A Brookings Iraq Series Briefing

MOUNTING CONCERNS IN IRAQ: STREET-TO-STREET FIGHTING, HUMANITARIAN DISTRESS, MORE MILITARY AND CIVILIAN CASUALTIES

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MR. JAMES B. STEINBERG: Let's get started. Welcome once again to Brookings, our regular Thursday morning session. For once we have a beautiful day outside.

We're going to discuss a variety of aspects of the conflict this morning beginning with our Director of Research at the Saban Center here at Brookings, Ken Pollack talking about whether the war is going as well as expected, not as well as expected, a lot of debate about whether we have enough armor to do the job and the like.

Then we'll turn to Shibley Telhami, Nonresident Senior Fellow here at Brookings and the Saban Center to talk about reaction in the Arab world. As the war goes on this is getting more difficult for the Arab governments to handle.

Then Roberta Cohen, Senior Fellow here at Brookings is going to talk about the humanitarian dimension which is getting increasing attention in the press and on the ground. And in particular, how does this situation differ from past crises that we've seen.

Finally our own Stephen Hess will talk about how the media has been handling this rather extraordinary and unique experience of having the moment-by-moment of the war from the tank turret being broadcast into the homes.

So Ken, how are we doing?

MR. KENNETH M. POLLACK: Let me start out by doing what I think may be the opposite for many of you who have been attending our regular briefings and maybe even reading some of the Saban Center memos that I've written.

I think it would be easy for me to stand up here and say we went in with too little force. I was warning early on that there were real risks involved in going with a force this size. Again, those of you who heard me, have seen my stuff, I was saying we need at least four divisions plus the British. We went with three plus the British. I think we're getting a little bit messier war as a result of it.

But that's not actually what I want to do. Instead what I want to do is to talk a little bit about what is going on and try to put things in a bit more perspective. I think things are getting very badly skewed, very badly out of whack over the last few days.

Let me start by saying I think Saddam has over-achieved. I think that Saddam feels he has over-achieved. Knowing what we know about Saddam's strategy, and again we don't have it perfect, we don't have a blueprint of what Saddam's strategy is, but we were able to see what he

was saying before the war; we could see what his force deployments were; and obviously U.S. intelligence was listening very carefully to what they were hearing about what he was intending. It seems pretty clear that Saddam never expected his irregulars to have this kind of an impact on our forces. His expectation was that the way he was going to win was by making the fight about Baghdad and winning the fight at Baghdad.

The irregulars were always something out there that was in a sense a bonus for him. He wanted to use them to attrit U.S. forces, to slow U.S. forces, to cause us problems but I don't think he ever expected that they would cause us the kind of problems that they have caused us. Even there I'm going to talk a little bit later about exactly what kind of problems. I think we're getting a little bit ahead of ourselves in terms of the degree of problems they're actually causing us. But I think there's no question that the irregular forces have exceeded Saddam's expectation. This was not Saddam's going in strategy was that these kind of forces would give us the kind of problems that they have.

By the same token I think we have to guard against some of the claims that are coming out that Saddam, his generals are some kind of -- brilliant strategists, brilliant tacticians who have absolutely baffled us.

Again, I don't see any indication of that. What I've seen so far is very much in keeping with what we have seen from Saddam and from his generals over the 25 years that we've been watching them in military operations.

I think there is no question that they have learned some lessons. I talked about this in previous sessions. They clearly have learned some lessons from the Gulf War. I think they also have learned some lessons from other wars. In particular, I think they learned from Mogadishu. I think the appearance of the technical is a clear sign that they have learned from Somalia. And they have learned some good lessons from Somalia which is that irregulars can give us problems and in particular that using civilians as literally human shields for those forces can be very problematic for American forces.

I kind of wonder whether Blackhawk Down, the film, got smuggled into Iraq at some point in time and the General Staff didn't spend some time watching it. I say that only half facetiously. That is how the Iraqis have learned in the past.

That said, they also are making some mistakes. The use of these, we keep calling them technicals from Somalia. The use of these SUVs and pickup trucks mounted with crew-served weapons is actually probably a mistake. It would be much harder for U.S. troops if they weren't using those things because in point of fact they make wonderful targets. We can pick them off much easier than just infantrymen running around with RPGs. You get a guy on a pickup truck, you can blow up the pickup truck and you'll take out both the guy and the weapon he's firing. So

again, it's good and bad.

What's more, again, it is always important to note that they are causing problems because they create the potential threat to the supply line but they are not inflicting large numbers of casualties on U.S. forces.

What we're seeing from the irregulars is, again, very much in keeping with Iraqi military history. The Iraqis are ferocious fighters, at least I should say some Iraqi units have proven to be ferocious fighters in two sets of circumstances. When they are dug in and they are hit frontally by an adversary, and when they themselves are launching frontal assaults. Again, you don't have to know much Iraqi history to know this.

In 1973 against the Israelis on the Golan the Iraqis were completely inept and did not cause many Israeli casualties but they would not stop attacking. That was what was so remarkable about the Iraqi performance in 1973. They just kept attacking. And it didn't matter what the Israelis did, they just kept fighting.

The same thing in 1991. I think we all got fixated, or many people got fixated by the surrender of so much of the regular army and I don't think most people even were aware of how hard the Republican Guard fought against our 7th Corps.

The Republican Guard fought like tigers. They too would not give up. They kept fighting no matter what it was and there are all kinds of stories about U.S. troops putting rounds into Iraqi BMPs only to have kind of two or three charred survivors fall out of the BMP, pick up their RPGs, pick up their AK-47s and keep firing at us.

So again, I think this is very much in keeping with what we have seen from the Iraqis over the past. So far I have seen some changes, some shifts, some lessons that they have learned, but I have not seen any kind of a quantum improvement in either Iraqi strategy, tactics or capabilities. There's what we have to keep this in perspective.

So what has happened? First, and I think you are starting to hear this, the CENTCOM strategy was a very bold, very audacious strategy. Those are euphemisms for saying risk. There was risk in the CENTCOM strategy. The inherent risks, and again, these are things you heard both myself and Michael O'Hanlon say from this podium before the war ever started. One of the great risks out there was the risk to the supply lines. There was an expectation that Iraqi resistance would simply fold and we were going to have very long supply lines, 500 kilometer long supply lines that we probably didn't have the kind of forces that we wanted to be able to protect them if those supply lines came under attack.

I will say I think it is clear that some in the military and some in the Administration did

set up the campaign plan or did go into the campaign based on some faulty assumptions. Remember, there were many people in the Administration who were saying for months if not years ahead of time that the Iraqi regime was brittle, that the Iraqi army soldiers wouldn't fight for it, that it really wouldn't take much effort to just knock this regime over. That's why you had a number of people arguing that the Iraqi Opposition and U.S. air power could do it by themselves. I think that conditioned part of the plan, it conditioned the thinking of people who were involved in the planning process, and I would say it was my sense talking to U.S. military personnel beforehand that even some of the U.S. military personnel began to kind of buy into the shock and awe, the impact of air power, what we saw in Afghanistan, and did begin to think that this risky strategy was more likely to just simply overwhelm the Iraqis than I certainly thought at the time.

There were also some problems in terms of mistakes compounding themselves. For me, one mistake we made and I think we're seeing it now, was not taking Iraqi prisoners of war. Again, this is an inherent risk built into the plan. Because we didn't have a whole lot of troops we didn't want to use a whole lot of troops dealing with Iraqi POWs. So the decision was made we would simply tell POWs put down your weapons and go home.

