

The Battle for Fallujah



IKRAM SEHGAL writes from Karachi

SITUATED on the eastern bank of the Euphrates, Fallujah is bound by the desert on all sides. Two bridges connect the city to the peninsula on the west bank of the river...

really plan a set-piece battle, because of the time available and the wealth of intelligence, US commanders planned the Fallujah battle carefully...

The US and Iraqi invasion force comprised, viz (1) US -- HQ 1st Marine Div, 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU) as an HQ with one integral battalion and a battalion each of Marines and Army...

The general deployment had the US Marines on the west and the Army formations to the north. In the initial thrust preparing for the actual offensive, US Marines came in from the west to seize the two bridges connecting Fallujah to the peninsula...

again the spearhead of the attack. The approaches to Fallujah having been secured, the invasion plan and the routes thereof were expected to be a west-to-east thrust by the Marines, the Army attacking on a North-South axis.

However surprise was achieved with four Marine Battalions and two Army battalions all attacking from the north. The US Marines went for the Jolan District cutting it off from the rest of Fallujah while the Army

units led by armour (2/7th Cav) came through into the Askari District while cutting it from the Jolan District by moving down the intersecting North-South Road.

In both cases they aimed for Route 10 dividing Fallujah west-to-east to prevent the guerrillas from retreating to southeast and southwest Fallujah. However a sizeable number of guerrillas escaped to the south, thereby forcing flushing-out operations to continue beyond the planned dates. In careful intelligence build-up had located insurgent strongholds through use of unarmed aerial vehicles (UAVs), electronic (ELINT) and human intelligence (HUMINT), sensors, aerial photographs, etc.

strongholds by the invasion force quickly penetrating to the centre of Fallujah, this was accomplished within three days of the initial assault, but it did take hard fighting. Once the routes had been secured fresh troops carry out house-to-house flushing out of the insurgents, isolating them into smaller concentric circles.

The attacking troops found it heavy going in their effort to avoid excessive civilian casualties, even though most of Fallujah was evacuated these were in the hundreds. In some cases they themselves found themselves temporally surrounded by heavy fire, the urban guerrillas making coordinated attacks with mortars, small arms and RPGs (rocket propelled grenades).

Before the start of fighting, images of civilian dead and wounded had already inflamed public opinion in Iraq. This will be further exacerbated by TV images of a wounded guerrilla lying helpless in a mosque where an earlier Marine

unit had left them being killed by a US Marine detachment. While the soldier concerned has been taken into custody pending a detailed investigation, the atrocity has already caused a great furore with Iraqis and the Muslim world.

Iraq's Interim Government had already declared emergency, most cities in Iraq including Baghdad being put under night curfew. To try and divert the effort of the attacking troops, insurgents have been carry-

ing out sporadic attacks on the US-led Coalition troops and police/ING locations throughout the Sunni triangle. Even PM Allawi's cousin and his entire family were taken hostages in Baghdad, the kidnapers demanded cessation of the Fallujah offensive.

Iraqi troops have deliberately played a central symbolic role, particularly in neutralising those religious locations from where there has been insurgent activity. Since snipers have been using mosque minarets, these have been targeted

by fire without inhibition. The visible presence of Iraqi troops has been very helpful in containing religious sentiment already severely exacerbated.

While a true picture of the performance of the Iraqi troops is not yet available, it is far better than that on display some months ago when 2/3rds of two battalions deserted just before time came to launch an offensive. The US has been careful in playing up the relative Iraqi successes in the Fallujah offensive in the media. The main police station within Fallujah was captured by Iraqi forces who immediately put up the Iraqi national flag as a symbolic demonstration of their major role in the offensive.

The careful build-up of intelligence about invasion routes helped in targeting not only strongholds but booby-trapped sites including car bombs. Those that were not destroyed by air and artillery strikes were dealt with by special demolition teams that in some cases worked beyond the existing front lines. The casualty rate has been high, where two US Marines died in a location at least 50 were seriously wounded. The invasion force has secured Route 10 fully to deny insurgent activity to proliferate in the industrial town which makes up the south of Fallujah.

