

COUNTDOWN

A Lunatic Timetable For War ARROW Anti-War Briefing 32 (24 February 2003) WAR PLAN IRAQ Update Number 11

aircraft carriers are on the way. These deployments may take another three weeks. The main problem, however, is the ground forces: with tens of thousands of vehicles, trailers and oversize pieces of equipment, they are complicated to deploy, time-consuming to receive and difficult to sustain... the logistics are tough... **the deployment appears well behind schedule for an early Mar. attack**, especially if going through Turkey is an essential part of the plan. The Turks have not yet approved the flow of major forces, and that will entail an arduous 435 miles (700km) supply line across Anatolia.

'The full ground forces deployment, including the British elements and a couple of US divisions, is probably at least a month from completion. The more complete the deployment the lower the risks when the attack begins.

'Thirdly, the optimal environmental window for the attack is approaching. Ground troops want to finish the fighting before the heat of approaching summer.

'If Saddam were to prepare to strike pre-emptively against American forces concentrated in Kuwait, we would be likely to launch early. Nor could allied forces stand by if the Shia in Iraq rise up against Saddam's army. Without our prompt intervention, they would suffer losses so devastating that it might compromise our campaign.

'Despite these unpredictable factors, the diplomatic and military logic is beginning to argue for mid to late March... While I lean towards **March 24** as the more appropriate start date, place your money on it at your own risk.'

RECENT INDICATIONS TEND TO SUPPORT CLARK

Military strikes 'could be launched in the first week of March. A more likely date would be later in the month.' (*Independent*, 21 Feb., p. 1) 'An invasion could begin any time, perhaps around 23 Mar., when moonless conditions will provide maximum advantage of US forces.' (*Independent on Sunday*, 23 Feb., p. 11) '[I]t is possible that Mr Powell has allowed room for last-minute diplomacy, perhaps even a formal ultimatum to Baghdad. A war might then start towards the end of Mar., when the darker nights before the new moon on Apr. I would favour an Allied air campaign.' (*Telegraph*, 24 Feb., p. 14)

War is not inevitable: the timetable for war has been delayed many times already—in large measure because of popular pressure—it can be again.

ARROW BOOK *War Plan Iraq: Ten Reasons Against War On Iraq* by Milan Rai (Verso, 2002)
'Readable and well-sourced' *The Times* 'Excellent' Tariq Ali 'Required reading' Professor Paul Rogers

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SUMMARY

The US schedule for war on Iraq has been delayed again, possibly to the third week of March—23/24 March is a strong possibility. The plan seems to be to press for a negative inspectors' report in early March, secure a second Resolution in mid-March, and then go to war either in mid- or late- March.

AVOIDING WAR IN THE SUMMER

The US timetable for war is looking distinctly shaky. The basic assumption has been that the US does not want to fight during the Iraqi summer. Michael Smith, Defence Correspondent for the *Daily Telegraph* pointed out last Nov. that it would be months before British tanks and other armoured units were ready for war: 'If they began moving now, it would be early Mar. before a British land force was ready for action... to ensure the campaign does not last into the Iraqi summer. This is because they will have to wear gas masks and nuclear, biological and chemical warfare suits. Even on Salisbury Plain in the winter they are impossibly hot to work in, so the belief has always been that any campaign in Iraq should be waged in the cooler first four months or last three months of the year.' (22 Nov. 2002, p. 16)

Smith noted that 'defence sources have recently begun to prepare the ground for a summer war, saying British troops would be able to fight in Iraq whatever the temperature.' Some US military planners even pretend to prefer the summer, 'since the rivers and desert wadis that flood in winter would less of an obstacle to US tanks.' (*Newsweek*, 27 Jan., p. 23) But this is probably whistling in the dark. For example, 'The planes have been designed for the cold war. They start losing lift, carry lighter loads and must make shorter runs when the temperature goes over 35', according to a British official involved in the Anglo-American debates about the timing of an attack. (*Guardian*, 24 Jan., p. 1) More water has to be transported to soldiers, etc.

WHY NOT AN AUTUMN WAR?

The war could be delayed until the cooler autumn. This may be Britain's preference. A senior British official said in Jan., 'There is an assumption that there will be a campaign before the summer because of the heat. The autumn

would be just as sensible a time and in the meanwhile Saddam would be thoroughly constrained by the inspectors.' (*Telegraph*, 9 Jan., p. 1)

The delay would create more time for inspectors to find incriminating materials. However, the British military has warned Mr Blair 'that any proposals to postpone an attack until the autumn could mean having to bring our forces home again'. A senior Whitehall source said in Jan., 'In practical terms you cannot keep such a large number of troops throughout the summer months on enhanced stand-by. The Prime Minister risks total meltdown if troops are recalled. His credibility would be shot to pieces.' But a big delay was 'becoming a very real possibility.' (*Mirror*, 10 Jan., p. 5)

1) REPORT. 2) RESOLUTION. 3) REVENGE.

