putting pressure on the Bush Administration (unofficial as yet) to deal harshly with Iran, North Korea, Syria (Donald Rumsfeld's calls for China to be treated as a "strategic competitor" seems to have abated for the time being), the US may yet go into Kennedy's imperial overstretch.

Before the war, there was considerable pressure from Rumsfeld to downsize the US military, especially the army. As a journalist summarised these ideas, "[i]n this view, mass is no longer a strength on the battlefield, because it simply presents a larger target."<sup>95</sup> Rumsfeld had even floated the idea of cutting the army's combat units by 20% to pay for the new precision weapons.<sup>96</sup> No wonder people like him and Vice President Dick Cheney tried to make as much capital as possible out of the fact that the shining victory over the Iraqis was achieved with so few boots on the ground.

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<sup>94</sup> Paul Kennedy: *The rise and fall of the Great Powers. Economic change and military conflict from 1500 to 2000* (New York, Random House, 1987).

<sup>95</sup> Thomas E. Ricks: "Rumsfeld stands tall after Iraq victory" (*Washington Post*, 20.4.2003).

<sup>96</sup> Seth Stern: "Military 'transformation' may not mean smaller forces" (*The Christian Science Monitor*, 7.5.2003).

Well, first of all, although there were enough troops to win the war, there clearly were not enough to win the peace. “American ground commanders who said the war plan provided too few troops were right for the wrong reasons,” according to David K. Shipler, who observed the war first-hand. “There were enough soldiers during battle – but not enough afterward. There was plenty of firepower from air and armor but not enough visible power in the streets to create an impression of American control.”<sup>97</sup> And closer to year’s end, Senator Chuck Hagel (Republican, Nebraska), a Vietnam War veteran and member of the Foreign Relations Committee who had frequently visited Iraq, said, “[w]e so underestimated and underplanned and underthought about a post-Saddam Iraq that we’ve been woefully unprepared. Now we have a security problem. We have a reality problem. And we have a governance problem. ... And time is not on our side.”<sup>98</sup>

The well-known commentator Edward Luttwak – himself an ex-General – pointed to the fact that “[t]he support echelon is so large that out of the 133,000 American men and women in Iraq, no more than 56,000 are combat-trained troops available for security duties.” In addition to this, “[e]ven the finest soldiers must sleep and eat. Thus the number of troops on patrol at any one time is no more than 28,000 — to oversee frontiers terrorists are trying to cross, to patrol rural terrain including vast oil fields, to control inter-city roads, and to protect American and coalition facilities. Even if so few could do so much, it still leaves the question of how to police the squares, streets and alleys of Baghdad, with its six million inhabitants, not to mention Mosul with 1.7 million, Kirkuk with 800,000, and Sunni towns like Falluja, with its quarter-million restive residents.”<sup>99</sup>

If Clausewitz is correct that war is a continuation of politics by other means, the opposite must also be correct – politics is a continuation of war by other means. This implies that the war against the Saddam regime did not end when Baghdad fell. It continued, and to win this new war as efficiently as the old, other rules would apply – and it is this that the Americans apparently did not understand adequately. For months after the collapse of the Iraqi dictatorship, the ordinary Iraqis were still aching under electricity cuts, a shortage of water, no work, no income, no safety. And this part of the war was at least as important as the shooting part. But for this war there were simply not enough boots on the ground.

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<sup>97</sup> David K. Shipler: “When freedom leads to anarchy” (*The New York Times*, 18.4.2003).

<sup>98</sup> Robin Wright & Thomas E Ricks: “New urgency, new risks in Iraqification” (*Washington Post*, 14.11.2003).

<sup>99</sup> Edward N. Luttwak: “So few soldiers, so much to do” (*The New York Times*, 4.11.2003).

