

<iraqwar.ru> reports on the Second Gulf War
up to the 8th of April, 2003

verbatim reproduction
by The *Gazette du Golfe et des banlieues*
<ggb@yahoo.fr>

The War in Iraq report database

The IRAQWAR.RU analytical center was created recently by a group of journalists and military experts from Russia to provide accurate and up-to-date news and analysis of the war against Iraq. The following is the English translation of the IRAQWAR.RU report based on the Russian military intelligence (the Main Intelligence Directorate, or GRU) reports.

Table of Contents:

April 8, 2003, 1846hrs MSK (GMT +4 DST), Moscow (UPDATE)
April 8, 2003, 1613hrs MSK (GMT +4 DST), Moscow
April 7, 2003, 2400hrs MSK (GMT +4 DST), Moscow (UPDATE)
April 7, 2003, 1914hrs MSK (GMT +4 DST), Moscow
April 6, 2003, 2000hrs MSK (GMT +4 DST), Moscow (UPDATE)
April 6, 2003, 2000hrs MSK (GMT +4 DST), Moscow
April 5, 2003, 1357hrs MSK (GMT +4 DST), Moscow
April 4, 2003, 1507hrs MSK (GMT +4 DST), Moscow
April 3, 2003, 1301hrs MSK (GMT +4 DST), Moscow
April 2, 2003, 1335hrs MSK (GMT +4 DST), Moscow
April 1, 2003, 1404hrs MSK (GMT +4 DST), Moscow
March 31, 2003, 1828hrs MSK (GMT +4 DST), Moscow
March 30, 2003, 2042hrs MSK (GMT +4 DST), Moscow
March 29, 2003, 0924hrs MSK (GMT +4 DST), Moscow
March 28, 2003, 1448hrs MSK (GMT +3), Moscow
March 27, 2003, 2321hrs MSK (GMT +3), Moscow (UPDATE)
March 27, 2003, 1425hrs MSK (GMT +3), Moscow
March 26, 2003, 1230hrs MSK (GMT +3), Moscow
March 25, 2003, 1230hrs MSK (GMT +3), Moscow
March 24, 2003, 0800hrs MSK (GMT +3), Moscow
March 23, 2003, 1200hrs MSK (GMT +3), Moscow
March 22, 2003, 1300hrs MSK (GMT +3), Moscow (UPDATE)
March 22, 2003, 0800hrs MSK (GMT +3), Moscow
March 21, 2003, 0930hrs MSK (GMT +3), Moscow
March 20, 2003, 1015hrs MSK (GMT +3), Moscow

April 8, 2003, 1846hrs MSK (GMT +4 DST), Moscow - Events of the last 2 days have made further work of Ramzaj group in its current format impossible.

With the embassy personnel and journalists having left Iraq and most of Iraqi information services evacuated from Baghdad, analysis of the situation in Baghdad and Iraq as a whole becomes ineffective.

The quickly changing course of street fights leaves any informational updates far behind. Direct TV broadcasts are far more evident than any analytics. At the same time, we do not have the right to reveal classified, itop secret information.

Apart from that, our actions meet increasing opposition from the official quarts and in fact are turning into confrontation the outcome of which is not difficult to forecast.

Therefore we have to discontinue our work and thank everybody for taking part in the project.

In conclusion we would like to say:

All the updates came out from a compact group formed a few years ago in the framework of a special service. The group used to work for the government for a long time but all its members have left the service and now act as an independent analytical group that has kept some capabilities. This gives an answer to the most common question about the sources of our information.

We participated in the ongoing events on a non-profit basis and had no object other than to stand the US-British informational blockade of the war in Iraq.

Our updates were not genuine materials from any of Russian or other special services, but rather an intellectual product of the group itself, product of its operative, informational and analytical abilities. But compiling the updates we used materials available from our friends from special information structures. The very form *operativnaya informatsiya* never claimed to be military information updates but served as additional data for self-dependent analysis.

The main goal of the project was to present intelligible military analytics on the war in Iraq, which is currently missing, to the informational space. We had both success and obvious fails along the way.

We are grateful to the iraqwar.ru and forum.vif2.ru administration that took the risk and burden of working with us and we understand how many problems they have to endure because of that.

With all responsibility we state that no messages, letters, appeals and other materials, apart from the daily updates on iraqwar.ru and forum.vif2.ru were made by Ramzaj group and any other statement in our name is nothing but mystification.

The author with the nickname *Kondor* is the only authorized source of information about the group and its official contact person. In cases of uncertainty or nickname cloning authentication is possible using his personal photo that supplements one of images published on iraqwar.ru and comes as its logical continuation.

With unfailing respect to all of you,

Ramzaj

(source: iraqwar.ru, 04-08-03, translated by Necroman)

April 8, 2003, 1613hrs MSK (GMT +4 DST), Moscow - This morning battles in Baghdad resumed. The US marine units at 7am managed to break to the right bank of the Diyala near Al-Jassir, and at 8am advanced to the left bank of the Tigris in the Bessaf district, on the junction of streets Abu-Nuvas and Al-Rashid. Currently up to one battalion have got over the bridges opposite to the Ministry of Information and TV center and are now assaulting those buildings.

According to specified data, after yesterday's raid into Baghdad up to two companies of Americans fortified in the Al-Shihud palace, which was attacked by Republican Guard troops this morning. The coming reports indicate that the American command is trying to take control of the administrative center of Baghdad whereupon proclaim to have practically captured the city.

From the northern district As-Sulaija toward the city center battalions of the 3rd Mechanized Division are moving. As early as by 5pm they can reach the Abbasid Palace and split Baghdad along the Tigris. The right-bank part of the city is also under threat of a split along the Mansur roadway line.

Information on casualties is quite desultory so far. By now, only the loss of 2 marines during the storm of the bridge across the Diyala and 1 tank destroyed by the Ministry of Information has been verified. The battle of Baghdad has broken into multiple skirmishes and therefore the casualties sustained by both sides will only be specified along toward evening.

According to reports by American commanders the resistance of the Iraqis does not make an impression of them acting under a united organized command and looks more like operations of autonomous groups. Moreover, the Americans note very limited use of Iraqi tanks and artillery. There are almost no serious artificial obstacles and strong points prepared for a long defense. This does not give grounds to consider Baghdad prepared for a long siege. And, under such level of resistance the battles for Baghdad may end in 5-7 days.

But in spite of certain success, the US forces are still unable to break the Iraqi opposition. Even units fortified at the outskirts are being attacked and are constantly receiving fire.

It is still unknown where the top political and military Iraqi leaders are. Out of the high-ranked officials only the Minister of Information Mohammad Saed Sahaf is certainly present in the city.

According to arriving information, at about 11am an American helicopter was shot down over the southern suburb of Baghdad.

The US command has confirmed their loss of a heavy attack plane A-10 at Baghdad.

This morning in Basra marine units began to clean up the old city blocks where remains of the Iraqi garrison held the line yesterday. Currently, according to the first reports, the advancing marines do not face any resistance and there is a high probability of the Iraqis having abandoned their positions and left the city or mixed with Basra citizens when darkness fell.

(source: iraqwar.ru, 04-08-03, translated by Necroman)

April 7, 2003, 2400hrs MSK (GMT +4 DST), Moscow (UPDATE) - By this evening the situation on the US-Iraqi front in the environs of Baghdad has become less tense. All the American units have returned to their initial positions corresponding to the morning of April 7th. Currently artillery and aviation occasionally open fire at the city. The details of today's raid of the 1st tank brigade of the 3rd Mechanized Division column to the central district of Baghdad are now available. Radio surveillance data allow us to contend that it was a joint action of the American Special Forces and the army command. Having penetrated into Baghdad a few days before the commandos after reconnaissance concentrated near several government buildings and got ready for a storm.

At the same time from the Khan-Azad region towards Al-Rashid along the Kadissiya roadway advanced a mechanized unit of the 3rd Division consisting of one tank battalion and one motorized infantry battalion (up to 70 tanks and 60 armored personnel carriers). No sooner had the column reached the outskirts of the city, at the rear of the Iraqis the commandos started to storm the target objects - two government buildings and the building of the Ministry of Information, the waiting room of the Security Service and the building of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Iraq. The main objective was to find an entrance to the government underground shelter system and capture high-ranking Iraqi officials. Without combat the commandos were able to seize the Al-Shihud palace and the Republican palace, which were guarded by small patrols only. The palaces turned out empty, and their examination did not reveal any underground

shelters. Soon after the palaces had been captured a column of the 1st brigade moved into this region and stood guard over.

But when attempting to storm the government offices the commandos were sighted, blocked and engaged by the guardians. In order to help the commandos a mixed battalion group that had managed to break to the quay of the Tigris moved forward but was stopped by an anti-tank artillery barrage and got ambushed by RPG soldiers. During that almost two-hour battle the Americans lost up to 5 APC and 2 tanks. At least 8 soldiers were killed and more than 20 wounded. By 3pm the remains of the commando assault groups forced their way to the American positions and at 15:30 their common withdrawal began. At 5pm the American troops left the city.

The exact casualties of the American Special Forces remain unclear. According to communications between American commanders the status of least 15 men is unknown. Whether they are dead, captured or hiding in the city is still obscure.

It was reported that the commandos captured a high officer but during the rush he was killed and left in the city.

The American command criticized the raid. General Tommy Franks who came to the airport region called the level of the casualties during this local operation unacceptable and the results paltry. Yet it was noted that the Iraqi command reacted on bringing the forces into Baghdad with an inexplicable delay and the actions of the counter-attacking Iraqi units uncoordinated. American commanders believe that it happened due to severe malfunction of the whole communication and control system. It is still unclear what damaged Iraqi communications. According to some data most of the high command left the city after it had been blocked and moved to a reserve command center located in the northern regions of Iraq while the local command remaining in the city has not taken control over the situation yet.

Some officers in the coalition HQ presume that if this is the case then even storming Baghdad will not finish this war and a campaign to the north, where quite an effective and large group of Iraqi troops remains, might be necessary.

During this day the British forces of the 7th armored brigade and the 3rd marine brigade have been assaulting Basra. After a nine-hour battle the British have managed to occupy the districts of the New Basra Subhay and Ahavat-Rezan and advanced into the Old Basra towards the Presidential residence, but still cannot take control of the old districts. The Al-Ashar and Akina regions as well as a part of the Al-Arab quay remain in Iraqi hands and the British command admits that it will be very difficult to occupy them since armored units cannot move down narrow streets.

The total losses of the British in this region amount to at least 7 killed and 15 wounded. A tank and 2 APC were destroyed. The Iraqis lost up to 100 men killed, about 50 captured, 3 tanks and 6 guns. The British estimate the number of defenders in the old districts to be 500 Iraqi militiamen and soldiers of the 51st Infantry Division supported by at least 10 tanks, 12 guns and a lot of portable antitank launchers.

This morning the coalition troops captured Karbala. According to its citizens most of the Iraqi units that were defending the town during the evening-night of April 6th left it and moved north. Just a few home guard units remaining in the town ceased their resistance and mixed with the local population. A captured RG officer said that the order to leave the town was received in the morning of April 6th personally from Saddam Hussein after the general HQ obtained information about the American artillery barrage that resulted in a few shells dropped near one of the main Moslem sacred places, the grave of Hussein ibn-Ali. So as not to insult the Shia population of Karbala by the possible destruction of the sacred place the order to leave the town was issued. Currently the Americans are trying to reveal and clean off Saddam's agents.

Reports about taking over the Al-Khindiya town after the ten-day storm are also coming. The town of 30 thousand people was in turn assaulted by an Expeditionary Marine unit and later a brigade of the 101st Airborne Division. After occupation of the town and interrogation of captives it was discovered that the whole garrison of Al-Khindiya consisted of 3 RG companies and 1 militia squadron, about 500 soldiers altogether. More than 200 defenders of the town were killed, about 100 captured. In battles of Al-Khindiya the Americans lost up to 15 men killed, at least 40 wounded. 10 armored vehicles were destroyed. By evidence of a iRed Crescentî representative who came there yesterday, even seriously wounded soldiers incapable of walking were taken to the prisoner-of-war camp. Arrests of citizens suspected in resistance are now taking place in the town.

An-Nasiriya, An-Najaf, Al-Kut, Ad-Divaniya and some more small towns on the south of Iraq remain under Iraqisî control. Only yesterday the Americans lost up to 5 armored vehicles, at least 3 men killed and 10 wounded. Today near An-Nasiriya a rear American column got ambushed. The casualties are unknown so far, but judging from the immediate takeoff of aviation cover and helicopters with an airborne unblocking group the battle is not in favor of the column.

All the information the Russian side has about the fire opened at the Russian embassy column indicate that shooting at the diplomats and journalists was not an accidental event but rather a planned action of frightening and retribution.

This version is also supposed by several todayis attempts of Americans to stop the column on its route and carefully examine the diplomatsî cars and accompanied baggage. The Russian Foreign Ministry and the high-ranking officials keep silent. On the meeting of the President of Russia Vladimir Putin and the National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice they agreed ito forget about this regrettable incidentî and iprevent any impact on the Russian-American partnershipi.

(source: iraqwar.ru, 04-07-03, translated by Necroman)

April 7, 2003, 1914hrs MSK (GMT +4 DST), Moscow - The situation on the US-Iraqi front during the morning-night on April 7th was characterized by extreme fierceness of combat. During the night-morning the coalition units continued to encircle the city from west and east. The 2nd brigade of the 3rd Mechanized Division, as was revealed before, after a five-hour march reached the northern approaches of Baghdad and occupied the region bordering to the strategic bridge Salah-Khasan, but was unable to seize the bridge itself because of a heavy missile and artillery barrage. Up to 10 men were killed, at least 20 wounded. In the morning the brigade lost its communication center destroyed by a tactical Iraqi missile.

From south-east the American marine units that had repeatedly tried to seize a strategic bridge across the Diyala, as we assumed before, during the night advanced to the eastern suburbs of the New Baghdad and by the morning tried to take over bridges near the iRashidî airport. In this violent conflict the bridges were destroyed by the Iraqi artillery and the marines sustained losses. According to intercepted radio communications up to 5 marines were killed, at least 12 wounded. 3 APC and 1 tank were destroyed.

Last night on the right bank of the Tigris in the Al-Mansur region American commandos numbering up to 200 men landed in a block of government buildings. Apart from that, fighting squadrons landed on two government residences in this region. The goal of the operation was to capture top officials of Saddam Husseinis administration. Almost immediately the airdrop was detected and engaged. In order to unblock the commandos at 7am an enforced tank battalion from the 1st brigade of the 3rd Mechanized Division entered the city and after a two-hour fight was able to break to the Haifa street along the Kadissiya roadway and partly reached the bank of the Tigris. This movement turned out unexpected by the Iraqis and met no resistance at first. But in the region of the government quay the American forces confronted with organized Iraqi defenses. After 3 hours of battle the commandos got to the American

positions and the whole column fell back from the city.

The American losses total up to 10 men killed, 20 wounded and 10 missing. Up to 3 tanks and 3 APC were destroyed. The commandos only examined a few government buildings in a hurry. All of them were found empty and no captives were taken. The tolls of the Iraqi side during the day were up to 150 men killed and about 200 wounded. They lost up to 5 tanks and 8 guns.

By the afternoon Iraqi actions became more confident. There is information that one of yesterday's air strikes severely damaged one of their communication and control centers and currently the Iraqi command has to control their units using VHF-stations and envoys which delays battle-orders and commands.

Today the American command had to admit that the fighting potential of Baghdad defenders is fairly high and the rivals show no sign of demoralization.

(source: iraqwar.ru, 04-07-03, translated by Necroman)

April 6, 2003, 2000hrs MSK (GMT +4 DST), Moscow (UPDATE) - Around Baghdad skirmishes between coalition forces and Iraqi divisions are going on. As we said before, during the next two days the coalition troops will extend the zone of blockade to the west and north-west using local strikes. Currently a part of the 1st brigade of the 3rd Mechanized Division is outflanking the city from Abu-Harraib, trying to reach the south outskirts and seize a strategic bridge across the Tigris at the north of the Tunis area (Salakh-Khasan).

Fire has not stopped near the Airport, both sides are using artillery. According to the most recent data the rush of the coalition forces toward to the southern borders of Baghdad, though expected by the Iraqi command, was tactically surprise. Hidden in the interiors of the city, parts of the Iraqi army were unable to leave their covered positions, advance and face the enemy. There arose confusion that led to disorganization of the Iraqi squadrons that engaged their rivals in the move, without proper reconnaissance and concentration of forces. According to specified information in different conflicts and during the assault of the airport up to 400 Iraqi soldiers were killed, 25 tanks and 12 guns were lost.

But the coalition command also faced serious problems. Powerful Iraqi attacks aimed at the airport immobilized most of the force breaking towards Baghdad and it turned out necessary to bring reinforcements from other sectors of the front in order to succeed. In particular, up to 2 battalions of the 101st Airborne Division located by An-Nasiriya and An-Najaf and at least 1 battalion of the 82nd Division were moved there. American tolls at the south and south-east of Baghdad for the last 24 hours amount to: up to 30 men killed and at least 80 wounded, 15 soldiers are known to be missing. The Americans lost at least 8 tanks and 5 APC.

Marine squadrons are still incapable of breaking down defenses by the Diyala river. Currently the vanguards are trying to outflank the city from east and seize the bridge in the New Baghdad region. There are not enough coalition forces to block such a city, and the troops blocking An-Nasiriya, An-Najaf, Al-Kut and Al-Diwaniya were given categorical orders to break down the Iraqi resistance in the next 3 days, take control of those areas and advance toward Baghdad to join the blockade.

To organize offensive against Karbala the blocking troops were enforced with one expeditionary marine squadron, and another storm started this morning. There is no information about casualties from this region yet.

Analogous tasks were set before the British command at the south of Iraq near Basra.

For the past 2 days the British have tried to overcome Iraqi defenses from An-Zubair and the Manavi

regions 3 times, but they still cannot break down the resistance. This morning an armored column was able to come up to a strategic cross-road near Akhavat-Rezan, but got under heavy fire and had to retreat. Yesterday and during this morning the British lost at least 3 armored units, 2 men killed and 6 wounded.

The coalition command and the foreign policy departments of Russia and USA are now making every effort to close all the information related to the Russian embassy getting fired near Baghdad.

Sources claim that the embassy ceased its activities in many respects because of the danger of an air strike on the embassy. The American command was utterly irritated by the presence of the Russian embassy in Baghdad and believed that some technical intelligence equipment was deployed there that provided the Iraqis with information. Moreover, some officers in the coalition HQ in Qatar openly claimed that it was on the territory of the Russian embassy that the ijamersî hampering the high-precision weapons around Baghdad were operated.

Yesterday morning the Secretary of State Colin Powell demanded of immediate evacuation of the embassy from the Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Igor Ivanov. Yesterday evening the Russian minister informed the Americans that on the 6th of April the embassy column would be leaving Baghdad heading for the Syrian border. This gave rise to dissatisfaction among the State Department officials who suggested that the column should move to Jordan.

The coalition special operations HQ were sure that the embassy column would contain secret devices taken from military equipment captured by Iraqis. In this connection one cannot shut out the possibility of ivengeî from the coalition command.

Moreover, experts claim that the purpose of this armed assault could be to damage a few cars where the Russians would have to leave some of the salvage. This is also indicated by the fact that neither the ambassador himself nor journalists in the column were among the injured. In this case we can expect that this action was committed by coalition special forces and the column was shot using Russian-made weapons to conceal the origin of the attackers to blame the Iraqis afterwards.

