

## **US v. Iraq the Tale of the Tape:**

*The Road to Basra and Back*

by WILLIAM A. COOK

As the US military sets up offices in Qatar and prepares for war, I thought it might be an interesting exercise to compare the combatants. As a kid, I'd come home from the last days of elementary school in June ready to listen to the Lewis/Conn fights on the radio. My Dad would set up a gambling pool of winner rounds selected by chance from slips of paper taken from a hat. He'd then show us the "Tale of the Tape." I remember the importance of the comparison of the fighters as a measure of the fairness of the fight. So what does the "Tale of the Tape" tell us about the Iraq vs US combatants?

It was fairly easy to find figures on the US forces from the Department of Defense. In addition, CNN.com "In Depth Specials" provides Gulf War Facts for the first war against Iraq and the Washington Post offers a site that gives figures for US strength in the Persian Gulf in 1998. The most recent 2002 figures are not readily available since that might disclose current strength and positions to the enemy. Statistics for Iraq are not quite so available although I was able to find figures for Iraq's military through the International Institute for Strategic Studies and supplementary material on [www.alertnet.org](http://www.alertnet.org). In addition, [Seattlepi.com](http://Seattlepi.com) has a special Iraq facts report that provides demographic information and World Factbook has alternative information on Iraq military power.

We have heard from the likes of Richard Pearle (American Enterprise Institute) that Iraq's forces are about a third of what they were in 1991 as a result of coalition destruction of their military. We also know that the sanctions have devastated the civilian population's health and wealth. The UN has marked the estimated number of children dead as a result of the sanctions, approximately one and one half million, thus reducing the number of potential recruits reaching enlistment age. But Iraq, we are told, still pose a threat and must be dealt with immediately.

The CNN report tabulates the number of Iraqi soldiers in the 1991 war in this way: 100,000 Iraqi soldiers died (Human Rights groups tabulate more than that), 300,000 wounded, 150,000 deserted and 60,000 taken prisoner. Baghdad lists 35,000 civilians killed. Those figures are not easy to read. Do we subtract the 150,000 deserters and the 60,000 prisoners from the 300,000 wounded? Would that mean that Iraq's military forces amounted to 400,000 total? Let's assume that is so; we now must reduce that number by two thirds to meet the estimate provided by Pearle or roughly 130,000. One is tempted to hope they are from the deserter pool!

Now as we draw the comparison with American and coalition forces in that first war we find the following: the US had more than 500,000 troops in the War while non-US forces added up to an additional 160,000. US wounded tallied 467, British 24, French 2. US casualties were 148 battle deaths and 145 nonbattle deaths and allied Arab casualties numbered 39. That means that the US suffered 293 deaths to Iraq's 100,000, not counting the 35,000 civilians killed or 460 times as many Iraqi dead as US forces.

Before and during the brief war, the US flew more than 116,000 air sorties losing 75 aircraft. Iraq on the other hand lost 36 fixed wing aircraft, 6 helicopters, 87 aircraft lost on the ground, 3,700 tanks, 2,400 assorted armored vehicles, 19 naval ships sunk, 42 divisions made combat-ineffective, and 2,600 artillery pieces destroyed. Aside from aircraft losses, the US lists no other equipment losses. Since the Iraqi forces consisted, at the time, of 4,280 tanks reduced to 580, and 2,870 assorted vehicles reduced to 471, and 3,110 artillery pieces reduced to 510, the available hardware for this upcoming war appears rather thin. However, Iraq does have the potential, perhaps, to recover 137 aircraft flown to Iran although the reason they left Iraq appears to be that they could not compete with US and British aircraft. However one looks at it, Iraq has about 15% of its former ordinance to hurl against the current US forces, 90% of its ordinance having been destroyed.

That update brings us to today. How do these two Goliaths compare? IISS reports that the total armed forces in active service in Iraq numbers 424,000. There are an additional 650,000 reservists. The Army has 375,000 including 100,000 recalled reserves with, perhaps, 2200 main battle tanks. The Navy has an overwhelming force of 2000 men overseeing a fleet of 1 frigate, 5 patrol and coastal vessels, and 3 mine sweepers! The Air Force has 30,000 men with about 6 bombers and about 316 fighter aircraft. The Airforce Command has an additional 17,000 personnel.

By contrast, if the US deployed the same number of troops as it did in 1991, they would outnumber the Iraqi forces by 236,000. Eleven years ago the US had 100 strike aircraft equipped with precision-guided bombs and an unidentified number of aircraft with conventional bombs. The Washington Post reported on Tuesday, December 10, 2002 that the aircraft carrier USS Harry Truman "left Virginia last week at the head of a naval group. The Truman carries about 70 strike jets. The group has a supplement of three other battle groups, each with carriers holding 70 aircraft." That's a total of 210 aircraft on its way to Iraq not including the numbers that are already stationed in the vicinity.