Apart from this, there are some critical shortages in the American military, such as members of the National Guard and reserves, refuelling tankers, transport helicopters, and cargo aircraft.<sup>100</sup> In other words, the US simply cannot afford to downsize their military to any real extent. On the contrary, they will come under great pressure to enlarge it, Rumsfeld's plans notwithstanding, especially because they cannot depend on a future enemy being just as incompetent as the Iraqis.

America's global obligations are huge and are growing. In an insightful article in *The Observer*, Thomas Withington<sup>101</sup>, a defence analyst at King's College, London, wrote that there are still 98 000 US military personnel in Europe, a legacy of the Cold War. (These troops will, granted, to some extent be moved from Germany to some of the Central European countries, but this will not lessen the numbers.) There are 2 000 in Bosnia, 5 000 in Kosovo, 840 in Macedonia, 7 500 in Afghanistan, 18 000 in Japan, 20 000 in outlying Japanese islands, 37 000 in South Korea, 370 in Colombia and Honduras, 1 700 in Bermuda, Iceland and the Azores, plus up to four aircraft carrier battle groups in the Atlantic, Indian Ocean and the Pacific. And then, of course, there is the tens of thousands of soldiers who will be necessary in Iraq for a considerable time.

Furthermore, given the fact that – just as in the eighties with president Ronald Reagan's enormous defence force – this can apparently only be financed through a growing budget deficit, the Americans may find that they are diverting too much of their wealth into the defence of their "empire" to keep up their economic strength. If that happens (and granted, this is only one possible scenario, by no means a foregone conclusion), Kennedy's predictions may, after all, come true. As Withington puts it, "[a]ny future US 'empire building' could be rendered unaffordable and Washington may wish to note those before them who stretched too far. History also shows that the war might be quick to fight, but the peace can take longer to flourish."<sup>102</sup>

Is the world now a safer place? It is to be doubted. The early indications in post-war Iraq was that the fundamentalist Shiite clerics stepped into the power vacuum that came into being with the American inability to restore law and order on the streets. These people have no interest in transforming Iraq into a nice liberal-

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<sup>100</sup> Cf. "Iraq war exposes weak spots in Pentagon's defense plans" (*USA Today*, 21.4.2003).

<sup>101</sup> Thomas Withington: "America's forces patrol the world" (*The Observer*, 6.4.2003).

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*

style democracy; they have different shades of an Islamic state in mind.<sup>103</sup> If Iraq indeed becomes an Islamic theocracy, the law of unintended consequences, which has so often visited the Americans in their foreign policy, will once again hold sway.

There never was any credible evidence that Saddam, bad guy that he undoubtedly was, had anything to do with the events of 9/11, or that Al-Qaeda had any plans to forge meaningful ties with him. The war was a deep humiliation to the Arabs at large. Arab TV viewers across the Middle East watched enraptured as Iraqi irregulars fought bravely against the invaders. But this was abruptly cut short by the fall of Baghdad.<sup>104</sup> This feeling of intense national humiliation, it seems, could be tapped into by al-Qaeda, just as the feelings of national humiliation in Germany after 1918 were tapped into by Adolf Hitler. And, while it is true that history never repeats itself, it may at least imitate itself.

At the time of publication it was obviously too early to say what the long-term outcome of the war would be. Nevertheless, the early indications – which may, of course, be reversed – were that the world was not a safer place. America's policy to wage the war alone, if need be, without the consent of the international community or indeed of most of its most important allies, apparently weakened the UN, Nato and the EU. In fact, the US has to some extent isolated (and therefore weakened) itself. Even though a rapprochement may come about with Russia, Germany and France, the resentment of the US's bullying will, no doubt, linger for a considerable time. Armed might is in the end no substitute for *convincing* others of your right. And in the Arab world, the humiliation could lead to highly undesirable consequences, like a strengthening of international terrorism.

