

Gulf War II

Operation Iraqi Freedom

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On 20 March 2003, Coalition forces led mainly by the United States and United Kingdom launched 'Operation Iraqi Freedom'. The stated aim of the Operation was to topple the dictatorial regime of Saddam Hussein and destroying its ability to use weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) or make them available to terrorists. By 05 April 2003, US Ground forces had entered Baghdad and on 09 April 2003, a grand statue of Saddam Hussein at Firdos Square was toppled, thus signaling the end of his 24 year long regime. But the conventional victory in Iraq for the Coalition forces soon degenerated into a protracted insurgency which continues to fester till date.

Causes of the Conflict

Ever since the end of the Persian Gulf War in 1991, the US and UK had been keeping Saddam Hussein's regime in Iraq under a tight leash. In addition to imposing sanctions, "No-Fly Zones" were regulated over North and South Iraq in order to prevent Iraqi forces from bombing the Northern Kurds and the Southern Shiites. UN Weapons Inspectors were permitted to inspect facilities to confirm the destruction of SCUD missiles and WMDs. In 1998, under Iraqi pressure, the weapons inspectors left Iraq. In retaliation, the United States launched a severe three day aerial bombing campaign codenamed 'Operation Desert Fox'. Following this, Iraqi forces significantly increased attempts to challenge the Allied planes patrolling the No-Fly Zones, thereby also causing an increase in the Allied bombing of Iraqi targets.

Post-9/11, US President George Bush had increasingly started to link Iraq's alleged production of WMDs with terrorism. Backed by the UN, US and UK forces began surrounding Iraq with ground forces. Under pressure Iraq once again permitted Weapons Inspectors. However, the US and UK stated that Iraq was not fully cooperating with the inspectors. On 17 March 2003, President George

W Bush issued an ultimatum to Saddam Hussein and his sons to enter into exile within 48 hours. Saddam Hussein's defiance set the ball rolling for 'Operation Iraqi Freedom'.

Operation Iraqi Freedom

Nearly 248,000 soldiers from the United States, 45,000 British soldiers, 2,000 Australian soldiers and 194 Polish soldiers from Special Forces unit GROM sent to Kuwait for the invasion. The invasion force was also supported by Iraqi Kurdish militia troops, estimated to number upwards of 70,000. The strength of the Iraq Army in 2003 was estimated to be around 3,75,000 troops organized into 5 corps. In all, there were 11 infantry divisions, 3 mechanized divisions, and 3 armoured divisions. The Republican Guard consisted of between 50,000 and 60,000 troops.

