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Random Gleanings

What's next for Iraq

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The next set of major decisions to be made by Saddam Hussein and George W. Bush will likely strongly influence the events and direction of the next few years, and perhaps decades. We have several comments to add to those made last week on BANKSTOCKS.COM. Consensus opinion among many informed people is that **an invasion of Iraq is highly likely within the next few months**. The shape and form that a U.S. military operation may take may also be reasonably guessed at; it will likely be very different in important respects from the first Gulf War.

As mandated by the UN resolution, the Iraqis have submitted their declaration of weapons. Experts say that a study of that document will require a week to ten days. **It's still highly uncertain, of course, that the Iraqis have been fully forthcoming**. And it's also not clear how much knowledge the U.S. has about Iraqi capabilities which can be used as a comparison. The U.S. should be able to demonstrate "material breaches" of the UN sanctions through the inspection process, Iraqi defections, or other means will. Tom Friedman has maintained in *The New York Times* (12/1) that **defectors offer the best way to uncover virtually irrefutable evidence of deception and noncompliance**. So far, the UN inspection team's interest in following that avenue of information-gathering is unpromising.

The Iraqi leadership has been as defiant as ever at a time when U.S. political leaders and governmental officials have been traveling abroad to attempt to identify and strengthen the fabric

of our support. Over the weekend two returning senators, Joe Biden and Chuck Hagel, both of whom had previously raised questions about our policies, used public television appearances to heap praise on the Bush administration's tactics to win multinational backing. **Paul Wolfowitz's efforts to woo more strategic support from Turkey are more difficult to gauge.** The president continues to use tough rhetoric while proceeding with cautious behavior, but he'll soon have to be more open as to what the government actually knows. If our knowledge seems circumstantial or dated, how credible will it be to the many who harbor misgivings about military action? Dr. Hussein al Shahratai, former head of the Iraqi nuclear energy agency who spent 11 years in solitary confinement prior to escaping Iraq in 1991, recently expressed doubt that the inspections will prove revealing (*NYT* 12/3). **It is only through the release of more evidence that many of the current doubters will be convinced.**

Nor has the administration persuaded a number of people that wars against al Qaeda, terrorism in general, and Iraq are inextricably linked (*WSJ*, 12/3, *FT* 10/15). And even many allies have voiced doubts about the U.S. stated intention to consider launching "preventive wars" under certain circumstances (*New Yorker*, 9/16). So if there is no indication Hussein will submit to disarmament, then the key focus will be on the President. His advisors say that he has yet to make a decision; it may or may not be portentous that the president's holiday reading at his Texas ranch this August included Prof. Eliot Cohen's book *Supreme Command*. Cohen's thesis is that four statesmen-Winston Churchill, Georges Clemenceau, David Ben-Gurion and Abraham Lincoln – owed their greatness as wartime leaders to their **ability and willingness to question and overrule the instinctive caution of their military advisors.**

One Churchill quote from the book: "you may take the most gallant sailor, the most intrepid airman, or the most audacious soldier, put them at a table together, what do you get? The sum total of their fears." (*FT*, 8/30)

The Order of Battle

What form an attack might take has been the subject of many stories and rumors. It's difficult to segregate what's information, what's disinformation, and what's merely a reflection of Washington turf battles. We heard one retired general say the window of time for war is short, between early in the year and March, due to weather conditions. Another, a former arms inspector who spent eight years in Iraq, said that timing doesn't matter that much and that there really isn't a single good time to attack because conditions are bad all year. A critical factor is the time that will be required for buildup, with general agreement that it could be faster than in the 1990-1991 hostility, in part because this time the troop requirements are much lower. U.S. officials seem highly confident that, because of gains in technology and improvements in preparation (and the apparent deterioration in Iraqi competency), that **our edge is more decisive now than it was a decade ago.**

But stories spilling out of *The New York Times* and *Washington Post* since summer have varied. An early autumn story was that **Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld had rejected the Pentagon's first plan**, which called for the commitment of 250,000 to 300,000 troops and a conventional invasion, and instead called for a much more intense use of high technology, Special Operations

troops, and a much-reduced force of only 50,000 men.

