

# Impact of War in Iraq and Emerging Security Challenges in the Middle East

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The First Gulf war commenced, in effect, on 02 August 1990 with Iraq's invasion of Kuwait and ended with its eviction on 28 February 1991. The actual conflict witnessed the war being fought by Iraq against a multinational coalition of 50 countries, which had 38 countries contributing actively to war. This virtually one sided war was fought in several dimensions, political, diplomatic, economic and finally military with the rapid capitulation of the Iraqi forces. The combat phase lasted 42 days including a 100 hours ground war. The operational environment witnessed excellent co-ordination of multinational assets by the coalition. Whereas Iraq had deployed its forces in static defence of Kuwait and prepared for attrition warfare, the coalition employed manoeuvre warfare and destroyed the Iraqis means of waging the war as also their will, with overwhelming firepower and high technology. The war became totally one sided and resulted in the imposition of the UN sanctions - both economic and military, including periodic inspections for Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) by the UN teams.

Before an analysis of the second Gulf War is made, it is necessary to recapitulate its geo-strategic environment. Iraq is strategically located in the Middle East. It borders Turkey, Syria, Jordan, Iran and the Arabian Peninsula in the South. It is the gateway for the Central Asian Republics and has the largest oil resources after Saudi Arabia. Iraq had been involved with a war with Iran for eight years before being engaged in the conflict with Kuwait which resulted in the First Gulf War of 1991. Subsequent to that conflict, it had come under the UN sanctions. It was also subject to active surveillance and to selective Anglo-American bombing, thus crippling its economic and military capabilities. At the time of the US led coalition war in March 1993, it had been ruled by Saddam Hussain's Sunni dominated Baath-Party, although it had a heterogeneous population of 55 per cent Shias, 22 per cent Sunnis, 18 per cent Kurds and 5 per cent Turkman and Assyrian Christians.

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The political aim of the Second Gulf War in 2003 by the American led coalition-forces was to wage a 'Pre-emptive War' to oust the Saddam Hussein regime who allegedly supported terrorism, and possessed WMD, and to establish a democratic set up in Iraq. The military intervention in Iraq by the US Allies was, however, without the sanction of the UN Security Council. There were widespread protests by the international community and public criticism by France and Germany against this overt unilateralism of the US. The war was, in every respect, illegitimate as neither was there any evidence of WMD nor of Al Qaeda linkages. As for the so called right of 'pre-emptive strike' it can be resorted to only in Self Defence, for which also no justification existed.

The military aims of the war were to ensure an early collapse of the regime by securing the key towns of Baghdad, Basra and Mosul with speed and the economic assets of oil wells, ports and air-heads.

The military strategy was to conduct joint military operations with relentless offensive action for the capture of Baghdad, once the battle field was sufficiently degraded. It consisted of the following components:-

(a) Crippling the fighting potential of the Iraqis by denial of wherewithal through sanctions and by massive military build-up on air, sea and land to break their will to fight. The isolation of Iraq was achieved by an eight months long concentration of forces.

(b) Destruction of Iraqi Military capabilities, command and communication centres and leadership by application of the strategy of "Shock and Awe" through air attacks, Precision Guided Missiles (PGMs) and technology degradation. The US led coalition launched 1200 air-sorties per day. They destroyed over 2500 tanks and other equipment by PGMs and smart bombs from 30 warships and air bases.

(c) Conducting Psychological operations by information warfare, intelligence operations and exploiting ethnic diversities of the population. The Kurdish population in the North was openly supportive, the Shias in the South displayed a mixed response with the Sunnis definitely hostile to the invasion.

### **Analysis of the Second Gulf War**

The US military operations achieved spectacular success,

over running the entire country within three weeks. Momentum of the operations were maintained by developing strategies in depth, by exploiting speed and mechanised forces, Special Forces operations and air power. Independent logistics capabilities were provided by self containment, aerial resupply and securing air heads. Such situations are not normal and assymetrical war would exist only as exceptions, between adversaries.

Collateral damage was minimized for the civil assets by avoiding fighting in the urban centres by engineering surrenders and defection. But the damage to the country's infrastructure was considerable, particularly to power, oil and water supply, since it became difficult to distinguish military targets from the civil targets in the capital city of Baghdad and other major towns.