Even with the US troops in the centre of Fallujah, the resistance continued unabated with the for-

ward lines ebbing back and forth. One helicopter was shot down in the first house, two later just outside Fallujah. One US commander had estimated that it would take about a week of severe hand-to-hand fighting before all the terrorists were flushed out. In fact that will be the major problem for the invasion force, having reached all their objectives to be subjected to continuous attack by urban guerrillas operating out of the shadows of demolished structures.

It is estimated that until now nearly 50 US troops have been killed in action along with a smaller number of Iraqis, with over 300 US troops being seriously wounded enough to be evacuated to Germany. The US commanders on the ground are estimating the insurgent casualties to be running into several hundreds, estimated to be ranging from 1200 to 1600, probably true given the concentrated fire.

In the initial stages the battle developed well for the US and Iraqi forces, but because they failed to decimate the insurgent force within 2-3 days as planned, there is continuing bloody resistance in pockets. Failure to subdue Fallujah completely will make it a continuing symbol of mass Iraqi resistance to US presence in the country.

Ikram Sehgal, a former Major of Pakistan Army, is a political analyst and columnist.

AS I SEE IT

In the initial stages the battle developed well for the US and Iraqi forces, but because they failed to decimate the insurgent force within 2-3 days as planned, there is continuing bloody resistance in pockets. Failure to subdue Fallujah completely will make it a continuing symbol of mass Iraqi resistance to US presence in the country.

The future for girls

RAFIQUL ISLAM SARKAR

IT is now a universally accepted truth that the future of girls and women is one and the same. Today's girls are tomorrow's women. Girls cannot advance without the advancement of women and no improvement in the lives of women will be sustained unless girls are provided with the skills and opportunity to achieve their potential.

Women are at the centre of the development process. Empowerment of women results in faster economic growth, less corruption in governance, lower childhood malnutrition and lower child mortality, increased agricultural production, more children in school including girls, and reduced health risks. When women are empowered the overall health and well-being of a society is greatly improved. For this, a society-wide transformation is urgently needed. It is not as simple

as "let's just send little girls to school." We need to get beyond the obvious answers. In what environment will they be safe, will they not be harmed, will they truly be educated, will they be properly fed and will they be nurtured? Our efforts at finding the answers to these questions will help us build a self-reliant future for our country.

Let us pause for a moment to see the condition of girls worldwide. Half of reported sexual assaults are perpetrated against girls aged 15 years and younger. There are 17 countries with high rates of female infanticide. An estimated one million female fetuses are aborted each year in China and an estimated five million female fetuses are aborted each year in India. By age 18, girls have completed an average of 4.4 fewer years of school than boys. Globally, girls are three times more likely to suffer from malnutrition than boys. Each year two million girls between ages 5 and

15 are forced into the commercial sex market. 58 per cent of the over ten million young people infected with HIV/AIDS are girls. Of the school aged children who do not go to school, 60 per cent

are girls -- an estimated seventy million more girls than boys. Fifteen million girls aged 15 to 19 years give birth each year. Each year female genital mutilation is performed on an estimated two million little girls, most often between the ages of 4 and 8 years.

To ensure a better future for our women ten critical actions must be undertaken. These are: helping to create women's organisations, income generation, better nutri-

tion, basic and reproductive health, action against violence and trafficking, education, information, freedom of movement, shared responsibility for household work, and participation in

should lay emphasis on the rights of girl children, proper implementation of laws and take necessary steps to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women. They must have the information they

need to make appropriate decisions about nutrition. They must have access to basic health care at all stages of life -- from infancy to adolescence to adulthood. In addition, they must have access to reproductive health including contraception, prenatal care and information on child spacing and the hazards of early marriage.

Bangladesh must adopt "zero tolerance" of trafficking and violence against women. Men must change their behaviour. Families must treat violence in the household as a criminal act. Government must prosecute each and every case of violence against women to the fullest extent of the law. Local communities must have the resources and accountability to ensure basic literacy and numeracy for girls and women. When women and girls are educated, this translates into lower population growth, reduced child mortality, lower school drop-out rates and improved family nutrition.

They must have access to clear and accurate information on education, health, sanitation, nutrition, legal rights, and religion. Women leaders must ensure that this information is communicated orally to women who are illiterate. They must enjoy freedom of movement. Their participation in economic and social activities outside the home never contradicts with the

religions teachings. To address the basic issues for a healthy community, women's participation in the local government must be ensured. Communities must commit themselves to overcoming the obstacles to women's full participation in local government.