This plan then gave way to other versions. Reports suggest that General Tommy Franks (and perhaps Colin Powell) succeeded in modifying this Rumsfeld suggestion, so that a larger force would be in the general area, though not involved in the first stages. In fact, Nicholas Lemann wrote in *The New Yorker* (11/18) that **the preliminary phase of the war has already begun**, with the insertion of Israeli special-ops people into western Iraq, already where Saudis missiles are. At the same time, a covert operation run by the CIA is underway involving our own special ops-people looking for Scuds in Southern Iraq, which could be used to hit the Saudis. Our forces have been helicoptered in and are living off the land. The intent is also to reduce or eliminate Hussein's ability to employ biological or chemical weapons in areas where U.S. forces will be staged. Once the signal is given, an intense air bombardment will commence at night involving thousands of sorties of aircraft and guided missiles. More than 80% of the bombs used in a new war will be precision munitions, as opposed to 10% last time. A major goal of the "planned effects-based operation" is to strike at critical targets and shatter the enemy's ability to fight as a coherent force.

The war is being designed to attack a government rather than a country. **A bulls-eye is Hussein's hometown of Tikrit**, 100 miles north of Baghdad. A retired intelligence officer says, "This is the political center of gravity and must be eliminated because of its tie to the security policy and weapons of mass destruction." (*Washington Post Weekly Edition* 9/30 – 10/6) Other warheads would be targeted at anti-aircraft systems and missile sites, then regime targets such as presidential palaces, Hussein's bodyguards, communications systems, secret police facilities, and the bases of the Republican Guards.

B-2 bombers will be used to drop precision bunker-buster bombs on hardened underground facilities. Reportedly, the bombs could be set to penetrate to the fourth subterranean level. A weapon that will be used to destroy biological-weapons-development sites is the "thermobaric bomb," which can penetrate to indoor and underground spaces and then set off a blast of heat and pressure intense enough to eliminate anthrax or smallpox germs. Microwave bombs will be played to explode in midair, **releasing pulses of electromagnetic energy that can burn out transformers, antennae or computers**. The focus will be on toppling the regime as quickly as possible while minimizing attacks on the Iraqi population.

Ground force operations may begin as early as four days following the commencement of air operations (vs. 40 days in the first Gulf conflict). Ground forces will move against Basra and Euphrates bridges, while the 82nd Airborne division will attack northern Iraq--preventing the Republican Guards from moving south to Baghdad and sealing them off between the Kurds in the north. Iraqi units deemed most unlikely to fight are those around Basra in the south, and some in the north. The overall attack would use two tank-heavy Army divisions, a light Marine unit, and the fourth Infantry Division to provide reinforcement if needed. Parts of the 101st Airborne and Special Forces units may attack northern Iraq from bases in Germany and Turkey, supplemented by a helicopter-heavy British unit.

Other British forces and U.S. Marines would likely seize the airstrips and the port city of Basra.

If Hussein has not yet been toppled from power, then a multi-pronged attack led by tanks would be launched on Baghdad and Tikrit (*Washington Post Weekly Edition*, 11/18-24). **That part of central Iraq is considered to pose the most difficult military problem and has the greatest concentration of anti-aircraft weaponry.** Our total force contemplated for these operations is about 250,000.

The plan seems to place heavy reliance on new weaponry, of which there's plenty. An improved battle tank, the Abrams M1 A2 may be used, as well as a new Apache Helicopter, the Apache Longbow. This helicopter reportedly can hear a tank, radar the tank, see it, and then fire 16 hellfire missiles capable of penetrating a tank's armor and destroying everything inside. **One claim is that a single helicopter could hover out of sight behind a hill and take out most of a tank battalion** (*New Yorker*, 11/18). Also available will be the new high-altitude Predator, an unmanned plane, which can launch missiles such as the Hellfire. That was the unmanned aircraft that killed the senior Al-Qaeda leader last month in Yemen.