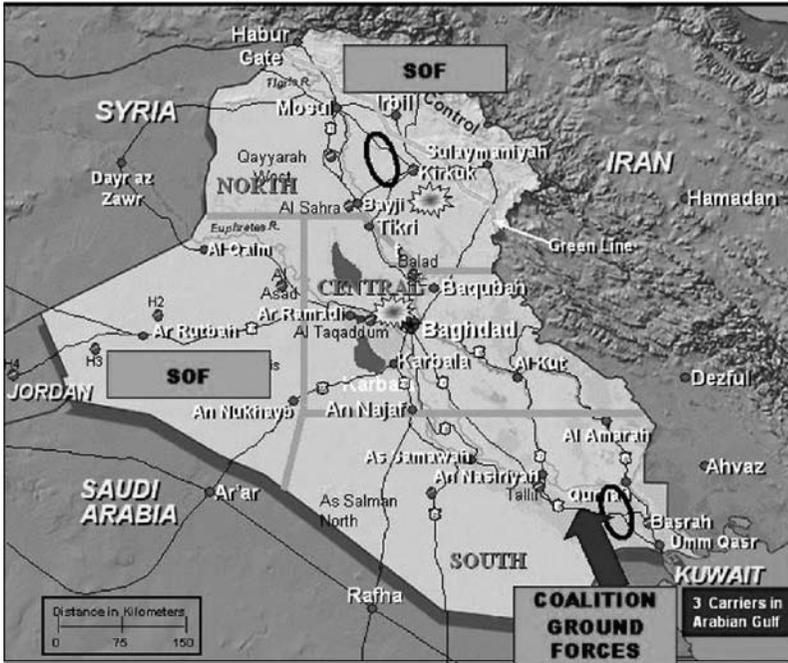
Early Infiltration

The war effort had begun with the early infiltration by the so-called Northern and Southern Iraq Liaison Elements (NILE and SILE), whose task was to gather intelligence, form relationships, and lay the groundwork for the early entry of Special Operations Forces (SOF). These covert teams consisting of troops from the US, UK, Australia and Poland SOF, in turn, had also entered Iraq before the formal launch. Among other missions, SOF secured bases in Al Anbar province in western Iraq, secured suspected WMD sites, pursued some of the designated "high-value targets," and worked closely with Iraqi Kurdish forces in northern Iraq—the *pesh merga*—to attack a key stronghold of the designated Foreign Terrorist Organization. It is estimated that nearly 10000 SOF troops participated in the major phase of the war.

The Ground Campaign

The ground campaign was led by Army Lieutenant General David McKiernan, the Commanding General of the Combined Forces Land Component Command (CFLCC), the ground component of CENTCOM. The strategy was a quick, two-pronged push from Kuwait up through southern Iraq to Baghdad. Under CFLCC, the ground "main effort" was led by U.S. Army V Corps, under Lieutenant General William Scott Wallace. V Corps was assigned the western route up to Baghdad, west of the Euphrates River. The 1st Marine Expeditionary Force (IMEF), led by Lieutenant General James Conway, was assigned the eastern route, closer to the border with Iran. UK's 1st Armoured Division was to take Basra.

MAP 1: Disposition of Coalition Ground forces on 20 March 2003



The strategy of the 1991 Gulf War in which protracted aerial bombings had precluded a ground offensive was abandoned in ‘Op Iraqi Freedom’. Instead, simultaneous aerial and ground offensives were launched in order to bypass major Iraqi cities and military centres to avoid large-scale collateral damage. It was hoped that by following a ‘shock and awe’ campaign, coalition forces would be able to decapitate the Iraqi leadership and forces quickly which would lead to their collapse. The local population would then support the ground troops.

On 19 March 2003, at 5:34 AM in Iraq, US Stealth bombers and Tomahawk Cruise Missiles struck “leadership targets” in and around the Iraqi capital of Baghdad to begin the second major war between a United States-led Coalition and Saddam Hussein’s Iraq. Soon thereafter, air attacks began against Iraqi targets in southern Iraq, followed by missile attacks from Iraq toward US military positions in the Kuwaiti desert.

On the first full day of the war, 20 March, British 3 Commando Brigade, with the United States Marine Corps’ 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit and the Polish Special Forces unit GROM attacked the port of Umm Qasr, near

the major Iraqi city of Basra, while a second wave of air attacks hit Baghdad. Over the next several days, Iraqi militia (known as the Saddam Fedayeen), and holdout troops continued to resist Coalition forces, inflicting several casualties. Amphibious operations were launched prior to March 20 to secure the oil fields in the Al-Faw peninsula. The British Army's 16 Air Assault Brigade also secured the oil fields in southern Iraq in places like Rumaila while the Polish commandos captured offshore oil platforms near the port, preventing their destruction. Despite these fleeing Iraqi troops set fire to nearly 44 oil wells.