What you're seeing, and you're seeing the Pentagon even report on it is the fact that a lot of those POWs or potential POWs, people who did try to surrender, went back into Basra, went back to their homes, and there they were dragooned back into the fight by the Fedayeen Saddam, by the SSO, by other elements of Saddam's paramilitary organization. I think if we had it to do all over again it probably would have been better to have the forces in place to take those guys prisoner of war.

The other thing that's out there that is so different in this war as opposed to the last one, again, which was being said any number of times before this, is the terrain. You've got to keep the terrain in mind.

In 1991 the KTO was about as ideal a battlefield as the U.S. is ever likely to fight on. This time around we are not fighting on a tabletop the way that we did in 1991, and so much of what we are seeing now is entirely a product of that difference in terrain. The fight that we're seeing in Nasiriyah, it's because it's a built-up city. We didn't fight in any cities in 1991.

I'll give you another perfect example. The Apache helicopter raid, the 32 Apaches that went in. You're now hearing people talk about how terrific the Iraqis are and they've got all these new tactics. I think they have tweaked their tactics a little bit but the biggest change there has nothing to do with that. I think there is a wild set of exaggeration going on. The biggest difference is the terrain.

The Apache was meant to sit off two or three kilometers and lob Hellfire missiles at

tanks. Because of the terrain that they're operating in now they can't do that. The Republican Guard always put up a huge amount of anti-aircraft fire in 1991. We tried going after them by dropping the ceiling and bringing in A-10s at lower levels in 1991 and we immediately lost four Thunderbolts doing that. Immediately in the first day, lost four Thunderbolts so we immediately kicked the ceiling back up on them.

Again, the Republican Guards will fight and they will fight hard and they will throw everything that they can into the air. What's different this time from 1991 is that because of the terrain, we can't simply go back to, we didn't want to go back to these high-level strikes, and what's more, the terrain is allowing them to hide and it's forcing our Apaches to get in closer and to get into situations where they can take fire from multiple different vectors which they can't always see.

In other words, they can't sit back two or three kilometers out of the range of Iraqi small arms fire and just take shots at Iraqi tanks. They're being forced to get in there. The same thing is what we're seeing in Nasiriyah, in Basra, in all these places where the fighting is harsh. The terrain is the critical difference out there.

Let me just finish by saying that I think there are risks out there. What I've tried to do is suggest that what we are seeing is not quite the calamity that it is being described as. It certainly is something that I think many people in the Administration and many people in the military weren't expecting, but as I said, I think this was to be expected, and I don't believe that this necessarily is a sign that somehow the entire battle plan was wrong. Clearly changes have needed to be made. It looks like the military is adjusting.

But there are risks in what's going on, and I will finish by doing that even at the risk of leaving it on a potentially sour note which is that first of all we have lost some momentum. That is important. A big element of this campaign, and again it was part of the thinking, was that we would preserve momentum and the momentum would create a beneficent cycle in the sense of we would be seen as progressing, Iraqis would become demoralized, they would surrender, the surrenders would speed further demoralization.

The fact that we have been forced to stop, been forced to reorient forces, to go back, the fact that Saddam and his loyalists are seeing the irregulars giving us fits I think hurts us. It means that momentum is no longer with us right now. We can take it back, hopefully we will, but right now the momentum is feeding Saddam and I think it is giving heart to a lot of people in the Iraqi military and perhaps even among Iraq's civilian population who may have been on the fence. So I think an important element is going to be seizing back the momentum quickly.

Then a final thought, I also wonder, and here this is just pure speculation, but as an old Iraq analyst I wonder to what extent Saddam Hussein isn't looking at the situation and wondering

if there aren't possibilities for him in the future inherent in what he is seeing. And in particular, I think it was very clear early on, or going into this, that Saddam's intention was to make his fight in Baghdad. He would go down with the ship in Baghdad if that's what it came to. I just wonder if the success of the irregulars aren't convincing Saddam that maybe there is a possibility that he could flee Baghdad if things really got bad and try to take up his fight as a guerrilla movement in the desert, in the hills somewhere outside. I will say that I think that is going to be extremely difficult for Saddam. And if in fact he decides to do that that may actually play very much to our advantage because ever since the advent of air power guerrilla warfare in the desert has been exceptionally difficult.

But it's possible. It's out there. And as I said, I think it is clear that Saddam has over-achieved. He feels like he's discovered a new weapon of his. And I think that may open up in his own mind new tactics and new strategies that he might decide to take advantage of.

MR. STEINBERG: Ken, before we go on, the question I think presumably on a lot of military commanders' minds and a lot of watchers' minds is where is the WMD? We've seen discoveries of new chemical suits in the south. Is this imminent? Are we going to see as part of the battle of Baghdad the Iraqis moving to use WMD?

MR. POLLACK: I continue to believe that at some point in time in the battle for Baghdad we are likely to see weapons of mass destruction used. However, I do think that Iraq's successes over the last few days and in particular the successes that they believe they have struck have totally pushed up their threshold for WMD use.

Saddam never wanted to use WMD. It was always his second, his fall-back strategy. His primary strategy was prance up to Baghdad, deter us from attacking Baghdad, bring tremendous international pressure on the United States to get us to call off the attack. I think it was clear right from the get-go and again, those of you who were here heard me say this even before the war started, that I thought it was unlikely we would see WMD used until we got to the battle of Baghdad because Saddam recognized that using WMD would likely shift international opinion so heavily in our favor, and that refraining from using WMD would very much keep all of the nay-sayers out there, all the opponents of the war very firmly behind his position.

So therefore I always felt that it was unlikely we'd see WMD used or even uncover it for that matter until we got up into Baghdad.

At this point I think that Saddam is seeing two things. One, he is seeing his irregulars more successful than he expected. And second, he is hearing Western journalists, particularly American journalists, describing skirmishes as massive battles and describing 10 or a dozen killed in action as heavy casualties.

I think that both of those things are reinforcing one of Saddam's most important assumptions about this campaign which is that the United States simply can't take casualties. I think that all of this has made him very hopeful that if he can just keep this going for a little bit longer he will reach that casualty threshold, that cross-over point where we will be forced to basically throw in the towel. Obviously none of us knows exactly where he puts that casualty threshold, but I think what he's hearing has brought the casualty threshold down lower, and that is likely to make him want to hold off on the WMD use for even longer than he probably did going into the war. So you may even see some fights around Baghdad where again he refrains for as long as he thinks possible from using the WMD to try to make that optimal strategy, that first line strategy work. But as I said, I think at some point he is going to realize that that strategy is not working and then I think you will see WMD used.

MR. STEINBERG: Shibley, the one thing we thought we all knew was that the Arab governments wanted a very quick war with very few civilian casualties. We've now got reports saying the war could go on for months. We have pictures of this attack on the market in Baghdad. It's not entirely clear who was the perpetrator of that attack, and certainly the kinds of pictures that most Arab leaders look very unhappy about having to face.

What's going on in the Arab world?

MR. SHIBLEY TELHAMI: actually when you look first of all at the U.S. attempt to win public opinion and to compete with the Iraqi story in the Arab world, the U.S. began with two strikes against it. One strike is that this has been perceived as an unjust war by the vast majority of the people in the Middle East. If you look at the surveys not only did the public oppose the war, the public even opposed the war even if Iraq had been found to be hiding weapons of mass destruction and even if the war had been led by the UN. The public in the Middle East opposed this war.

So clearly, they saw the U.S. as the aggressor, they saw Iraq as the victim. In that environment it's very difficult to have the moral high ground when you are trying to appeal to the propaganda game on both sides trying to, the U.S. highlighting the Iraqi violations of international law and the Geneva Convention while the Iraqis are -- I mean the U.S. is highlighting the violations, the Iraqis are clearly trying to talk about their civilian casualties, highlight the damage to themselves.

