

RESEARCH NOTE

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Scenarios for Australian Military Contributions to the Probable War in Iraq

Introduction

In the aftermath of the 1991 Gulf War, the US and its coalition partners developed a containment strategy designed to curtail Iraq's military adventurism and to force Saddam Hussein to comply with United Nations Security Council Resolutions regarding Iraq's development of Weapons of Mass Destruction.

As was evidenced by his recent [speech](#)¹ to the UN General Assembly, President Bush has set in motion diplomatic and military preparations for an end to Saddam Hussein's regime. Detailed background to the UN-US-Iraq situation is contained in the e-brief ['Iraqi Precipice'](#).²

Nevertheless, the almost overwhelming momentum for war against Iraq suggests that a non-military solution will be hard to find. In this overheated environment, decisions about what sort of contribution Australia may eventually make to the war could be influenced by factors other than the Australian Defence Force's (ADF) strictly logical assessments.

Furthermore, in the absence of a broad coalition, such as was forged for the 1991 Gulf War, the US may seek visible and substantial contributions from willing countries such as Australia. This could translate into much more generous logistic and other support than would otherwise have been the case and thus open a wider range of military options to the Government.

Scenarios

A host of factors, both internal and external, affect what military

options are available to the Government to contribute to a possible War in Iraq. These factors include what ADF capabilities would fit within the overall US operational plans; the ADF's current operational commitment, the ADF's requirement to retain a degree of flexibility to deal with short-notice regional requirements, and the federal Government's political priorities.

In particular the ADF is currently operating at a level not seen since the days of the Vietnam War. Current ADF operations include peacekeeping in East Timor (approx. 1200 personnel), patrolling against unauthorised boat arrivals in Australia's north in Operation RELEX II, operations in the War Against Terror in Afghanistan (approx 150 Special Forces personnel, 2 Frigates and 2 Air to Air Refuelling aircraft) as well as continued support to peacekeeping in Bougainville (approx 35 personnel).

At the present time, it is possible to envisage four broad scenarios (see diagram overleaf) for Australia's contribution to a possible War in Iraq. These are as follows:

Scenario GREEN

This reflects a situation where no additional capabilities are deployed beyond what is in place in Afghanistan and the Persian Gulf. Forces involved include:

One SAS Squadron—redeployed from Afghanistan to Iraq.

- Two Frigates
- Two P3-C Orion aircraft for maritime patrol in the Persian Gulf.

- Two 707 aircraft—tasked with Air-to-Air refuelling.

This scenario would neither require additional funding, nor place additional burdens on the ADF. Consequently this option is considered to have a very high probability.

Scenario BLUE

This option represents a deployment of medical and other support troops, with a force protection element. Forces involved could include:

- A medical unit—such as a Field Hospital or similar.
- One Amphibious Afloat Support ship—either the HMAS KANIMBLA or MANOORA—to transport equipment, provide additional medical and other support such as aeromedical evacuation.
- The Chemical Biological and Radiological squadron from the Incident Response Regiment (IRR). Elements would provide protection and decontamination in high-risk chemical and biological environment.
- One Infantry Company to provide local area protection.
- One section of Air Defence troops for local protection.

This scenario is similar to the ADF's deployment to Rwanda in 1994-95 where the ADF deployed in the order of 300 medical and support personnel in support of UN operations. This option is likely, as it would provide a noticeable contribution to the War in Iraq without having a significant impact on the ADF's current commitments in our own region.