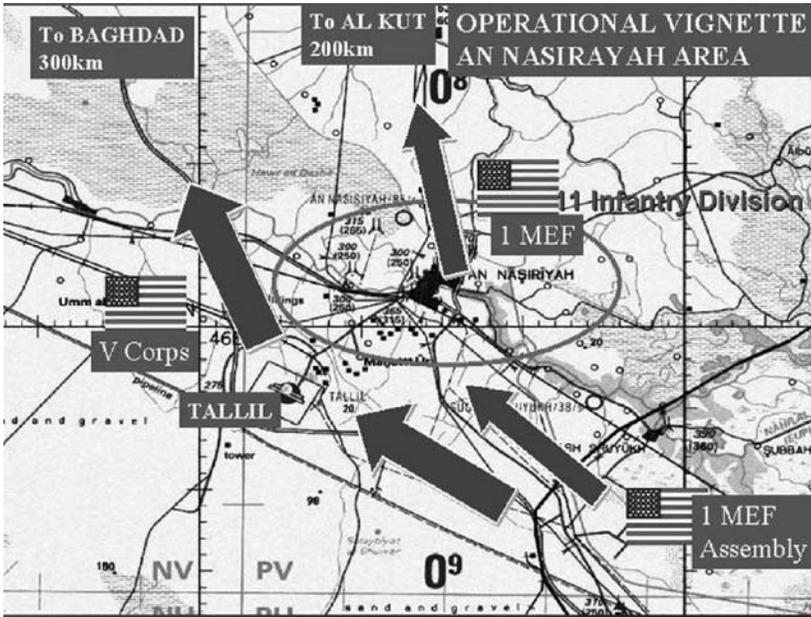
In keeping with the rapid advance plan, the US 3rd Infantry Division moved westward and then northward through the western desert toward Baghdad, while the 1st Marine Expeditionary Force moved along Highway 1 through the center of the country, and 1 (UK) Armoured Division moved northward through the eastern marshland.

By 23 March, Coalition forces had seized H-2 and H-3, airfields in western Iraq, and controlled parts of Umm Qasr, Basra and Nasirayah. Armoured and mechanized forces had advanced to within 100 miles of Baghdad and forced a crossing of the Euphrates River at Nasirayah, where Iraqi forces put up a stiff fight. In northern Iraq, the US launched an attack with 40 to 50 cruise missiles on forces of two Islamist parties opposed to the Pro-US Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK). These two groups are Ansar al-Islam (Supporters of Islam), believed associated with Osama bin Laden's al-Qaida and Komala Islami Kurdistan (Islamic Society of Kurdistan). Also on March 23, US forces began airlifting troops into Kurdish-controlled northern Iraq in what was to be the opening move toward a second front against Iraqi forces. Also on March 23, Iraqi forces ambushed the US Army's 507th Maintenance Company in Nasirayah. By March 24, the 1st Marine Regiment had secured a perimeter to the north of Nasirayah and after a battle which killed nearly 200-300 Iraqi soldiers, Nasirayah was secured. The 101st Airborne Division continued its attack north in support of the 3rd Infantry Division.

Fierce fighting also broke out in Najaf which was eventually secured by the 101st Airborne Division and elements of the 70 Armoured Regiment by April 04.

By 27 March, fierce fighting erupted in the city of Samawah, where US forces were faced by up to 1,500 Iraqi irregulars at a vital bridge over the Euphrates River. US forces eventually took control of the bridge and continued the advance to Baghdad. In northern Iraq, approximately 1,000 paratroopers of the U.S. Army's 173rd Airborne Brigade parachuted onto an airfield in an effort to open a

MAP 2: Battle of Nasirayah



northern front against Iraqi forces. Within days, Kurdish Peshmerga troops of the PUK, along with US special forces units, assaulted the stronghold of the Ansar al-Islam group along the Iranian border.