This author agrees with the assessment of the British political observer Martin Woollacott: “[t]he United States today is discovering what other great powers have found before it, which is that military victories can have results quite opposite to those intended. The world has not been made more pliant and respectful by a demonstration of American might, but is, on the contrary, more recalcitrant, sulky, and difficult than it was before the war.” He ends his article thus: “The truth is that a weakened America faces a weak world, not the best combination

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<sup>103</sup> Cf. Peter Beaumont: “Revolution city” (*The Observer*, 20.4.2003); Rajiv Chandrasekaran: “US military slow to fill leadership vacuum left by war” (*Washington Post*, 5.5.2003).

<sup>104</sup> Cf. Alan Sipress: “Arabs feel sting of yet another bitter setback” (*Washington Post*, 23.4.2003).

imaginable for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.”<sup>105</sup> Sombre words indeed, but words that one will have to heed.

## POSTSCRIPT

As brilliant as the conventional campaign was, the guerrilla war that followed was completely botched by the Americans. Just as the imperial British forces in the Anglo-Boer War were intellectually, emotionally and materially badly prepared for the Boer commandos’ switch to guerrilla warfare, so the upsurge of a vicious guerrilla and terrorist campaign in Iraq caught the Americans totally wrong-footed.

Having occupied Bagdad and Tikrit, there was perhaps a window of about six months for the Americans to translate their conventional military success into a political success – something all wars are, after all, about. During this period of relative calm they had the opportunity to pacify the country by putting in a huge logistical and engineering effort, the kind Americans are renowned for, to rebuild the shattered infrastructure and restoring law and order. They did not make use of it, partly because there were too few boots on the ground, but partly also because there was virtually no planning for the post-war period. Political hubris on the part of president George Bush, his Defence Secretary, Donald Rumsfeld, and the other “neocons” in the Bush administration seems to have played a big role here. They thought that the Iraqis would welcome the American and British liberators with open arms and refused to countenance the possibility that things could go wrong.

Well, wrong they went. With so few troops available and not having been prepared for it, the coalition forces could do little when the country erupted into general chaos in the aftermath of the fighting. And in this chaos, which lasted for several months, three anti-American forces grabbed the chance of establishing themselves among the Iraqi people. These were the remnants of the Saddam regime, fundamentalist Sunni Islamic terrorists who infiltrated the country (probably mainly from Syria), and the majority Shiite population. Each of these had its own agenda, but at times the three converged. At the time of writing, the Shiites seemed to have decided to put in a minimum of cooperation with the coalition forces in order to facilitate the transition and get the occupiers out, while the Saddam loyalists and the

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<sup>105</sup> Martin Woollacott: “Strong-arm tactics leave the world a weaker place” (*The Guardian*, 2.5.2003).

Sunni fundamentalists seemed to have forged a marriage of convenience. Especially the latter two threatened to make the Sunni areas in the centre of the country, around Bagdad, Falluja, Tikrit and Mosul ungovernable. Regular attacks on American troops and the (badly trained and led) security forces of the transition Iraqi government made life very dangerous.

The American reaction to this was fundamentally erroneous. In towns like Samarra and Falluja they launched large-scale search-and-destroy offensives in which the insurgents were, in view of the Americans' enormous firepower, overwhelmed. But many insurgents chose, wisely and in line with guerrilla warfare theory, not to fight, but to melt away. And within a few weeks, the fighting would again erupt in another place.

In his brilliant study on revolutionary warfare, Colonel Thomas X. Hammes writes that this type of conflict, in contrast to previous generations of warfare, "does not attempt to win by defeating the enemy's military forces" – the way the Americans and Brits did so well on the road to Bagdad. Instead, "it directly attacks the minds of enemy decision makers to destroy the enemy's political will."<sup>106</sup> This is typically the way in which, for example, the ANC fought its war against the apartheid government. Judging on the large-scale semi-conventional sweeps in several towns, the Americans still have not learnt the lesson of Vietnam.

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<sup>106</sup> Thomas X. Hammes: *The sling and the stone. On warfare in the 21st century* (St. Paul, Zenith, 2004), p. 3.