According to the most recent data the column got ambushed almost 30 km to the west from the city on the territory occupied by the coalition, but moving fast it escaped from fire and made a few more kilometers where it was blocked by military jeeps. On attempting to establish contact with their crews it received fire again, then the jeeps vanished.

Today at 5pm a phone conversation between president of Russia Vladimir Putin and president of the USA George W. Bush took place. Before this conversation, his assistant for National Security Affairs Condoleezza Rice, who came into Moscow today, had consulted Bush. At this time Rice is meeting Igor Ivanov, the head of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The details of this meeting are unknown so far, but we can suppose that very soon some iunknown squadronsî will be made responsible for the incident and the situation will be dampened to the maximum.

Analysts reckon that the situation with the nuclear submarine iKurskî, when a whole series of private contacts between top Russian officials and American representatives brought more questions than answers, is about to occur again to some extent.

(source: iraqwar.ru, 04-06-03, translated by Necroman)

April 6, 2003, 2000hrs MSK (GMT +4 DST), Moscow - By the morning of April 6th an uncertain and quickly changing situation has developed. Coalition divisions are continuing to advance toward the city outskirts. The 22nd and 15th expeditionary marine squadrons are trying to break into the region of military airport iRashidî from south-east. Iraqis are holding the line along the Diyala river and currently the marines cannot capture beach-heads on the right bank.

A hard situation has formed near the international airport. The day before yesterday the Iraqi minister of propaganda claimed that the coalition forces in this region would have been eliminated by this morning, and the Iraqi command ordered to storm the airport. At 10am it was attacked by 3 Republican Guards battalions enforced with militia troops. Americans requested artillery and aviation support. The battle lasted for almost 6 hours. After several unsuccessful attacks Iraqis managed to drive Americans back from the second runway to the airport building. Currently the coalition forces control the building itself and the new runway bordering to it. During the day the foes had to increase their strengths and deploy reinforcements. By the evening up to 2 regular Iraqi brigades and 2 thousand militiamen were fighting for the airport. Americans had to use all available forces of the 3rd Mechanized Division and 101st Airborne Division to repulse the attacks. Only assault aircraft and battle helicopters made more than 300 operation flights to this region.

During the fight Iraqis lost up to 20 tanks, 10 APC, about 200 men killed and up to 300 wounded. The American losses were up to 30 men killed, about 50 wounded, at least 4 tanks, 4 APC and 1 helicopter. But it is impossible to obtain the exact data yet. By this hour there have been more than 20 flights for evacuation of killed and wounded coalition soldiers and the command have requested ambulance aviation again.

The combat was so intense that commander of the 3rd Mechanized Division general-major Bufford Blunt had to issue an order to organize a false strike. Around 8am from Khan-Azad road junction an attack was organized in order to demonstrate tank vanguards of a large subdivision advancing toward Al-Daura from south. The group was able to reach the outskirts of the town near the Avajridge village. After entering the village the group was met by Republican Guards. In direct combat the group lost 2 tanks, 3 APC, 3 men killed, up to 10 wounded and, after two hours of fighting, withdrew to the main forces. Iraqis lost 4 tanks, 2 APC and up to 30 men killed.

By the evening the foes reduced their activity and were regrouping during the last night. Americans are rapidly fortifying their defense positions and deploying reinforcements to the airport region, increasing their forces at Khan-Azad and Abu-Harraib. Iraqis are moving anti-armor divisions closer to the city outskirts.

Despite the exchange of strikes there are no reasons to expect any serious attempts to capture the city in the nearest future. By numerical strength the coalition troops that have reached the city borders do not meet even the minimal requirements for storming and heavy urban fights. Coalition forces by Baghdad number up to 18-20 thousand men and can be enforced with no more than 3-5 thousand men while the minimal force necessary to capture a city like Baghdad equals from 80 to 100 thousand soldiers.

According to weather forecasts, in the coming day the weather may abruptly change to the worse. The wind is expected to intensify, visibility may reduce to 200-300 m.

All the claims made by aviation commander of the coalition, general Michael Mosley, about iÖIraqi army, as an organized structure consisting of large units, exists no longerÖî are contrary to fact and, according to analytics, are probably connected with severe pressure put on the military command by American financial groups that desperately needed good news from the US-Iraqi front by the end of the financial week. In fact, the Republican Guards defending Baghdad have not lost even 5% of their numerical strength and military equipment. Most of those losses were due to bombardments and not land combats. The total losses of Iraqi army since the beginning of the war have not exceeded 5-8% of their defensive potential. This means the main battles are still to be seen.

The situation in other sectors of the US-Iraqi front will be summarized closer to this evening.

(source: iraqwar.ru, 04-06-03, translated by Necroman)

April 5, 2003, 1357hrs MSK (GMT +4 DST), Moscow - The situation on the US-Iraqi front is characterized by gradual reduction of American offensive activity. After the 3rd Mechanized Infantry Division tank forces had marched towards Baghdad and its vanguards reached the city from south and south-west, engineering fortification of their positions began, which indicates the end of the current stage of the campaign as well as the loss of offensive potential of American forces and necessity to rest and regroup. It is supposed that during the next two days the American command will attempt local strikes in order to improve and extend their positions on the south and, especially, south-west approaches to Baghdad (crossing the Baghdad ñ Samarra roadway) and begin bringing fresh forces from Kuwait.

As we supposed, during the last night Americans were moving 101st Airborne Division troops to help the 1st Mechanized Division that captured the airport of Baghdad yesterday morning. About 80 strike and transport helicopters and 500 marines were deployed there.

But all the efforts to reinforce the brigade with heavy armor failed as Iraqi started powerful artillery strikes at the transport routes and organized mobile firing groups on the roads. After reports about losing 3 tanks and 5 APCs on the route the American command had to pause the movement of the reinforcements by land.

Yesterday's estimates of the forces concentrated here were overstated. After analysis of intercepted radio communications and reports of American commanders it was specified that at the airport there were only parts of the 1st brigade troops, up to 2 enforced battalions with the help of a self-propelled artillery division 3 thousand soldiers and officers strong, 60 tanks and about 20 guns.

Another battalion enforced with artillery crossed the Baghdad-Amman roadway and came into position at the crossroads to the south of the airport, near Abu-Harraib.

Soldiers of the 1st Mechanized Brigade spent almost all the last night in chemical protection suits, waiting for Iraqi to use their iuntraditional weapons. Apart from that, their positions were constantly shot with artillery and machine gun fire. The brigade commanders report that the soldiers are ultimately dead-beat, and are constantly requesting reinforcements.

About 10 armored units including 4 tanks were lost in this area yesterday. Up to 9 men were killed, about 20 wounded, at least 25 reported missing. Moreover, the status of a patrol group that didn't arrive at the airport remains unclear. It is supposed that it either moved away towards Khan-Azad and took defense there or got under an ambush and was eliminated. It is now being searched for.

The losses of Iraqi were up to 40 men killed, about 200 captured (including the airport technical personnel), 4 guns and 3 tanks.

Currently American reconnaissance squadrons are trying to dissect the suburban defenses with local sallies.

At the same time, marine troops are approaching the south-east borders of Baghdad. Their vanguard units reached the outskirts of Al-Jessir and immediately tried to capture the bridge over a feeder of the Tigris, the Divala river, but were met with fire and stopped.

Commander of the 1st Expeditionary Marine Squadron colonel Joe Dowdy was deposed yesterday morning. As was revealed, the colonel was deposed for utmost hesitation and loss of the initiative during the storm of An-Nasiriya. This way the coalition command in Qatar found an excuse for their military faults by that town. The guilt of the colonel was in his refusing to enter the town for almost 3 days and trying to suppress Iraqi resistance with artillery and aviation, trying to avoid losses. As a result, the command additionally had to move the 15th squadron of colonel Tomas Worldhouser there, who had to storm the ferriages for almost 6 days, with about 20 of his soldiers killed, 130 wounded and 4 missing. The 1st Expeditionary Squadron lost no men at An-Nasiriya, but 3 marines died, as were reported, by inadvertency and about 20 soldiers got wounded.

Despite the fact that marines were able to capture one of the bridges at the south outskirt of An-Nasiriya, the ferriage across the Euphrates is still risky. Fights in the city are going on. The American command has to cover the ferriage with a company of marines enforced with tanks and artillery, up to 400 soldiers and officers strong. Every column passing across the bridge gets shot by Iraqis from the left bank and the marines have to cover it by setting smoke screens and delivering constant fire. A brigade group of the 101st Airborne Division is engaged in the combat but is unable to break the Iraqi resistance. Throughout the day 3 men were wounded, 1 soldier reported missing.

In An-Najaf, after 3 days of gunning and bombardment the 101st Airborne Division marines were able to advance towards the center of the town and are now fighting in the market region.

It is reported that 2 marines were killed and 4 wounded. 1 APC was destroyed with a RPG. At the same time there arrived information that during the last night most of the garrison (up to 3 thousand Republican Guardians of the Medina Division) left the town on cars for Karbala. Only militia remained in the town, covering the withdrawing main forces and continuing to resist.

All the attempts of American marines to advance into Al-Khindiya failed. After 1 APC from the vanguard was knocked out and more than 20 RPG shots at the column, the marines withdrew at their original positions. 2 soldiers were wounded and evacuated rearwards. American intelligence believes that no more than a battalion of Iraqis are defending the town. Their resistance remains, despite that the town has already been under siege for 8 days.

Americans were unable to capture the left-bank part of Al-Hillah. The 82nd Airborne Division troops are only capable of keeping a narrow corridor across the outskirt of Al-Hillah with the bridge over the Euphrates. There is constant shooting in the town. Throughout the day in this region the coalition lost 1 man killed and 4 wounded.

A similar corridor is kept by marines in the Al-Kut town. But there is information that allows us to suppose that Americans were pushed away from the town last night. Continuous requests of artillery and aviation support and coordinates transmitted to the artillery HQ indicate that the combat occurred in immediate proximity to the American positions. 4 times ambulance helicopters flew into this region, and there hasn't still been a report from the commander of the marine group that defends this area, which may indicate that he hasn't yet have full information about his units.

The situation at Al-Diwaniyah, where a heavy combat has been going on for 3 days, has become a little clearer. Currently all American forces have been pushed away from the town. Early morning an American helicopter was attacked. Its crew died. Another helicopter was shot down and had to land to the east from Karbala. Information about its crew is being obtained.

The overall situation in the central region of Iraq is characterized by gradual reduction of the coalition

activity and change to active defense. But extraordinary dispersion of the ground forces, their fragmentation (the biggest group now contains up to 12 thousand troops) create advantageous preconditions for Iraqi counter-attacks, but the air superiority of the coalition severely complicate such projects. If, due to weather conditions, the coalition forces lose their air support, it may have very dramatic consequences.

At the south of Iraq the British advance on Basra is losing its strength as well and may already stop during the next two days. Currently the British have been unable to achieve any serious success on this direction, and fights are only occur at the outskirts of the city.

The British command had to admit that it had underestimated the strength of Iraqi resistance and was unable to reveal the structure and number of Basra defenders fully and operatively. Currently in the city and the Fao peninsula, according to the British data, about 5 thousand of regular Iraqi military forces are defending (parts of 51st Mechanized Division of general Khaled Khatim Saleh al-Hashimi) and up to 5-7 thousand volunteers and militiamen. At the same time, British hopes for an armed Shia revolt have been ruined. The Shia leaders in Iran called their Iraqi coreligionists to fight against English and American isatanistsî and iZionistsî, leaving British without their ibest cardî in the plan of capturing Basra. 3 men were killed and 8 wounded yesterday.

At the North of Iraq desultory fightings between Kurdish troops ipeshmergaî and Iraqi forces are going on. The morning messages about the town Kalak captured have not been confirmed yet, and according to the radio surveillance data the actions only take place at the approaches of the town. For now, Kurds are mainly busy robbing neighboring villages and transporting the stolen goods into their basic regions. According to American special forces which have recently been replaced here, sometimes after capturing a village up to half of the Kurdish squadron abandon their positions. They load stolen property into captured cars and leave for their homes to be back next morning for new salvage.

But apart from clear marauding of ipeshmergaî, the coalition command has more and more problems with keeping the decent moral level of their fighting soldiers. Spite and irritability are growing even in British troops, which were always icorrect enoughî towards the civilians on the occupied territories. In increasing frequency British soldiers show violence and rudeness towards civilians. At a recent consultation at the British HQ, a representative of the military police command pointed at the fact that even actions of arresting people suspected in underground activities occur with unnecessary violence and publicity, and resemble rather intimidation than special police operations. The command issued a special order regarding the required behavior in the occupied regions, but even after it had been published a few analogous incidents were registered.

An event that had happened 5 days before also received publicity at the coalition HQ. During a night icleanupî in one of suburban houses near An-Nasiriya three marines shot a man and afterwards raped and shot his wife. The command got information about this accident from one of its informers. After interrogation the marines were sent to Qatar for additional investigations.

In increasing frequency commanders find things belonging to Iraqis in their soldiersí rucksacks. The soldiers are discontent of their commanders attempting to cease this practice, and call those items iwar salvageî. Currently the command is preparing a special order regarding this issue.

(source: iraqwar.ru, 04-05-03, translated by Necroman)

April 4, 2003, 1507hrs MSK (GMT +4 DST), Moscow - By the morning of April 4 the situation on the

US-Iraqi front showed a tendency toward stabilization. As the forward coalition units reach Baghdad they fulfill their primary orders outlined by the coalition command. During the four days of the advance elements of the US 3rd Mechanized Infantry Division have bypassed from the east the Iraqi defenses at Karabela and, without encountering any resistance, advanced around 140 kilometers along the Karabela-Baghdad highway and reached the Iraqi capital. However, the goals of this attack will be fully achieved only when the US Marine brigades, now advancing along the left bank of the Tigris, reach the southeastern outskirts of Baghdad.

All indications are that the breakthrough by the 1st Brigade of the 3rd Mechanized Infantry Division toward the Baghdad international airport, although a significant thrust forward, did not come as a surprise to the Iraqi command. The US units occupying the airport area did not encounter here any significant resistance (the airport was guarded by no more than 2-3 Iraqi companies without any heavy weapons) nor did they see any indication that the Iraqis were even planning on defending the airport. Except for the line of trenches along the airport's perimeter the US troops found no other defensive structures. The airport was clear from all aircraft with the exception of a few old fuselages and a passenger plane (possible belonging to a Jordanian airline company), which did not have time to leave the airport before the flight restrictions were announced by the coalition with the beginning of the war.

Currently the coalition group of forces in the airport area number up to 4,000 troops, up to 80 tanks and about 50 artillery systems. It should be expected that several helicopter squadrons from the 101st Airborne Division will be deployed here in the next several hours.

According to electronic surveillance the coalition command in Qatar order the attacking US forces to halt on at least three occasions. The command ordered additional reconnaissance to be done in the airport area fearing there may carefully concealed Iraqi units and extensive defenses. The coalition command issued the final order to capture the airport only until the coalition reconnaissance units contacted the command headquarters directly from the airport terminal. The Iraqi forces protecting the airport offered little resistance and after a few exchanges of fire withdrew toward the city. Communication was lost with one of the coalition units protecting the flanks of the advancing column. It is still being determined whether this unit got lost or if it encountered an ambush.

Around 0800hrs the US positions [in the airport area] were attacked by the militia forces probably from among the local population. The militia was dispersed by tank and APC fire.

The 2nd brigade of the [3rd Mechanized Infantry] Division reached the southern outskirts of Baghdad and is currently located near the intersection of the Baghdad-Amman and Baghdad-Karabela highways.

The coalition claims of "completely destroying" the "Media" ("Al Madina al Munavvara") and the "Hammurabi" Republican Guard divisions of the 2nd Republican Guard Corps received no confirmation. No more than 80 destroyed Iraqi armored vehicles were found along the coalition's route of advance, which corresponds to about 20% of a single standard Iraqi Republican Guard division.

It has been determined that only a few forward elements of the "Hammurabi" Division participated in combat while the entire division withdrew toward Baghdad. A single brigade of the "Medina" division was involved in combat. The brigade was split in two groups during fighting and withdrew toward Baghdad and toward Karabela to join the main forces of the ["Medina"] division.

Equally unimpressive are the numbers of the Iraqis captured by the coalition. In four days of advance the US troops captured just over 1,000 people only half of whom, according to the reports by the US field commander, can be considered regular troops of the Iraqi army. There are virtually no abandoned or

captured Iraqi combat vehicles. All of this indicates that so far there has been no breakthrough for the coalition; Iraqi troops are not demoralized and the Iraqi command is still in control of its forces.

No significant changes occurred at other Iraqi resistance areas.

Fighting is continuing at An-Nasiriya where the US troops are still unable to capture the part of the town on the left side of the river. Despite of the announcement by the US command about the "near complete control of the city", exchanges of fire are continuing and just during the last day the US forces sustained one killed and no fewer than three wounded. The US troops are no longer trying to storm the areas [of An-Nasiriya] held by the elements of the Iraqi 11th Infantry Division, but instead use artillery and aviation to methodically destroy these areas.

The coalition was also unable to take the city of An-Najaf. The designated brigade of the 101st Airborne Division was able to take control only of the southern outskirts of the city and now has halted its advance using artillery and aviation to destroy the city blocks occupied by the Iraqi defenders. Intercepted radio communications indicate at least three killed or wounded US troops.

The Iraqis remain in control of Al-Hillah on the left side of the river. There are continuing exchanges of fire and the city is under a constant artillery barrage.

Nearly all fighting has stopped near Karabela, where the US forces limit their action to blockading the city and launching artillery attacks against Karabela's outskirts. The available US forces in this region are only sufficient for the blockade and for now no reinforcements can be expected. The 4th Infantry Division, currently unloading in Kuwait, will be able to move into Iraq no sooner than April 6. Additionally, the newest and the most modern division is actually only a partially-deployed force and numbers up to 12,000 troops – only about half the size of the 3rd Infantry Division already fighting in Iraq.

A tense situation remains near the town of An-Divania. According to radio surveillance, the coalition forces were forced out of the town and thrown back 3-5 kilometers as the result of a three-hour-long firefight. The US field commanders reported 2 lost tanks and up to 5 lost APCs. Some 7 [coalition] soldiers were killed, 4 are missing and up to 20 were wounded. During the past 24 hours coalition medevac helicopters flew more than ten missions to this area. As an emergency measure a 101st Airborne Division's battalion is currently being deployed to An-Divania. The town is under artillery and aircraft attacks.

With much difficulty the British marine infantry is advancing near Basra. However, despite their best efforts the British are only able to attack the outer defensive perimeter stretching along the Shatt-al-Basra canal. By today's morning the British were finally able to take control of the bridge on the As-Zubair – Basra highway and to establish positions on the opposite side of the river. During the fighting one British tank was hit, one APC was destroyed and up to 10 soldiers were killed or wounded. Now the British are facing Basra's main defense lines located 1.5 kilometers ahead of them.

The Iraqis still control a portion of the Fao peninsula. Today the Iraqi artillery attacked the Al-Fao port. No casualty figures are currently available.

Radio surveillance reveals Iraqi resistance units fighting on the territories occupied by the British. A Kuwaiti radio source reported an attack last night resulting in a fire on one of the oil wells where the previous fire was just recently extinguished. Coalition troops deployed in Umm-Qasr come under regular automatic weapons fire during the night hours. Radio surveillance indicates that yesterday coalition

troops conducted a massive operation in the town to find the resistance members.

In the north of Iraq the Kurdish units have stopped their advance after encountering resistance by the Iraqi troops. Kurdish field commanders told the US officers they will not go forward unless the Americans clear the way for them. There is information pointing to certain financial motives behind this attitude of the Kurdish commanders. The US Brig. Gen. Osman, who commands the US troops in this area, told one of the Pentagon officials during a phone conversation: if for them [the Kurds] to move forward we literally have to throw a stack of dollars in front of them!