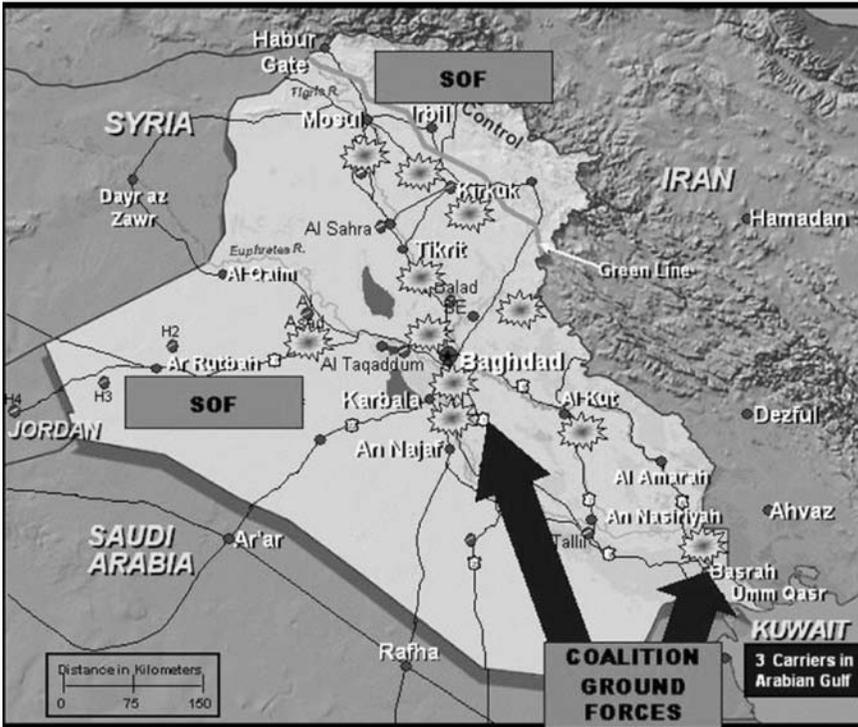
By the tenth day of the war on 29 March, US forces had advanced as far north as Karbala, where large battles with Iraqi forces took place. Major combat continued at Najaf, Nasirayah, Basra and other locations as Iraqi guerrilla forces, many of whom belonged to the Saddam Fedayeen, proved to be formidable forces for the Coalition to overcome. Bombing raids on Baghdad and other Iraqi cities continued, as did Iraqi attempts to hit Kuwaiti-based targets with surface-to-surface missiles. One missile successfully hit Kuwait City on March 28, inflicting damage on a shopping mall and causing minor wounds to two Kuwaitis.

Also on March 29, the first suicide bombing on Coalition forces occurred, killing four American troops at Najaf.

On March 30, Six hundred British commandos attacked near Basra, destroying Iraqi tanks and capturing nearly 300 prisoners.

On April 1, US forces rescue Pfc. Jessica Lynch and recover the bodies of several other members of the 507th Maintenance Company.

MAP 3: Progress of Land Forces by 26 March 2003.



Battle of Karbala

The Karbala Gap was a 20-25-mile wide strip of land with the Euphrates River to the east and Lake Razazah to the west. This strip of land was recognised by Iraqi commanders as a key approach to Baghdad, and was defended by some of the best units of the Iraqi Republican Guard. The Iraqi high command had originally positioned two Republican Guard divisions blocking the Karbala Gap. The US deception plan led the Iraqis to believe that the US 4th Infantry Division would invade Baghdad from Turkey in the North. This led to the redeployment of Iraqi troops from the Karbala front.

American troops rushed through the gap and reached the Euphrates River at the town of Musayib. At Musayib, US troops crossed the Euphrates in boats and seized the vital al-Kaed bridge across the Euphrates after Iraqi demolitions teams had failed to destroy it in time. The Iraqi 10th Armoured Brigade from the Medina Division and the 22nd Armoured Brigade from the Nebuchadnezzar Division,

supported by artillery, launched night attacks against the U.S. bridgehead at Musayib. The attack was repulsed using tank fire and massed artillery rockets, destroying or disabling every Iraqi tank in the assault. The next morning, Coalition aircraft and helicopters rained death on the Republican Guard units, destroying many more vehicles as well as communications infrastructure. The Republican Guard units broke under the massed firepower and lost any sense of command and cohesion and the US forces poured through gap on to Baghdad.

On 3 April, US forces reached Saddam International Airport on the outskirts of Baghdad.

