



U.S. Rangers in Somalia

Baghdad Is Not Mogadishu

The war in Iraq will be nothing like the Somalia debacle. **BY GARY SCHMITT & TOM DONNELLY**

IN A FLURRY of recent articles speculating on the nature of a potential U.S. invasion of Iraq, reporters and commentators have raised a “nightmare” scenario: that a battle for Baghdad would turn into a second Mogadishu. With virtually no chance to survive—let alone win—a force-on-force conflict outside of Iraq’s capital, Saddam would retreat to the close quarters of the streets of Baghdad, the thinking goes. There, the Iraqi army would exact a tremendous price in American blood. In effect, the fighting in Baghdad would be an epic version of the 1993 battle of Mogadishu, as chronicled in the book *Black Hawk Down* and dramatized in the recent movie.

But the only thing epic about this scenario is its distortion of recent history. Indeed, almost every aspect of a fight in Iraq—political, strategic, operational, and tactical—would be fundamentally different from that in Somalia.

The biggest and most obvious difference would be in the American government’s will to win. In Somalia,

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the first Bush administration thought it was simply delivering food to starving people, and the Clinton administration was unwilling to back a broader agenda with a larger and adequately equipped force. In Iraq, by contrast, President George W. Bush has left no doubt that he means to remove Saddam Hussein and his henchmen from power. Accordingly, where the Clinton administration could walk away from Somalia without fundamental harm to its national security strategy, the Bush administration must succeed in Iraq. The Bush Doctrine—the essence of Bush’s presidency—depends upon it. A half-hearted campaign is not in the cards. The fact is, while “will” is not the only ingredient required for success in war, it matters a great deal. And in a world with a single superpower, it is the essential variable.

Operationally, fighting in Baghdad would be part of a larger campaign to “take down” all of Iraq as rapidly as possible. Indeed, as the *New York Times* reported last week, attacks on Baghdad could well come in the initial phase of a larger Iraq campaign. And even if it didn’t come first, any “siege of Baghdad” would follow quickly upon successes elsewhere

across the country. Given the overwhelming advantage the Americans and their allies would hold outside the city, Iraqi forces (both elite and not) would realize this was the end of the line for Saddam and company. Whether the leaders of the Republican Guard would fight to the death at that point is unknowable, but it is likely the rank and file would not. Iraq’s soldiers know that an American conquest of their capital will not result in the wholesale destruction of their homes and the slaughter of their families.

However Saddam came to power and ruled in his early days, he has remained in power by creating overwhelming fear among his subordinates. Once he loses the ability to sustain that fear, how can he maintain the discipline and loyalty of a sufficient number of troops to hold out in Baghdad?

No doubt some in Saddam’s inner circle figure that, once captured, they will be held accountable for the crimes they have perpetrated against their countrymen. On the other hand, being captured, tried by an international tribunal, and sentenced to life in prison beats dying a violent death for the sake of a tyrannical thug. No doubt many of Saddam’s cronies will prefer to rip off their uniforms and try to disappear into the crowds of Baghdad or into the countryside en route to escaping from the country. This was the choice made by many in Manuel Noriega’s Panama Defense Force in 1989 (when, by the way, there was significant urban combat). Once Noriega’s officers and soldiers reckoned that he would no longer be ruling Panama—and that the Americans would—their perception of their own interests was reversed. Generals in Iraq who have understood President Bush’s rhetoric over the past year may already have made this calculation.

Finally, the tactical situation facing U.S. troops in Baghdad would be different from that in Mogadishu. Their purpose would be to capture the city and destroy the last remnants of organized resistance—a conventional, if

difficult, operation—not to arrest an individual using only elite forces in a “strike and grab” operation.

Where Somali warlord Mohamed Farah Aided’s clansmen had spies inside the U.N. headquarters and were able to observe American operations close at hand over a period of months, including several operations targeted at Aided and his command structure, an Iraqi force in Baghdad would have no such experience. They would surely “prepare the battlefield,” as soldiers say—boobytrapping buildings, for example—but their ability to predict precise U.S. tactics would not be enhanced by the kind of preparation the Somalis had.