At the same time the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan leaders are trying to distance themselves from these [Kurdish] field commanders, calling them uncontrollable borderline gangs. According to them [the Kurdish leaders] these rogue units number no more than 3000 fighters.

Information coming from Qatar indicates that the coalition command is seriously concerned with the possibility of another sand storm. Not only will this delay the blockade of Baghdad, but it will also leave the coalition without its major advantage – the aviation, without which the coalition will be left one on one with a numerically superior enemy.

(source: iraqwar.ru, 04-04-03, translated by Venik)

April 3, 2003, 1301hrs MSK (GMT +4 DST), Moscow - During the last and today early morning the coalition continued its advance toward Baghdad that it had begun three days ago. Units of the 3rd mechanized Infantry Division, failing to quickly capture the town of Al-Khindiya, blockaded it with a part of their forces and moved around the town from the east to reach Al-Iskanderiya by the morning. It is now clear right now whether the US troops were able to take the town of Al-Musaib or if they went around it as well. The overall [coalition] progress in this direction was about 25 kilometers during the past 24 hours.

This thrust came as a surprise to the Iraqi command. The Iraqi defense headquarters around Karabela remained deep behind the forward lines of the advancing US brigades. Due to the intensive aerial and artillery strikes the Iraqi headquarters [in Karabela] lost most of its communication facilities and has partially lost control of the troops. As the result the Iraqi defense units in the line of the coalition attack became disorganized and were unable to offer effective resistance. During the night fighting the Iraqi forces in this area were pushed from their defensive positions and withdrew toward Baghdad. The Iraqi losses were up to 100 killed and up to 300 captured. The US troops destroyed or captured up to 70 Iraqi tanks and APCs.

Currently the Iraqi command is rushing to create a new line of defense 20-30 kilometers south of Baghdad. The US losses in this attack were 3 armored vehicles, up to 8 killed and wounded.

Late night on April 2 east of Karabela a unit from the 3rd Mechanized Infantry Division went off-course and ran into an artillery ambush after moving too close to the Iraqi positions. In the resulting firefight the US forces have lost no less than 8 armored vehicles and, according to the Iraqi reports, at least 25 US troops were killed or wounded.

In the town of Al-Kut US Marine units were able to capture a bridge across the Tigris; but they were unable to capture the entire town and currently fighting is continuing in the residential districts. No fewer than 3 US soldiers were killed and up to 12 were wounded in this area during the past 24 hours. The US troops are reporting 50 killed and 120 captured Iraqi soldiers.

The coalition was able to make serious progress to the south of Al-Kut. After quickly taking the town of An-nu-Manyah the US forces have set up a bridge across the Tigris and immediately proceeded to transfer the Marine units to the left bank. There is a highway going from An-nu-Manyah to Baghdad along the left bank of the Tigris. No more large populated areas are located along the highway and the attacking forces may be able to come within 15-20 kilometers of Baghdad as early as tonight.

The blockade of An-Najaf is continuing. Numerous attempts by the [coalition] troops to reach the center of the town have failed after being met by Iraqi fire. At least five [coalition] soldiers have been wounded and one is missing.

The situation around An-Divania remains unclear. Heavy fighting in this area is continuing since yesterday. The US field commanders have requested artillery and aviation support on several occasions and have reported "strong counterattacks by the enemy." It has been determined that by the evening of April 2 the command of the US 101st Airborne Division ordered its troops to withdraw from the town in order to create some space between its forces and the Iraqis to allow for artillery and aerial strikes. The overall US losses in this area during the past two days are up to 15 killed and around 35 wounded. At the same time the US commanders are reporting "hundreds of killed Iraqis; about 50 Iraqis - some of them wearing civilian clothes - have been captured by the coalition. There has been a report of another [coalition] helicopter loss in this area.

Resistance is also continuing in An-Nasiriya. The town's garrison has been fighting for the past ten days and continues to hold its positions on the left bank of the Euphrates. During the past day there has been a reduction in the intensity of the Iraqi resistance. However, the US commanders at the coalition headquarters believe that this is due to the Iraqis trying to preserve their ammunition, which is by no means unlimited. According to one of the US officers at the coalition headquarters elements of the [Iraqi] 11th Infantry Division remain in control on the left bank of the Euphrates. "...Resilience of this unquestionably brave enemy is worth respect. Four times we offered them to lay down their arms and surrender, but they continue resisting like fanatics..." [Reverse-translated from Russian] During the past night 1 US soldier was killed and 2 more were wounded in firefights in this area.

Another attempt by the British to penetrate Iraqi defenses near Basra has failed. Up to 2 battalions of the British 16th Air Assault brigade reinforced with tanks attempted to break through the Iraqi defenses last night northwest of the Maakil airport along the Al-Arab River. Simultaneously from the southwest at As-Zubair another 2 marine infantry battalions made an attempt to enter the area of Mahallat-es-Zubair, but were met with heavy fire and withdrew after a four-hour-long battle. The Iraqis have reported 2 destroyed British tanks, 5 APCs and no fewer than 30 British troops killed. However, the British commanders are reporting 4 lost armored vehicles and 5 killed. Additionally, Iraqi air defenses have shot down an F-18 fighter-bomber of the town. The radio surveillance units reported the loss of another plane to the north of Baghdad. It is not known whether this plane was shot down or crashed after losing control due to a technical malfunction.

As we can see, the coalition command is continuing with its "march on Baghdad" tactics. In the course of their advance the coalition troops are moving around the primary centers of the Iraqi defense and blockade them leaving the rest of the work to aviation and artillery. The very near future will show how effective this tactics really is. So far, according to intelligence reports, more than 50,000 Iraqi troops continue fighting behind the coalition forward lines at Karabela alone. No fewer than 5,000 Iraqis are defending An-Najaf and An-Divania. Experts estimate that the total number of Iraqis fighting behind coalition front approaches 90,000-100,000 regular army troops and militia.

Under such circumstances the coalition has two options: it can either try to quickly capture Baghdad, thus leaving the Iraqi garrisons in the occupied territories with no reason to continue with their resistance; or the coalition troops can dig in around Baghdad and prepare for the final assault while "cleaning up" the captured territory. The latter seems more likely as the coalition can use the fresh troops arriving now to Kuwait for these "clean up" operations. This will also allow these troops to gain the valuable combat experience fighting the weakened enemy before the assault on Baghdad.

Analysts believe that this war will cause a review of the role of precision-guided munitions (PGM) on the modern battlefield. Already the results of using PGM in Iraq cast doubt on the effectiveness of PGM in woodland areas and in cross-country terrain. Under such conditions the main objective becomes not to hit the target with the first shot but to locate, identify and to track the target.

Reviewing ground operations [in Iraq] analysts conclude that the desert terrain and the resulting inability of the Iraqis to fight outside of towns and villages provide the coalition with its main strategic advantage. Complete air dominance allows [the coalition troops] locating and engaging Iraqi positions and armor at maximum distance using precision-guided munitions not available to the Iraqis, while remaining outside of the range of the Iraqi weapons. Considering the course of this war and the tactics used by the coalition, [Russian military] analysts find this tactics to be far removed from the realities of modern warfare and designed exclusively against a technologically much weaker opponent. Such tactics is unimaginable on the European theater of combat with its woodlands and cross-country terrain. Foreseeing the possibility of a future military standoff between the US and North Korea the analysts are certain that the US cannot hope for a military victory on the Korean Peninsula without the use of nuclear weapons.

(source: iraqwar.ru, 04-03-03, translated by Venik)

April 2, 2003, 1335hrs MSK (GMT +4 DST), Moscow - Exceptionally difficult and unstable situation has developed on the US-Iraqi front by the morning of April 1. The coalition troops are persistently trying to take control of the strategic "triangle" Karabela - Al-Khindiya - Al-Iskanderiya. At the same time the coalition units are continuing their advance toward Al-Kut and An-nu-Manyah, but so far the US forces were unable to take any of these towns. To move forward the US units are forced to leave behind large numbers of troops needed to blockade the towns remaining under Iraqi control. The An-Najaf and An-Nasiriya garrisons are still involved in active combat deep behind the coalition forward lines.

The coalition command had to deploy two brigades from the 101st Airborne Division to blockade and to storm An-Najaf and An-Nasiriya. These two brigades will replace elements of the US 1st Marine Division (the 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit under the command of Col. John Waldhauser) that has been fighting in this area for the past six days. These "heavy" attack brigades are currently being deployed to the area of intense fighting near Al-Hillah.

Rough estimates show that the territory "captured" by the coalition forces still contains at least 30,000 Iraqi regular troops and militia engaged in active combat. Military experts are already warning the US command about the danger of underestimating the enemy: doing so may seriously complicate the situation of the attacking forces and foil the coalition's very optimistic plans.

On the other hand, the Iraqi command is being forced to withdraw its troops under the protection of towns. Iraqis are also forced to minimize all active combat operations outside the city limits as the desert terrain maximizes the enemy's advantage in aviation and its technological superiority in reconnaissance and targeting systems. This robs the Iraqis of their mobility and forces them to resort to "fortress-like" type of warfare, which, clearly, is significantly reducing their combat effectiveness.

Near Karabela the command of the 3rd Mechanized Infantry Division has completely abandoned its plans to storm the town. After blocking Karabela on three sides the 3rd Infantry Division directed its main thrust toward the towns of Al-Musaib and Al-Khindiya. Heavy combat is continuing in this area for the second day. The US is continuously escalating the intensity of its attacks and is using nearly all artillery and tank units available to the strike group's command. Nevertheless, the coalition forces are still unable to penetrate the Iraqi defenses. The commander of the 3rd Infantry Division Major General Buford Blount is reporting fierce Iraqi resistance. According to the General, elements of the 2nd Iraqi Republican Guard "Medina" Division that are defending these positions maintain high combat potential and are repelling all attempts to break through their lines. During the past day and today's early morning the [coalition] field commanders have reported the loss of up to 5 tanks, 7-10 APCs and IFVs and no less than 9 killed. At least one helicopter was hit and made an emergency landing. Two more helicopters reported taking serious damage and their situation so far is unknown. Iraqi losses [near Karabela], based on the US reports from the battlefield, include at least 300 killed and up to 30 destroyed tanks and APCs. In the morning the coalition forces have ceased the attack and now the Iraqi positions are being engaged by aviation. The next [coalition] attack is anticipated during the night.

Heavy fighting is continuing in the town of Al-Hillah. Despite strong aviation and artillery support the US Marine units are still unable to strengthen their positions on the left bank of the Euphrates and to push the Iraqi forces out of the town. During the past 24 hours the US Marines in Al-Hillah lost up to 5 armored vehicles; at least 10 soldiers were killed or wounded. According to the reports by the US commanders, the Iraqi losses during this time amount to at least 100 killed; 10 reinforced strongholds inside the town have been destroyed; there are reports of 80 Iraqis captured during a cleanup operation in the occupied part of the town.

A crisis situation has developed in the area of Al-Divania. Having encountered no initial Iraqi opposition elements of the US Marine 2nd Expeditionary Unit begun advancing toward the town but were met with heavy artillery and mortar fire and were forced to assume defensive positions resorting to close combat. The exchange of fire continued for nearly seven hours resulting in up to 12 destroyed US tanks and APCs and up to 20 killed or wounded Marines. Currently the Iraqi positions are being attacked by artillery and aviation.

Yesterday's attempts by the US troops to storm the part of An-Nasiriya on the left bank [of the Euphrates] yielded no results. After moving behind the Iraqi positions, while simultaneously attacking them from the front, the US troops still were unable to break the Iraqi defenses and by morning were forced to return to their starting positions. The coalition losses in this engagement, according to reports by [the US] field commanders, were 2 killed and up to 12 wounded; a [US] helicopter took a hit and made an emergency landing in the northern part of An-Nasiriya.

Also no results came from the coalition attempts to capture An-Najaf. All US attacks were repelled. There have been reports of 3 destroyed APCs and at least 5 killed or wounded coalition troops.

Near Basra the British forces are still unable to tighten their blockade of the city. During the night the Iraqis attacked British units near the village of Shujuh and threw the British back 1.5-2 kilometers. According to the Iraqi reports, at least 5 British soldiers were killed in this attack. The British, on the other hand, have reported 2 missing and 4 wounded soldiers. Iraqis have reported that a destroyed British tank and two APCs were left behind on the battlefield.

Tactical attack units from the US 82nd Airborne Division and the 22nd SAS Regiment, earlier deployed to northern Iraq near the town of Al-Buadj, were destroyed and dispersed as the result of a daylong battle

with the Iraqi troops. The exact number of [coalition] losses is still being verified. Intercepted radio communications show that the coalition troops are retreating in small groups and have no exact information about their own losses. Currently the remaining units are trying to reach the Kurdish-controlled territory. It is believed that up to 30 [coalition] soldiers were killed or captured by the Iraqis.

Military analysts believe that today and tomorrow will decide the outcome of the attack on Baghdad that begun two days ago. If the coalition forces fail to break the Iraqi defenses, then by the weekend the US will be forced to curtail all attacks and to resort to positional warfare while regrouping forces and integrating them with the fresh divisions arriving from the US and Europe. Such a tactical pause in the war, although not a complete halt in combat operations (the coalition command will continue trying to use localized attacks to improve its positions), may last seven to fourteen days and will lead to a full re-evaluation of all coalition battle plans.

(source: iraqwar.ru, 04-02-03, translated by Venik)

April 1, 2003, 1404hrs MSK (GMT +4 DST), Moscow - As of the morning of April 1 active combat operations continued along the entire US-Iraqi front.

The town of Karabala ñ one of the key points in the Iraqi defense ñ is subjected to a continuing artillery barrage. The town outskirts are being attacked by the coalition aviation. However, so far the US forces made no attempts to enter the town. Available information suggests that after evaluating Karabala's defenses the US command made a decision to delay storming the town. Orders were issued to the coalition troops to move around the town from the east and to take control of the strategic Al-Hillah, Al-Khindiya, and Al-Iskanderiya region. Several largest highways are intersecting in this area, which also contains the three strategic bridges across the Euphrates. Gaining control of this triangle will finally open the way for the coalition troops into the valley between the Tigris and the Euphrates and the route to the Babylon-Baghdad highway. Yesterday and today early morning most heated combat continued in this area.

During a night attack the US forces were able to reach the center of Al-Khindiya by 0800hrs and to move to the right bank of the Euphrates. However, their further advance was stopped by heavy fire from the Iraqi positions across the river. Al-Khindiya is being defended by up to 2,000 Iraqi soldiers and militia armed with up to 20 tanks and around 250 anti-tank weapons of various types. During this battle one US soldier was killed, 2 were missing in action and seven were wounded. For now it is impossible to determine the Iraqi losses. Throughout the night the US field commanders have reported at least 100 killed and 30 captured Iraqi soldiers and militia members. However, by morning the number of captured was revised down to less than 15.

The [coalition] effort to capture Al-Hillah was unsuccessful. All attempts by the US troops to enter the town during the night have failed. Every time they were met with heavy Iraqi fire near the town. Intercepted radio communications show that one US APC was destroyed and at least 5 soldiers were killed and wounded.

Fighting is continuing near An-Najaf. The town is currently surrounded from three sides by the US Marines, who are still unable to enter the town. The Iraqi positions are being subjected to artillery and aerial bombardment. No information is available about any losses in this area.

Since 0700hrs reports are coming about large-scale attacks by the US Marines and infantry units against An-Nasiriya. As was previously expected, up to two Marine battalions deployed on the left bank of the

river to the north of the town have begun advancing on An-Nasiriya from the north and are now trying to break the Iraqi defenses and to capture this strategic town. More than a hundred of aerial strikes have been delivered against the Iraqi positions [at An-Nasiriya] just during today's morning. There is a continuing artillery barrage. All this indicates the US Marines are determined to fulfill their orders and take the town. However, so far neither Marines nor the paratroopers were able to widen their staging area or to break through Iraqi defenses. Radio surveillance indicates that during the morning hours of today there were 5 medevac helicopter flights to this area. At least 3 US soldiers were killed.

Another US combat convoy crossed to the left bank of the Euphrates and by today's morning reached the outskirts of the town of Ash-Shatra located 40 kilometers north of An-Nasiriya. This unit is now engaged in combat. For now there is no additional information about this convoy's losses or movements.

Localized fighting is continuing near Basra. Throughout the last night and today's early morning the British forces were making attempt to capture the neighboring villages of As-Zubair and Suk-al-Shujuh, but, despite of overwhelming artillery and aviation support, the British were forced to return to their original positions. During these battles 1 British soldier was killed, 1 is missing and up to 5 were wounded. No information is available about the Iraqi losses. According to the reports by the British, at least 200 Iraqi troops were killed and no less than 50 were captured. However, only under 10 captured Iraqis were delivered to the British camp and only 4 of them were in military uniform. This was reported by one of the US journalist located in this area during a phone conversation with the editor.

Active combat reconnaissance operations by both sides are continuing in the north of Iraq. There have been reports of an attack launched by an Iraqi battalion against the positions of a US combat unit from the 82nd Airborne Division. It was reported that during the night the Iraqis moved around the US position and in the morning attacked the US forces from the rear. A fierce exchange of fire is continuing in this area. The US forces have requested aviation support.

The combat activity of the Kurds supported by the US forces was limited to clearing several areas occupied by its long-time enemy – the militant Islamic group called *Ansar al Islam*, after which the Kurdish units have stopped. Amid calls by the US military for a continuing offensive the Kurdish troops appear to be in no rush to engage the regular troops of the Iraqi army and are more interested in reaping the spoils of war. The Kurdish leadership is not particularly interested in leading the advancing forces. Instead they are calling on the US to strengthen the US forces deployed in this area. With at least another 2,000 paratroopers and to bomb the Iraqis some more. This indicates that the Kurds are not willing to move their forces too far from the home bases fearing an attack in the back by the Turkish troops. Their fears are reinforced by the continuing assurances by the US to respect Turkey's territorial integrity. The term *territorial integrity* in this case covers almost 40% of the territory of the current Northern Kurdistan, which has the de facto independence from Turkey and Iraq. It is likely that the Kurdish forces will move forward only after the complete military defeat of the Iraqis, when their desire for the war booty will make them less cautious.

Analysis of the present state of the US-British coalition fighting in Iraq suggests that the current active combat phase will last for about 4-5 days. After that the troops will once again require time for rest, repairs and reinforcement. Most analysts believe that this time the coalition will require more downtime than the last time, when it stopped for just long enough to get resupplied and immediately continued their advance so not to lose the initiative and not to let the enemy come to their senses. The price of putting this *squeeze* on the troops is enormous exhaustion and extensive wear of equipment, which is long overdue for serious scheduled maintenance.

At the same time the fresh forces arriving in Kuwait from Europe and the US will not be able to join the

combat before Monday April 7 as deployment of troops is progressing with many delays and is poorly organized. The units that already arrived [in Kuwait] cannot get to their weapons and the weapons already delivered here are sitting here without the troops to which they are assigned.

Because of this the coalition command has ordered the attacking forces to be as aggressive as they can be to use this short time to break the Iraqi defenses along the entire line of the front. The troops are ordered by the end of this operation to advance to the starting positions for the final assault on Baghdad and to begin preparing to take the Iraqi capital. This order is specifically referring to the importance of An-Nasiriya, An-Najaf and the Karabela ñ Al-Hillahñ Al-Iskanderiya itriangleî. These areas will see the most combat action in the upcoming days.

