

advertisement | your ad here

Weekly Ad
Great deals this week only at your Sacramento Target.
Prices valid July 26 - August 1.

SALE
Back to Basics 2-speed Blender
17.99
Roll over for deals >

home of the

Home Delivery | Subscriber Services

SEARCH



SFGate



Web Search by YAHOO! | Advanced Search

Sign In | Register

Bay Area & State Nation World Politics Crime Tech Obituaries Education Green Science Health Weird **Opinion**

SUNDAY INSIGHT

Archive | Feedback |

The Next War

The Iraq conflict was a preview, but not the whole script, of battles to come

John Arquilla

Sunday, May 4, 2003

PRINT E-MAIL SHARE COMMENTS

FONT | SIZE:

The adage that generals always fight the last war is only partially true. They also fight some of the next war each time they go into action.

MORE OPINION

[Dieting goes federal](#) 07.30.09

[Racial 'don't ask, don't tell' makes no sense](#) 07.30.09

[Venting on renting: Daly's big move](#) 07.30.09

Wars are time portals, waged in the present but reflecting both the staying power of older ideas and the allure of unproven new concepts.

In World War I, for example, the centuries-old tradition of massed infantry assaults was still adhered to -- with appalling casualties the result. On the first

day of the Somme offensive alone, the British lost 20,000 men to German artillery and machine guns -- and gained only a few yards of ground.

This same war also saw the debut of the tank at Cambrai, where it enabled the capture of a huge swath of ground in a few hours -- with almost no casualties -- and heralded the rise of armor to its long-dominant role in military affairs.

Thus wars carry both the past and the future within them. The art of generalship lies in knowing when to jettison the old in favor of the new. This has proved true again in our second war with Iraq, but some of this conflict's implications for the next war may prove quite uncomfortable for the Pentagon.

The biggest casualty of the war in Iraq should be the much-hyped notion of shock and awe -- a warmed-over variant of the belief that strategic aerial bombing can bring any adversary quickly to heel.

Every major conflict beginning with World War II has featured the bombing of cities and civil infrastructure, with noncombatants often deliberately targeted. Enormous destruction has been done, yet it is hard to see any air campaign as having worked by itself.

During the Korean War, U.S. bombers flattened every building in Pyongyang, yet we could manage only a draw. The Air Force dropped more bombs on North Vietnam than in any other campaign, yet we lost that war. Bombing may have worked in Kosovo, but the Serb retreat there could just as likely have resulted from President Bill Clinton's decision, after 77 days, to consider a ground invasion.

In this latest war, we dropped seven times the amount of explosives that fell in 1991 -- with little effect on Iraqi will. Only a successful ground invasion brought down the regime.

advertisement | your ad here

Lock in a rate today

blue of california

apply now >

- MOST COMMENTED** **MOST READ** **MOST E-MAILED**
1. Fox's Glenn Beck says he believes Obama is racist
 2. Obama birthers ate my love child! The president is an alien! The...
 3. UPDATE: Giants acquire Freddy Sanchez for Tim Alderson
 4. Daly, wife paid cash for Fairfield homes
 5. Police: SC man charged with having sex with horse
 6. House deal reached on health care
 7. Velez powers win over Pirates

TopJobs

MANAGEMENT
Not Satisfied With Your Current Job?
[Self Storage 1](#)

[About Top Jobs](#)
[View All Top Jobs](#)
[Search more Jobs](#)

PROVIDED BY: **hgtjobs**

IN1026 American Family Life Assurance Company of Columbus (Aflac)

Despite knowing the limitations of air bombardment, triumphalists in and out of uniform tried to sell this war to the American public and to the world on the basis of the patently false claim that big explosions would prompt surrender in a day or so.

Instead, the steady pattern of past strategic bombing failures was borne out again, the lesson for the next war being to stay away from such delusions. Bombing doesn't win by itself, and the killing of innocent noncombatants in such attacks undermines the justice of any cause.

The second cautionary lesson of the war in Iraq was highlighted by the multidivisional march up Mesopotamia -- another blast from the past. Tanks and humvees made a beeline for Baghdad and had to rely on vulnerable supply lines that stretched for hundreds of miles.