So, for reasons of political credibility in London and Washington, the war must come soon. The preferred sequence seems to be: hear Hans Blix's report in early March (having pressured him to make a negative report); a few days later, 'persuade' the UN Security Council to pass a new Resolution that can be presented as 'authorising' military action; then shortly afterwards proceed to a massive aerial bombardment and then a ground invasion.

'Mr Powell says a vote should shortly follow a meeting expected in the first week of Mar., after Mr Blix's next report.' (*FT*, 24 Feb., p. 6) The US Secretary of State added, 'It isn't going to be a long period of time from the tabling of the resolution until a judgement is made as to whether the resolution is ready to be voted on or not. Iraq is still not complying and time is drawing to a close when... the Security Council must show its relevance by insisting that Iraq disarm or that Iraq be disarmed by a coalition of forces that will go in and do it.' (*Independent*, 24 Feb., p. 1)

Hans Blix is due to make a quarterly UNMOVIC report to the Security Council on 1 Mar., 'but the text could be delivered earlier' on paper. (*FT*, 22 Feb., p. 6) 'Blix is scheduled to meet security council members by 7 March [for an oral presentation]. A vote on the second resolution is likely to follow soon afterwards. The "final" deadline for Iraqi compliance could be March 14, the date proposed by the French for a ministerial meeting of the security council.' (*Sunday Times*, 23 Feb., p. 2) So there will be a Security Council meeting to hear Blix, then a second meeting to vote on the US/UK Resolution.

The schedule is slipping around. The Resolution, which has been tabled by the US and UK 'is likely to [to be voted on] no earlier than March 7 and no later than March 14, *The Times* learnt last night.' (*Times*, 21 Feb., p. 1) 'Number 10 sources' said there would be 'a vote taken in mid-March' (*Observer*, 23 Feb., p. 1), 'before March 14' (*Financial Times*, 21 Feb., p. 5), 'probably on 14 March' (*Independent*, 24 Feb., p. 14).

It seems likely that 'The proposed US-UK timetable attempts to preempt French efforts to delay decisions until as late as March 14'. (*Guardian*, 24 Feb., p. 1) Blair's foreign policy adviser Sir David Manning is reported to have pressed Condoleezza Rice, Bush's National Security Adviser, 'for a short delay to give diplomacy three more weeks—until mid-March—as the French had suggested.' Rice was less patient. (*Sunday Times*, 23 Feb., p. 13)

THE ROLE OF THE MOON

'Military analysts and officials familiar with war planning said that the uniformed leadership, particularly the US Air Force, have been pushing for an assault to begin with the new moon, when allied technological advantages in the dark will be at their highest. According to the US naval observatory, the new moon will occur on the night of Mar. 3, with the first quarter not fully lit until Mar. 11.

'The next new moon will not occur until Apr. 1, a date that would push an invasion increasingly close to the heat of the summer in the Arabian desert. The average high temperature in the southern Iraqi town of Basra is 88F (31C) in April and hits 98F (37C) in May. The weather and moon phases have led military analysts to believe that an attack will occur in the first week of Mar.

'But that timetable is looking increasingly pressed by the contentious debate at the UN. The UK has continued to insist it wants a second resolution before an invasion, and US officials have recently conceded it would be almost impossible to buck British demands.' (*FT*, 19 Feb. 2003, p. 7) The problem is that the resolution is likely to be passed at the worst point of the lunar cycle.

AN EXPERT VIEW

General Wesley Clark, Supreme Allied Commander Europe 1997-2000, and leader of NATO forces during the Kosovo campaign (*Times*, 19 Feb., p. 11.): 'Washington has not given up its preference for early [March], but here is why the attack might slip **three weeks**. First, the diplomatic game is only now shifting into high gear. Britain needs another UN resolution, and the US needs Britain. Getting the resolution may well take another four or five weeks.. Then there will be a final diplomatic spasm involving the European states. The better part of wisdom would be to delay as long as necessary to pick up additional support and the UN resolution, so long as we can see an acceptable end-game. The greater the consensus for going in, the easier the fight and postwar occupation will be. But one warning: if Washington feels the diplomatic momentum faltering amid rising anti-war protests and uncompromising French opposition, the President would elect to attack early, UN resolution or not.

'Second, this is a very complicated military operation. Special forces... could always use more time... [For the air attack] additional squadrons and