Additionally, we should expect elements of the coalition forces reaching the Amman-Baghdad highway, currently controlled only by small US paratroop and special operations units and to form here in the area of Al-Khabbania the western side of Baghdadís blockade. The Al-Khabbania region also contains three strategic airfields and large stores of weapons causing serious concern on the part of the coalition.

(source: iraqwar.ru, 04-01-03, translated by Venik)

March 31, 2003, 1828hrs MSK (GMT +4 DST), Moscow - During the night of March 30-31 the situation on the US-Iraqi front became increasingly more critical. All indications are that the coalition has launched a new attack.

Following a three-hour-long artillery barrage and several nighttime aviation strikes the coalition forces came in contact with the Iraqi troops near Karabela and attempted to move around the Iraqi defenses from the east.

For now the coalition is limiting its actions to probing the forward layer of the Iraqi defenses, attempting to assess its density and organization after nearly five days of artillery and aerial bombardment. There have been no reports of any coalition breaks through the Iraqi defenses in this area. At the same time morning radio intercepts uncovered a large US military convoy moving around the Razzaza Lake. At the moment it is unclear whether the purpose of this movement is to get to the town of Ar-Ramdia or a wider maneuver leading to the town of Al-Falludja.

Another [coalition] convoy numbering up to 100 combat vehicles was seen near the town of Al-Hillah moving in the southeaster direction 30 kilometers from the strategic Baghdad-Basra highway. Given there is no Iraqi resistance this coalition force will be able to reach the highway by todayís night. So far there were no reports of any losses in this area.

The US forces resumed attacking Iraqi defenses near An-Najaf. The US group of force in this area has been reinforced with at least three reserve Marine battalions and now Americans are trying once again to capture this key town. According to the US intelligence Iraqi defenses in this area number up to 3,000 troops aided by around 1,500 volunteers and [Baíath] party activists. The Iraqis here are armed with around 30 T-55 and T-62 tanks, up to four artillery batteries and more than 300 various anti-tank weapons. The town is being stormed by the elements of the 1st Marine Division numbering up to 6,000 troops assisted by 80 tanks and 60 artillery systems. Additionally, aerial support is provided by up to 40 helicopters. So far the Americans were unable to push the enemy. Early today morning an American tank was destroyed near An-Najaf. At least two of its crew were killed.

Intensive exchange of fire is continuing in the vicinity of An-Nasiriya. The US Marines have so far been

unable to side nth staging area they captured seven days ago on the left bank of Euphrates. The bridge connecting this staging area with the main coalition forces is nearly destroyed and is under constant fire from the Iraqi defenses located in the riverside city blocks. This is the reason why the [coalition] troops holding the staging area can only be reinforced by small and lightly-armed units and only during nighttime. During the past night alone the Marines holding the staging area sustained 2 killed and 5 wounded.

The situation [for the coalition] is complicated by the fact that the residential blocks occupied by the defending Iraqis come to the very edge of the river, giving a significant advantage to the defenders who control the river and all approaches to the river. Currently the coalition artillery and aviation is methodically destroying these blocks in an attempt to push the Iraqis away from the shoreline.

Intercepted radio communications indicate that the Marines engineering units are ordered to build a pontoon crossing up the stream from An-Nasiriya and move up to three battalions of Marines and troops from the 82nd Airborne Division to the left bank of the Euphrates for a future strike in the rear of the An-Nasiriya garrison. The coalition command would have been ready to bypass other defended crossings on the Euphrates if it wasn't for one problem: the entire group of forces has only two pontoon units. Any new pontoon units will arrive not sooner than in mid-April.

A standoff between the Basra garrison and the British marine infantry is continuing in the area of Basra. Using localized attacks the British are attempting to lean on Basra as closely as possible and to tighten the blockade, but so far they were unsuccessful. Thus, during the last night the British attempted to take the town of Al-Hasib located 7 kilometers southeast of Basra. The British plan was to reach the Al-Arab River and to slice the local Iraqi defenses in half, separating Basra from the defending Iraqi forces on the Fao peninsula. Up to a battalion of the British marine infantry supported by armored vehicles entered the town of Al-Hasib from south but in less than an hour they were stopped by Iraqi fire and requested aviation and artillery support.

Fighting for the control of the town is continuing. At least two British soldiers were killed and three were wounded in this battle. One British armored personnel carrier was destroyed. British commanders are reporting killing 50 Iraqis and capturing 10. In the area of the As-Zubair River port, which was declared to be under full coalition control just a week ago, a British patrol boat was attacked. The boat was carrying its crew and a marine infantry unit. As the result of the attack at least 4 British soldiers were killed and 9 were wounded.

The official coalition losses are, to put it mildly, falling behind the actual figures. The 57 dead acknowledged by the coalition command reflect losses as of the morning of March 26. This information was provided to a BBC correspondent by one of the top medical officials at a field hospital in Al Kuwait during a confidential conversation. We have standing orders to acknowledge only those fatalities that have been delivered to the hospital, identified and prepared to be sent back home. The identification process and the required standard embalming takes some time – occasionally up to several days. But only the command knows how many casualties we sustained today and you will learn about it in about three days. [Reverse-translated from Russian] This conversation was taped by the journalist and sent to the editor via a cellular phone network.

Based on the radio intercepts and internal information networks of the US field hospitals as of this morning the coalition losses include no less than 100 killed US servicemen and at least 35 dead British soldiers. Additionally, some 22 American and 11 British soldiers are officially considered to be missing in action and the whereabouts of another 400 servicemen are being established. The number of wounded has exceeded 480 people.

US experts at the coalition command headquarters studied the cases of destroyed and damaged M1A2 tanks and various APCs. The conclusion was that without a doubt the Iraqis do possess modern anti-tank weapons but so far use them on a very limited scale. Only three tanks have been hit by guided weapons which destroyed these tanks with the first hit. The rest of the tanks were destroyed with more standard weapons. Some of the most common causes [of destroyed armor] include: anti-tank guns (about 40% of all hits), man-portable rocket-propelled grenade launchers (25% of hits), and landmines (25% of hits). Effectiveness of anti-tank artillery has been particularly high. Impacts by high-velocity projectiles do not always destroy the tank and its crew. However, in 90% of all cases the tank is disabled and the crew is forced to abandon the tank on the battlefield – says the report that was distributed to the commanders of the forward units for analysis.

Russian military analysts are advising the Iraqi military command against excessive optimism. There is no question that the US blitzkrieg failed to take control of Iraq and to destroy its army. It is clear that the Americans got bogged down in Iraq and the military campaign hit a snag. However, the Iraqi command is now in danger of underestimating the enemy. For now there is no reason to question the resolve of the Americans and their determination to reach the set goal – complete occupation of Iraq.

In reality, despite of some obvious miscalculations and errors of the coalition's high command, the [coalition] troops that have entered Iraq maintain high combat readiness and are willing to fight. The losses sustained during the past 12 days of fighting, although delivering a painful blow to the pride and striking the public opinion, are entirely insignificant militarily speaking. The initiative in the war remains firmly in the hands of the coalition. Under such circumstances Iraqi announcements of a swift victory over the enemy will only confuse its own troops and the Iraqi population and, as the result, may lead to demoralization and a reduced defensive potential.

Russian military analysts believe that the critical for the US duration of the war would be over 90 days provided that during that time the coalition will sustain over 1,000 killed. Under such circumstances a serious political crisis in the US and in the world will be unavoidable.

(source: iraqwar.ru, 03-31-03, translated by Venik)

March 30, 2003, 2042hrs MSK (GMT +4 DST), Moscow - No significant changes have been reported during March 29-30 on the Iraqi-US front. Positional combat, sporadic exchange of fire and active search and reconnaissance operations by both sides continue along the entire line of the front.

American troops continue massing near Karabela. As was mentioned in the previous update, the US group of forces in this area numbers up to 30,000 troops, up to 200 tanks and up to 230 helicopters. Latest photos of this area suggest that the [US] troops are busy servicing and repairing their equipment and setting up the support infrastructure.

According to radio intercepts, the coalition commander Gen. Tommy Franks has visited the US forces near Karabela. He personally inspected the troops and had a meeting with the unit commanders. Currently no information is available about the topics discussed during the meeting. However, it is believed that the [coalition] commander listened to the reports prepared by the field commanders and formulated the main objectives for the next 2-3 days.

The current technical shape of the coalition forces was discussed during the meeting at the coalition central headquarters. During a personal phone conversation with another serviceman in the US one participant of this meeting called this technical state "depressing". According to him "...a third of our

equipment can be dragged to a junk yard right now. We are holding up only thanks to the round-the-clock maintenance. The real heroes on the front lines are not the Marines but the "ants" from the repair units. If it wasn't for them we'd be riding camels by now..." [Reverse-translated from Russian]

Based on the intercepted radio communications, reports from both sides and other intelligence data, since the beginning of the war the coalition lost 15-20 tanks, around 40 armored personnel carriers and infantry fighting vehicles, more than 50 military trucks and up to 10 helicopters. In addition to that there have been at least 40 more disabled tanks, about the same number of disabled APCs and IFVs, about 100 disabled wheeled vehicles of all types and around 40 disabled helicopters. These numbers are based on the analysis of non-classified technical reports received daily by the Pentagon.

During the attack last night up to two US Marine battalions attempted to push the Iraqis out of their defensive positions near An-Najaf. Despite of the preliminary 4-hour-long artillery and aerial bombardment once they approached the Iraqi positions the US troops were met with heavy machine-gun and RPG fire and were forced to return to their original positions. One US tanks was destroyed by a landmine and two APCs were hit during this night attack. Radio intercepts show that 2 Marines were killed and 5 were wounded. The latest attempt by the US troops to improve their positions on the left bank of the Euphrates near An-Nasiriya was also a failure. Despite of all the precautions taken to ensure the tactical surprise the US forces were met with heavy fire and returned to the original positions. According to the reports by the [US] field commanders, three Marines were missing in action and four were wounded in this engagement.

These failed attacks have once again confirmed the fears of the coalition command that the Iraqi forces were much better technically equipped than was believed before the war. In particular, the DIA [US Defense Intelligence Agency] intelligence report from February 2003 insisted that the Iraqi army practically had no night vision equipment except for those systems installed on some tanks and serviceability of even that equipment was questioned. In reality, however, the coalition troops have learned that the Iraqis have an adequate number of night vision surveillance systems and targeting sights even at the squadron level and they know how to properly use this equipment. A particular point of concern [for the coalition] is the fact that most Iraqi night vision systems captured by the coalition are the latest models manufactured in the US and Japan. After analyzing the origins of this equipment the US began talking about the "Syrian connection". In this regard, the US military experts have analyzed Syria's weapons imports for the past two years and have concluded that in the future fighting [in Iraq] the coalition troops may have to deal with the latest Russian-made anti-tank systems, latest radars and radio reconnaissance systems resistant to the effects electronic counter measures.

In the same area [An-Najaf] a coalition checkpoint manned by the US Marines was attacked by a suicide bomber - an Iraqi soldier - who detonated a passenger car loaded with explosives next to the US troops. At least 5 of them were killed.

In a closed radio address to the coalition troops the coalition command asked the soldiers to show "patience and restrain" and "not to let loose their emotions and feelings of anger" [Reverse-translated from Russian] The radio address was recorded following an incident in the area of Umm Qasr when, in plain view of the locals, British soldiers executed two Iraqis after finding a submachine-gun in their house; and after a US attack helicopter returning from a combat mission opened cannon fire on a passenger car and its occupants. It was announced [by the coalition] that both of these incidents will be investigated. However, military psychologists believe that these incidents are the result of the troops being subjected to enormous stress; psychologists say that these soldiers require medical treatment.

Near Basra the British forces have completely abandoned offensive operations and switched to positional

warfare. Isolated attacks continue in the airport area - still not under full British control - and on the Fao peninsula where the Iraqis continue to hold a large staging area.

According to the British field commanders, the troops are extremely exhausted and are in dire need of rest and reinforcements. Three British soldiers went missing and two more were wounded in this area during the past 24 hours.

A supply convoy of the 3rd Motorized Infantry Division was ambushed last night to the south of An-Nasiriya. In the course of the attack 10 fuel trucks were destroyed, one escorting APC was hit, 8 troops were wounded and 1 is missing. So far it is not known who was behind the attack: the Iraqi army combat reconnaissance units or the partisans operating in this area.

Analysis of the information coming from the combat zone shows a rapid decline in the [coalition's] contacts with the media and increasing restrictions on all information except for the official reports. For example, since yesterday morning all phone and Internet lines used by the coalition troops to maintain contact with relatives in the US and Europe have been shut down at the division level and below. Not only does this indicate that the coalition command is trying to change the course of the information war, but this also points to a possible upcoming massive coalition attack against the Iraqi forces and an attempt on the part of the [coalition] commanders to prevent any information leaks.

[Russian] analysts believe that all the talk about a "two-week timeout" in the war is nothing more than a disinformation attempt by the coalition. Forces and equipment currently available to the coalition will be sufficient for at least 1-2 weeks of active combat; this is comparable to the duration of a major combat operation. It is likely that such an operation may take place during the next day in the area of Karabela. Goals of this operations have already been discussed in previous reports.

At the same time the coalition is already planning a new large-scale operation that will utilize the new forces currently being deployed to the region. Based on our [Russian] intelligence and that of our allies [Russian] military experts believe that this large-scale operation will be launched from the general vicinity of Karabela and will develop into a wide maneuver around Baghdad from the west ending in the area of the Tartar lake east of Al-Hadid (or east of the Tartar lake at Samarra). From this point a part of the force will continue advancing toward Saddam Hussein's home town of Tikrit and from there it will turn toward Baghdad from the north through Samarra and Baahkuba; meanwhile the rest of the [coalition] force will strike the rears of the Iraqi forces fighting in the north near Kirkuk and Mosul. Such an operation would require up to 60,000 troops, no less than 300 tanks and 200 helicopters. It is believed that such forces can be put together by April 15 and by April 18 they should be ready to attack.

Certain available information points to a serious conflict between the coalition command and the US political and military leadership. The [US] Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld - the main planner and lobbyist of the military operation against Iraq - accuses the coalition command and Gen. Tommy Franks personally of being passive and indecisive, which [in Rumsfeld's opinion] led to the lengthening of the conflict and the current dead end situation. In his turn Franks in front of his subordinates calls the Secretary of Defense the "old blabbermouth" and an "adventurist" who dragged the army into the war on the most unfavorable terms possible. However, most [US military] officers believe that both military leaders are responsible for the coalition's military failures. Rumsfeld allowed gross errors during the planning of forces and equipment required for the war, while Franks did not show enough strength to get the right forces and the right training for the troops in this campaign and, in essence, surrendered to the whims of the politicians...

It is entirely possible that the future of this war will see the departure of one of these two commanders.

Some reports suggest that Rumsfeld has already proposed to President Bush a change in the coalition command. However, Bush declined this proposal calling it untimely and damaging to the morale of the troops and that of the American people.

(source: iraqwar.ru, 03-30-03, translated by Venik)

March 29, 2003, 0924hrs MSK (GMT +4 DST), Moscow - During the past day the situation on the US-Iraqi front remained largely unchanged. The US is continuing reinforcing the attack group near Karabela for a thrust toward Baghdad. By the morning of March 29 up to 20,000 coalition troops were massed in the area of Karabela. This force includes up to 200 tanks, 150 artillery systems and more than 250 helicopters. The order for the attack will be given by the coalition commander Gen. Tommy Franks, who, according to intercepted radio communications, will personally inspect the troops during the next several hours.

Around 1900hrs yesterday an Apache attack helicopter crashed. Intercepted radio communications show that the helicopter was heavily damaged in a combat mission. The helicopter's pilot lost control during landing and the helicopter crashed, causing serious damage to another helicopter that landed earlier.

The coalition troops have so far failed to take An-Nasiriya despite of the categorical orders from the command and more than 800 combat missions by the strike aircraft. All attempts to break through the Iraqi defense were met by Iraqi counterattacks. After 24 hours of fighting the coalition troops only managed to advance several hundred meters in two sectors near An-Nasiriya at the cost of 4 destroyed armored personnel carriers, no less than 3 Marines killed by sniper and mortar fire, 10 wounded and 2 missing in action. The exact Iraqi losses are being determined.

The Americans have also failed to advance near An-Najaf. Every coalition attack was met by massive artillery barrages from the Iraqi side. Later during the day the Iraqis mounted a counterattack throwing the US forces back by 1.5-2 kilometers. No fewer than 10 Marines were killed or wounded. After exchanging fire for six hours both warring sides remained in the same positions. Iraqi losses in this area are estimated to be 20 killed and up to 40 wounded.

Near Basra the British troops pushed the Iraqi defense lines on the Fao peninsula but were unable to capture the entire peninsula. The British advance was a maximum of 4 kilometers from the highway leading to Basra. Radio intercepts show that in this attack the Iraqis shot down a British helicopter. Additionally, two tanks and one APCs were destroyed by landmines. At least 2 [British] servicemen were killed, around 20 were wounded and 15 were captured by the Iraqis.

Exchange of fire continued in the area of the Basra airport. The Iraqis destroyed one coalition APC wounding two coalition soldiers. The Iraqi losses are difficult to estimate, but available information suggests that up to 20 Iraqi soldiers and local militia members might have been killed in the air and artillery strikes.

All attempts by the British troops to break through the Iraqi defenses from the south along the Al-Arab river have yielded not results. The British command reported that it is unable to storm Basra with the available forces and will require no less than two additional brigades and at least five additional artillery battalions. Thus, to avoid further casualties the British are adopting defensive tactics, while trying to maintain a tight blockade around Basra and trying to improve their positions with small localized attacks. The British are also maintaining pressure on the Iraqi positions on the Fao peninsula.

The psychological levels among the city's residents, according to interviews, is far from critical. The Iraqi

military made several public announcements to the residents offering them a chance to leave the city. However, most of the residents do not want to leave, fearing the faith of the Palestinian refugees, who, after losing their homes, gained pariah status in the Arab world. Basra's residents were extremely depressed by the video footage aired by the coalition command showing Iraqis on the occupied territories fighting for food and water being distributed by the coalition soldiers. The city's population views this as a sample of what awaits them if the Americans come...

At the Al-Kuwait airport the unloading of the 4th Mechanized Infantry Division is continuing and is expected to be completed by the night of April 1. During a night flight one of the US military transport aircraft requested an emergency landing. What happened to the plane is still being determined.

Currently the coalition command is deciding how better use the 4th Infantry Division. The complete deployment [of the division] and preparations for combat are expected to take at least 10 days. However, the combat units require immediate reinforcements and it is possible that the [4th Infantry} Division will be joining combat in stages, as the units become ready. This will mean a considerable reduction of the Division's combat effectiveness.

A report was obtained, prepared by the Al-Kuwait-based [coalition] Psychological Operations Tactical Group for the [coalition] Special Ground Forces Command. The report analyzed the effectiveness of the information and propaganda war. According to the report, analysis of the television broadcasts, intercepted radio communications, interrogations of Iraqi POWs show that psychologically the Iraqis are now "more stable and confident" than they were during the last days before the war. This, according to the report, is due primarily to the coalition's numerous military failures.

"...Following nervousness and depression [of the Iraqis] during the first days of the war we can now observe a burst of patriotic and nationalistic feelings. ...There has been a sharp increase in the number of Iraqi refugees, who left the country before the war, returning to Iraq. A "cult of war" against the US and the UK is now emerging among the Iraqis...", the report states. [Reverse translation from Russian]

[Coalition] analysts believe that if this attitude of the Iraqis is not changed within the next 7 days, a "resistance ideology" may take over the Iraqi minds, making the final [coalition] victory even more difficult. In response to this report the US Army Psychological Operations command decided to combine all Iraqi POWs into large groups and to distribute the resulting video footage to the world media. A more active use of the Iraqi opposition was suggested for propaganda work in the occupied villages. The same opposition members will be used to create video footage of the "repented" Iraqi POWs and footage of the local [Iraqi] population "opposing Saddam."

