



# IDSS COMMENTARIES (19/2003)

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## WINNING THE WAR IN IRAQ: HOW THE COALITION DID IT

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Before drawing conclusions about a three-week military campaign that ended only a few weeks ago it is prudent to sound a note of caution. Security analysts will be studying this war for a long time. Yet a general consensus is beginning to emerge among military analysts. Coalition forces achieved perhaps the most lopsided military victory of all time.

At a cost of just over a hundred British and American casualties Saddam Hussein's army in defensive positions on its own soil was utterly routed, his regime was thrown down, its leading figures killed, captured or set on the run. What makes this all the more remarkable is that it was achieved in less than half the time and with less than a third of the troops it took to eject Saddam's forces from Kuwait twelve years ago.

How did they do it? In general terms, it boils down to this: victory in warfare is no longer primarily a function of which side has the larger force; rather it is a matter of which side has the better picture of the battlefield. In this respect – what is called 'Information Warfare' – the United States military is unsurpassed. In more specific terms, however, we can point to three 'force multipliers' that gave Coalition forces a much greater combat power than would be suggested by their size alone.

First, there has been a significant advance in C<sup>4</sup>ISR technology (Command, Control, Communications, Computing, Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance) in the last decade. In space, surveillance satellites like the American KH-11 operating around 200 kilometers from the surface of the Earth are able to resolve objects on the ground as little as 15 centimeters across. Closer to the ground, the airborne Joint Surveillance and Target Attack Radar System (JSTARS) which can detect enemy vehicular movement on the ground at ranges of 200 kilometers or more is now deployed with US forces. Even closer still, unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV) such as the Predator are able to loiter over the battlefield for over 24 continuous hours collecting real-time optical, infra-red and radar imagery.

The intelligence data generated by these assets is used to build an integrated, real time digital picture of the battlefield that commanders can access through a tactical internet. In effect, regardless of time of day and almost regardless of weather conditions, Coalition commanders knew exactly where they were and where the Iraqis were while Iraqi commanders never did. To understand the battlefield impact here, imagine it as a chess game where one player can see the whole board while the other can only see his own pieces (and sometimes not even that) – even with fewer and weaker pieces the player with the superior view will win.

But it is not just the ability to see the enemy that counts; it is also the ability to strike him quickly and accurately with deadly force. From cruise missiles or ground-launched ATACMs, from aircraft with JDAMs and HARMs or from practically face to face with Coalition ground troops, the Iraqis faced an insoluble dilemma of threat: if they moved they would be detected and if they were

detected they could be destroyed; if they stayed in place they could still be attrited from the air – perhaps a little more slowly but just as irrevocably – before being smashed by advancing ground forces. The only course of survival was surrender or flight.

Most of the Iraqi regular army chose flight. In the few cases where counterattacks were attempted, such as in the An Najaf and An Nasiriyah areas during the swirling sandstorms of 25-28 March, they were comprehensively shattered by disciplined, accurate and overwhelming Coalition fire. Dug-in units like the Republican Guard divisions deployed south of Baghdad fared no better; the Medina division, for example, was reduced to 18 per cent of its pre-war strength by incessant air attack by 5 April.

Finally, it was the Coalition military doctrine and training that allowed for the rapid collection, analysis, and dissemination of accurate, actionable information to battlefield commanders that won the day. The ‘sensor to shooter’ gap between when a target is detected and when it is attacked is now extremely short – the last attempt to assassinate Saddam Hussein took twelve minutes from the time authorization was given in Washington to the impact of bombs on the Baghdad restaurant in which he was thought to be meeting members of his inner circle. In practical terms, the difference between a detected Iraqi tank, bunker, or artillery piece and a destroyed one could be as little as a few minutes. It is probably this approaching-real-time fusion of targeting intelligence with precision strike that is the most significant explainer of Coalition battlefield success.

It would be easy to explain the outcome of this war purely in technological terms – easy but wrong. It was the traditional military virtues of superior skill, discipline, morale and courage that allowed these three ‘force multipliers’ to be realized by the Coalition. Moreover, as Carl von Clausewitz stated, war is an act of force to *compel* our enemy to do our will; that is to say war is a reciprocal act between at least two sides. In this case, one side was well led, splendidly trained, superbly equipped and had high morale. The other side was ill trained, badly equipped and led by a military jackass. Iraqi forces could perhaps have exploited more of the advantages that naturally accrue to the defender in war, but it would not have changed the outcome. In the end, the failure of Iraqi forces to put up more of a fight speaks volumes of the revulsion most Iraqis felt for Saddam. Absent the motivating factor of fear there was nothing holding up the house of cards and so the cards have fled.

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