
Eminent German Historians Predict U.S. Defeat

By the German Social Democratic Party (Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschland)

Well-known German military experts are convinced that the allies would never occupy Baghdad because historically no invading army has ever achieved this. They said there were two possibilities for the allies to secure Baghdad and Basra: destroy them totally or starve them out.

Memories of Stalingrad

Professor Manfred Messerschmidt, chief historian at the Research Centre for Military History (University of Freiburg) until 1988, who retired in 1999, is considered Germany's top military history researcher. He believes it probable that the allies will be defeated if the Hussein regime holds on to power. The conquest of Baghdad is impossible unless the allies intend to burn and destroy the capital totally. World War II, and especially the 900-day siege of Leningrad, showed that street fighting always leads to complete destruction and the most horrible human losses.

A City of Millions cannot be secured

Even the German *wehrmacht* had originally hesitated to conquer the major Russian cities, until Hitler ordered that they must either be totally destroyed or starved out. In Leningrad, as well as in Stalingrad, this concept did not work. A city of millions cannot be secured. At best, invading forces can hole up in certain locations. When streets are filled with rubble and ash, even tanks cannot move.

Conquest of Baghdad would be a precedent

The working group for research into the causes of war at the Institute for Political Science (University of Hamburg) has a website and an archive devoted to a global view of the events of the second world war. Should the Americans and British succeed in conquering the city of Baghdad this would mean a historical precedent because until now no army has managed this under comparable circumstances.

A similar view is held by Gerd Krumeich, Professor at the University of Dusseldorf and chairman of the working group for military history. In 1870, during the German-French war, Paris capitulated only because the French army and its Emperor had already surrendered and the supply situation of the city had become catastrophic. The Russian population in the beleaguered cities of Leningrad and Stalingrad retained the hope of military support. This is not to be expected in Iraq, but "Faith moves Mountains."

One cannot conquer a major city cleanly

Evidently the Americans had not calculated that certain parts of the Iraqi population would provide some support for Saddam Hussein. Nobody knows for sure how strong the dictator is. The enormous technical superiority of the allied troops and their control of the air is of no use at all in street-fighting. One cannot conquer a major city "cleanly." One effect of the bombardment is that the population will support the dictator all the more. Nothing united the German population around Hitler more than the allied bombs.

This is an odd phenomenon which can also be noted with other criminal historical regimes.

The military historian Bernhard Kroener, of the University of Potsdam, has a clear opinion about the desired conquest of Iraqi cities: "If there is resistance, a major city cannot be conquered in principle." There are no historical examples for this. Paris in 1940 and Rome in 1944 were not defended and only for that reason was a military occupation possible. And the former Vietnamese capital of Saigon was indeed conquered, but not by "foreign" invaders, but by Vietnamese.

House-to-house fighting cannot be won

Kroener believes that the awareness of Europeans has changed. A bombardment like the allied attack on Hamburg with its 30,000 dead in two nights is now quite unthinkable. Nor is street fighting in Baghdad. There are no alternatives. If the allies try to seal Baghdad off completely they will need a lot more troops and will have to count on a siege lasting months or even years. The current advance on the Iraqi capital was apparently based on the idea that the population would quickly abandon the regime. This is an error according to Koerner. Even if the population remains passive it would suffice if the elite troops can organize the resistance in order to defend the city. If the regime of Saddam Hussein cannot be destabilized and the leadership cannot be eliminated then defeat is preprogrammed.

Mao Tse Tung as recommended reading

Kroener recommends to British and American militaries a reading which, though old, nevertheless describes well how Iraqi commandos will behave in the defence of Baghdad: the collected works of Mao Tse Tung. The guerilla fighter moves within the sympathetic population like fish in water.

German military people must no longer say anything about the Iraq war. This applies to the press office of the Bundeswehr as well as the Research Office for Military History, now located in Potsdam. Former soldiers like retired Brigadier General Helmut Harff, first commander of the German troops in Kosovo and today chairman of the Commission for Defense Economy within the Association of German Industry, are more open. Hauff confirms the views of German military historians. "It is not possible to govern Baghdad by military means. This will lead to house-to-house fighting lasting for years, a regular terrorist guerilla war." This could already be seen in the relatively small city of Mogadishu in Somalia. At that time, the Americans withdrew because opinion at home reversed itself.

Source: *Telepolis*, March 26, 2003. <www.spd-heiligenhaus.de/antikriegsseite.htm>

Note from Update editor: The source of this article, *Telepolis*, has a good reputation for truth and responsibility. I translated this commentary because I thought it relevant and interesting. I cannot personally vouch for its accuracy, but since the various authorities quoted are clearly eminent persons, I did not hesitate to include it. It throws a new light on the Iraq disaster, *Walter Josephy*.