**Air-Power and Air-Space Management.** It is not only the control of various platforms in the air, but also the tremendous clutter of communication transmission that would call for strict control and management. In the case of ground forces, the launch base was 200 Kms south in Kuwait and air bases extending over considerable distances from Europe to the Indian Ocean. In the first weeks of war, a dozen opportunities to strike time-critical and high-value targets were missed due to the wide sensor-shooter gap. This was markedly reduced to just 12 minutes as the operation progressed, displaying substantive strides in improved joint operations, inter-operability and seamless data linking.

**Civil Affairs.** This is described as facilitating military operations and consolidating operational activities by assisting commanders in establishing, maintaining, influencing or exploiting relations between military forces and civil authorities, both governmental and non-governmental, and the civilian population in a friendly, neutral manner in a hostile area of operation. Language and culture training of target countries is essential. Cross-cultural proclivities and sophistication can be developed by study of a target country and living there for some time. Unless this is done, civil affairs will not succeed. This is a Special Forces mission and selected Units would have to train for it. The American forces did not adequately plan this aspect well in Iraq. They firstly antagonised the local population unlike the British forces who were friendlier and polite. Secondly, rather than be the liberators of the oppressed people, the Americans behaved like an "Occupation Force". Thirdly, after

disbanding the Government machinery i.e. the Army, the Police and other agencies it should have been ensured that such steps do not hurt the national pride of the Iraqi people.

**Use of high technology.** All weather continuous surveillance by 'Global Hawk' Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) and aerial platforms, satellite digital communication, PGM strikes, use of tank busters (40 bomblets) and use of smart bombs, both from air and warships achieved total degradation of Iraqi war machine. Iraqi equipment was mostly of pre-1991 vintage Soviet origin, which could not be up graded or even maintained due to lack of spares and the imposition of UN sanctions. It had few "Scud" missiles and AD guns which were no match for the Allied air might.

**Use of Special Forces.** Special Forces were used effectively before, during, and after the campaign both for the traditional roles and for unconventional warfare. In addition to the unconventional warfare, they were used for rapid transfer and management of human and signals intelligence, and for directing air-strikes

**Post conquest Issues.** Western media had created an impression that a military conquest of Iraq would not be difficult and that when the Americans went in, the Iraqi people would greet them as liberators. The obsession with the conquest was so paramount, that the coalition forces did not take the necessary steps for preventing the administrative collapse of Iraq or closing the porous borders with Jordan, Syria and Iran to prevent escape of Saddam loyalists across the borders. Similarly the damage to infrastructure was so total that even the basic amenities like water and electricity supply became a major problem.

### **The Current Iraq Situation**

In military terms, the US started losing the upperhand in Iraq when the Islamic fundamentalists and others opposing them started to fight the coalition forces in Iraq where the coalition forces present over a hundred thousand targets daily. Restricting themselves into "fortresses" results in loss of freedom of manoeuvre, whereas sallying out involves escorting by tanks gunship and helicopter gun ships. Both the options require additional troops and resources, which would imply nearly doubling the present force levels of 150,000 troops. Every US soldier killed raises the morale of the Islamic fundamentalists correspondingly reducing the morale of the US forces.

According to a reliable analyst, (Jeffery D Sachs) America is paying an astounding US \$ 51 billion per year to station 1,40,000 troops in the country. The US could save itself tens of billions of dollars per year by withdrawing troops and instead allocate resources for reconstruction of infrastructure and recovery of oil production. The US seeks greater participation from friendly countries for additional troops as well as funds but opposition from Jehadi Islamists and absence of UN mandate are the restricting factors. The US has already lost 2000 soldiers since last two years, whereas in Vietnam the total US soldiers killed between 1962-63 were only 392. This is making the war in Iraq highly unpopular in the US.

It would be reasonable to assume that the US is unlikely to stabilise the situation without enhancing the force levels. A pull out would result in loss of face and greater chaos. Placing the country under UN Security Council control does not serve the long term US strategic goals or provide control over oil. The US is left with no choice but to continue 'occupation' for another three to five years and shape the new Iraqi Government. The US is also simultaneously undertaking back-channel contacts with the insurgents both amongst the Sunnis and Shias, to break the insurgency.