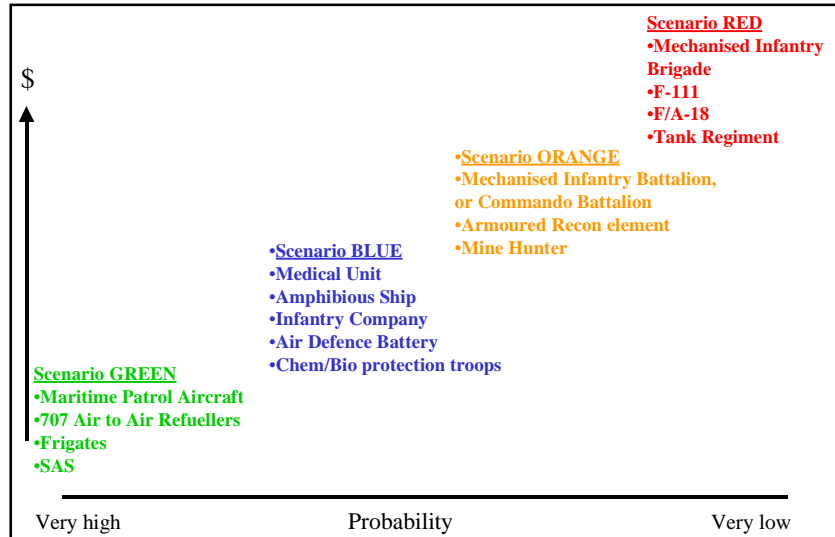
Scenario ORANGE

This scenario envisages an Australian contingent able to engage in offensive land operations. The composition of such a force is malleable and some options are shown below:

- A Mechanised Infantry Battalion Group from 1 Brigade in Darwin or a Commando Battalion (4RAR) for operations in urban terrain.
- One or more squadrons of Armoured Recon vehicles from the 2nd Cavalry Regiment.
- One or more HUON-class Mine Hunters for operations in the seaways around Al-Basra in the South of Iraq.
- An Amphibious Afloat Support Ship (HMAS KANIMBLA or MANOORA) with helicopters and an Air Defence section.

This option represents a major commitment of Australian ground troops of a size comparable to Somalia (1992–1993). At that time the ADF committed a light infantry battalion and a squadron of Cavalry (approximately 1000 troops). It should be noted that Australian troops would be most likely allotted support tasks at the flanks of any operation due to our shortage of air defence troops, self propelled artillery and other components which are essential for participation in high-end land operations.

This type of deployment would be very costly and have some impact on the ADF's ability to carry out its current operational tasking while maintaining a high readiness battalion group for regional contingencies. While the ADF's current commitments and preparedness levels for such an operation make it a low probability option, political priorities could make this scenario likely. It is worth noting that this option would have a significant impact on the ADF, particularly when considering the rotation of units and personnel. It was this requirement for regular



rotation of fresh troops and units that proved difficult during the East Timor operation in 1999–2000.

Scenario RED

This option envisages a military deployment of the scale of the Australian contribution to the Vietnam War. Possible options in this scenario include:

- One Mechanised Infantry Brigade (1 Brigade based in Darwin).
- One Armoured Regiment (tanks).
- F-111 Strike Aircraft.
- F/A-18 aircraft.

It should be noted that the deployment of a Brigade sized formation is unlikely due to preparedness, sustainability and current commitments, in particular the deployment of 1 Armoured Regiment is highly unlikely due to its tanks being inferior to those of the Iraqi Army.

Similarly, the F-111 and F/A-18 would not be able to operate until the missile threat was completely extinguished due to their lack of modern Electronic Warfare Self Protection equipment. Other ADF capabilities, such as the COLLINS submarines, would not be deployed, as there would be no feasible role for them.

This option would be extremely costly and would create significant

challenges for the ADF in the maintenance of its regional tasks. Consequently, its probability is rated as very low.

Of course, the various options listed above can be mix-and-matched to meet the Government's requirements, and will depend on concurrent requirements such as any expanded role in Afghanistan.

1. President's Remarks at the United Nations General Assembly, Remarks by the President in Address to the United Nations General Assembly September 2002, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/09/20020912-1.html>
2. 'Iraqi Precipice', *E-Brief*, 2002, <http://www.aph.gov.au/library/intguide/FAD/iraq.htm>

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