The Iraqis correctly avoided our combat teeth and went after our long logistical tail -- causing us some real problems for a while. In the end, we were able to cope with their small-unit attacks, but the lesson for the next war should be to avoid creating such soft, juicy targets. Our next opponents may prove better armed or more skillful than the Iraqis. Or both.

It is high time, then, in the military evolutionary process, to lose our tails.

So much for residual elements of past conflicts that should disappear. The campaign in Iraq also gave us some tantalizing glimpses of the next war. The most important aspect of the future of conflict on display was the way in which small forces were empowered by networking.

That is, by being connected to each other in ways that allowed our forces to identify, target and strike the enemy within minutes of detection. In the last Gulf war, this process generally took several hours.

SMALLER IS BETTER

In this latest campaign, Anglo-American forces undertook a mission several times bigger than in the last Gulf war -- with less than half the force. The only way this could be done was by packetizing our forces in small task groups,

then linking them to each other and to aircraft overhead in mutually supporting ways.

Indeed, aircraft found their proper use in close support of ground troops, allowing the allies to fight with less than one-tenth of the artillery that was used 12 years ago. This accounts for the speedy advance to Baghdad because it is hard to move artillery along swiftly.

The tremendous hitting power of small but highly networked combat formations also made it possible to strike at the enemy from many directions simultaneously -- i.e., to use swarm tactics. Thus the campaign featured the quick disabling of the Iraqi Scud missile fields in the west, the saving of the oil fields in the south, and the launching of a Kurdish attack in the north, led by our special forces.

These aspects of the campaign came off far better than the bombing of Baghdad or the march up Mesopotamia. There was a shift this time from Desert Storm to Desert Swarm.

It seems clear what we should discard and what we should keep when thinking about the next war. But the opposition to meaningful change in the American military is on guard and well entrenched.

The first warning shot fired at military traditionalists came earlier, in the fall 2001 Afghan campaign. This was a time war, too, as it featured similar images from the past and glimpses of the future.

REAL ESTATE



Bargains, tax credit help boost new-home sales

New-home sales rose last month at the fastest clip in more than eight years as buyers eagerly took advantage of...

Home price declines continue to slow
Index adds to spate of upbeat housing news
Recession could zap Cali's population boom

[Search Real Estate »](#)

CARS



A local teacher gets his dream Cabriolet

Jaynes Friedman, 62, teaches special education high school students and also works as a part time antique toy appraiser...

Is there a (fuel efficient) Ford in your future?
Kia replaces Spectra with more refined Forte
Auto recyclers leery of cash for clunkers

[Search Cars »](#)

JOBS



Lawmakers support restrictions on executive pay

A House panel voted Tuesday to prohibit large financial firms from offering corporate pay packages...

Co. pays \$1.7 million to settle EEOC suits
Arbitration is key in fight over union bill
Looking to start your own business?

[Search Jobs »](#)

ADVERTISERS

Sheraton Maui \$485+ 3 Nights with Air. Pleasant Holidays.

Equifax can help you monitor your credit score

First, there was a month of unsuccessful strategic bombing of Kabul, Kandahar and other fixed targets. At that point, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld compelled senior military officials to unleash small teams of special forces highly networked with aircraft and unmanned aerial vehicles. In a few weeks, just over 300 special forces operators -- for the most part riding on horses -- toppled the Taliban and al Qaeda from power.

DEBATE OVER STRATEGY

Between the Afghan and Iraq conflicts, a sharp policy debate erupted, characterized by innovators' calls for radical downsizing of field armies and creating a fully networked military. Traditionalists held that Afghanistan was an exceptional case at best, with some, like Stephen Biddle of the U.S. Army War College, writing official studies that saw little new in the campaign.

To them it was just a clash between two ground forces, in which air support proved decisive. Rumsfeld's sympathies were clearly with the innovators, but he had to manage and maintain an equilibrium between both camps.

He did so by compromising on the campaign in Iraq, where the innovators wanted to send no more than 75,000 troops and the traditionalists wanted 500, 000. He split the difference, coming in with an expeditionary force of about 300,000.

When the first hitches in the campaign arose -- the spectacular failure of shock and awe and the Fedayeen attacks on our supply lines -- traditionalists renewed their calls for larger forces. Whether observing events from inside the Pentagon or from television studios, traditionalists were unwilling or unable to see that the only problems with the campaign had arisen from the inclusion of the very elements that they had insisted upon or supported in prewar planning.