In that game Iraq was bound to have the upper hand in the Arab world. It has more sympathy in that arena and continues, and will continue to have it probably in the foreseeable future.

The second strike against the U.S. was the very success of the projection that the U.S.

was going to have an overwhelming superiority. That this is going to be a quick war. In a way, strategy that was intended to have a bandwagon effect. A political bandwagon effect and a military bandwagon, perhaps some of the military in Iraq would defect. That was the idea.

It succeeded too well in the sense that people in fact were expecting the shock and awe to bring about very quick results, so every little setback in that process was again for Iraq. So you have two major setbacks to begin with and that's the dynamic. That's exacerbated by a media that plays by definition against the U.S.. Not only because of the mistrust of the U.S. among the public mind, and you have this dynamic of pictures, but because even the neutral pictures. That is when you have without commentary, if you put on television the live, shock and awe, bombing of Baghdad, here it looks like a powerful America exercising its overwhelming power. Well, in much of the Arab world given that they have already started with the idea that this is an unjust war, this is a powerful America, unjustly attacking an Arab capital, so the very pictures themselves have a different impact.

In fact the Arab media actually has been given the American side of the story. By that I mean has actually regularly been covering the news conferences of the President, the Secretary of State, Rumsfeld, the military reports hosting them, but again, if you look at it through Middle Eastern eyes, the only stories that are intended essentially for the American public, the international public do not resonate. They seem out of context for people in the region and they are not believed.

I'm listening to them watching on Arab media to see how they are seen through Middle Eastern eyes, they don't look believable. And to give you one example yesterday when a military spokesman was being interviewed on Al Jazeera and he was pointing to the deception of the Iraqi, the sort of civilian, the Iraqi soldiers wearing civilian clothes and then attacking American soldiers, a violation of international law. The host responded by what do you expect, given the fact that you have all the military technology, all the assets you're under, so don't you expect them to at least try some deception? That actually -- That's the host saying that, not even a caller. You can imagine how the public response to this kind of thing. So that's a problem.

This media issue has played against governments themselves. The governments have been in a mind. They've been stuck between two fears. One fear is the fear of an angry public that, a public that's angry with America and therefore with them, particularly those who are cooperating with the U.S.. On the other hand, the fear of a powerful unilateralist America that could succeed and therefore they don't want to be on the wrong side of the U.S.. They have mostly made a strategic decision to cooperate with America, at least privately, some even publicly, but at the same time to try to appease the public, and in a way for the past several weeks some of them have actually been trying to spin the story a little bit away from blaming the U.S. and more toward blaming the Iraqi regime. In part because they want to reduce the public anger. It hasn't worked. The public opinion surveys show it hasn't worked.

In large part because they no longer monopolize the media. We see in fact in my surveys about the media, when I ask people what they go to watch the news, including increasingly a place like Egypt and certainly Saudi Arabia, they mostly now go to satellite stations that are broadcasting outside the boundaries. Not only Al Jazeera, by the way. Al Jazeera is one. But the Lebanese television is highly watched. MBC is highly watched. Even Al Manar or Hezbollah Television is highly watched in several Arab countries. In Jordan it's the leading source of news on Arab-Israeli issues, for example. So these are very very important outlets now and the government cannot spin the story.

That is why I think we found these governments in the past few weeks trying first to maneuver, to look like they're doing something because the public expects them to do something; and in essence I think in the Foreign Minister meeting in Cairo, I think some of them were hoping that what would emerge would be putting the ball back in Saddam's court so to speak. But they found the public was so opposed, the public sentiment was such that they actually ended up with a resolution that essentially called the British and American attack and aggression and called Iraq a victim and called for the withdrawal.

So they're in a bind.

If you look at the public sentiment in general, I think you find there is not only a sort of a rallying, nationalistic rallying both in the Arab world and in Iraq, but you also find kind of a fear even among some of the governments who wanted to see a quick war and wanted to see minimal casualties because they fear for the public opinion. Many of them at the very same time really didn't want to see this to be an easy war for America because many of them believe this is episode one of a nightmarish serial and they wanted the ratings to be so bad that episode two and episode three will not be shown. And that is the sort of dynamic that is going on that is driving a lot of the frustration of people while knowing that America will prevail in the end, don't want America to have it so easy, has to think that let's go to episode two and episode three. Governments in the short term will prevail, but they will do it with only one method and that is repression. There goes democracy.

MR. STEINBERG: Shibley, you talk about the independence of the satellite outlets. How much exposure are Al Jazeera and MBC and others giving to the degree of military support that these Arab governments are giving to the coalition fight? Are they broadcasting the fact that we're using the CAOC in Saudi Arabia, that we're using the bases in the Gulf?

MR. TELHAMI: This is really a fascinating story, Jim, and in fact in my book I had a section on Al Jazeera. I said one of the fascinating stories about this coming war that I was expecting would be how Al Jazeera would cover the fact that the war is being conducted from bases in Qatar. Because while Al Jazeera has been independent, set up to be independent, it still

gets governmental funding. The government can unplug, pull the plug at any time. They're dependent on the government. They're not official, but they're dependent on the government.

By and large they remain somewhat independent, but don't underestimate the extent to which they have actually tried to cover the American side of the story as well, but it hasn't worked because of the reasons I've said. But they have not really highly focused on the bases issue, and that maybe is a, it may be related to the fact that even all these statements with the exception of Al Manar which is truly sort of independent, have governmental links. MBC is owned by members of the royal family. Al Qatar is still funded in part by the Qatari government. So it's not that they're fully independent and they still, there is a line of defense there that you can see particularly showing on the issue of the bases.

MR. STEINBERG: I think I'm going to switch the order here since we've been talking about the Arab media, I think maybe we should switch, if you don't mind, to Steve because I think it's a natural break there.

And Shibley has to get up to New York fairly shortly, so if you see him walk off the stage I hope it won't be viewed as a protest. [Laughter]

MR. STEPHEN HESS: I should preface this by saying that since this is the first time that media analysis is included in Brookings' weekly Iraq war briefings, I should add that anyone who does media studies promptly learns two lessons. The first is that since everyone is a media consumer, everyone is a media expert. And the second is that when it comes to assessing the media, the truth is in the eyes of the beholder.

I think to fully grasp the audaciousness, the boldness of the Pentagon's media strategy, that is having 600 or so journalists not only from the United States but from around the world embedded with their troops, it's useful to quickly jump back two wars. If you look at Vietnam, what you find was a war in which journalists were free to roam at will and to write at will. The second thing is the United States lost the war. Ergo, as military planners probably thought from then on, in the next war we would be quite cautious about having the nattering press wander around freely, and indeed if we fast forward to the next war, the Gulf War, we see the most restrictive policy that we've ever seen. There was indeed censorship, material that came out of units where it was a pool arrangement, had to go through military officers and be cleared while most of the real news, in a sense, was conducted back in the hotel by briefers.

So we saw the war through the Pentagon, through very good briefers who had the advantage of videotapes and in a sense the journalists there were props in this presentation. We

won that war, ergo that sounds like a pretty sensible media strategy, and in effect in Afghanistan it was very much that with even heightened briefings in which Don Rumsfeld became something of an icon around the world.

The brilliance I think of what we're seeing now is that the military must have decided, deliberately, that a media strategy that worked in Gulf I was probably going to be ill-fitting in Gulf II. Why? I think in part because we did not have a great coalition of allies but we had a world that was often very hostile and certainly very skeptical to the United States.

So by allowing the war to be seen through the eyes of the journalists, they change the messengers. The messengers became the journalists rather than the Pentagon.

This had a very positive effect for the Administration even before hostilities began because the reporters had been embedded for several weeks and the reports that they sent back were warm and fuzzy and main street reports on the troops there. So that the war, the support of the war continued quite high and in some regard it became less of a George W. Bush war than a main street American war when we went in there.