Radio communications intercepted during the last five days suggest that the coalition is using Israeli airfield for conducting night air strikes against Iraq. Combat aircraft are taking off regularly from the [Israeli] Hatzerim and the Navatim airbases do not return to the same bases but fly toward the border with Jordan while maintaining complete radio silence.

Possibly these are just Israeli Air Force exercises, However, [Russian] radio intercept and radar units observe increased intensity of radio communications coming from the Jordanian air force and air defense communication centers during such overflights, as well as changes in the operating modes of the US Army "Patriot" tracking radars deployed in Jordan. This indicates the Israeli airbases as used as forward airfield or that some of the coalition air force units are based there. Normally the IAF F-15I fighter-bombers and A-4N strike aircraft operate from the Hatzerim airbase and the F-16 fighter-bombers operate from the Nevatim base.

Experts believe that these airbases may be used by the F-117 stealth bombers "officially" based at the Al-Udaid airbase in Qatar. Using these two locations minimizes the risk to the F-117s by allowing them to fly along the left bank of the Euphrates (in the direction of Turkey) and to avoid the dangerous maneuvering over Iraq.

The destruction of the telephone stations in Baghdad did nothing to disrupt the communications of the Iraqi army. The coalition command acknowledged this fact after analyzing the dense [Iraqi] radio traffic. Because of that the USAF was ordered to employ the most powerful available [conventional] munitions against predetermined strategic targets. This attacks will be carried out immediately before renewing ground advance.

(source: iraqwar.ru, 03-29-03, translated by Venik)

March 28, 2003, 1448hrs MSK (GMT +3), Moscow - According to the latest intercepted radio communications, the command of the coalition group of forces near Karabela requested at least 12 more hours to get ready to storm the town. This delay is due to the much heavier losses sustained by the coalition troops during the sand storms than was originally believed. Just the US 3rd Mechanized Infantry Division sustained more than 200 disabled combat vehicles of various types. The 101st Airborne Division reported some 70 helicopters as being disabled. Additionally, the recently delivered reinforcements require rest and time to prepare for combat.

At the same time the US forces have resumed attacks near An-Nasiriya and An-Najaf since 0630hrs and are continuously increasing the intensity of these attacks. During the night and early morning of March 28 the Iraqi positions in these areas were subjected to eight aerial assaults by bombers and ground attack aircraft. However, so far [the coalition] was unable to penetrate the Iraqi defenses.

Also during the early morning the British units begun advancing along the Fao peninsula. Latest radio intercepts from this area show that under a continuous artillery and aerial bombardment the Iraqis have begun to gradually withdraw their forces toward Basra.

First firefights between troops of the US 82nd Airborne Division and the Iraqi forces occurred in northern Iraq in the area of Mosula. At the same time the arrival of up to 1,500 Kurdish troops has been observed in this area. So far it is not clear to which of the many Kurdish political movements these troops belong. Leaders of the largest Kurdish workers party categorically denied participation of their troops. They believe that these may be units of one of the local tribes not controlled by the central authorities of the Kurdish autonomy and "ready to fight with anyone" for money.

According to verified information, during the past 48 hours of the Iraqi counterattacks the coalition forces sustained the following losses: up to 30 killed, over 110 wounded and 20 missing in action; up to 30 combat vehicles lost or disabled, including at least 8 tanks and 2 self-propelled artillery systems, 2 helicopters and 2 unmanned aerial vehicles were lost in combat. Iraqi losses are around 300 killed, up to 800 wounded, 200 captured and up to 100 combat vehicles 25 of which were tanks. Most of the [Iraqi] losses were sustained due to the artillery fire and aerial bombardment that resumed by the evening of March 27.

First conclusions can be drawn from the war

The first week of the war surprised a number of military analysts and experts. The war in Iraq uncovered a range of problems previously left without a serious discussion and disproved several resilient myths.

The first myth is about the precision-guided weapons as the determining factor in modern warfare, weapons that allow to achieve strategic superiority without direct contact with the enemy. On the one hand we have the fact that during the past 13 years the wars were won by the United States with minimum losses and, in essence, primarily through the use of aviation. At the same time, however, the US military command was stubborn in ignoring that the decisive factor in all these wars was not the military defeat of the resisting armies but political isolation coupled with strong diplomatic pressure on the enemy's political leadership. It was the creation of international coalitions against Iraq in 1991, against Yugoslavia in 1999 and against Afghanistan in 2001 that ensured the military success.

The American command preferred not to notice the obvious military failures during expeditions to Granada, Libya and Somalia, discounting them as "local operations" not deserving much attention.

Today we can see that in itself massed use of strategic and tactical precision-guided weapons did not provide the US with a strategic advantage. Despite the mass use of the most sophisticated weapons the Americans have so far failed to disrupt Iraqi command and control infrastructure, communication networks, top Iraqi military and political leadership, Iraqi air defenses. At the same time the US precision-guided weapons arsenal has been reduced by about 25%.

The only significant advantage of the precision-guided weapons is the capability to avoid massive casualties among the civilians in densely populated areas.

What we have is an obvious discrepancy between the ability to locate and attack a target with precision-guided weapons and the power of this weapon, which is not sufficient to reliably destroy a protected target.

On the other hand, precision-guided munitions demonstrated their superiority over conventional munitions on the battlefield. The ability to attack targets at long ranges with the first shot is the deciding factor in the American superiority in land battles.

The second myth disproved by this war is the myth propagated by the proponents of the "hi-tech" war, who believe in the superiority of the most modern weapons and inability of older-generation weapons to counteract the latest systems. Today the technological gap between the Iraqi weapons and those of the coalition has reached 25-30 years, which corresponds to two "generations" in weapons design. The primary Iraqi weapons correspond to the level of the early 1970s. Since that time the Americans, on the other hand, have launched at least two major rearmament efforts: the "75-83 program" and the "90-97 program". Moreover, currently the US is in the middle of another major modernization and rearmament program that will continue for the next five years. Despite of this obvious gap, Iraqi resistance has already been publicly qualified by the US as "fierce and resilient". Analysts believe that the correlation of losses is entirely acceptable to the Iraqis and they [the analysts] do not see any strategic coalition advantage in this war. Once again this proves that success in modern warfare is achieved not so much through technological superiority but primarily through training, competent command and resilience of the troops. Under such conditions even relatively old weapons can inflict heavy losses on a technologically-superior enemy.

Two enormous mistakes made by the US command during the planning stages of this war resulted in the obvious strategic failure. The US has underestimated the enemy. Despite the unique ability to conduct reconnaissance against the Iraqi military infrastructure through a wide network of agents implanted with the international teams of weapons inspectors, despite unlimited air dominance the US military command has failed to adequately evaluate combat readiness of the Iraqi army and its technical capabilities; the US

has failed to correctly assess the social and political situation in Iraq and in the world in general. These failures led to entirely inadequate military and political decisions:

The coalition force was clearly insufficient for a such a large-scale operation. The number of deployed troops was at least 40% short of the required levels. This is the reason why today, after nine days of war, the US is forced to resort to emergency redeployment of more than 100,000 troops from the US territory and from Europe. This, in essence, is the same number of troops already fighting in Iraq.

The buildup and distribution of the coalition forces have been conducted with gross neglect of all basic rules of combat. All troops were massed in one small area, which led to five days of non-stop fighting to widen this area. The initial attack begun without any significant aerial or artillery preparation and almost immediately this resulted in reduced rate of advance and heated positional battles.

Today we can see that the US advance is characterized by disorganized and "impulsive" actions. The troops are simply trying to find weak spots in the Iraqi defenses and break through them until they hit the next ambush or the next line of defense.

Not a single goal set before the coalition forces was met on time.

During the nine days of the war the coalition has failed:

- to divide Iraq in half along the An-Nasiriya - Al-Ammara line,
- to surround and to destroy the Iraqi group of forces at Basra,
- to create an attack group between the Tigris and the Euphrates with a front toward Baghdad,
- to disrupt Iraq's military and political control, to disorganize Iraq's forces and to destroy the main Iraqi attack forces.

A whole range of problems that require their own solutions was uncovered directly on the battlefield. Thus, combat in Iraq raised serious concerns about the problem of coordination between units from different services. Limited decision-making time and the ability to detect and to engage an enemy at a great distance make "friendly fire" one of the most serious problems of modern warfare. For now the coalition has no adequate solution to this problem. At one location or another every day of this war the coalition troops were attacking friendly forces.

The second problem of the coalition is its inability to hold on to the captured territory. For the first time since the war in Vietnam the Americans have to deal with a partisan movement and with attacks against their [the US] lines of communication. Currently the coalition is rushing to form some sort of territorial defense units for guarding its supply lines and for maintaining order in the occupied territories.

A range of technical problems with equipment has been revealed during the combat operations. Most operators of the M1A2 Abrams main battle tank agree that the tank was inadequate for performing the set combat tasks. The primary problem is the extremely low reliability of the tank's engine and its transmission in desert conditions. Heat from the sun, hot sand and the constantly present hot dust in the air nearly nullified the advantages offered by the turret-mounted thermal sights. Visibility range of these sights did not exceed 300 meters during movement in convoy and reached up to 700-800 meters during stops. Only during cold nights did the visibility range reach 1000-1,500 meters. Additionally, a large number of thermal sights and other electronics simply broke down. The tiny crystalline sand particles caused electrical power surges and disabled electronic equipment.

This was the reason for the decision by the coalition command to stop movement of troops at night when

a contact with the enemy was deemed likely.

The main strong side of the coalition forces was the wide availability of modern reconnaissance and communication systems that allowed to detect the enemy at long ranges and to quickly suppress the enemy with well-coordinated actions of different types of available forces.

In general the US soldiers showed sufficiently high combat resilience. Even in the extremely difficult weather conditions the troops maintained control structure and adequately interpreted the situation. Combat spirit remained high. The majority of troops remain confident in their abilities, while maintaining belief in the superiority of their weapons and maintaining reasonable confidence in the way the war is being fought.

It should be noted, however, that the way the war is being fought did create a certain sense of disappointment in most of the troops. Many are feeling that they've been lied to and are openly talking about the stupidity of the high command and its gross miscalculations. "Those star-covered Pentagon idiots promised us a victory march and flowers on the armor. What we got instead were those damned fanatics fighting for every dune and the sand squeaking in your ass!" said one of the wounded recuperating at a hospital in Rammstein. [Reverse translation from Russian]

Nevertheless, despite the sand storms the terrain favors the coalition actions by allowing it to employ their entire arsenal of weapons at the greatest possible range, which makes it difficult for the Iraqis to conduct combat operations outside of populated areas.

Overestimating the abilities of its airborne forces was a weak side of the coalition. Plans for a wide-scale use of helicopters as an independent force did not materialize. All attempts by the US command to organize aerial and ground operations through exclusive use of airborne forces have failed. Because of these failures by the end of the fourth day of the war all airborne units were distributed across the coalition units and used by the attacking forces for reconnaissance, fire support, and for containing the enemy. The main burden of combat was carried by the "heavy" mechanized infantry and tank units.

Another serious drawback in the coalition planning was the exceptionally weak protection in the rear of the advancing forces. This resulted in constant interruptions in fuel supply. Tank units sometimes spent up to 6 hours standing still with empty fuel tanks, in essence, being targets for the Iraqis. Throughout the war delivery of food, ammunition and fuel remains a headache for the US commanders.

Among the US soldiers there has been a wide-scale discontent with the quality of the new combat rations. Servicemen are openly calling these rations "shitty." Many soldier just take the biscuits and the sweets and discard the rest of the ration. Commanders of the combat units are demanding from the coalition command to immediately provide the troops with hot food and to review the entire contents of the combat ration.

Among the strong sides of the Iraqi troops are their excellent knowledge of the terrain, high quality of defensive engineering work, their ability to conceal their main attack forces and their resilience and determination in defense. The Iraqis have shown good organization in their command and communication structures as well as decisive and well-planned strategy.

Among the drawbacks of the Iraqi forces is the bureaucratic inflexibility of their command, when all decisions are being made only at the highest levels. Their top commanders also tend to stick to standard "template" maneuvers and there is insufficient coordination among the different types of forces.

At the same time commanders of the [Iraqi] special operations forces are making good use of the available troops and weapons to conduct operations behind the front lines of the enemy. They use concealment, show cunning and imagination.

The first strategic lessons of the war

[Lessons of the war in Iraq are discussed here with a focus on a possible similar war between Russia and the US]

The main of such lessons is the ever-increasing significance of troop concealment as one of the primary methods of combat. Concealment and strict adherence to the requirements for secrecy and security become strategic goals of the defending forces in the view of the US reliance and that of its allies on precision-guided weapons, electronic and optical reconnaissance as well as due to their use of tactical weapons at the maximum possible range afforded by these reconnaissance methods. Importance of concealment is being seen in Iraq and was clearly demonstrated in Yugoslavia, where the Yugoslav Army preserved nearly 98% of its assets despite the three months of bombing. Within our [Russian/European] battle theater concealment methods will offer us [the Russian army] an enormous advantage over the US.

The second lesson of this war is the strategic role of the air defenses in modern warfare as the most important service of the armed forces. Only the complete air dominance of the coalition allows it to continue its advance toward Baghdad and to achieve the critical advantage in any engagement. Even the short interruption in air support caused by the sand storms put the US and British troops in a very difficult situation.

Elimination of the air defenses as a separate service branch of the [Russian] Armed Forces and its gradual dissipation in the Air Force can be called nothing else but a "crime". [This statement refers to the recent unification of the Russian Air Force (VVS) and the Air Defense Force (PVO) and the secondary role of the air defense force within this new structure.]

The third lesson of the war is the growing importance of combat reconnaissance and increased availability of anti-tank weapons capable of engaging the enemy at maximum range. There is a requirement on the battlefield for a new weapon system for small units that would allow for detection of the enemy at maximum distance during day or night; for effective engagement of modern tanks at a range of 800-1000 meters; for engagement of enemy infantry at a range of 300-500 meters even with the modern personal protection equipment possessed by the infantry.

(source: iraqwar.ru, 03-28-03, translated by Venik)

March 27, 2003, 2321hrs MSK (GMT +3), Moscow (UPDATE) - Intercepted radio communications indicate that tomorrow we should expect a powerful attack by the coalition. During all day today the coalition troops were being reinforced and fully resupplied with fuel and ammunition. Additional units reserved for maintaining security along the Kuwaiti border were moved today to the front lines. The total number of additional [coalition] forces to enter Iraq numbers up to five battalions and around 800 combat vehicles.

By 1600hrs today the sand storm in Iraq has subsided allowing coalition to resume helicopter support of ground troops. At the same time the Iraqi positions were attacked by bombers and ground attack aircraft, which forced the Iraqis to cease their attacks and to resume defensive operations.

Available information suggests that the coalition command, despite the extreme exhaustion of its troops,

will attempt to use elements of the 3rd Mechanized Infantry Division to actively contain the Iraqi forces around Karabela and to reach the strategic Al-Falludja highway by moving from the west around the Razzaza lake, thus cutting off the way to Jordan. It is expected that by noon of March 29 the main coalition forces will reach this area.

During the night from March 29 to March 30 elements of the US 82nd Airborne Division aided by the Army Special Operations units may attempt to capture the Saddam Hussein Airport. Immediately following the capture of the airport the coalition plans to use it for the deployment of a brigade from the 101st Airborne Division, which will be responsible for holding the airport until the arrival of the main forces.

Commanders of the reinforced Marine brigade trying to take An-Nasiriya for the fourth day have received strict orders to suppress the Iraqi defenses and to take the town during the next day, after which to continue their advance toward Al-Kut and Al-Ammara. Similarly strict orders were received by the command of the brigade attacking An-Najaf. They will have to take this town, widen the staging area on the left bank of the Euphrates and push the Iraqis away from the town. By the morning of March 29 both these brigades are supposed join up southwest of Al-Kut, where they will be reinforced by the elements of the 101st Airborne Division and, after forming a southern attack line, they would blockade Baghdad from the south.

The British command has been ordered to completely take over the Fao peninsula, complete the blockade of Basra from the south and to completely take over the [Basra] airport area. After that the British are to advance toward Basra from the south along the Al-Arab river.

Based on this information to say that tomorrow we should expect heated combat would be an understatement.

(source: iraqwar.ru, 03-27-03, translated by Venik)

March 27, 2003, 1425hrs MSK (GMT +3), Moscow - There has been a sharp increase in activity on the southern front. As of 0700hrs the coalition forces are subjected to nearly constant attacks along the entire length of the front. The Iraqi command took the advantage of the raging sand storm to regroup its troops and to reinforce the defenses along the approaches to Karabela and An-Najaf with two large armored units (up to two armored brigades totaling up to 200 tanks). The Iraqi attack units were covertly moved near the positions of the US 3rd Infantry Division (Motorized) and the 101st Airborne Division. With sunrise and a marginal visibility improvement the Iraqis attacked these US forces in the flank to the west of Karabela.

Simultaneously, massive artillery barrages and counterattacks were launched against units of the US 3rd Infantry Division and the 101st Airborne Division conducting combat operations near An-Najaf. The situation [for the US troops] was complicated by the fact that the continuing sand storm forced them to group their units into battalion convoys in order to avoid losing troops and equipment in near zero-visibility conditions. These battalion convoys were concentrated along the roads leading to Karabela and An-Najaf and had only limited defenses. There was no single line of the front; aerial reconnaissance in these conditions was not possible and until the very last moment the coalition command was unaware of the Iraqi preparations.

During one of such attacks [the Iraqi forces] caught off-guard a unit of the US 3rd Infantry Division that was doing vehicle maintenance and repairs. In a short battle the US unit was destroyed and dispersed, leaving behind one armored personnel carrier, a repair vehicle and two Abrams tanks, one of which was

fully operational.

At the present time visibility in the combat zone does not exceed 300 meters, which limits the effectiveness of the 101st Airborne Division and that of its 70 attack helicopters representing the main aerial reconnaissance and ground support force of the coalition. One of the coalition transport helicopters crashed yesterday during take-off. The reason for the crash was sand in the engine compressors.

The Iraqis were able to get in range for close combat without losses and now fierce battles are continuing in the areas of Karabela and An-Najaf. The main burden of supporting the coalition ground troops has been placed with the artillery and ground attack aircraft. Effectiveness of the latter is minimal due to the weather conditions. Strikes can be delivered only against old Iraqi targets with known coordinates, while actually supporting the ground troops engaged in combat is virtually impossible and attempts to do so lead to the most unfortunate consequences.

Intercepted radio communications show that at around 0615hrs this morning the lead of a flight of two A-10 ground attack planes detected a convoy of armored vehicles. Unable to see any markings identifying these vehicles as friendly and not being able to contact the convoy by radio the pilot directed artillery fire to the coordinates of the convoy.

Later it was discovered that this was a coalition convoy. Thick layers of dust covered up the identification markings - colored strips of cloth in the rear of the vehicles. Electronic jamming made radio contact impossible. First reports indicated that the US unit lost 50 troops killed and wounded. At least five armored vehicles have been destroyed, one of which was an Abrams tank.

During the past day the coalition losses in this area [Karabela and An-Najaf] were 18-22 killed and up to 40 wounded. Most of the fatalities were sustained due to unexpected attacks by the Iraqi Special Forces against the coalition rears and against communication sites. This is a sign of the increasing diversionary and partisan actions by the Iraqis.