Instability in Iraq suits the Sunni population, who dominate only 4 out of 18 districts. The Al Qaida supporters in the region, and the Taliban in Afghanistan are growing stronger. Syria and Iran are threatened by the Americans with possible air-strikes. The two US allies - Saudi Arabia and Pakistan also have hardliners at the grassroots who are supporters of fundamentalists, with the autocratic governance at the top forced to coexist with the fundamentalists.

### **The Emerging Security Challenges in the Middle East**

It appears that having temporarily pushed the Islamic fundamentalists from Afghanistan, the Anglo-American intention to use Iraq as a launch pad for further consolidation in the Middle East with Turkey, Israel, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan on the outer flanks, has met a setback for the present. American bases in the Central Asian Republics for operations in the region have also become potential trouble spots as both the local governments and

<sup>38</sup> the Russian and the Chinese have come to suspect them of serving American interests.

After winning the war in both Afghanistan and Iraq and bringing down the governments that were in power before the attacks, the resistance of the local population has increased and Fidayeen attacks have taken a heavy toll of both the coalition led forces and civilian populations. One of the biggest problems that the US forces and their allies face is the need for higher allocation of combat elements for safeguarding the assets and bases of the occupying forces. It leaves less effective combat strength for offensive operations whose reach and periodicity is thereby reduced. The public opinion in America and in the home countries of the coalition countries demands reduction and early return of their soldiers, which has no prospect of immediate relief in sight. The morale of the occupation forces would get adversely affected due to prolonged deployment and the stress. This would require shorter tenures and frequent relief and hence higher allocation of troops,

The high tech advantage of the initial onslaught of shock and awe and savage effects has died down. The local elements fighting the Americans have found ways to effectively neutralize the high tech advantage.

**Urban Warfare-Future Trends.** The Americans did not visualize the need for sufficient ground forces and the power of the "boot" in the urban warfare in Iraq and they are not able to ensure effective security in Iraq. William S Lind and others of the US Army, have written on the **Fourth Generation of Warfare** where the battlefield is likely to include the enemy's society and warfare will be widely dispersed and the distinction between war and peace may vanish. The difference between civilian and military may disappear, as there would be no definable battlefields or fronts. Major military and civil facilities will become targets. The characteristics of this type of warfare combined with new technology would possibly be the outline of the fourth generation of warfare. However, urban warfare involves people, and unless deliberate attempts are made to win them over, nothing else will succeed. It implies military dealing with non-state actors rather than the conventional armed forces of a country, (such as the Jehadis) with which they are not comfortable.

## SECURITY SCENE IN THE IRAQI NEIGHBOURHOOD

### Post Conflict Peace Building

The political process in 'Iraq' has not proceeded as visualized and the interim Government has taken a heavy beating. The Army and the Police have not become fully professional, lacking leadership, motivation and equipment. The new constitution that is being worked out as the federal democratic set up has met with disagreement by the 'Sunnis' who do not want the federal structure, as it would involve domination of Shias and the Kurds in respective majority areas, leading to eventual separation and disintegration.

### Balance of Power in the Region

Although, in general terms the war in Iraq has not altered the security scene in the Middle-east dramatically, it has changed the balance of power as under:-

- (a) The new Regime in Iraq will no longer be a pro-Arab Sunni regime as the majority Shias, the Kurds in the North of Iraq, and to a certain extent the Turkmans will sit in a mixed government. A Shia Regime in Iraq is also likely to develop closer relations with Iran, thus posing a potential threat to the Saudis, the third major power in the region.
- (b) The US is now a power in the region with its troops stationed in Iraq. This will make the radical forces in Syria and Iran uncomfortable.
- (c) The war has inflamed Arab anger and encouraged radical elements as also anti-West resentment, thereby creating a space for the Islamic radicals who subscribe to fighting a Jihad against Western powers. Frequent suicide attacks within Iraq and outside in the neighbouring region of Israel and Jordan clearly demonstrate this trend.
- (d) The traditional US-Turkey cordial relations were also somewhat strained due to the denial of bases to the US as also due to the rising aspirations of the Kurds for autonomy. However, Turkey remains a strategically located North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) ally both to the US and the European Union (EU).