Several things happened with this strategy I think. First of all, we get more information than we've ever had before about any war. It's quite amazing what we have. But Rumsfeld was quite right to call it slices. It is a very disjointed and very very hard for at least television watchers to see the gestalt and the whole of it. Obviously the more time you have to do it the better job you're going to do so that the morning newspapers will have it in somewhat greater context and presumably the news magazines even greater context. That's partially the nature of the medium.

What worries me otherwise is that this may have been a strategy, a media strategy, quite deliberately designed for a war that was expected to be short and antiseptic. How well will it work over time for a war in which it may be neither? And in fact I think Ken even talked about that from the point of view of Saddam Hussein and what he is seeing. The question also of course becomes what Americans are seeing and what the rest of the world is seeing in that regard.

My gut feeling at this time is that this coverage is something like a house of mirrors. Something like in the amusement park you remember, and what's big becomes great; what's small becomes minute so that we have some sense of good news becomes great news, bad news becomes horrendous news, and how will this play?

I think there are some clues in public opinion polls, though obviously this has only been going on a very short period of time, that for those who have come from a pro-war point or view they become even more strongly fixed in that and from those who come from an anti-war point

of view that they become even more fixed in that and the separation, the divide becomes even greater.

So those would be my initial thoughts on the question of embedding and what the implications may be.

MR. STEINBERG: There has been a lot of criticism about the sort of a notion that once you embed them it's a little bit of the kind of Stockholm Syndrome that the reporters become identified with their units, they go on and talk about we are now moving, we're taking fire. How hard is it as a journalist to do that job if you're in that quite extreme situation where your fate in many ways is being a shared one with the soldiers with whom you're embedded?

MR. HESS: I think it's very difficult indeed. Remember, journalists are put in a very dangerous position. I checked with the Committee to Protect Journalists yesterday, and the tally as of yesterday was two journalists killed, two journalists missing, and two journalists detained. Journalists are in harm's way and that's going to be reflected in their coverage.

Now again, how that Stockholm Syndrome works I would almost defer to Shibley. It works that way with American journalists. How does it work with Al Jazeera and others? The same way or quite contrary in that regard? In other words, every country's journalism starts with a cultural orientation, if you want to call it a cultural bias, accept that. American journalists know who their consumers are and that's how they play, although we have standards that are far more robust than most countries in terms of sourcing and objectivity.

So that I would assume, I certainly sense that it's working in favor, if you will, of the government, although when I see BBC which you can see in Washington at 6:30 and 10:00 o'clock at night, I certainly don't get that same feeling from the BBC.

MR. STEINBERG: Obviously one of the things that will have the biggest impact in how the media story affects the public's view is what's happening on the humanitarian front. This is the greatest concern presumably of anybody who is worried about the image of the war is not only the problem of civilian casualties but the sense that because of what we've done that tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands of people are starving, without water, etc., etc.

The humanitarian dimension was very prominent in the two previous wars, Kosovo and Afghanistan. How is the military facing the problem here? How is it different? What are the challenges that we're looking at?

MS. ROBERTA COHEN: I'm going to focus on some of the distinctive features in this war with regard to the humanitarian situation.

To begin with, most of the Iraqi population, an estimated 16 million people, are completely dependent on food aid from abroad. That's the result of 12 years of sanctions and an oil for food program, that while efficiently providing food has also discouraged domestic production, encouraged rural to urban migration, and has made almost an entire population dependent on handouts. Four hundred thousand metric tons of food have to be shipped in every month. This is the largest humanitarian assistance program in the world and while the Iraqis reportedly have five weeks worthy of food stockpiled, having to feed this many people in an emergency and over a longer period of time is a staggering responsibility.

A second obvious difference between this war and more recent emergencies is that the responsibility to ensure that the civilian population is taken care of, fed, housed and protected, lies squarely with the United States and its coalition partners. The U.S. has the troops on the ground and will be the occupying power. The 4th Geneva Convention is clear on these points. As a result, humanitarian aid has to become a significant part of the political/military strategy.

But there's a risk here. The aid is becoming completely politicized.

Opposition to the war and the impact of this on the humanitarian situation is another distinctive feature of this particular war. In the weeks and the months leading up to this war there was a singular lack of preparation on the part of many international humanitarian agencies. Many NGOs and UN agencies didn't want to be seen as helping to plan for a war or encouraging the march to war. UN agencies were even barred from discussing preparations or contacting the U.S. military.

And many donor governments refused to fund contingency planning when organizations did ask for it because the donors opposed the war or they didn't want to be seen to be planning for the war.

So there is now a race against time to preposition supplies and humanitarian workers in order to address a humanitarian crisis. Despite the television pictures of food and supplies in warehouses in Kuwait that is stockpiled by the U.S. military, these supplies are only enough for a limited period.

Opposition to the war is also the main event in the current debate in the Security Council over reinstating the oil for food program which was suspended at the beginning of the war.

Russia, France, others have been opposing a new UN resolution that would reactivate the program under the auspices of the UN because they say there is still a government in place in Baghdad and they don't want the UN coordinating its efforts with coalition troops and legitimizing their military action.

So what you see is this is jeopardizing feeding the Iraqi population. The longer the delay in the Security Council the longer it's going to take to get contracts signed, to get the pipeline going, to restore the distribution networks.

Unlike in other war-torn countries, it should be emphasized that there is no real aid infrastructure in Iraq other than the oil for food program which was under the authority of the government of Iraq. Because of the sanctions regime as well as Iraqi government restrictions, there are very few international non-governmental organizations inside the country, less than 20, and the ones there have small programs and few funds. There also has been little NGO presence in neighboring countries yet NGOs are usually the mainstay of humanitarian emergencies working as partners with UN agencies in bringing in food and medicine and shelter.

Even the international agencies in Iraq have been involved primarily in overseeing the oil for food program. The International Organization for Migration, I might mention, is one of the organizations that's being given principal responsibility for people who are internally displaced in the country. But, they're not even in Iraq. They don't have any presence or any infrastructure or any programs there.

So once again there is a race against time on the part of NGOs and also UN agencies to begin to expand their operations, gain access, and position themselves in neighboring countries.

American organizations have had a particularly difficult time since U.S. sanctions have prohibited their providing assistance in Iraq. Even now with the restrictions relaxed and economic sanctions waived, official red tape continues to obstruct the ability of NGOs to move quickly.

The relationship between the military and the civilian relief agencies is more uneasy in this crisis than usual because of the U.S. military's overall control of the situation and its occupation plans. Many relief agencies have been complaining of lack of communication and coordination with the Pentagon, pointing out that everything is classified. They also object to the placement of the Office of Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance in the Pentagon.

Other NGOs have announced they're not going to work under military authority. Still others express concerns about being bypassed by private U.S. contractors who are being hired rather than experienced NGOs to undertake post-conflict reconstruction in sectors such as public health and education for which NGOs are better prepared.

Finally, and more than in most wars, the U.S. is responsible for the physical security and protection of the civilian population. That's not just making sure they have food, medicine and shelter, but protecting them from assault, abuse, reprisal or revenge killings, looting. We're going to have to see the coalition troops become involved in restoring public order and undertaking policing. There is a security vacuum developing in the country with the government and its security apparatus beginning to collapse. It's a vacuum that the United States is going to have to fill but I don't believe it's yet focused on this.

MR. STEINBERG: Roberta, maybe you could say just a word more about what you understand to be the current state of discussions between General Garner and the UN about how they see -- Once this issue of the Iraqi government goes away, at what point will the UN agencies be prepared to work with Garner and under what terms do you see this developing?