During the same period of time the Iraqi forces sustained up to 100 killed, about the same number of wounded and up to 50 captured.

Since the beginning of the operation no more than 2000 Iraqi troops were captured by the coalition. The majority of the captured troops were members of regional defense [militia] units.

The Iraqis were able to move significant reinforcements to the area of An-Nasiriya making it now extremely difficult for the Americans to widen their staging areas on the left bank of the Euphrates. Moreover, the Americans [on the left bank of the Euphrates] may end up in a very difficult situation if the Iraqis manage to destroy the bridges and to separate [these US units] from the main coalition force. The US forces in this area consist of up to 4,000 Marines from the 1st Marine Division and supporting units of the 82nd Airborne Division. Currently, fighting has resumed in the An-Nasiriya suburbs.

During one of the Iraqi attacks yesterday against the US positions the Iraqis for the first time employed the "Grad" mobile multiple rocket launch systems [MLRS]. As the result an entire US unit was taken out of combat after sustaining up to 40 killed and wounded as well as losing up to 7 armored vehicles.

There are no other reports of any losses in this area [An-Nasiriya] except for one US Marine drowning in one of the city's water canals and another Marine being killed by a sniper.

During the sand storm the coalition command lost contact with up to 4 coalition reconnaissance groups.

Their whereabouts are being determined. It is still unknown what happened to more than 600 other coalition troops mainly from resupply, communications and reconnaissance units communication with which was lost during the past 24 hours.

The situation around Basra remains unclear. The Iraqis control the city and its suburbs, as well as the area south of Basra and the part of the adjacent Fao peninsula, which the British have so far failed to take. The British forces are blockading Basra from the west and northwest. However, due to difficult marshy terrain crossed by numerous waterways the British have been unable to create a single line of front and to establish a complete blockade of the city. Currently main combat operations are being launched for control of a small village near Basra where the local airport is located. The British field commanders report that there has been no drop in the combat activity of the Iraqis. On the contrary, under the cover of the sand storm up to two battalions of the "surrendered" Iraqi 51st Infantry Division were moved to the Fao peninsula to support the local defending forces.

Rumors about an uprising by the Basra Shiite population turned out to be false. Moreover, the Shiite community leaders called on the local residents to fight the "children of the Satan" - the Americans and the British.

During the past 24 hours the British sustained no less than 3 killed and up to 10 wounded due to mortar and sniper fire.

It is difficult to estimate the Iraqi losses [in Basra] due to limited available information. However, some reports suggest that up to 30 Iraqi troops were killed during the past day by artillery and aircraft fire.

During an attack against a coalition checkpoint in Umm Qasr last night one British marine infantry soldier was heavily wounded. This once again points to the tentative nature of the British claims of control over the town.

Information coming from northern regions of Iraq indicates that most of the Kurdish leaders chose not to participate in the US war against Iraq. The primary reason for that is the mistrust of the Kurds toward the US. Yesterday one of the Russian intelligence sources obtained information about a secret agreement reached between the US and the Turkish government. In the agreement the US, behind the backs of the Kurds, promised Turkey not to support in any way a formation of a Kurdish state in this region. The US has also promised not to prevent Turkey from sending its troops [to Northern Kurdistan] immediately following [the coalition] capture of northern Iraq.

In essence, this gives Turkey a card-blanc to use force for a "cleanup" in Kurdistan. At the same time the Kurdish troops will be moved to fight the Iraqis outside of Kurdistan, thus rendering them unable to support their own people.

Along the border with Kurdistan Turkey has already massed a 40,000-strong army expeditionary corps that is specializing in combat operations against the Kurds. This force remains at a 4-hour readiness to begin combat operations.

All of this indicates that the coalition command will be unable to create a strong "Northern Front" during the next 3-4 days and that the US Marines and paratroopers in this area will have to limit their operations to distracting the Iraqis and to launching reconnaissance missions.

During a meeting with the Germany's chancellor [Gerhard] Schroeder the heads of the German military and political intelligence reported that the US is doing everything possible to conceal information on the

situation in the combat zone and that the US shows an extremely "unfriendly" attitude. Germany's own intelligence-gathering capabilities in this region are very limited. This is the result of Germany, being true to its obligations as an ally, not attempting to bolster its national intelligence operations in the region and not trying to separate its intelligence agencies from the intelligence structures of NATO and the US.

There has been a confirmation of yesterday's reports about the plans of the coalition command to increase its forces fighting in Iraq. The troops of the 4th Infantry Division (Mechanized) are currently being airlifted to the region, while its equipment is traveling by sea around the Arabian Peninsula and the unloading is expected to begin as early as by the end of tomorrow. The Division numbers 30,000 soldiers and officers. By the end of April up to 120,000 more US troops, up to 500 tanks and up to 300 more helicopters will be moved to the region.

In addition to that, today the US President [George W] Bush asked the British Prime-Minister [Tony] Blair to increase the British military presence in Iraq by a minimum of 15,000-20,000 troops.

At the current level of combat operations and at the current level of Iraqi resistance the coalition may face a sharp shortage of troops and weapons within the next 5-7 days, which will allow the Iraqis to take the initiative. The White House took this conclusion of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff with great concern.

During the past seven days of the war the US Navy detained all ships in the Persian Gulf going to Iraq under the US "Oil for Food" program. Since yesterday all these ships are being unloaded in Kuwait. Unloaded food is being delivered by the US military to Iraq and is being distributed as "American humanitarian aid" and as a part of the "rebuilding Iraq" program. These US actions have already cause a serious scandal in the UN. The US explained its actions by its unilateral decision to freeze all Iraqi financial assets, including the Iraqi financial assets with the UN. These assets the US now considers its property and will exercise full control over them. Captains of the detained ships have already called these actions by the US a "piracy."

(source: iraqwar.ru, 03-27-03, translated by Venik)

March 26, 2003, 1230hrs MSK (GMT +3), Moscow - As of the morning March 26 fierce battles have resumed in Iraq along the entire front. As was previously expected the sand storm has halted the advance of the coalition forces. Additionally, the coalition troops were in serious need of rest, resupply and reinforcement.

For much of the day unfavorable weather paralyzed combat activities of one of the main attack groups of the coalition - the 101st Airborne Division, which was forced to completely curtail all of its combat operations. Combat readiness of this division is of strategic importance to the entire coalition force primarily due to the fact that the division operates 290 helicopters of various types, including the 72 Apache attack helicopters. The 101st Airborne Division along with the 82nd Airborne Division and the 3rd Infantry Division (Mechanized) forms the backbone of the XVIII Airborne Corps - the main strike force of the coalition.

In essence, the 101st Airborne Division provides suppression of the enemy while simultaneously conducting aerial reconnaissance and suppression of any newly-discovered enemy forces. It maintain constant contact with the enemy and contains the enemy until the main forces arrive.

Currently the coalition's main forces are conducting combat operations along the approaches to the towns of Karabela and An-Najaf.

During the past 24 hours the coalition units in these areas sustained 4 killed and up to 10 wounded. All indications are that one coalition special operations helicopter was lost and no communication with the helicopter could be established. The faith of its crew and the troops it carried is still being investigated. Another two coalition helicopters made emergency landings in areas controlled by friendly forces. Aircraft engines were found to be extremely susceptible to the effects of sand.

As was determined by our [GRU] intelligence even before the start of combat operations, the primary goal of the coalition command was an energetic advance across the desert along the right bank of the Euphrates river, reaching the central Iraq with a further thrust toward Baghdad through Karabela. Another strategic attack was to go around Basra through An-Nasiriya toward Al-Ammara followed by a full isolation of the southern [Iraqi] forces, effectively splitting Iraq in half.

The first part of the plan - a march across the desert toward Karabela - was achieved, albeit with serious delays. The second part of the plan in essence has failed. Up to this moment the coalition troops were unable to punch through the Iraqi defenses near An-Nasiriya and to force the Iraqis toward Al-Ammara, which would have allowed the coalition to clear the way to Baghdad along the strategically important Mesopotamian river valley with Tigris and Euphrates covering the flanks of the advancing forces. So far only a few coalition units were able to get to the left bank of the Euphrates, where they are trying to widen their staging areas.

Additionally, the prolonged fighting near An-Nasiriya allowed the Iraqis to withdraw most of their forces from Basra region and to avoid being surrounded.

Currently the coalition forces are trying to get across the river near An-Najaf and Karabela, where, all indications are, heavy combat will continue during the next two days.

Harsh criticism from the top US military leadership and pressure from Washington forced the coalition command to resort to more energetic actions. In addition to that the shock of the first days of war among the coalition troops, when they expected an easy trek across Iraq but encountered stiff resistance, is now wearing off. They are now being "absorbed" into the war. Now the coalition actions are becoming more coherent and adequate. The coalition command is gradually taking the initiative away from the Iraqis, which is in part due to the reliance of the Iraqi command on inflexible defensive tactics.

Now the main tactical move of the US troops is to use their aerial and ground reconnaissance forces to test the Iraqi defenses, to open them up and, without entering direct close combat, to deliver maximum damage using artillery and ground attack aircraft. The coalition has finally stopped pointlessly moving around in convoys, as was characteristic of the first three days of the ground war.

The tactics allowed for increased combat effectiveness and considerably increased losses of the Iraqi side. Due to such attacks by the coalition during the previous night and today's early morning the Iraqis have lost 250 troops killed and up to 500 wounded. Up to 10 Iraqi tanks were destroyed and up to three Iraqi artillery batteries were suppressed.

However, despite the increased combat effectiveness, the coalition forces have so far failed to capture a single sizable town in Iraq. Only by the end of the sixth day the British marine infantry was able to establish tentative control over the tiny town of Umm Qasr. During the hours of darkness all movement around the town is stopped and the occupying troops withdraw to defensive positions. Constant exchanges of fire take place throughout the town. Out of more than 1,500-strong local garrison the British managed to capture only 150 Iraqis. The rest has either withdrew toward Basra or changed into

civilian clothes and resorted to partisan actions.

Near Basra the British forces in essence are laying a Middle Ages-style siege of a city with the population of two million. Artillery fire has destroyed most of the city's life-supporting infrastructure and artillery is used continuously against the positions of the defending units. The main goal of the British is to maintain a strict blockade of Basra. Their command is confident that the situation in the city can be destabilized and lack of food, electricity and water will prompt the local population to cause the surrender of the defending forces. Analysts point out that capture of Basra is viewed by the coalition command as being exceptionally important and as a model for the future "bloodless" takeover of Baghdad.

So far, however, this approach does not work and the city's garrison is actively defending its territory. Just during the past night at least three British soldiers were killed and eight more were wounded in the exchange of fire [near Basra].

It is difficult not to notice the extremely overstretched frontline of the coalition. This frontline is stretching toward Baghdad through An-Najaf and Karabela and its right flank goes all the way along the Euphrates and is completely exposed. All main supply and communication lines of the coalition are going through unprotected desert. Already the supply routes are stretching for more than 350 kilometers and are used to deliver 800 tonnes of fuel and up to 1,000 tonnes of ammunition, food and other supplies daily to the advancing forces.

If the Iraqis deliver a decisive strike at the base of this front, the coalition will find itself in a very difficult situation, with its main forces, cutoff from the resupply units, losing their combat readiness and mobility and falling an easy prey to the Iraqis.

It is possible that the Americans are relying on the power of their aviation that should prevent any such developments. It is also possible that this kind of self confidence may be very dangerous.

Massive numbers of disabled combat vehicles and other equipment becomes a strategic problem for the coalition. Already, radio intercepts indicate, all available repair units have been deployed to the front. Over 60% of all available spare parts have been already used and emergency additional supplies are being requested.

The sand is literally "eating up" the equipment. Sand has a particularly serious effect on electronics and transmissions of combat vehicles. Already more than 40 tanks and up to 69 armored personnel carriers have been disabled due to damaged engines; more than 150 armored vehicles have lost the use of their heat-seeking targeting sights and night vision equipment. Fine dust gets into all openings and clogs up all moving parts.

The coalition command has effectively acknowledged its defeat in the information war with the strikes against the television center in Baghdad and now further strikes should be expected against television and ground satellite transmitters. The coalition is attempting to leave the Iraqis without information in order to demoralize them.

The extreme length of the resupply routes and the actions of the Iraqi reconnaissance units have created a new problem: the coalition command is forced to admit that it has no information about the conditions on the roads. Currently, as intercepted radio communications show, the coalition command is trying to establish the whereabouts of more than 500 of its troops that fell behind their units, departed with resupply convoys or were carrying out individual assignments. So far it was not possible to establish how many of these troops are dead, captured or have successfully reached other units.

(source: iraqwar.ru, 03-26-03, translated by Venik)

March 25, 2003, 1230hrs MSK (GMT +3), Moscow - As of morning March 25 the situation on Iraqi fronts remains quiet. Both sides are actively preparing for future engagements. Exhausted in combat US 3rd Motorized Infantry Division is now being reinforced with fresh units from Kuwait (presumably with up to 1 Marine brigade and 1 tank brigade from the 1st Armored Division (all coming from the coalition command reserves) and elements of the British 7th Tank Brigade from the area of Umm Qasr. The troops have a stringent requirement to regroup and, after conducting additional reconnaissance, to capture An-Nasiriya within two days.

The Iraqis have reinforced the An-Nasiriya garrison with several artillery battalions and a large number of anti-tank weapons. Additionally, the Iraqis are actively deploying landmines along the approaches to their positions.

However, currently all combat has nearly ceased due to a sand storm raging over the region. Weather forecasts anticipate the storm's end by noon of March 26. According to intercepted radio communications the coalition advance will be tied to the end of the sand storm and is planned to take place during the night of March 26-27. The coalition command believes that a night attack will allow the its forces to achieve the element of surprise and to use its advantage in specialized night fighting equipment.

There have been no reports of any losses resulting from direct combat in the past 10 hours. However, there is information about two coalition combat vehicles destroyed by landmines. Three US soldiers were wounded in one of these incidents.

Positional warfare continues near Basra. The coalition forces in this area are clearly insufficient to continue the attack and the main emphasis is being placed on artillery and aviation. The city is under constant bombardment but so far this had little impact on the combat readiness of the Iraqi units. Thus, last night an Iraqi battalion reinforced with tanks swung around the coalition positions in the area of Basra airport and attacked the coalition forces in the flanks. As the result of this attack the US forces have been thrown back 1.5-2 kilometers leaving the airport and the nearby structures in the hands of the Iraqis. Two APCs and one tank were destroyed in this encounter. According to radio intelligence at least two US soldiers were killed and no less than six US soldiers were wounded.

The coalition forces are still unable to completely capture the small town of Umm Qasr. By the end of yesterday coalition units were controlling only the strategic roads going through the town, but fierce fighting continued in the residential districts. At least two British servicemen were killed by sniper fire in Umm Qasr during the past 24 hours.

The coalition command is extremely concerned with growing resistance movement in the rear of the advancing forces. During a meeting at the coalition command headquarters it was reported that up to 20 Iraqi reconnaissance units are active behind the coalition rear. The Iraqis attack lightly armed supply units; they deploy landmines and conduct reconnaissance. Additionally, captured villages have active armed resistance that is conducting reconnaissance in the interests of the Iraqi command and is organizing attacks against coalition troops. During the past 24 hours more than 30 coalition wheeled and armored vehicles have been lost to such attacks. Some 7 coalition servicemen have disappeared, 3 soldiers died and 10 were wounded.

The coalition commander Gen. Tommy Franks ordered his forces to clear coalition rears from Iraqi diversionary units and partisans in the shortest possible time. The British side will be responsible for

fulfilling these orders. A unit from the 22nd SAS regiment supported by the US 1st, 5th and 10th Special Operations Groups will carry out this operation. Each of these groups has up to 12 units numbering 12-15 troops each. All of these units have some Asian or Arabic Americans. The groups also have guides and translators from among local Iraqi collaborators, who went through rapid training at specialized centers in the Czech Republic and the UK.

The sand storms turned out to be the main enemy of the American military equipment. Just the 3rd Motorized Infantry Division had more than 100 disabled vehicles disabled. The repair crews are working around the clock to return all the disabled equipment back into service. This is causing serious concern on the part of the coalition command. The M1A2 Abrams tanks are not known for their reliable engines as it is, but in the sand storm conditions multiple breakdowns became a real problem for the tank crews.

All attempts by the US paratroopers to capture the town of Kirkuk have yielded no result. The Americans counted on the support of the Kurds but the latter refused to take a direct part in the attack and demanded guarantees from the US command that it will prevent a Turkish invasion. The Turkish themselves are avoiding giving any such guarantees.

Additionally, the situation [at Kirkuk] is affected by the lack of heavy weapons on the part of the US paratroopers. The aviation support alone is clearly not sufficient. The northern group of forces commander Marine Brig. Gen. Osman has requested artillery and armored vehicles.

All indications are that so far the US is unable to form a combat-capable strike force in this area.

According to satellite reconnaissance it seems likely that the Iraqis had time to remove the captured Apache Longbow attack helicopter of the 11th Aviation Regiment. The pieces remaining at the landing site following a US bombing strike indicate that the bombs hit a crudely constructed mockup.

Aerial bombardment of Baghdad has so far failed to produce the expected results. All targets designated before the war have been hit 3 to 7 times, but this had almost no effect of the combat readiness of the Iraqi army, their air defenses or the command and control structures.

It seems that during preparation for the war the Iraqis were able to create new, well-protected communication lines and control centers. There is plenty of intelligence information indicating that so far the US electronic reconnaissance was unable to locate and to penetrate the Iraqi command's communications network, which is an indication of the network's high technological sophistication.

A particular point of concern for the US command is the huge overuse of precision-guided munitions and cruise missiles. Already the supply of heavy cruise missiles like the "Tomahawk" has been reduced by a third and, at the current rate of use, in three weeks the US will be left only with the untouchable strategic supply of these missiles. A similar situation exists with other types of precision-guided munitions. "The rate of their use is incompatible with the obtained results. We are literally dropping gold into the mud!" said Gen. Richard Mayers during a meeting at Pentagon yesterday morning. [reverse translation from Russian]

The US experts already call this war a "crisis". "It was enough for the enemy to show a little resistance and some creative thinking as our technological superiority begun to quickly lose all its meaning. Our expenses are not justified by the obtained results. The enemy is using an order of magnitude cheaper weapons to reach the same goals for which we spend billions on technological whims of the defense industry!" said Gen. Stanley McCrystal during the same Pentagon meeting. [reverse translation from

Russian]

Since the early morning today the coalition high command and the Joint Chief of Staff are in an online conference joined by the Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld. This meeting immediately follows an earlier meeting last night at the White House. During the night meeting with President Bush emergency actions were outlined to resolve the standstill in Iraq. The existing course of actions is viewed as "ineffective and leading to a crisis". The Secretary of State Collin Powell warned that, if the war in Iraq continues for more than a month, it might lead to unpredictable consequences in international politics.

The Chairman of the Joint Chief of Staff Gen. Richard Mayers reported on the proposed actions and corrections to the plan of the operation in Iraq. George Bush demanded that the military breaks the standstill in Iraq and within a week achieves significant military progress. A particular attention, according to Bush, should be paid to finding and eliminating the top Iraqi political and military leadership. Bush believes that Saddam Hussein and his closest aides are the cornerstone of the Iraqi defense.

During today's online meeting at the coalition headquarters Gen. Franks was criticized for inefficient command of his troops and for his inability to concentrate available forces on the main tasks.

According to [Russian military] intelligence Pentagon made a decision to significantly reinforce the coalition. During the next two weeks up to 50,000 troops and no less than 500 tanks will arrive to the combat area from the US military bases in Germany and Albania. By the end of April 120,000 more troops and up to 1,200 additional tanks will be sent to support the war against Iraq.