Psychological operations advocated by Stephen Peter Rosen of Harvard (*WSJ*, 9/30) and others will be employed, involving leaflets and radio broadcasts to persuade the Iraqi military and civilians to change sides, cease resistance, and to refrain from using chemical and biological weapons. A number of retired U.S. military officers have been quoted as **believing the regime can be toppled without having to engage their army with a large invasion force.** One, Richard Leghorn, writes in *The New York Times* (11/18) that an all-or-nothing approach of immediate war isn't even necessary. A strategy should be that if Iraqis hinder the work of United States inspectors, then the no-fly zones should be extended throughout of country, that air inspection by reconnaissance aircraft should be conducted at any altitude, and that precision air strikes should be authorized.

The Risks

The plans sound neat and plausible, but are far from riskless. **There is certainly a risk that Saddam Hussein will deploy chemical and biologically weapons against our forces,** as he did against the Iranians and Kurdish civilians. He had such weaponry available in bunkers used in the first Gulf war. Stephen Bryen, a former defense technology official, theorized recently in *The Wall Street Journal* (12/8) that Hussein didn't use the chemical weapons then because his troops lacked atropine, the only effective antidote to nerve gas. Now he has large stocks of atropine.

Another worry is that, if Hussein and his security guards survive the initial onslaught, operation could turn into a siege of Baghdad, complete with street fighting and a heavy loss of life on both sides. **Much of our technology advantage would be sharply reduced in city warfare.** Sustained international and American public opinion support for such a conflict is uncertain, particularly if the carnage is broadcast on daily TV display (*FT*, 11/22). Some worry that oil prices would surge with the onset of hostilities. Daniel Yergin, Chairman of Cambridge Energy Associates, downplayed his worry (*NYT*, 8/25) as long as the war and disruption didn't spread to other Middle Eastern countries. He writes that Iraq has so marginalized itself as an oil exporter that its exports are now only a million barrels a day. In 1990-91, the combined exports of Iraq and Kuwait were five million barrels. The OPEC producers have about six million barrels a day

of unused production capacity that could be quickly called upon.

The deeper worries involve the threats from growing Muslim resentment toward us, and also international opinion. A recent survey of global public opinion by the Pew Center **showed a sharp rise in negative opinions the US in the Muslim world** over the last three years (*FT*, 12/5), especially in Turkey and Pakistan. According to the survey conducted between July and October, only 30% of those polled in Turkey and 10% in Pakistan have a favorable opinion of the United States. Some 38,000 people in 44 countries were contacted worldwide. The survey showed that huge majorities in France, Germany, and Russia oppose the use of force to get rid of Hussein. More see the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as a bigger threat to stability than Hussein. Craig Smith reported recently that the ultraconservative movement in Saudi Arabia and its military is on the rise. Many ultraconservatives support bin Laden's holy war against the US, and regard the American military presence in Saudi Arabia as "blasphemous" (*NYT*, 12/3).

Even leaders in Great Britain are not 100% supportive of our position. Lord Douglas Hurd, formerly the Conservative UK foreign secretary, says that **our priority should not be Hussein but rather a peace settlement between the Israelis and the Arabs**. A quick Anglo-American victory in Iraq would lead to a sullen and humiliated Iraqi nation, which might move Arabs to step up acts of violence against Western interests and Israel. A quick military conquest may not prove a reason for happy celebration.

And So?

Given the sense of mission evidenced by the president following September 11, his consistently tough rhetoric, and the buildup of our forces in the Persian Gulf, it's easy to understand the conventional wisdom that war is inevitable. However, the sheer fact of talking loudly and positioning a big stick does not by itself assure war. It's the only way a good poker player could have stared down his opponent and stiffened the backbone of presumed friends. The president has seems to have committed himself to "either/or". **He has also shown that he is attentive to the opinion of others**. He and the more hawkish of his advisors believe there are more risks in leaving Hussein alone and relying on containment. What we don't know is how much weight the president himself places on the risks of war. He's unlikely to be equivocal.

The odds seem to be on the consensus view unless Hussein astounds the world with a last minute swan dive.

What do you think? Let me know!

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