MS. COHEN: There's a lot of ambivalence I believe within the U.S. Administration about the role the UN should have and when it should have it.

The latest, at least that I'm aware of, is that the U.S. military will be over this Office of Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance, whose civilian administrators will be running Iraq and that's what's going to happen initially.

Then they're talking about a turnover to Iraqis. Where the UN fits into this, whether they're going to be involved in coordinating relief, what role they're going to play is not really yet known and I think that there are some in the Administration who would like to see the UN actually play the role of administering the country after the military battles are over for one good reason. That is that it would be much more palatable to those in the region and possibly to the Iraqis than an American occupation. But this is not settled at all.

There are others that really want to see the UN sort of sidelined, used in some way, but they don't want to see the whole occupation as some sort of multilateral presence.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

MR. STEINBERG: Let's turn to your questions.

QUESTION: I'm Chuck McCutcheon from Newhouse News Service. This question is for Ken.

You talked about the faulty assumptions on the part of the military. What do you think the source of these faulty assumptions were? I've heard some people suggest there is perhaps some sort of a cultural myopia or a lack of knowledge about Iraq that could be responsible.

MR. POLLACK: I'm not even going to try to deal with that one. I think there are two real sources of the faulty assumptions. And again, I don't want to exaggerate them because I think there were some faulty assumptions, but they're not catastrophic. There's nothing that has happened so far that is catastrophic even though is sometimes the way it's being made out to be.

On the one hand there was a lot of intelligence coming into the U.S. government, talking about the demoralization of the Iraqi armed forces, the problems within the Iraqi high command, fissures that were developing there.

On that point I will simply say that I don't think that intelligence was wrong. I think those problems are still there and I think that if things had unfolded a little bit differently you might have seen the place coming apart more. Again, I made that point about the surrenders in particular from the 51st Mechanized Division.

If we had taken those prisoners in rather than turning them back around and allowing them once again to fall prey to the Fedayeen Saddam, to [Alumnahas], to the other internal security organizations I think things might have turned out differently.

I am continuing to hear, and in fact I think there's a piece in the Post if I recall correctly that suggested that the divisions up in Northern Iraq remain very demoralized and the expectation there is that they will not put up much of a fight.

We should remember, most of the Iraqi formations have not. The 11th Infantry Division did not put up much of a fight. The 51st Mech has not put up much of a fight. The problems that the U.S. and U.K. are seeing, what we're seeing out there are caused by very small groups, in the thousands. I don't know that necessarily the numbers that the Pentagon is putting out are exactly right but I think the numbers are in the thousands in each of these cities, primarily Fedayeen Saddam, [Alumnahas], other internal security organizations along with a bunch of shanghaied, dragooned soldiers and other civilians who are being forced to participate in it.

I think another set of problems that went into the faulty assumptions though was also, I think the people were a bit mesmerized by what we did in Afghanistan, by the new technologies that we have, and I think that once again there was an assumption that shock and awe, that this new air campaign was really going to be able to deliver something, was going to be able to land some kind of a paralyzing blow to the Iraqi command structure. It was always something that I was dubious of because I had seen the Iraqi command structure survive the air campaign of the first Gulf War. What we saw Saddam do then and I think what we're seeing him do now is the same thing. He will go back and he will rely on ancient methods to compensate.

There is a news story out there on the wires that the 101st captured six Fedayeen Saddam

couriers who had a lot of money and a bunch of instructions from Baghdad going out to Fedayeen groups in outlying cities. This is what we saw Saddam do in 1991 and it allowed him to compensate for what we did to his communications systems, for the more sophisticated abilities he had to command and control. He just went to old-fashioned systems and they worked.

Given what he was trying to do, given the capabilities of his forces, they worked in that sense. It allowed him to keep control of his forces. We should always remember that in 1991 during the four-day ground war, despite all the claims about cutting off Saddam's command and control, the Iraqi General Staff formed up a screening force of five divisions out in the west of the Kuwait theater of operations. It was really quite remarkable. Didn't do much against us, we plowed through those divisions again because of our advantages and again because of how good the terrain was, but they did it. I think we're seeing the same thing now and I think that we did, I should say there were people in the Administration and in the military who did become a little bit mesmerized with the technology.

But again, I think it's really important to keep this in context. Nothing that has happened is catastrophic. I've seen nothing that suggests to me that we are going to lose this war. I think it's just going to be messier than many people expected going in. Not necessarily any messier than I expected.

QUESTION: Thank you, Jim. Just to follow up on the question before me.

Ken, do you think that assumption is in a way based on almost a racist perception that the Arabs will not fight for their homeland? Although we have evidence to the contrary. They have been fighting for their homeland and there really is some brutalness of their conditions. That's one.

Second, on the issue of the media. I am amazed, I'm struck on how let's say the Saddam Fedayeen are shown as hooligans and they are deceptive, they are dressed in civilian clothes, while on the other hand we seem to treat American Special Forces dressed like Americans as being James Bondic and really clever and doing things. Why is that?

While the Fedayeen, as a matter of fact they are civilians. They are party members. They're not military, they're fighting in their own clothes and so on.

The third point is on the issue of POWs. I think if we look at the picture on the front page of the Washington Post on Sunday and we see an Iraqi soldier being blindfolded, his hands tied, being subdued by these really strong rough leathernecks and so on, almost reminiscent of the American hostages in Iran. That was okay. We of course are treated to parades of Iraqi soldiers, their faces in the dirt and so on. It was really terrible to see American POWs -- and I don't

condone that, I condemn that. But why one is sort of a breach of international law and one isn't, thank you.

MR. POLLACK: Let me start by answering the two you directed to me.

First, I can't speak for every person in the U.S. armed forces, but I will say that the members of the U.S. armed forces who I've spoken to any number of times, I see no indication of racism as part of this.

That said, --

QUESTION: I'm talking about in general. Historically. The West versus --

MR. POLLACK: As Edward Said taught us, it's really a mistake to make those kinds of enormous generalizations. I think in the case of the U.S. military, as I said, while there may be racist individuals out there, the people I've come across, the problem is not racism.

I will say I think there is, as always in this country, a problem about knowing history. This is wonderful for me because I get to plug a different book. I have an 800-page book on Arab military history over the last 50 years, and one of the things that I argued against most strenuously was this misperception that Arab armies just won't fight. I think there are a lot of Americans who looked at the Arab-Israeli wars and they looked at what happened in 1991 and they just assumed Arab armies won't fight.

In fact if you actually go back and look at the history, that's not what happened at all. In point of fact there were many Arab units that fought incredibly courageously throughout all of those wars. They were undone by other problems that they have but it was never a matter of courage which is why as I said in my opening remarks, there is nothing that I have seen to me that looks in some way like an outlier from previous Iraqi military history. If you actually know the military history I think what we're seeing is very much in keeping with what we've seen them do before.

Your point about Special Forces dressing up as [Bush America] versus Fedayeen. I think there's definitely a point in there. Let me start with the counter though which is I do think what the Fedayeen is doing is disgraceful in the sense of I obviously don't have a problem with Iraqis who believe in a particular cause fighting for it. There are causes which I would fight for too. But I think that the methods they are using are in many cases absolutely disgraceful, beyond the pale, using Iraqi civilians as human shields, forcing Iraqis at gunpoint to do this. Those tactics I do find egregious.

That said, I certainly think you're right, that there are differences in perceptions. And one

of the things that did strike me was that when we started complaining about the Iraqis showing American prisoners of war, their faces on TV, we'd been showing Iraqi prisoners of war, their faces on TV. I noticed this morning that the newest tape coming from the field now is obscuring the Iraqi prisoners of war.