## US-Iran Relationship

Re-establishing security in Iraq would become the prime concern of the international community to prevent its spill-over effect. As far as Iran is concerned, it does not pose any credible threat to the US notwithstanding the US branding it as part of the 'evil empire', although in a decade or so it may pose some threat to US interests in the region. It is unlikely to harbour any expansionist ambition. However, Iran would need to be integrated into the world community in return for its abjuring its nuclear ambition, by lifting all restrictions and providing access to nuclear technology for peaceful purposes.

## The US-Arab Equation

Despite the rhetoric, the Syrian response to the Israeli air strikes on Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) was symbolic. Most countries in the region are beholden to the US in one way or the other. Egypt, the traditional leader in the Middle East has been living on an annual American grant of US \$ 2 billion since the Camp David agreement. However, wide-spread suspicion remains among Muslims that Iraq is only part of a wider American plan to subvert their faith. Jordan, though one of the progressive states has hardcore elements with Jehadi leanings who undertake terrorist activities in Iraq with some of the underground groups.

## Relationship with CAR countries

The US intrusion into the traditional Russian turf of Central Asian Republics (CAR) worries Moscow more and more. What began as temporary American Military presence in Central Asia endorsed by Russia to facilitate the anti terror war in Afghanistan, far from winding up, is expanding. In addition to air bases in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, the US is helping Kazakhstan to set up a naval base on the Caspian Sea close to the Russian border, besides seeking to lease three military bases in Tajikistan. Russian President Putin has reportedly stated in an interview to *Al-Jazeera* TV that "we are against the policy of pre-emptive strikes without the UN approval. But if this practice continues to be asserted in international relations, Russia retains the right to act in the same way".

## Conclusion

Two of the basic justification of the Second Gulf War i.e. that Iraq had WMDs and that the Iraqi people (other than the Kurds) were eager to be liberated have not been proved right. The situation on the ground today for the common people is no better than during the Saddam era, infected with a hurt national pride, and an ineffective administration with a civil warlike situation.

The war has been won militarily but nearly lost politically. The war on terrorism has got enlarged with more Bin Ladens in the making. The Middle East appears to be heading for greater instability. American stature has been reduced and the coalition forces have got involved in a 'quagmire' from where there is no easy way out. American led forces need wider allied support and a UN mediated authority to handle the civil-war like situation in Iraq, whereas the US does not wish to hand over the mandate to the UN as it wishes to be able to influence the new government in Iraq for strategic interests. An early pull out would result in loss of face which is not in the US interest. The Americans are also attempting to split the insurgency by establishing interest groups, not only with the Kurds, the Shias but even the Sunnis. The new Iraqi Army, the Police and the Administrative authorities are also being indoctrinated with the US strategies. However, there are others who feel that the war in Iraq will never be won as there are no clear military targets and the political issues are complex. People are getting disillusioned and a civil war like situation is emerging.

In the final analysis, it is ironic that the strategy of pre-emption adopted by the US has legitimised terrorism as a heroic fight for justice. The war on terrorism has not only extended the reach of terrorists but has even glamorised them. Hence what is needed is not the American concept of pre-emption but genuine attempts to pre-empt the causes of poverty, ignorance and negative religious indoctrination that provides a continuous stream of recruits to Jehadi outfits.

There are signs now that the US is changing its foreign policy orientation because of difficulties it is facing in establishing democracy. It is advocating greater Middle East and South Asian initiatives to encourage these countries to adopt democratic institutions, economic reforms and ensure human rights. A closer

political and economic cooperation along with engagement and security arrangement is being propagated. This would involve applying pressure on Saudi Arabia to introduce democratic reforms and curb funding of Jehadi terrorism. It would warrant to pressure Syria and Iran to deny sanctuaries to the insurgents and on Pakistan to dismantle the terrorist infrastructure and finally provide incentives to the CAR countries for pursuing secular and democratic governance.

### References

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