

Indian general warns the U.S. strategists

by Linda de Hoyos

A knowledgeable military officer in the Indian subcontinent is offering a different scenario for the course of the Gulf war than the U.S. media. Writing Jan. 28 in the Delhi *Sunday Mail*, India's Lt. Gen. Kripal Singh Randhawa countered the Pentagon's contention of the devastating affects of the 50,000 bombing sorties flown against Iraq in the "air war." The Indian general said that he was not at all surprised that the United States had discovered that it had been bombing cardboard dummies in Iraq for the first week of the war. The Iraqi Army, he said, are "neither fools or pushovers." The Iraqis "are going to amaze the United States by their innovations. The multinational forces would never know what to expect next."

For example, Randhawa writes in a later article on Feb. 3, the Iraqi attack on the Saudi town of Khafji was a morale booster for the Iraqi forces. The Iraqis surprised the coalition by suddenly driving 20 kilometers with a mechanized thrust led by armor. In the bargain, the payoff for Iraqi losses was a boost to their morale, exhibiting their ability to turn the tables. The key to the war, Randhawa contends, will be Iraqi "resilience."

Randhawa is in a unique position to understand Iraqi capabilities: He was the chief instructor for the Iraqi Army between 1977-79. In the mid-1970s, Randhawa relates, the Iraqi military staff, led by current Defense Minister Saadi Toma Abbas, decided that a recent humiliating treaty imposed on Iraq by the Shah of Iran for the division of the Shatt-al-Arab waterways, necessitated Iraq to carry out a strategic reevaluation and re-training of its Armed Forces. Initially, Randhawa says, the Iraqi government toyed with the idea of taking offers of U.S. help. But this was rejected on grounds that the United States, since World War II, had only had the experience of fighting in jungles, and that experience was an "unhappy one." The Iraqis then scoured Europe for help, but it soon dawned on them that the Europeans had not fought a war of any significance since 1945.

A process of elimination brought Iraq to the Indian subcontinent, where both India and Pakistan had a history of wars fought in the last 30 years. Though Iraq and Pakistan were tied by Islamic bonds, Iraq chose India since it had just won the war for the liberation of Bangladesh in 1971. "Besides, the Iraqi Army, like the Indian Army, too, fights with Russian weapons, and that was an added advantage."

In 1977, Randhawa himself was posted to Baghdad as the chief instructor. The first lesson taught, Randhawa says, was that the Iraqis must create obstacles in the way of the enemy.

With his knowledge of Iraqi training and tactics, Randhawa disputes Pentagon claims that the Iraqi forces could be knocked out with air power. "It was foolish of the United States to think that in 1991 a country would keep its missiles on the ground, waiting to be bombed out. And if I know the Iraqi mind, I am sure that 25% of their offensive weapons would be tucked away in safe zones."

Bursting the 'air power' bubble

Nor does Randhawa believe that Iraq's command and control lines have been destroyed; "The Iraqi generals are not stupid enough to have not set up a parallel line of communication. Bombing telecommunications only creates impediments. Their communication system is not dependent on computers, but on human beings. Besides, the soldiers must have been taken into confidence on what to do in case of a communication breakdown."

The reality, Randhawa states, along with many other military officers including in the U.S., is that, "no war can be won by dropping bombs. The problems for the U.S. will begin when the ground assault starts." As did the jungle in Vietnam, the concrete jungle in Kuwait will suck up manpower. "When the U.S. Marines inch their way into the streets of Kuwait, they will be unable to draw the battlelines. There will always exist the danger of the U.S. soldiers getting hemmed in. The bombing of Kuwait will make things more dangerous, because demolished buildings, that is, rubble, are more effective in staving off attacks." Although the United States ultimately has the capability to clear the Iraqis out of Kuwait, Randhawa says, "The casualties will be very high. And this will create an opinion against the war. . . . The Iraqis are battle-hardened and more motivated. Besides, the Iraqis have the experience of the eight-year war [with Iran] and the Indian experience of the 1948, 1961, 1965, and 1971 wars. They will use that effectively, and are in fact doing so. I am not saying they are good because we trained them, but it is going to be very difficult for the U.S. all right."

Furthermore, Iraq has the advantage that the United States and its blackmailed coalition forces are fighting an imperialist war. "Whenever [Iraqi] morale looks like it is flagging, renewed motivation may continue to come from the euphoria that a developing country is single-handedly taking on the might of the multinational forces. If President Saddam Hussein and Iraq survive, which they probably will, with divisions already coming up even among the Arabs supporting the multinational forces, even a battered Iraq will find the Arab world and Muslim countries rallying around the call to ward off neo-colonialism. They may also rally the support of the rest of the Third World who, while not condoning the occupation of Kuwait, did not subscribe to the attempts to write off Iraq."