So I don't think there is relativity in the sense that I do think the U.S. has been much better about that than the Iraqi regime, but I also think it's the case that we weren't absolutely faultless. The U.S. government wasn't absolutely faultless to begin with. But I think even there you can say that one of the things that's different about the two governments is that the U.S. government recognized its mistake and is now acting to correct it.

MS. COHEN: In the United States there are now, I mean Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, a watchdog group, and many others, that are very closely monitoring what the U.S. does so that any even slight infraction or possibly conceived infraction of international humanitarian law is immediately recorded and great protests are made.

So I think in this sense, NGOs are getting more and more expert, so it's another new feature, and I think the U.S. is very influenced by that.

MR. STEINBERG: The problem with humanitarian law is that we are, there was a great achievement with the Geneva Conventions but they have remained static in their formal requirements since the late 1940s and war and its character has changed.

So for example on the issue of the prisoners of war, the no exploitation rule was one that basically was focused on what a government did in terms of its treatment of prisoners and not abusing prisoners.

How does the no exploitation rule work when you have press embedded with the soldiers who are making the capture in which the government is not orchestrating the parading of prisoners or the like, but they are facilitating the fact that the press is there to take pictures of the capturing of prisoners and the like. So how we apply the no exploitation rule in this new context, is a difficult one.

On the question of Special Forces, I think there is a very profound issue here which we as a country have not faced. As Secretary Rumsfeld and some of his supporters try to expand the role of Special Forces in both covert and paramilitary type operations, how the Geneva Conventions apply to the use of our forces in those contexts. They're not wearing uniforms, they're not wearing badges and insignias. All the rules that we have developed around that depend to a great deal on the idea that the way you protect civilians is because regular armies are doing that, and yet we claim the right to treat the enemy combatants in the context of the Afghanistan war as non-military and therefore not entitled to the protections of the Geneva

Convention. What will happen to our forces when they're faced with a similar situation, when they in effect look the way the al Qaeda fighters looked in Afghanistan.

So as we move more and more down that direction we have to think about what the broader consequences are going to be for our soldiers when they face similar kinds of circumstances.

QUESTION: I'm Tim Johnson from Knight Ridder.

A question for Mr. Hess in particular. In this world of hyper-compressed news cycles and scorecards on momentum, and we've already heard the talk of momentum this morning, how resilient is public support for President Bush, and how is time, the factor of time going to play out over the next few weeks?

MR. HESS: Well, the polls have been very interesting because they show to date Americans adjusting their expectations, obviously, to the events that they see. The question of how long the war is going to go on, if they think it's not going to be necessarily such a short war. They think the danger is it's not going to be a war of so few casualties.

But on the two questions of support for the war and support for the President, they have remained very very high.

Now we can't really go much beyond that but we still have a lot of polling, and usually with polling the best way to do it is bunch it together. If it's all telling us the same thing you can suspect that it's pretty accurate, and that has been the results this week of all the major polls.

QUESTION: Miles Benson, Newhouse Newspapers.

I would ask this question of Mr. Telhami if he were still here, but maybe Mr. Pollack and Roberta Cohen could comment on it.

The question is whether the U.S. declared objective of establishing a democracy in Iraq is realistic. Whether the culture of Iraq is such and the history of Iraq is such that it would make that possible or are there special obstacles to the importation of democratic ideals in that part of the world?

I've heard it suggested, and I want to be careful to put this in the context I intend it because it's not intended to sound racist but could easily.

I've heard it suggested by people of Arab descent that the people in that part of the world are ungovernable in the democratic sense and that's the reason why there are totalitarian

governments, so many totalitarian governments in that part of the world. And if you did have a democracy established in Iraq after this war, it would quite likely select leaders who would not be the sort of leaders Americans would hope to see. That there would be a predominance of Islamic Fundamentalists preferred.

Could you talk to that general question?

MR. POLLACK: I tend to be in the camp of cautious optimists on this question. There's a lot of debate on the issue. Actually I have a piece coming out in the next Washington Quarterly on exactly the subject.

What I will say is I think that building democracy in Iraq will be difficult, it will take a long time. I think the idea that it's going to happen in three or five years is ridiculous. I've never seen it happen in three or five years anywhere. But I think the idea that it's impossible in Iraq is A, historical at the very least; and beyond that extreme I'd say also foolish.

I'd start by answering the question this way. First, we've seen any number of societies over time about which other people have said democracy can never take root there. It's impossible.

I read Michael Beschlos' wonderful book The Conquerors a number of months back where he talks about how so many Americans felt that way in World War II, that Germany was just impossible to be a democracy and they pointed to the failure of Weimar. They said Germans are congenitally incapable. They are born and bred to autocracy. They can never be democrats.

I remember back in the 1970s and '80s when people were saying effectively the same thing about East Asia. I remember the arguments about Confucian culture and how it was all about conformity and autocracy and therefore East Asia could never be democratic.

We've seen this time and again. The West Europeans used to say it about Eastern Europe, that they could never be democratic. I think time and again it's been proven to be false.

That's not to suggest that democracy in Iraq is guaranteed. It's just to suggest that there's no reason to believe these theories that a particular culture is simply impossible, it's impossible to create democracy there.

I would also say that if you look at Iraq and you wanted to try some grand social experiment of building democracy in some Arab country you might actually pick Iraq as the place you want to start with because while it's certainly true that there are all kinds of problems there in terms of what you look for in building democracy, they do have some real advantages. It's one of the most secular countries in the Middle East, it is one of the best-educated

populations in the Middle East, it has one of the largest middle classes in the Middle East. Yes, economically developed, but as a social force they're there. It's a very progressive society. Women's education has gone much farther in Iraq than it has in many of the other Arab countries. These are all things that you look to to say is it possible. But even then we've seen democracy take hold in places which had none of those things.

Bangladesh isn't doing so terrible. On almost every one of those scores it is well below Iraq. On the other hand, Belarus is a mess and it's much better than Iraq on most of those scores.

So what I'm suggesting is, and this is why I call myself a cautious optimist. I see no reason that democracy cannot take hold in Iraq. I think it will be a long, arduous process, and I don't think it's guaranteed, either. But I absolutely don't' believe that it's simply a hopeless task.

I'll also say as an Iraq expert, I don't think anything else will work in Iraq. It's one of the biggest reasons driving me toward democracy is every time I try to sketch out any other future for Iraq, some new dictator, some kind of collective oligarchy, every time I sketch out those paths it leads me to war lordism and chaos which remember, that's basically what we had before Saddam Hussein. Remember the constant changing dictators in the 1950s and '60s. Men who could not hold power because of the fractures within Iraqi society. It took the brutality of a Saddam Hussein to hold that place together. As far as I'm concerned in the future it's either got to be some kind of long term process of building democracy or else we're going to get either another Saddam Hussein or some form of war lordism and chaos.

MR. STEINBERG: I'd just add that, because your second point is even if we get democracy we may get a government we don't like. I think if you look at the evolution of political Islam, there is reason for cautious optimism there as well. We obviously got a very radical Islamic government in Iran and that was partly as a result of popular sentiment, but it was in reaction to a very repressive government that was deeply identified with the West. And we've seen over the last now 23 years a movement away from that in Iran as the population again begins to find its own political legs, that discontent with that kind of regime is very high.

We have not seen enormous success for radical political Islam. Even in Turkey where you have a government now which has Islamist roots. It's hardly a radical government. It's very much committed to a Western orientation for Turkey.

So I think while there is a danger for many of these governments in the very short term, because they have been seeing, their repressive governments seem to be allied with the West, that a government that was brought about by popular sentiment would initially react in ways that are anti-Western. That doesn't presage over long term that political [inaudible] would necessarily be the dominant force.