On 5 April, US armoured forces entered Baghdad, conducting a large raid. Such incursions would continue for several days. Iraqi civilians begin widespread looting of the city. an initial engagement of armoured units south of the city saw most of the Republican Guard's assets destroyed and routes in the southern outskirts of the city occupied. On 5 April, Task Force 1-64 Armor of the U.S. Army's 3rd Infantry Division executed a raid, later called the "Thunder Run", to test remaining Iraqi defenses, with 29 tanks and 14 Bradley armoured fighting vehicles advancing to the Baghdad airport

On 7 April, the British 7 Armoured Brigade and 3 Paras (Red Devils) reached the center of Basra and declare the city to be under Coalition control. Entering Basra was achieved after two weeks of fierce fighting, which included the biggest tank battle by British forces since World War II when the Royal Scots Dragoon Guards destroyed 14 Iraqi tanks on 27 March.

On 9 April, US troops helped Iraqi crowds topple a large statue of Saddam Hussein at Firdos Square. Coalition forces continued to extend their control over the city.

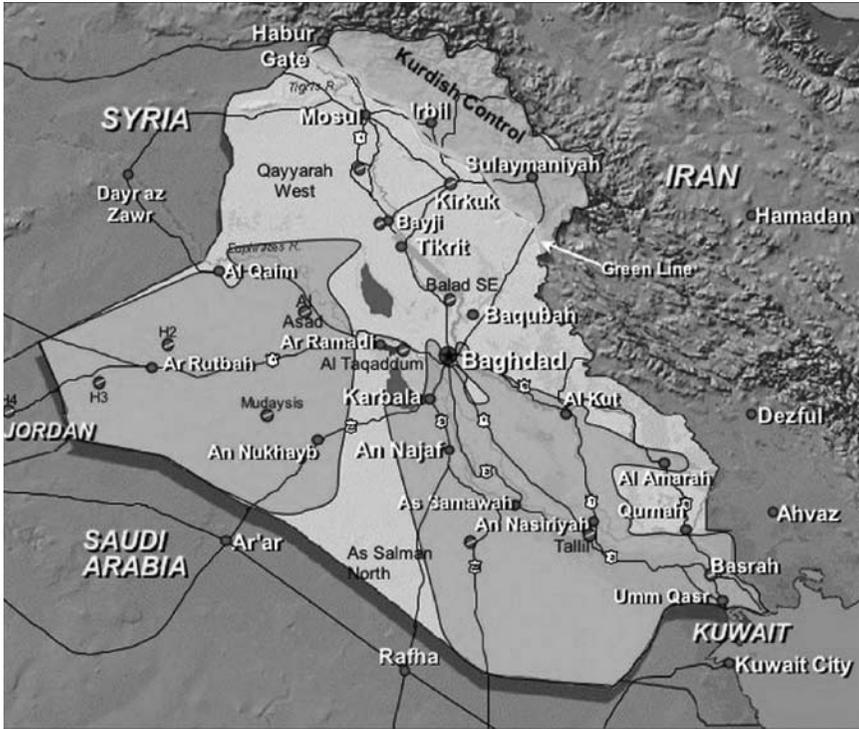
On 10 April, Kurdish fighters seized the northern city of Kirkuk from the Iraqi forces.

On 11 April, US and Kurdish troops entered Mosul in the north.

On 13 April, US forces entered Saddam's hometown of Tikrit. On April 15, 2003 Tikrit fell and the Coalition forces declared the war to be effectively over. Several minor actions and skirmishes continued till 01 May. By now the war had degenerated into a guerilla campaign by remnants of the Iraqi Army and Saddam Hussein's loyalists who were organizing a Sunni resistance against the Coalition forces.

On 01 May 2003, Bush landed on the aircraft carrier USS Abraham Lincoln, in a Lockheed S-3 Viking, where he gave a speech announcing the end of major combat operations in the Iraq war.

MAP 4: Areas under Coalition control by 10 April 2003 (Green Zones).



On 22 July 22 2003, Uday and Qusay Hussein were killed by troops of the US 101st Airborne Division. Saddam Hussein was captured on 13 December 2004.