All soon came out right, though, leaving us military analysts with the need to think through what the next war ought to look like. At present, the most likely place where a new conflict might erupt is Korea, as the communist regime in the north determinedly seeks to expand its arsenal of weapons of mass destruction. It also has a million-man army, about 10 percent of which is comprised of special forces.

The North Korean military is in far better shape than the Iraqis, and the terrain on which it would fight is far tougher than the flat, open desert of the Tigris valley. How then should insights from our most recent conflict inform contingency plans for this possible next war?

Military traditionalists will view Iraq as another exceptional case and seek ways to emphasize the need for more troops on the ground in Korea and for more strategic bombing capability.

STRATEGY FOR KOREA

Innovators (of whom I am one) will argue that the campaign in Iraq should lead us to discard large forces and strategic bombing and replace them with a distributed network of small ground units that can call in close fire support from missiles and aircraft. Also, this approach would work whether we were on the defensive from the outset or if we engaged in hot pre-emption.

A smaller, networked approach to this possible next war would complement South Korean forces and would mitigate our serious vulnerability to North Korean attacks with bugs, poison or nuclear weaponry. We wouldn't provide any juicy targets for such weapons. Further, the rough terrain on the Korean peninsula would channelize any attack from the north, allowing us to swarm the invaders from all directions.

However, we should be concerned that the North Koreans will have been watching events in Iraq closely and that they are preparing their own surprises for us if war breaks

out. They will likely deploy their special forces in swarming attacks on our supply lines, flying them in on canvas-covered, radar-evading AN-2 Colt biplanes that can carry a dozen soldiers each.

They might also think about detonating a nuclear weapon at high altitude, generating an electromagnetic pulse that could cripple our communications.

But these are solvable problems. If we stay away from using heavy forces, their commandos will have no supply lines to hit. Communications can be hardened against pulses, and replacements and redundancies can be used to mitigate this risk.

The question about fighting a war is always about finding the proper mix of old and new. Right now, the U.S. military is at a tipping point. Our second Gulf War was roughly a half-and-half affair, with old and new ways of fighting employed in equal doses.

This is hardly likely to remain the case. The implications of the war in Iraq clearly point to moving away from strategic bombing and big, heavy force packages.

However, these are the two most cherished items in the U.S. defense establishment. They have long been quintessential elements of what historian Russell Weigley calls the American way of war.

They also cost a great deal, doing much to justify our current rate of defense spending, which is more than \$1 billion per day. Small, networked forces pose the prospect of fighting more effectively at much lower cost -- a dire threat to the current system, which will be resisted.

What is to be done?

Very simply, the debate between the traditionalists and the innovators must be fully and publicly aired, and presidential candidates next year must be urged to be explicit about their positions on this aspect of defense policy. In the meantime, consider this the opening salvo in the fight over the next war.

John Arquilla is professor of defense analysis at the Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey.

This article appeared on page E - 1 of the San Francisco Chronicle

PRINT E-MAIL SHARE

Empty text input field for comments.

Submit

Characters left: 1000



Walk-through: Bluff life in Bolinas



Violet Blue: A kinky coffeehouse



Sorority prez's \$900K wax statue



MSFT, Yahoo ally against Google



Bauer: Hunt for the best cioppino

Ads by Yahoo!

Super Cheap Car Insurance

Get Discount Car Insurance Quotes Online – Rates from \$15 / Month. (Discount-Car-Insurance-Rates.com)

Obama Announces New Refinance Plan

Now is the time to Refinance! \$130,000 Refinance for \$679/mo. (www.SeeRefinanceRates.com)

Obama Backs Insurance Regulation

Drivers Pay \$44/mo on Avg for Car Insurance. Are you paying too much? (Auto-Insurance-Experts.com)



Subscribe to The Chronicle

Home News Sports Business Entertainment Food Living Travel Columns Classifieds Jobs Real Estate Cars Site Index

[return to top]

Advertising Services: Place a Classified Advertise in Print Advertise Online Public Notices

Reader Services: Home Delivery Subscribers E-Edition Mobile RSS Feeds Newsletters Feedback Buy Photos FAQ Corrections Get Us

Company Info: Contact Us Hearst Corp. Privacy Policy Terms and Conditions Work for Us Chronicle in Education Events & Promotions Submissions

© 2009 Hearst Communications Inc.