MS. COHEN: I just wanted to add because most of the points I was going to make have been said very ably, the rhetoric used is perhaps not always the most persuasive. The democracy rhetoric with regard to Iraq and the way it's sort of propagated does make for much cynicism. I think it sounds almost as if we're going to just take our system here and we're going to just bring it to you all and that's what you, and everybody's waiting for and why aren't they welcoming us.

So I think it needs to be more realistically looked at. After all, a democratic way or even a pluralistic or representative way, it's probably the most effective way to hold that country together. They've had years of civil wars. You're not going to be able to bring the Kurds into a system unless they're represented in some way. Otherwise you'll just go on having these civil wars.

So perhaps if it were to begin to be looked at as a way of government that might be more effective in keeping their country together and also keeping the different groups at least satisfied that they're getting some share of the political and economic system, that might be a better way to go.

QUESTION: My name is David Hoffman. I want to follow up on an earlier question and it's for Dr. Pollack, but for others too.

It's often said that the first casualty of war is truth. On the matter, and you raised it Dr. Pollack, of so-called, the use of human shields. I want to just say as a preface that my belief is that the U.S. government will observe as a rule much higher standards as regards rules of engagement and decency in war than would the government of Saddam Hussein. I just wanted to say that.

But going back to your allegation I guess it was that the Fedayeen or others have been using human shields, there was a follow-up question as to evidence in that regard.

Of course evidence, if truth is the first casualty of war, and we've seen plenty of that whether it's the aluminum tubes, whether it's the uranium from Niger, whether it's even most recently the so-called popular uprising in Basra. So my question really is simply this. Is there any evidence for the use of human shields?

MR. POLLACK: Let me answer it this way. We're in the middle of a war. No one knows what's going on.

For me one of the most important experiences in my life actually was after the Gulf War when I was at CIA I was the lead author on the CIA's classified post mortem of the entire war. We had something really remarkable at the time. We had synoptic coverage of the entire Kuwaiti theater of operations taken immediately after the war. No one has ever had this in a war before,

so we actually got to see the entire battlefield in front of us.

What we did, my co-analysts and I, was we sat down with all the after-action reports of the U.S. military and we started going through and finding the actual battles and seeing if what we saw on the ground, because we saw all of the Iraqi destroyed equipment and we had all of the tracks laid out in this perfect -- it wasn't just perfect for the U.S. for the fighting but also for historians. It was an incredible thing. We started going through it and trying to figure out what exactly happened. On every single occasion there was confusion. It was clear that things were happening that weren't actually what they saw on the ground.

One of my favorite examples was at the battle of the 73 East Sting where you had the 2nd Armored Cavalry Regiment. All those guys thought that they were being counterattacked by a force in it. It turns out they had simply blundered on an Iraqi defensive position that they hadn't seen before. The tanks weren't moving, but in a sandstorm and from two kilometers away it looked like all of a sudden there were Iraqi tanks coming up at them. That to me was very important in terms of my own sense of the fog of war.

What that means to me is right now none of us has any clear idea of what's going on and it will be up to historians after the war to really piece out what happened, what didn't happen.

That said, right now I'm pretty comfortable with making that point, with making that claim. A, we've heard it from any number of different embedded journalists out there. It's not as if this is just coming from one place. It's coming from a whole variety of different places. A lot of those journalists I think, and I've seen it, would love to trip up the military. Some of those embedded journalists out there are not quite suffering from the Stockholm Syndrome.

It's been interesting to me, when I -- I watch a lot of CNN. When a particular person comes on I immediately watch it because I think I have a sense of whether this one is more in that camp or less in that camp.

In addition, this is entirely consistent with the behavior of the Fedayeen Saddam. I think that's also an important element of it. Everything we know about the Fedayeen Saddam is these are in many cases the worst of Saddam's thugs. Before going into it I think where most Westerners to the extent that they knew anything about Iraq, and encountered the Fedayeen Saddam, it was through things like they used to go through the streets of Baghdad and if they saw a woman who they thought was dressed indecently they'd accuse her of being a prostitute and they would cut off her head right then and there. It's things like that that set you up to say if there are a whole bunch of embedded journalists all saying that they're using civilians as human shields, it seems reasonable to believe that these guys would be doing so.

But yes, obviously I have no independent confirmation of it. All I can do as an analyst is

look at what I'm seeing and say is there any disconfirming evidence? So far I don't see any disconfirming evidence. Am I getting it from multiple sources? Is this consistent with what I've seen in the past?

QUESTION: Kristin Jansen from SAIS.

There doesn't currently seem to be a massive flow of refugees out of Iraq. I was wondering what do you perceive as limiting or preventing this movement of people? Is it the closed borders of neighboring states? Or more the situation on the ground in Iraq?

MS. COHEN: I think it's too early to tell yet about the refugee flows. There is a contrast with what happened in the first war in the Persian Gulf when you had over a million people, but they were fleeing from Saddam Hussein's armies. Right now the Saddam Hussein army is a bit on the defensive.

There is also the question that the neighboring states have all made clear that they really would prefer not to have any refugees. While they are making preparations, most of the camps they are setting up are right practically on the border, either on their side of the border or on the Iraqi side, and they've all announced they don't want to receive large numbers of refugees. So that is certainly a discouraging feature.

The Turkish case is most particular in this regard. I doubt very much whether -- I mean Kurds for a very last resort would head off for Turkey because the Turks have made clear that if there are large refugee movements going in that direction they're going to send their troops in and they're going to stop them because they have their own fears about their own Kurdish population.

So the general framework is one that is not encouraging of refugee flows. Secretary Rumsfeld has also announced, has urged everyone to stay home and not cross borders.

But I think it's too early to tell. It's going to be dependent on military strategy, on whether weapons of mass destruction are used. Also whether some of these countries when they actually see large numbers heading their way will actually open up a bit more.

I should say it was predicted that there might be about 600,000 refugees.

QUESTION: Evan Thomas from Newsweek.

Ken Pollack, could you talk a little bit about the end game in Baghdad? It's not clear to me, obviously we were hoping to break their will and that the Iraqi leadership would implode. Do you still think that can happen or are we going to have to go in and dig them out? And if we

have to dig them out, how does that work?

MR. POLLACK: I want to refrain from answering the last part of that, the how we do it, because I'm also very concerned about giving information to the enemy about how to do things. I think your first two questions are perfectly valid in terms of is it still possible.

Yes, I think it is still possible. We've not actually hit the Republican Guard divisions. Before, during the Gulf War, before the 26th of February the Republican Guard divisions were perfectly intact, their morale was good, they came out as I said, they fought us, they fought us very hard. After we started to hit the Republican Guard divisions we did see additional cracks start to develop. So the fact that we really haven't engaged their main line units does suggest that it is still possible to get the complete cracking of morale which hopefully would cause all of Baghdad to come apart.

That said, I think we've got to be realistic. Again my point earlier about the fact that we have lost some momentum and the fact that Iraqi morale has probably been buoyed by the unexpected success of their irregulars over the first few days does I think raise that threshold. I think it will make it harder. I think it will, even if the Guard divisions are destroyed, you will still have Ba'thist, hard core people around Saddam Hussein saying all right, we lost the Medina, we lost the Hamarabi but we're still making good progress with the Fedayeen. It's still possible to make this work.

It would have been much better to go into the battle of Baghdad with the Iraqis believing they had had no successes whatsoever. And again, what I'm talking about here is the apparent success, the way I think they are reading what's going on with the irregulars which I think they are reading it as a great success, a much grater success than they ever wanted to, and this is the problem with morale. It's dynamic. It's not static, it's not absolute, it is very much relative to what happened over the previous 24, 48, 96 hours. I think the fact that the Iraqis believe that they've scored some real successes is going to help buffer their morale even when the United States hopefully does go in and destroy the three regular Republican Guard armored divisions around Baghdad.