A decision was made to change the way aviation is used in this war. The use of precision-guided munitions will be scaled down and these weapons will be reserved for attacking only known, confirmed targets. There will be an increase in the use of conventional high-yield aviation bombs, volume-detonation bombs and incendiary munitions. The USAF command is ordered to deliver to airbases used against Iraq a two-week supply of aviation bombs of 1-ton caliber and higher as well as volume-detonation and incendiary bombs. This means that Washington is resorting to the "scorched earth" tactics and carpet-bombing campaign.

(source: iraqwar.ru, 03-25-03, translated by Venik)

March 24, 2003, 0800hrs MSK (GMT +3), Moscow - As of morning (MSK, GMT +3) March 24 the situation in Iraq can be characterized as quiet on all fronts. Attacking coalition forces have settled into positional warfare, they are exhausted, lost the attacking momentum and are in urgent need for fuel, ammunition, repairs and reinforcements. The Iraqis are also busy regrouping their forces, reinforcing the combat units and setting up new defense lines.

Exceptionally heavy fighting continued for two days and nights near An-Nasiriya. Both warring sides employed large numbers of tanks and artillery. More than 20,000 troops of the US 3rd Motorized Infantry Division, supported by 200 tanks, 600 other armored vehicles and 150 artillery pieces, were opposed by the Iraqi 3rd Army Corps consisting of up to 40,000 troops, up to 250 tanks, more than 100 artillery, up to 100 mortars and 1000 rocket propelled grenade launchers (RPG) and anti-tank guided missiles (ATGM). The two-day battle ended without any significant results.

The Americans have failed in trying to use their momentum in capturing An-Nasiriya and attempted to encircle the town from the west, where they encountered strong layered Iraqi defenses and forced to withdraw. The Iraqi forces used this opportunity to attack the US flanks with two brigades, breaking the

US combat orders and causing panic among the US troops. The US command was forced to halt the advance of its forced toward An Najaf and once again redirect several tank battalions to support the attacked units. Nearly 6 hours was needed for the US aviation to stop the Iraqi attack and restore combat order of the US forces.

During the past day the coalition aviation flew more than 2,000 close support missions in this area [An-Nasiriya]. "We can only thank God for having air dominance!" said the commander of the US 15th Marines Exp. Corps Col. Thomas Waldhauser in a private conversation with one of the CNN reporters. Later the CNN journalist cited the Colonel in a phone conversation with his editor. The conversation was intercepted.

According to the intercepted radio traffic, the US forces have sustained up to 40 killed, up to 10 captured and up to 200 wounded during the fighting near An-Nasiriya. There is confirmed information about one lost attack helicopter and an unconfirmed report about a lost ground attack plane. The US forces have also lost up to 40 armored vehicles, including no less than 10 tanks. Several intercepted reports by the US field commanders stated that their troops are unable to advance due to their soldiers being demoralized by the enemy's fierce resistance and high losses.

Four days of continuous advance exhausted the coalition forces, which now have settled into defensive positions nearly on every front to rest and regroup. As of this morning (MSK, GMT +3) the coalition forces are in control of the western part of An-Nasiriya but have no foothold on the left bank of Euphrates. The left bank of the river is controlled by the Iraqi forces, which are conducting engineering works to reinforce their defenses. A part of the Iraqi forces have been deployed to strengthen the defense of An-Najaf, where they expect the next coalition attack.

Around 2300hrs (MSK, GMT +3) March 23 a British platoon was ambushed by Iraqi Special Forces unit near Basra. Following a powerful initial artillery barrage the Iraqis engaged the British in close combat and destroyed several armored vehicles. After the Iraqis withdrew the British commander reported up to 8 killed, two missing and more than 30 wounded British soldiers. Thus over the 30% of the unit's troops have been disabled in the attack. Reinforcements and medevac helicopters have been dispatched by the coalition to the scene of the attack.

During the past day there has been a sharp increase in combat activity in the coalition's rearguard.

Reports have been intercepted showing at least 5 attacks on the coalition military convoys, 8 vehicles destroyed by landmines and 2 ambushes. Iraqi special operation units are mining the roads, setting up ambushes and conduct search and reconnaissance operations. The coalition forces have been ordered to halt the movement of convoys during dark hours and to provide each convoy with combat escort units and air cover.

The situation around the borderline town of Umm Qasr (population 1,500) still remains unclear. Radio intercepts and satellite images show that the town was under constant bombardment throughout out the night. The morning photos indicate its complete destruction. This shows that the coalition command, fed up with the Iraqi's stubborn resistance, ordered the complete destruction of the town using aviation and artillery. However, according to reports by the British troops ordered to "clean up" Umm Qasr the town still contains many pockets of resistance. The overall coalition losses at Umm Qasr during the past four days amounted to up to 40 killed and up to 200 wounded. Currently it is impossible to estimate the Iraqi losses at Umm Qasr. As of yesterday's morning the Umm Qasr garrison consisted of 1600 troops.

The units of the British marine infantry have failed to establish control over the strategically important

Fao peninsula. After yesterday's counterattack by the Iraqis the British forces have been thrown back some 3 to 5 kilometers and were forced into defensive positions. Intercepted radio communications indicate that today the British command will attempt to regain the lost ground after spending the night reinforcing their units on Fao with two additional marine infantry battalions. The overall British losses on the Fao peninsula during the past four days of fighting include up to 15 killed and up to 100 wounded. The Iraqis lost here up to 100 killed and around 100 captured.

A heated exchange of fire continues near Basra. The coalition units hesitate to enter the city and limit their actions to constant artillery and aviation bombardment of Basra. So far the coalition forces have failed to completely surround the city and to cut off the defending Iraqi garrison from the main Iraqi forces.

The US troops continue landing in northern Iraqi territories controlled by the Kurds. It is expected that as early as tomorrow morning these forces supported by the Kurdish units will make an attempt to capture the town of Kirkuk.

Aerial strikes against Iraq continued throughout the night. A total of up to 1,500 combat flights were carried out by the coalition aviation. Additionally, B-52 bombers launched more than 100 cruise missiles from the so-called "Turkish corridor". Some 150 more cruise missiles have been launched by the US and British naval forces.

Intercepted radio traffic indicates another lost coalition plane this morning. There was a confirmed loss of a "Predator" unmanned aerial reconnaissance aircraft.

Any further advances by the coalition within the next 8-12 hours are unlikely. The coalition command in Qatar has been in meeting since the early morning and is expected to come up with significant changes to the overall operational plan. According to most experts the coalition command made a most serious strategic error by starting the ground phase of the operation nearly at the very start of the war. The Americans have violated their own doctrine where the ground phases of a military operation coincide in time with the destruction of the enemy from the air.

The US made serious errors in their estimates of the Iraq's army strength and combat readiness. The US military intelligence and the CIA failed to uncover the true potential of the Iraqi forces and, in essence, misinformed the top military and civilian leadership of the coalition member countries.

(source: iraqwar.ru, 03-24-03, translated by Venik)

March 23, 2003, 1200hrs MSK (GMT +3), Moscow - The situation in southern Iraq can be characterized as unstable and controversial. Heavy fighting is taking place in the Umm-Qasr-An-Nasiriya-Basra triangle. Satellite and signals intelligence show that both sides actively employ armored vehicles in highly mobile attacks and counterattacks. Additionally, fighting is continuing near the town of An-Najaf.

As of this morning the Iraqi defenses along the Basra - An-Nasiriya - An-Najaf line are holding.

Following the yesterday's Iraqi counter strike near An-Nasiriya the US command was forced to halt the advance of its troops toward An-Najaf and to redirect a portion of available tank forces to cover the flanks of the 3rd Motorized Infantry Division attacked by the Iraqis. By late evening yesterday constant air strikes and increasing strength of American tank attacks forced the Iraqis to withdraw their troops back to eastern parts of Nasiriya, across the Euphrates river, where they assumed defensive positions along the river bank.

During the last day of fighting the Iraqis lost up to 20 tanks, up to 2 artillery batteries, and around 100 troops.

Yesterday's US losses are estimated at 10 destroyed or disabled tanks, several armored personnel carriers and up to 15 troops killed in action.

By 0700hrs MSK today the fighting at Nasiriya stopped. Currently both sides are rushing to regroup their forces and to get them ready for more fighting in this area.

Near Basra the advance of the coalition forces came to a complete halt at the near approaches to the western and southwestern outskirts of the city. The US and British forces are rushing to settle into defensive positions after failing to surround Basra. Eastern and northern approaches to Basra remain open and under control of the Iraqi forces.

More controversial reports are coming in from the town of Umm-Qasr. As early as three days ago the US command has declared that the coalition forces have captured this small port town and the adjacent oil terminal. However, throughout these three days heavy fighting continued in the town and in the suburbs. The US forces are still unable to break the defense put up by the Iraqi 45th brigade defending the town.

Moreover, several counterattacks by the Iraqi forces at Umm Qasr have pushed the US forces out of some part of the town. During last night the Iraqi 45th brigade was reinforced by a special tank battalion of the 51st Infantry Division. The reinforcement included up to 600 troops and 10 tanks. However, the coalition forces were also strengthened overnight with two tank battalions and self-propelled artillery. As of 1000hrs MSK this morning heavy fighting continues at Umm Qasr.

According to intercepted radio communications, the British marine infantry units in defensive positions on the Fao peninsula have requested emergency air and artillery support after being attacked by superior Iraqi forces. So far it is not clear whether this was an actual counterattack by the Iraqis or just a nuisance attack. The British commanders report that their positions are being attacked by up to a regiment of infantry supported by tanks.

Other intercepted radio traffic suggests that, as the British and US forces bend the Basra - An-Najaf line of defense, the Iraqi command will pull back its main forces to the Al-Ammara - Ad-Divaniya line. Already most of the Iraqi forces in this region have moved to the Al-Ammara - Ad-Divaniya positions and within the next 48 hours defense of Basra and Fao peninsula will be reduced to just the local units and garrisons. The goal of the remaining forces will be to tie up superior coalition forces in these areas.

According to radio intercepts during today's night the coalition begun airdropping troops in northern Iraq from airfields in Turkey and Jordan. These forces are being used to form mobile strike groups in northern Kurdistan and near the western-Iraqi town of Er-Rutbah. Already up to 5,000 coalition troops have been delivered to northern Kurdistan and up to 1000 paratroopers have landed near Er-Rutbah.

Russian military intelligence has uncovered a range of facts pointing to a separate arrangement between the top leadership of Jordan and the US military command. Officially Jordan has declared its neutrality in the war against Iraq and refused to provide its airspace to the coalition aviation. However, at the same time Jordan has allowed the anti-Iraq coalition to place surveillance radars and radio reconnaissance stations on its territory. Jordan has also allowed the coalition to use its military airbases.

Available information indicates that coalition special ops units, including up to 400 troops and their

command headquarters, have been deployed to the Jordanian Zarka military base and to the home base of the Jordan's 71st special ops brigade.

Reports that have surfaced in the media in the past 12 hours about the capture of a US special ops unit near Baghdad are probably not true. It is likely that these reports refer to the capture of coalition paratroopers yesterday morning near the town of Akashat.

During the past 12 hours there has been a drop in intensity of air strikes against Baghdad. Analysts attribute this to the fact that most of available coalition air assets are now deployed in support of ground forces. Intercepted coalition radio traffic shows that most of the bombing attacks against Baghdad are carried out by the US strategic aviation and by sea-launched long-range cruise missiles.

So far the US was unable to destroy the air defense networks in central Iraq. As before, the Iraqis continue to covertly use their radars and SAM launchers on a limited bases while employing a huge number of decoys designed to imitate radars.

The US was also unable to disrupt the central control over the Iraqi army. The US command is forced to admit that, despite the best efforts of the coalition aviation, the Iraqi forces maintain high combat readiness and reliable command and control structure.

[Russian] radio intercept units have reported the loss of two coalition planes. One of the planes was a "Tornado" strike aircraft and the other one was believed to be an F-16 fighter-bomber. The F-16 was shot down over Baghdad and is believed to have crash-landed in a desert in southern Iraq. A coalition search-and-rescue unit was immediately dispatched to this area.

A CIA referent in the combat area Col. Davis (likely to be a pseudonym) and the US DoD Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) regional director were demoted due to their inadequate performance in estimating the strength of Iraq's forces and their combat readiness.

Eyewitnesses report that Gen. Tommy Franks looks extremely exhausted and irritated. Gen. Franks has cancelled the meeting with journalists planned for this morning.

Work is paralyzed at the coalition press-center in Kuwait. Journalists are not able to get any information except for the hourly press communique from the command. A variety of reasons are cited by the military to reduce the number of trips into the combat zone for the journalists. All reports coming from the journalists attached to the coalition units are now being strictly censored by the military. All live broadcasts, as those seen during the first day of the war, are now strictly prohibited by a special order from the coalition command. The required time delay between the time news video footage was shot and the time it can be broadcast has been increased to a minimum of 4 hours.

More accurate information became available regarding the losses sustained by both sides during the first three days of the war. The coalition has officially acknowledged the deaths of some 25 servicemen. However, intercepted radio communications show that the actual number of coalition casualties is at least 55-70 troops killed and no less than 200 wounded. The emergency dispatch of the "Comfort" medical ship closer to the combat zone is a direct indication of serious casualties. The "Comfort" is expected to arrive to the southern tip of the Fao peninsula later tonight.

It is more difficult to evaluate the losses of the Iraqi especially due to the air strikes. On the south front Iraqi losses are estimated at 400-600 killed, 1,500 wounded and up to 300 captured.

(source: iraqwar.ru, 03-23-03, translated by Venik)

March 22, 2003, 1300hrs MSK (GMT +3), Moscow - Additional information about the situation in the primary combat areas in southern Iraq became available by 1300hrs (Moscow time, GMT +3). The US command reports about the supposed surrender of the entire Iraqi 51st Infantry Division turned out to be a complete fabrication. According to our sources the 51st Division continues to fight on the approaches to Basra and we can only talk about individual cases of Iraqi soldiers being captured in combat.

Elements of the US 3rd Infantry Division and the 1st Marine Infantry Division ended up in an exceptionally difficult situation. While attempting to encircle Basra from the north and to block An-Nasiriya elements the 3rd and 1st infantry divisions found themselves wedged between the defending Iraqi forces. The Iraqi command used this situation and delivered a decisive counterattack with up to 80 tanks in the open flank of the US forces, slicing through their combat orders. As the result of this counterattack these US units are now at risk of being separated from the main coalition forces and being surrounded.

By 1100hrs MSK Iraqi units advanced into the US attack front by 10-15 kilometers and Gen. Tommy Franks, the commander of the coalition forces, ordered his troops to switch entirely to defensive operations. At the same time he issued orders to the forward-deployed coalition tank units to halt their reconnaissance operations in the directions of Es-Samaba and An-Najaf and to move immediately to support the defending US forces. However, the situation is complicated by the fact that a part of the coalition tanks are currently disabled due to the lack of fuel and are awaiting the arrival of fuel convoys. Thus the tanks are able to gradually rejoin combat in small numbers as the fuel becomes available.

Currently the US and the Iraqi tank forces are engaged in mobile head-on combat approximately 70-90 kilometers to the south of An-Nasiriya. Combat orders have been received by the carrier borne aviation in the Persian Gulf, which until now did not take part in this battle. At the same time orders were issued to all available coalition strike aircraft in Qatar to scramble in support of the defending coalition forces.

Intercepted radio communications indicate that during the morning period of March 22 the US forces lost 10-15 tanks destroyed or disabled and up to 30 other armored vehicles. Medevac helicopters flew more than 30 search-and-rescue missions, which suggests heavy coalition losses.

Our sources report that during the early morning hours in southwestern Iraq in the vicinity of Akashat the Iraqi forces have engaged and surrounded a tactical paratroop unit of the 101st Airborne Division. Some of the surrounded paratroopers were able to break out into the desert, where they request air support and finally lost their Iraqi pursuers. However, up to 30 US troops were killed or captured in this engagement. Additionally, [Russian] radio intercept units report that one the US attack helicopters providing close air support was shot down.

The top US military command is planning to enhance the coalition command. During the Joint Chief of Staff meeting its Chairman Gen. Richard Mayers expressed strong criticism of the actions by the coalition commander Gen. Franks and proposed to strengthen his headquarters with several other senior military commanders. Gen. Franks is required to do everything he can to change the current situation on the front. Analysts believe that, if during the next 3-5 days Gen. Franks fails to achieve any significant results, than it is entirely possible that he will be replaced as the commander of the coalition forces.

Update: The coalition forces were able to capture a bridge in the suburbs of Nasiriya. Their control of the Basra airport is tentative at best as large numbers of Iraqi forces continue to resist with heavy artillery and machine gun fire. Around Basra the coalition forces have advanced at most by 1.5 kilometers. Gen.

Franks has announced a change in plans: the coalition forces are no longer set on capturing Basra so not to "create military confrontations in that city." The coalition forces still do not control Umm Qasr and appear to be losing territory.

(source: iraqwar.ru, 03-22-03, translated by Venik)

March 22, 2003, 0800hrs MSK (GMT +3), Moscow - Information received during the last night is very contradictory. During all day and night fighting continued around Basra, Al-Nasiriya, and on the Faw (Fao) peninsula. Despite of numerous reports by the American and British command about the capture of Umm Qasr the coalition forces have so far failed to establish full control over this small borderline town. Exchange of fire in the city is continuing. Elements of the [Iraqi] 45-th Infantry Brigade, which is defending the town, are surrounded but continue to resist and are trying to break out toward Basra.

According to intelligence reports, at Umm Qasr American and British forces have sustained 10 killed and around 40 wounded soldiers and officers. Additionally, the Iraqis have destroyed up to 8 British and US armored personnel carriers.

"Iraqi resistance turned out to be far more determined than we've expected," the British and US commanders are reporting. - "They are surrounded but continue fighting even after losing much of their heavy equipment. Often we could only advance after completely destroying them with artillery and aviation."

So far there was no success in trying to clarify the reports about the capture or surrender of the 51st Infantry Division. According to intercepted radio communications, this division was fighting as a part of the 3rd Army Corp (Al-Nasiriya). It's brigades took up defensive positions along the northwestern approaches to Basra and participated in combat since the first day of fighting, which makes their voluntary surrender unlikely. Analysts believe that the anglo-american coalition reports refer to a surrender by a capture of one of the destroyed units or to a successful operation by their special forces.

Analysis of the video footage of the captured Iraqis, distributed by the coalition press-service, makes it difficult to accept the Iraqi army's "moral breakdown" story advertised by the Americans. Most of the captives retain their dignity and show no fear or ingratiation characteristic of demoralized enemy. In addition to that, Americans did not come up with a single video recording of destroyed or abandoned combat vehicles or any other equipment, nor did they provide any interviews with the captured Iraqis.

The US forces have halted their advance into Iraq and are now actively engaged in reconnaissance along the directions of Al-Nasiriya, An-Najaf and Al-Ammara. However, the main efforts of the coalition are being concentrated around the approaches to Basra. It is expected that by tomorrow they will build up a strike force to storm the city. Most major events of the upcoming several days will be unfolding in this region. Radio intercepts show that up to 25,000 British and American troops are already in the Basra region. The city is under a constant artillery and aviation bombardment.

During the past night a fuel supply convoy of the US 3rd Infantry Division was attacked by Iraqi special forces. Up to 7 fuel trucks have been lost in the attack. Three US soldiers were killed and nine wounded. Another three US soldiers are considered MIA and are believed to have been captured by the Iraqis.