Casualties

US government declared 139 fatalities of its service personnel till 01 May 2003. It is estimated that nearly 7000 civilians were killed during the invasion phase of the war.

Implications & Lessons Learnt*

The Contemporary Operating Environment (COE)

Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) demonstrated that the COE is not just the enemy, but truly an environment consisting of the enemy, friendly forces, noncombatants, governmental and nongovernmental organizations, neutrals, terrain, weather, and other factors. More important, the Army's experience in--and ability to cope with--the COE as it existed in Iraq in March and April of 2003 suggests some areas worthy of consideration as the Army determines how to prepare for future combat operations or operations other than war. OIF also lends the Army a direction that transformation could take to maintain current demonstrated battlefield dominance into the middle of the 21st century.

OIF and the many other operations conducted since the end of the Cold War also demonstrate that the COE is dynamic. Friends and foes will make adjustments based on what they observed in OIF. Adaptation is therefore the rule for the Army and the other services. Specifically, adaptation in anticipation of change should characterize the way the Army designs, equips, mans, and trains units.

Preparation

The preparation of the theater and ongoing operations since Desert Storm proved essential to rapid tactical and operational success in Operation Iraqi Freedom. The US staged ground forces primarily in a comparatively robust theater infrastructure. Despite the fact that coalition forces could not stage in either Saudi Arabia or Turkey, they enjoyed the benefits of continued presence in the theater that their predecessors in the Gulf War did not. It is hard to overstate the importance of this fact. The caveat for US armed forces is clear--a decade's preparation adjacent to the territory on which ground combat operations are anticipated may not precede the next operation.

On the other hand, the work the services did to assemble and maintain pre-positioned equipment and improve lift capabilities clearly paid dividends and are independent of the theater.

Urban Operations

The initiative to assign Joint Forces Command (JFCOM) the responsibility for joint urban operations experimentation will have far-reaching effects because the OIF campaign appears to confirm what most soldiers understand instinctively:

- Urbanization is a trend that is unlikely to be reversed.
- Most potential opponents know they cannot confront American forces symmetrically, so they must consider, among other things, using complex and urban terrain to their advantage.
- US forces must be able to win the “close fight” inherent in urban terrain.
- US forces must be able to integrate fires with minimal collateral damage.

Operation Iraqi Freedom affords ample opportunity to consider the ramifications of how the armed forces have organized and prepared for combat operations in the COE. Iraq, however, is not the COE, but instead a subset of that larger context and must be understood as such.

Command and Control

Command and control is a particularly broad area of consideration. It affords the opportunity as a domain in which to consider decision making, organizations, the separate functions of command and control, and leadership, to name a just a few of the possible areas of discussion. Here the focus is narrowed to three separate areas of discussion which, while still broad, sharpen the focus and reflect those areas that could be observed with sufficient clarity and frequency as to warrant suggesting implications. Those are leadership and decision making, battle command, and how forces are echeloned.

Battle Command--Enabling Commanders to Lead from the Front

The ability to describe what is to be done, to visualize the end state, and to direct execution are components of the art and science of battle command. Art implies, among other things, intuition and a feel for the battlefield. Because combat operations remain, even in the early 21st century, human endeavors, commanders must also be able to assess the battlefield for themselves and inspire and direct important actions. The best commanders, therefore, also are good leaders who lead from the front. The science of command lends itself more to the technical competence soldiers expect in their commanders, but also to the means of effecting control in execution. Lieutenant General Wallace developed and executed a battlefield circulation scheme to visit each of his divisions daily to see his commanders and look them in the eye. When Lieutenant General McKiernan needed to make critical decisions, he went forward, as he did on his visit to Jalibah on 28 March, to see and hear from his commanders personally. To lead from the

front and to command effectively, commanders need support. They need the tools to communicate their vision and aids to command that enable or support control and direction. They need the means to communicate and they need the support staff to assist in assessing enemy intentions, planning operations, and directing execution.