MR. STEINBERG: Let me follow up and try to get you to at least hit on some of this.

You mentioned the possibility that Saddam could at least think about the possibility of now abandoning Baghdad and becoming a guerrilla group. Even assuming that Saddam is gone, say he doesn't survive it, can you draw any conclusions from how the Fedayeen has fought now? The possibility that even without him that they might pose a longer-term threat to the security of U.S. forces there, even after we were to succeed in Baghdad.

MR. POLLACK: I think that that possibility is out there, but for me I think it's less than

the possibility that Saddam himself will go off.

If Saddam is killed, and if he's killed I think it's reasonable to expect that most of the other members of his regime will be as well. I guess it's also possible they could be captured. I don't think that Saddam is necessarily going to allow himself to be captured. But under either of those circumstances yes, I think you could see pockets of not just Fedayeen but again, [Alumnahas], Muhabarat, other security service guys, hard core, committed, people who know they have a lot of blood on their hands, people who don't expect good treatment from the Iraqi people when this is over. I think you could see all of them say you know what? Let's try a guerrilla strategy. It seemed to work, we seemed to have some impact. I think that is definitely the case.

I think it is going to be less likely without Saddam because Saddam is very much a unifying force for this group. Once you get Saddam out of the way there are fissures and competing pressures within the Ba'th structure. Rivalries between different groups, different organizations, different tribes, different even in some cases ethnic groups within the Ba'th structure itself that my guess is will start to fragment the organization. In addition, I think it is still most likely that when Saddam goes the command structure itself will start to have problems. That you will see people pulling it in all different directions, people less willing to die without Saddam Hussein actually there because they will fear that the command structure will start to fall apart and that of course is always a self-fulfilling prophecy.

So I don't rule it out. I think that you could have a problem with guerrilla bands even without Saddam, but for me it's much less than if Saddam is still alive and somehow able to go out into the desert and marry up with the Jabor, the Dulane or one of the other big tribes, get them to protect him, and wage some sort of Lawrence of Arabia style campaign from out of the desert.

QUESTION: Gary Mitchell.

A two-part question, the first for Ken Pollack and the second for anybody else who wants to take a shot at it.

The first is that I think you've written and said as recently as Tuesday that you thought that this war could be as short as four weeks and as long as ten, and I'm interested to know whether your thinking holds on that today and if it's changed, why.

The second and related question I think is about this notion that despite having overwhelming press coverage, what we really have are sort of stovepipe perspectives on this war. Who up there would like to talk about what the big picture of this war is?

MR. POLLACK: You're absolutely right, those were my estimates, and they were because I didn't think this was going to be a quick, clean war. I always expected, my estimate was about a third of Iraq's armed forces would fight and would fight very hard.

I won't say I predicted every single thing that's happened, but I think broadly yeah, what's happening is mostly in conformity with what I expected.

I do still believe that four to ten weeks is probably about right, and I will say that I still think that right now if I am proven wrong on that four to ten week estimate that it's still probably more likely that it will be less than four weeks than that it will be more than ten.

MR. STEINBERG: On the broader picture one of the things, and I don't know whether Ken wants to comment on this because of his past life, but we are seeing a lot of tactical battlefield stuff but we're not hearing a lot about the broader strategic environment. One piece of that is what the intelligence community is able to provide. I mean we don't know, at least I don't know even watching the coverage what we know about, more specifically about the command and control, what kinds of intercepts are we getting about what's going on there, how do we see the activities at kind of the political, strategic level. We hear hints from the briefers about limits on the command and control and the effect of the bombing, but we're not I don't think able on the outside to judge what's going on there.

And very often, and I say this from experience, is that the American leadership will start to see some things which you are very cautious about drawing too much conclusions from, but you start to begin to hear things like dissention among the leadership or questioning about tactics on their side that begin to give you a feel about how things are going. Or the fact that you don't see that also gives you a feel about how things are going. You don't tend to make those public. One, because they're very valuable and you don't particularly want to tip off the other side to it. Second, you're always worried that, especially when you start to feel what you think is good news, is that you don't want to become complacent about it or put it out too much because it then comes back in some ways that I think the over-optimism that we heard both before the war and during its first few days tended to come about.

So for example after the initial strike, presumably there was a lot of intelligence. We've heard snippets about, reports about ambulances and things like that. Very often those are the things that you don't want to make public because you want to take advantage of it but you don't' particularly want to put out how much you know about it. It's I think a mistake that the Administration has been tending to try to put out too much of the stuff. In part because it's been part of their psychological strategy that they want to try to convince the other side that everything's falling apart and that therefore they should give up the cause.

But I'm not sure that we're seeing enough, and maybe that there isn't much, but certainly

the war coverage is not necessarily going to get you insight into that level of kind of the strategic sense about what's going on on the other side.

I don't know Ken whether you have --

MR. POLLACK: That's right although, the only thing I would add Jim is, again, from my experience in 1991, the first Gulf War, what we're now calling the first Gulf War, we didn't get much of that back then either. We really had very little understanding until after the war of what the Iraqis were thinking, doing, saying in Baghdad during that first Gulf War.

This time around we've got some better avenues of access into the regime but I think it's one of the problems with the Iraqi regime. It is as close to a black box in international politics as we've come to. What really matters is what Saddam Hussein thinks. The people around him tend not to voice dissent in any way, shape or form, even when they do feel very strongly the other way. Again, this is stuff that we only find out well after the fact, after those people have defected to us.

QUESTION: Kirt Beseaner from U.S. Institute of Peace.

This is for Ken Pollack. I just wanted to get a feel for how you think things might play out in the northern theater now that we have elements of an airborne brigade there. As I understand it, the 173rd isn't even really a full strength brigade. They've been building it up over time.

Do you think that's going to be an air head for other units to follow or are they just going to operate as a relatively light infantry force as far as you know? And what would they be capable of doing given their capabilities?

MR. POLLACK: Again, I want to be careful about what I say here.

If all we do is put the 173rd Airborne Brigade in, obviously the mission capabilities are limited. They can do two important things. One, they can provide a very important backbone for the Kurds in case the Iraqis decide to come north.

What's up in Kurdistan is mostly ash and trash. There are a couple of decent divisions up there for the Iraqis but most of the stuff up there are some pretty mediocre divisions. And again, there continue to be lots of intelligence that these guys are deeply demoralized.

But if Saddam decides to go north, have the 173rd up there will be very important. They have anti-tank capabilities that the Pushmerga don't have. They will also be able to serve as spotters for U.S. air power which is also an important element.

Beyond that there are extraordinarily important, and I think a lot of commentators have been saying his and they're absolutely right. They're extraordinarily important in terms of continuing to manage this very precarious balance between the Kurds and the Turks. I think it's worth pointing out that I give the Administration a lot of credit there. Managing that balance between the Kurds and the Turks is unbelievably difficult and so far they've been able to do it.

Getting the Turks to come out and publicly say they're not going to move troops into Northern Iraq except if there's a refugee crisis is huge. Much as I am glad to say that I think it was risky to go into Iraq with this size force, I also want to say I think they've done a very good job up there in terms of managing that.

Having the 173rd on the ground all by itself is also a very important element there. I think it gives a big more of a buffer in terms of preventing either the Kurds or the Turks from taking the kind of unilateral actions which could spark an escalatory response by the other side which could lead you into some kind of a spiral down into conflict. So in that sense as well it's extremely important.

Beyond that, if the Iraqi front lines do start to crumble, the 173rd by itself might be able to start moving forward. But I think the big question out there is what else does the Administration bring in and I don't' want to comment on that.

MR. STEINBERG: Thank you all. See you next week.

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