While operations in Baghdad would depend upon infantry, these ground units would be supported by tremendous firepower and a full array of intelligence assets. American air forces would win command of the skies even faster than in 1991, despite the Iraqis’ continuing efforts to mount air defenses. While every Baghdad rooftop is a potential gun site, the effectiveness of Iraqi air defenses would be rapidly reduced.

Perhaps even more important, U.S. troops in Baghdad would have lots of protection and firepower of their own. The armored vehicles that proved necessary to rescue the Rangers and other special operations forces in Mogadishu would be involved in the fighting—not parked in a compound miles away under U.N. command. The skies would be filled with Apache attack helicopters.

In short, the U.S. military would not be fighting in the Iraqi capital with one hand tied behind its back. There is no question that urban fighting can be difficult and dangerous. But the narrowly focused, high-risk operations of Mogadishu shed little light on what a battle for Baghdad would be like.

One should never be overconfident in war or anxious to put the lives of American servicemen and women at risk. But it’s just as wrong to conjure up scenarios that owe more to the imagination than to sound military assessments. ♦

“The Deal with Older Guys”

There’s a good reason Americans support parental notification laws. **BY ERIC FELTEN**

EVERYONE SEEMS TO AGREE that Texas Supreme Court Justice Priscilla Owen, President Bush’s nominee for a spot on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 5th Circuit, has about as much chance of getting past Judiciary Committee Democrats as James Traficant has of getting back into Congress. The reason: The “pro-choice” lobby has made her defeat its Number One priority.

What disqualifies Owen, in the eyes of the National Abortion and Reproductive Rights Action League (NARAL) and other critics, is her decision to uphold a Texas “parental notification” law. That law requires a minor, if she wants an abortion without her parents knowing about it, to demonstrate to a judge one of three things: (1) that she is sufficiently mature and well informed to make the decision herself; (2) that notification would not be in her “best interest”; or (3) that her parents would react to the news with physical, sexual, or emotional abuse.

Parental notification laws are tricky for the abortion rights crowd. Somewhere around three-fourths of Americans favor statutes that require girls under 18 to get their parents’ consent for an abortion. Not having had much luck dissuading voters—there are 42 states with laws requiring some type of parental consent or notification—Planned Parenthood, NARAL, and other abortion-rights groups have concentrated on creating enough loopholes and exceptions in those laws to make them ineffectual. For example, suspending parental

notification when a judge deems a girl sufficiently mature would normally make an excellent loophole, as long as judges are willing to take an elastic view of what counts as maturity. Justice Owen was not.

It’s hard to blame her. After all, if parents are kept in the dark, who looks out for the best interests of underage girls? In practice it is the clinic workers, the ones counseling pregnant teens, who assume the burden of protecting girls’ welfare. Which is why in most states, doctors, nurses, counselors, and other abortion-clinic workers are held to the same standard as doctors, nurses, and counselors in any other health care facilities: That is, they have a legal obligation to report child abuse when they see evidence of it. So it is worth asking how well clinics are fulfilling their role—and responsibilities—as advocates for troubled girls. The answer, it seems, is not well at all.

Life Dynamics is an aggressive, Texas-based antiabortion group. Mark Crutcher, who runs the group, has for years used lawsuits to harass doctors who provide abortions. Looking to lay the groundwork for a class-action lawsuit against abortion providers, Crutcher devised a way to test whether clinic staff would report child abuse when they saw it. Crutcher’s group made and recorded some 800 phone calls to clinics around the country. (It is legal in Texas for a party to a phone call to record it without the other party’s permission.) In each call, a woman pretending (very convincingly) to be 13 years old explains to the clinic that she is pregnant by her 22-year-old boyfriend; she asks if her boyfriend can bring her in for an

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