In a December 8, 2002 report the Post provided some troop numbers available for service should war come. "About 55,000 soldiers, sailors and Air Force personnel are within striking distance of Iraq." But that number does not include the forces on board the ships at sea; each carrier carries about 5,000 sailors and personnel or an additional 15,000. But the 5th fleet is currently deployed in the Persian Gulf with a listing of sailors and marines that exceeds 20,000. These behemoths of the

sea carry more than 4.6 million pounds of air launched missiles, laser-guided bombs, general purpose bombs, and ammunition (Washington Post, "US Strength in the Persian Gulf"). That same report lists 8,000 Air Force personnel and over 100 aircraft based in Saudi Arabia, two dozen fighter jets in Bahrain, 12 F-117 stealth fighter jets in Kuwait, 3 bombers in Bahrain, and 14 B-52 bombers at the island of Diego Garcia. These figures do not include support ordinance.

If we assume that the US intends to match its numbers from 1991 to invade Iraq, it would not only deploy 236,000 more troops than its foe; it will have available from the 5th fleet (in information reported in February of 1998 by the Washington Post) the USS Washington, USS Independence, USS Harry Truman, 2 Cruisers, 5 Destroyers, 3 Guided Missile Frigates, 2 Attack Submarines, 3 Fast Combat Support Ships, 2 Mine Countermeasure Ships, the USS Guam Amphibious Ready Group of 3 additional ships; it will have over 8,000 Air Force personnel from Jabir Air Base in Kuwait with 36 aircraft, Incirlik Air base in Turkey with 24, Sheik Isa Airfield in Bahrain with 40, and about 100 aircraft in Saudi Arabia; it will also have Army personnel, some 7,000 stationed at Kuwait plus the untold numbers being deployed from bases around the world. That puts potential US naval personnel at approximately 18,760. Enough personnel to subdue the 2000 sailors that Saddam will deploy, one would hope. Oh, in addition to the above, the US and Britain has pulverized Iraqi air defense over the past year by attacking 80 installations, a way of ensuring air superiority before we start a war.

Finally, a few figures on the relative size of the combatants: Iraq land area amounts to 167,000 square miles, its population approximately 22 million; the US by contrast contains 3,537,438 square miles, or to put this point into greater resolution, New York City has 119.6 square miles of area with population density exceeding 25,000, and a 2000 population count that approximates 280 million. Iraq's population is about 7.9% the size of the US population, with a land mass just 4.7% of the US. But that does not tell the whole story. US Armed Forces strength as of September 30, 2002 totals 1,385,116 not including the Coast Guard. The US has a larger Army than Iraq has total forces, 480,801 to 400,000. Indeed, the US Navy has almost as many forces, 377,810 and the Air Force is not far behind at 353,571 (DOD). The US has 3.27 times as many forces as Iraq.

That is the "Tale of the Tape." Once again the US takes on the worst threats to America: Nicaragua, Granada, Kadafi's Castle, and now Iraq. Considering how the US and its allies defeated Iraq eleven years ago in 90 days with a total death count of 293 (many killed by friendly fire), decimated the Iraqi Air Force, wiped out its supply of tanks and armored personnel carriers, and, in the process, effected one of the worst slaughters ever recorded at the "Highway of Death," one would think that a wounded Iraq would be no match for the new Empire of the World. What does the behemoth fear? Or is all this practice for the future when some upstart nation decides that it, too, would like more military toys and the President has to kick in his International Strategy Policy Report to curb their desires and we reduce that nation to rubble? Or is this action against Iraq a showpiece of US

might to demonstrate to the world that no one had better "Mess with Texas"? Whatever its purpose, it will inscribe for all the world, not least the Iraqi people, how the US and its citizens comport themselves against a helpless nation.

Let's consider how this nation comported itself in 1991 and hope beyond all hope that we do not repeat that behavior. Here is a passage from Jack Barnes' work "The Opening Guns of World War III: Washington's Assault on Iraq."

"The most concentrated single bloodletting was organized by the US command in the final forty-eight hours of the invasion, as Iraqi soldiers fled Kuwait along the roads to Basra. Washington ordered that tens of thousands of fleeing Iraqi soldiers be targeted for wave after wave of bombing, strafing, and shelling. These were people who were putting up no resistance, many with no weapons leaving in cars, trucks, carts, and on foot. Many civilians from Iraq, Kuwait, and immigrant workers from other countries were killed at the same time as they tried to flee.

"The US armed forces bombed one end of the main highway from Kuwait city to Basra, sealing it off. They bombed the other end of the highway and sealed it off. They positioned mechanized artillery units on the hills overlooking it. And then, from the air and from the land they simply massacred every living thing on the road. Fighter bombers, helicopter gunships, and armored battalions poured merciless firepower on traffic jams backed up for as much as twenty miles. When the traffic became grid locked, the B-52s were sent in for carpet bombing." Our forces did not wait for the fleeing people to surrender, they did not surround them and force them to surrender, they just exterminated them. Americans never heard about the "Highway of Death," they just paid for it, a slaughter that, in Barnes' words "ranks among the great atrocities of modern warfare."

Given the forces being assembled to destroy Iraq, the probability of our forces again using such devastating tactics against the weakest of enemies is all too likely. That possibility alone should deter us from allowing this President, son of the man who made possible the "Highway of Death," to carry out his vengeance in our name.

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