Battle Command on the Move and Dispersed

The Army developed and fielded purpose-built command and control vehicles with broad-band satellite suites that provided the means for commanders to command from well forward and while on the move. But there were very few of these systems, none were fielded below division level, and not all of the divisions had them. Maneuver commanders down to brigade level did have satellite communications, and most combat and combat support (CS) units down to company level had BFT that enabled at least limited email via satellite. Voice communication provided by single-channel wide band (25 kHz) tactical satellite assured communications over long ranges so that brigades could talk to each other and their division. Below that level, units relied on short-range FM radios. Some units remained tied to mobile subscriber equipment (MSE), which meant, in effect, that they had no means to effect battle command on the move enhanced by ABCS until the MSE nodes caught up--which is to say, too late to support them in the advance on Baghdad.

Theater Air and Missile Defense

The development of theater air and missile defense (TAMD) following DESERT STORM proved successful for a number of reasons. First, the services developed joint solutions to the problem. The USS Higgins, an AEGIS destroyer, provided the fastest means of early warning and effectively linked the Navy's missile defense capability to the Patriot defense umbrella. Second, the Army designed and organized a formation to fight TAMD. The 32nd Army Air and Missile Defense Command afforded the means to exercise battle command over the many units that provided TAMD and supported the commander of Coalition Force Air Component Command, serving as his deputy for TAMD. The Kuwaitis added their own Patriot defenses to the fight, freeing the US Patriots to defend other friendly nations in the theater.

Air Power: Flexible, Responsive, and Central to Decisive Joint Operations

Coalition air forces and ground component attack aviation drove home the qualities of flexibility and decisiveness that air power brings to the battlefield. The Coalition Forces Air Component Command demonstrated flexibility right from the outset when, for sound reasons, A and G days merged. Everyone, including the Iraqis and coalition ground troops, anticipated that a lengthy air campaign would precede any ground operations. When it did not, the air component commander still had important tasks to execute in support of his campaign to meet CENTCOM objectives. The proliferation of precision guided munitions and the fact that the coalition enjoyed air superiority enabled the airmen to undertake five separate tasks at once, some of which they may have preferred to do sequentially.

Deploying Troops: Issues and Possible Solutions Across the Department of Defense

The commitment of the services to improve deployment following DESERT STORM was sustained and effective over the last decade. Developing and fielding fast sealift, USMC Maritime Pre-position Squadrons, Army Pre-positioned Stocks, the C-17, and single port management all paid dividends during Operation IRAQI FREEDOM. Much remains to be done. The Request For Forces initiative, intended to afford greater flexibility to the regional combatant commander, did not work. Yet there is no question that the system in place did not meet the needs of commanders in contingency environment.

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* (Sourced from *On Point: The United States Army in Operation Iraqi Freedom*; for full reading, go to: <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/report/2004/onpoint/ch-7.htm>)

Suggested Readings

1. Comprehensive Report of the Special Advisor to the DCI on Iraq's WM. Washington, Central Intelligence Agency, 2004. 4 vols.
2. Cordesman, Anthony H. *The Iraq War: Strategy, Tactics, and Military Lessons*. Washington, CSIS Press, 2003. 572 p.
3. Crane, Conrad C. and Terrill, W. Andrew. *Reconstructing Iraq: Insights,*

Challenges, and Missions for Military Forces in a Post-Conflict Scenario. Carlisle Barracks, PA, Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 2003. 78 p.

4. Gordon, Philip H. and Shapiro, Jeremy. *Allies at War: America, Europe, and the Crisis over Iraq*. New York, McGraw Hill, Inc, 2004
5. Hanson, Victor Davis. *Between War and Peace: Lessons from Afghanistan to Iraq*. New York, Random House Trade Paperbacks, 2004. 282 p.
6. Krepinevich, Andrew F. *Operation Iraqi Freedom: A First-Blush Assessment*. Washington, Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, 2003. 36 p.
7. Peters, Ralph. *Beyond Baghdad: Postmodern War and Peace*. Mechanicsburg, PA, Stackpole Books, 2003. 337 p.