

US plots 'new liberation of Baghdad'

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Editor's Note

A new wave of US-UK sponsored atrocities is in the making.

The following report by the Sunday Times suggests that the US military is intent upon replicating Fallujah in an all out urban warfare to gain military control of Baghdad. The fact of the matter is that outside the Green Zone, US-UK forces no longer control the Baghdad metropolitan area.

According to defence sources, the US plans to combine air attacks with heavily armed AC-130 aircraft, F-16s and Cobra helicopters, with special forces and Marines urban combat units.

This operation, which is scheduled for the Summer, could be decisive. If the occupation forces fail to secure control over Baghdad, this could mark a major turning point in the war.

Michel Chossudovsky, Global Research, 18 April 2006

The American military is planning a "second liberation of Baghdad" to be carried out with the Iraqi army when a new government is installed.

Pacifying the lawless capital is regarded as essential to establishing the authority of the incoming government and preparing for a significant withdrawal of American troops.

Strategic and tactical plans are being laid by US commanders in Iraq and at the US army base in Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, under Lieutenant- General David Petraeus. He is regarded as an innovative officer and was formerly responsible for training Iraqi troops...

Helicopters suitable for urban warfare, such as the manoeuvrable AH-6 "Little Birds" used by the marines and special forces and armed with rocket launchers and machineguns, are likely to complement the ground attack.

The sources said American and Iraqi troops would move from neighbourhood to neighbourhood, leaving behind Sweat teams — an acronym for "sewage, water, electricity and trash" — to improve living conditions by upgrading clinics, schools, rubbish collection, water and electricity supplies.

Sunni insurgent strongholds are almost certain to be the first targets, although the Shi'ite militias such as the Mahdi army of Moqtada al-Sadr, the radical cleric, and the Iranian-backed Badr Brigade would need to be contained.

President George W Bush and Donald Rumsfeld, the defence secretary, are under intense pressure to prove to the American public that Iraq is not slipping into anarchy and civil war. An effective military campaign could provide the White House with a bounce in the polls before the mid-term congressional elections in November. With Bush's approval ratings below 40%, the vote is shaping up to be a Republican rout...

The operation is likely to take place towards the end of the summer, giving the newly appointed government time to establish itself. If all goes to plan, US troop withdrawals could take place before the end of the year. In the absence of progress by then, the war may come to be seen by the American public as a lost cause.

There are 140,000 US troops in Iraq. Lieutenant-General John Vines, who stepped down as commander of ground forces in Iraq at the beginning of this year, said it was essential to reduce the numbers.

"There is an incredible amount of stress and I'm worried about it," said Vines. He added that soldiers were on their third or fourth tours of duty in Iraq: "The war has been going on nearly as long as the second world war and we're asking a lot of the forces."

Vines said there was "an enormous amount of work in Baghdad under way" but cautioned that any onslaught against insurgents would be "fiendishly complicated". The approach would have to be "locale by locale". He added: "Ultimately we want a police solution in Baghdad."

US forces would try to avoid the all-out combat that was used to subdue **Falluja in 2004**. "If you cut up the city into pieces neighbourhood by neighbourhood, you can prevent it from becoming a major urban fight," said Gouré.

According to defence sources the Americans could augment their forces with heavily armed AC-130 aircraft and F-16s. But close air support is more likely to be provided by Cobra and Little Bird helicopters to minimise casualties.

The generals involved in planning the battle are architects of the "clear, hold and build" strategy in Iraq, designed to isolate insurgents from the population and prevent them regrouping in urban strongholds as soon as the military's back is turned.

Vines's replacement as commander of ground forces is Lieutenant-General Peter Chiarelli, who pioneered the use of force with Sweat to subdue Sadr city, a working-class Shi'ite district of Baghdad, in 2004. On the eve of his return to Iraq this year he described how the tactics had worked and vowed to repeat them...

Another model for operations in Baghdad is an American-led Iraqi-backed military campaign at Tal Afar, a rebel town on the Syrian border. In a speech last month Bush hailed the campaign as an extraordinary success and brandished a letter from the town's Iraqi mayor praising US forces as our "lion-hearted saviours". But Tal Afar remains far from secure and the military tactics cannot be copied wholesale...

Anybody connected, however remotely, with the administration is seen as a target; 18 traffic police officers have been killed in the past two months. "They were simply doing their duty and trying to prevent traffic jams. There are no traffic lights," said Major Hussein Khadem of the transport police...

Reuel Marc Gerecht, an expert on Iraq at the neo-conservative American Enterprise Institute, said that while it was essential to bring Baghdad under control, he feared the Americans would leave the bulk of the fighting to the Iraqis and that a showdown could misfire.

"You would have to come down like a hammer on the Sunni areas of Baghdad and go house to house and nobody wants to do that," Gerecht said. "It's inevitably going to come and it's going to be convulsive. The Americans will be there, but not in the numbers needed because American *casualty rates will go up.*"

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