As was expected, after realizing the failure of the coup against Hussein the US have resorted to intensive bombing of Baghdad beginning on the evening of March 21st. Just during that night Baghdad was attacked with 500 cruise missiles and over 1,000 aviation bombs. The city is engulfed by numerous fires.

Additionally, more than 20 other Iraqi cities were also bombed. More than 1,000 cruise missiles were launched against various targets and over 3,000 bombs were dropped. At the moment it is difficult to estimate the effectiveness of these strikes. However, judging by the high activity levels of Iraqi radio transmitters, the US was unable to disrupt the control of the Iraqi army.

Russian radio intercept units are certain that at least one coalition combat plane was shot down in these air raids.

Our sources believe that the high-intensity air strikes will continue for another 24 hours and after that the coalition will be forced to scale down the attacks to conduct additional reconnaissance and to regroup its forces.

A radio intercept made last night at approximately 4:40 am indicated that two British helicopters were shot down by a "Strela" SAM system after flying into a SAM trap. It is believed that the two SAR helicopters were to retrieve the pilot of the combat plane downed during the earlier air strike. The number of dead and wounded is still being established. So far the coalition command did not report these losses.
(1)

The coalition commander Gen. Tommy Franks demanded from the Air Force a maximum possible increase in the close air support of the ground forces. During a "radio-bridge" with the commanders of all units Gen. Franks expressed his concern with the mounting casualties and the stubborn Iraqi resistance. "We've just spent three days trying to capture one small town, so we can only guess what awaits us in Baghdad!" - angrily said the commander and demanded better aviation support to soften up the defending Iraqi forces ahead of the advancing coalition units.

For the past day the coalition losses are up to 30 killed and around 40 wounded. Ten coalition armored vehicles were destroyed by land mines. At least two armored vehicles were destroyed by anti-tank weapons.

Iraqi losses are estimated in the range of 250-300 killed and up to 500 wounded. So far it is not possible to determine the damage from the night bombing raids. However, more than 500 people have been taken to hospitals in Baghdad - all of them were civilians.

Update:

While this article was translated the US Navy has confirmed that two British Sea Knight helicopters of the Royal Navy have crashed killing all onboard - 6 Britons and 1 American - a US Navy officer. The helicopters crashed at around 4:30 am. The official explanation for the loss was that the two helicopters crashed into each other while taking-off from a ship. It is interesting to note that during more than 25 years in British service there wasn't a single collision between the Sea Knights. The Royal Navy operates more than 300 Sea Knights and all helicopter pilots adhere to strict sets of rules during take-offs and landings from ships; rules that are designed to help pilots to avoid this type of collisions.

(source: iraqwar.ru, 03-22-03, translated by Venik)

March 21, 2003, 0930hrs MSK (GMT +3), Moscow - In the course of yesterday's US military command meeting on Iraq the primary topic of discussion was the unexpected tactics adopted by the Iraqi forces. The coalition aircraft over Iraq encountered a huge number of various kinds of target mockups and other decoys on the ground. Thus, for example, after the post-strike aerial reconnaissance mission of an Iraqi airbase near Basra it was determined that all of the 20 Iraqi aircraft reported earlier by the coalition pilots

as being destroyed in the bombing turned out to be aircraft mockups. Additionally, nearly all Iraqi radars discovered earlier have ceased transmission and relocated to new positions. As the result, every third coalition aircraft designated for the role of suppressing Iraqi air defenses returned to base with its full combat load unused. The pilots report that there is no way to know if the weapons released against the Iraqi air defenses hit the real targets or just more decoys. "We engaged everything that looked like a radar. But there is no way in hell we can know what it really was!" reported one of the coalition pilots back to ground control after releasing missiles against a suspected Iraqi radar site.

A particular point of concern for the coalition air force commander is the fact that after the first 24 hours of the bombing campaign by the coalition aircraft Iraq is yet to launch a single air-to-surface missile. Coalition aerial, electronic and satellite reconnaissance forces are being urged to determine the locations and composition of the Iraqi air defenses in the next 16 hours.

The sources insist that the elements of the 3rd infantry division were purposefully provoked into fighting by the Iraqi mobile units, which from the first hours of the ground campaign used the "pinprick" tactics by launching more than 20 artillery attacks against the positions of the coalition forces. To prevent further such attacks the coalition command ordered its troops to pursue all attacking Iraqi units.

The GRU GSh RF radio intercept units reported that during one of such pursuits the Americans lost one of their helicopters. Following the loss of this helicopter Russian reconnaissance detected the take-off of a US search-and-rescue helicopter. This was at least a third helicopter lost by the coalition during the first 24 hours of fighting. As the result of the hit-and-run tactics employed by the Iraqis almost the entire 3rd infantry division was pulled inside Iraq and spent the day by conducting reconnaissance missions and exchanging fire with the Iraqis 20-60 kilometers from the Kuwaiti border. To protect the flanks of the division the US command was forced to begin the operation to encircle Basra and by 1900hrs the coalition ground forces (possibly the US Army III Corps which includes the 4th Infantry Div. Mech. and the 1st Cavalry Div., aided by the 1st Marine Div. begun advancing with one part of their forces encircling Basra from the west, while the part moved in the direction of Baghdad. This maneuver was predicted by the Russian intelligence even before the war started.

By sunrise the 1st armored division was forced to stop their advance after encountering a minefield. According to the intercepted radio communications, mines destroyed some two US armored vehicles.

Additionally, at 0730hrs forward Marine units walked into an ambush and called in air support and medevac helicopters. Based on the intercepted radio communications Russian military intelligence believes that the Marines have encountered one of the Iraqi mobile units. Currently this area is being bombarded by the US aviation.

The US command is disappointed with its psychological campaign designed to damage the morale of the Iraqi troops. So far there were no mass surrendering of Iraqi troops. During the first day of the war only a few dozen Iraqi soldiers have surrendered. These soldiers came mainly from the border checkpoints and border patrol units. Reports by the majority of the US field commanders show that they do not see any confusion or any loss of control on the part of the Iraqi forces.

So far the weak bombing attacks against Baghdad and other large Iraqi cities, analysts believe, are due to the continuing hopes by the US command that the planned coup against Saddam Hussein would finally materialize. The bombing campaign is being restricted to avoid heavy civilian casualties and provide the coup organizers with more favorable conditions in the cities. However, a step-up in the intensity of the bombing campaign against the Iraqi cities should be expected by the end of the day today, as the hope for a coup against the Iraqi president fades.

At least two of the eight supposedly Iraqi missiles that hit Kuwait turned out to be US sea-launched cruise missiles that strayed off course. This can be clearly seen even from the craters left in the ground by the explosions of these missiles. After detonation the iScudⁱ warhead leaves a crater as much as 8 meters deep. What was observed in Kuwait, however, is the typical crater left by the detonation of a cruise missile's warhead. The story with the rest of the Iraqi missile launches is also unclear. Experts are leaning toward a possibility that the explosions in the Kuwaiti border regions were caused not by missiles but by 120-mm mortar shells fired by the Iraqi mobile units.

The British troops failed to quickly capture the Fao peninsula. Once they landed on the peninsula they were hit with a heavy artillery barrage and held down near the shoreline. Only after the requested aviation support has arrived the British were able to advance 3-5 kilometers inland. During this operation, according to the intercepted radio communications, the British have suffered some casualties and called for medevac helicopters. Russian intelligence reports that the peninsula is being defended by up to two Iraqi regiments and by the armed civilians from the local population supported by several artillery battalions. Currently the British and the US forces are attempting to prevent the defending Iraqi forces at Fao peninsula from retreating toward Basra.

The coalition casualties during the first day of war numbered 23, as was reported to the US Secretary of Defense by the coalition commander Gen. Franks. However, during the next 12 hours the casualties are likely to grow to 40 killed and over a hundred wounded. At the moment the exact coalition casualty figures are difficult to determine due to the continuing evacuation of wounded from the Fao peninsula, the Basra region, and from the battlefield 70 km from the Kuwaiti border.

The first day of ground combat confirms the conclusion that the Iraqi command is organizing defenses in the central regions of the country. All main Iraqi forces have been pulled toward central Iraq leaving huge mine fields and many ambushes on the path of the advancing US forces.

The defense of Basra is carried out by the part of the Iraqi 4th Army Corp. and volunteer brigades formed by the residents of Basra. It is believed that the Iraqi command is not counting on preventing the US forces from taking Basra but is simply trying to inflict as many casualties on the coalition forces as possible.

The main battles of this war may begin as early as by the end of tomorrow, when the US forces reach central Iraq.

(source: iraqwar.ru, 03-21-03, translated by Venik)

March 20, 2003, 1015hrs MSK (GMT +3), Moscow - The sand storm raging over Iraq is seriously interfering with the US plans for the first air strike. So far the US Air Force was unable to launch any large-scale bombing raids against the positions of the Iraqi forces along the line of contact in southern Iraq. A sand cloud is covering the Iraqi positions and air strikes were carried out by the US only using cruise missile and only against well-known stationary targets.

Main air strikes are currently being carried out against the Iraqi positions in the vicinity of Basra. According to Russian radio intercepts of US military communications some 40 cruise missile launches and 200 combat flights were carried out by the US during the first 6 hours of the war against Iraq.

The US command is troubled by the news of the withdrawal of the Iraqi Republican Guard division from Basra region. Available information suggests that the defense of Basra will be carried out only by the

regional defense units and by the Basra garrison, which numbers some 30,000 soldiers and officers, about 200 T-55 and T-62 tanks and up to 300 pieces of artillery. This points to a possibility that the Iraqi command is not concentrating on strong defense of the border regions but, instead, withdrawing its most combat-capable units deeper inside the country.

Military command of the anti-Iraq coalition demanded from its air forces an immediate increase in the intensity of air strikes. At the same time the Coalition is in a rush to process all the recon information obtained during the initial air strikes. Aerial and satellite reconnaissance forces of the Coalition are concentrating on detecting Iraqi air defenses as well as command and control facilities used by the Iraqis to deflect the first wave of air strikes.

Based on radio intercepts, several US combat units deployed in the demilitarized zone were bombarded by Iraqi artillery around 0730hrs Moscow time. American commanders requested emergency artillery and air support. Up to five USAF planes were forced to return back to their bases after suffering onboard equipment failures. At 0950hrs Moscow time one of the helicopters of the US 101st airborne division crashed due to low visibility conditions. So far there is no information about casualties in this crash.

In the next 24 hours Americans are anticipating news of sharp political changes in Iraq. Analysts believe that an overthrow plot against Saddam Hussein prepared by the CIA during the past few months is the reason behind such expectations. However, Russian agents are reporting that this plot was either uncovered in time or was under control of the Iraqi security agencies from the very beginning. This information is confirmed by a certain air of unease within the CIA command center in Qatar, as the expected overthrow of Hussein was supposed to take place several days ago.

According to the information received from Baghdad, the US air strikes directed against the Iraqi leadership did not achieve their goals. Saddam Hussein and all key members of his cabinet are alive and distributed across several different locations. It is likely that Iraq's political and military leadership will be organized in accordance with the so-called network principle, originally implemented in Iraq in 1991 and later adopted by Yugoslavia in 1999. Iraqi political and military leadership will be constantly moving across a network of bunkers and other secure locations, conducting all communications using only secure lines and refraining from concentrating in one place more than two key leaders.

Information obtained by the radio intercept units of the Main Intelligence Directorate of the Russian Armed Forces (GRU VS RF) shows that the majority of the Iraqi air defenses did not take part in the deflection of the initial US air strike. Not a single surface-to-air missile was launched during this first wave of strikes. Moreover, immediately following the initial air raid alert all Iraqi radars with known positions ceased operation and over 300 decoy radar transmitters were engaged. This indicates that the Iraqi command is relying on preserving as many of its air defense assets as possible and that it is preparing for long-term conflict. At the same time at least four cruise missiles were shot down by anti-aircraft artillery fire.

In an emergency phone conversation with the President of the United States George Bush the British Prime Minister Tony Blair expressed his strong disappointment with the fact that the British military and political leadership was informed about the planned start of the combat operations just 20 minutes before the first air strike. Blair called this decision by Bush 'unfriendly' and characterized the US actions as a breach of trust between the two allies. All of this gives a double meaning to the role of Britain in the military partnership with the US, especially against the background of a major internal split in the ruling political coalition in the UK.

Update:

The US military confirms the loss of an MH-53J Pave Low special operations helicopter in southern Iraq. IraqWar.Ru was the first to report the loss yesterday. The US military officials have refused to specify the exact location of the crash or the exact number of personnel aboard the helicopter in addition to the standard crew of six. The helicopter is capable of transporting of up to 38 troops. The MH-53J that crash landed in southern Iraq was later destroyed by the US forces to avoid its capture by the Iraqi forces.

(source: iraqwar.ru, 03-20-03, translated by Venik)

March 19, 2003, 0403hrs MSK (GMT +3), Moscow - Based on the intercepted US military communications the Russian military intelligence believes that the US command is attempting to create a false impression of a pending massive ground attack on Basra.

Russian Main Intelligence Directorate (GRU) believes that all the talk about the attack on Basra is nothing more than disinformation designed to complement a diversionary strike to pin down large Iraqi forces around this city.

The main thrust of the US ground attack, Russian military thinks, will bypass Basra from the west splitting the Iraqi defenses through An Nasiriya (population under 500,000) and Al' Amarah (population under 500,000) at the end reaching the Hor-Es-Savakiya lake and forming an external encirclement facing Basra.

From An Nasiriya the invaders will advance along the Euphrates river reaching the Habbaniyah lake and capturing the city of Al Habbaniyah (population under 20,000), thus creating a solid front facing Baghdad from the south and partially reaching around Baghdad from southwest.

The encircled Basra forces will be contained using mass air strikes and ground troops to cut off the Iraqis in Basra from their main forces. The US command believes that the air bombardment will weaken and disorganize the Basra defenders and allow the US ground troops to further split these Iraqi forces into smaller pockets of resistance.

During these operations the US command plans to rely to a large extent on tactical airborne units dropped immediately behind the forward lines of Iraqi defenses to disorganize and to demoralize them, as well as to capture pockets of territory and hold them until the arrival of the main forces. A particularly important role in these operations will be played by combat aviation as the primary means of supporting ground troops and containing the enemy.

Already around 30 diversionary and reconnaissance units have been airdropped in Iraq by the US and Britain. Their primary task of these forces is provide targeting information for the upcoming initial waves of air strikes. Available information suggests that the first air strike may take place as early as Thursday morning 1.5-2 hours before the end of Washington's ultimatum. However, the sand storm currently raging over Iraq may force the US command to delay the planned attack by one or two days.

(source: iraqwar.ru, 03-19-03, translated by Venik)

March 18, 2003, 0126hrs MSK (GMT +3), Moscow - According to the information received from one of the Russian Defense Ministry's radio intercept units, certain aspects of the planned military operation against Iraq were uncovered by the Russian military intel. During one of the radio communications between Kurd troops information was intercepted indicating that during the next 48 hours there may be a large-scale airdrop of US troops in Kurd-controlled northern Iraq.

Information obtained from additional sources shows that Turkey's refusal to permit a large number of US ground troops on its territory threw into turmoil the US plans for invading Iraq from the north. However, after a further analysis of the situation, the US command concluded that Turkey's refusal creates a possibility for an element of surprise in the US attack from the north.

Radio intercepts of Kurdish and some Turkish sources allow for a reasonable conclusion that with the beginning of the military operation the US will rely on Turkey's permission to use its airspace to transport between 18,000-22,000 troops in two days to Northern Kurdistan. This fast-response group of forces will form the core of the northern attack force.

It is believed that by the end of the fifth day of the war this attack group will be able to initiate full-scale combat operations against the Iraqi forces. In their advance from the north the US forces are expected to make full use of the Kurdish troops and the sympathetic local population. In connection with these plans some 300 British Commandos from the 22-nd SAS regiment have been already deployed to the Kurdish-controlled territories. These troops are conducting reconnaissance of the Iraqi forces deployed in the region, organizing cooperation between the Kurdish forces and the US and British commanders in the region, and preparing landing sites for the upcoming drops of airborne troops.

Communication specialists and electronic equipment already have been delivered to Northern Kurdistan along with "Patriot" surface-to-air missile systems and are ready to support the air drop of troops.

(source: iraqwar.ru, 03-18-03, translated by Venik)

March 17, 2003, 1848hrs MSK (GMT +3), Moscow - During the March 14, 2002, emergency meeting the top [Russian] military commanders discussed the situation around Iraq. Reports were presented by the chief of Main Intelligence Directorate of the General Staff (GRU GSh) Col. Gen. Valentine Korabelnikov and the chief of Main Tactical Directorate of the General Staff (GOU GSh) Col. Gen. Alexander Rukshin. The GRU report contained information of the strength and composition of the US forces and its allies as well as strength and composition of the Iraqi forces.

According to Col. Gen. Korabelnikov beginning at 1200 on Friday March 14 US forces operate in the high combat readiness state and are capable of initiating combat operations 3-4 hours after they receive orders to such effect. All necessary combat orders have been delivered to all levels of command structure down to the battalion level commanders.

The GRU chief reported that due to the current international situation it is unlikely that the US will seek a vote in the UN Security Council on the new Iraq resolution. Doing so will inevitably lead to a failure to gain necessary support, which is most undesirable for the US. Therefore, the Bush administration will prefer to act using the previous UN resolution as an excuse for starting the war.

It seems likely that the combat operations will begin on 19-22 of March at around 2-4 am local time.

In connection with these developments the GRU and General Staff departments responsible for the Persian Gulf region will go to a 24-hour mode of operation. All [Russian] electronic reconnaissance brigades and divisions, intelligence agencies based in regions neighboring the conflict zone, sea- and space-based technical reconnaissance assets will be put on full combat alert.

The GOU GSh report provided an analysis of the Iraqi army's defensive capabilities and possible

scenarios of the war.

The first phase of the operation will consist of a strategic air operation which, according to the US command, will last between 8 and 10 days. The goal of this operation will be complete suppression of Iraqi air defenses, disruption of command and control structures, destruction of main command and communication centers, disruption of the main Iraqi forces, destruction of the military infrastructure and defense industry facilities.

The first wave of the attack will consist of between 200-250 Tomahawk cruise missiles followed in 30-50 minutes by an aircraft strike. The initial air attack will last up to six hours. It will consist of around 2000 combat flights and the launch of around 400 cruise missiles. During the next five days it is planned to deliver at least two major air strikes per day with a gradual shift toward sustain air operations against newly discovered targets.

After the first phase of the operation is complete the US command plans to spend two more days for additional reconnaissance and destruction of any new or remaining targets. After this the available air assets will be switched entirely to support the ground forces. The total time for the operation against Iraq is estimated by the US military planners to run between 15 and 21 days.

According to Col. Gen. Rukshin it is unlikely that the first phase of the US attack will be able to achieve its goals and destroy most of the main Iraqi forces. This stage of the operation is likely to take between three weeks and one-and-a-half months. During that time the US command will put an emphasis on the destruction of Iraq's top political and military leadership, including Saddam Hussein. For this purpose the US plans to use high-power aviation bombs capable of penetrating reinforced underground facilities at great depth. Additionally, for the first time the US plans to use tactical airborne troops and special forces against Iraq's military and political command sites.

GOU GSh finds it possible that the military campaign against Iraq will be considerably more difficult than expected by the US military planners. The US troops may encounter determined resistance from the Iraqi forces, which may lead to the slow down and even complete halt of the attack and will force the US to resume the mass bombing campaign. This will inevitably prolong the war into the 2-3-month timeframe and possibly longer.

(source: iraqwar.ru, 03-17-03, translated by Venik)