Women in Bangladesh will need to find the courage to rise above the subservient, subordinated roles that are dictated to them by the society. Men will need to become sensitive to the ways in which they and the society discriminate against and disable women and have the courage to change these ways. Together, we must forge a new partnership based on equality for the future of our families, our communities, and our nation.

Rafiqul Islam Sarkar is a former chief news editor, BTV, and current programme manager, The Hunger Project-Bangladesh.

Plight of the poor

NAZRUL ISLAM

A Daily Star photo (Oct 29) showing two female garment workers lying on the street of the port city, possibly in an unconscious state after being beaten up by law enforcers, touched the conscience of every sensible citizen, except those who matter. The logic behind my saying this is that no one, including trade union bodies and political parties, uttered a single word (at least I did not see in the media) condemning the acts. As if the agitating garment workers are criminals and any link with them would be a social stigma.

Beating of garments workers is not a new incident in our country, rather it's a single example among hundreds of unreported ones. Why they were beaten up mercilessly? What was their

The other day, another migrant rickshaw puller asked me: why the government does not impose ban on private cars as these occupy more road space and cause traffic jam in most of the rickshaw-free VIP streets? Again he answered his own question: the government will not do that or does not have the courage to do that because all of you are rich. You can maltreat the poor but you can't enrage the rich. I could say nothing in argument.

crime? Their crime, according to newspaper reports, was that they demanded arrears for three months. Their offence was that they demonstrated on the street after failing to get their just arrears through discussion? Is it a crime to demand daily wages?

If a garment worker is not paid her salary for three months, how could she survive in the city? How much a garment worker gets per day? A garment worker gets as low as Tk 30 per day, i.e. Tk 720 a month. And I think, no world famous economist or financial man-

ager, other than the garment worker, would be able to prepare a monthly budget with Tk 720 for a family. Remember, unlike officers/employees of government or semi-government offices, the garment workers do not have any opportunity to get "extra" money from other sources. Where they reside, how they buy food, clothes and other essentials, or respond during indisposition, it's really a miraculous matter.

The photographs of the women workers with malnourished complex-

ions and very ordinary sarees reflected their poverty. In fact, if we give a closer look at the passing by garment workers, we will find that most of them are malnourished. Their faces are depressed and gloomy. They walk a long way to reach their working places and go back by walking. Almost all the workers huddle in slums or slum-like residences. Under this circumstance, when a garment worker is not given his/her payment for three months, what could be his or her condition -- just think of that for a moment.

The garments sector has turned into the largest export earners in the country with annual turnover of over \$5 billion (2003-04). But our manufacturers did not do anything innovative and fundamental in expansion of this sector. In real sense, we have been working as tailors. The owners of garment factories are the owners of tailoring houses and they are getting sewing charges after getting order and materials.

Bangladesh has become one of the hubs of garments manufacturing due to availability of very cheap labour. Labour is indeed cheap here. But the tragedy is that the factory owners cheat these cheap labourers and thereby make money. Nowhere in the world, are the workers as much exploited as in Bangladesh.

Is there any contribution of workers in earning the highest amount of foreign exchange from the sector? The workers are one of the parties -- like the factory owners and the government -- involved in sustaining this sector. However, their contribution is not only ignored but they are treated just like beggars. Except the workers, the other two parties are getting their due shares, sometimes extra benefit depriving the workers. As reported in The Daily Star, when the workers of the particular factory were being beaten up in the street, the owner was abroad -- maybe on a business trip or on a pleasure trip with his entire family. While his workers' blood is staining the city streets, he might be sleeping in a 5-star hotel or dining in a luxurious restaurant. What a contrast!

Our industrialists and businessmen are preached neither by religion

nor by economic theories. Prophet Mohammad (SM) ordered to pay the wages before drying up the sweat of the workers. No economy -- capitalism or communism -- supports exploitation or cheating of the workers. However, our employers not only exploit and cheat their employees but also now and then harass them. And with the money being cheated from the workers, our manufacturers lead luxurious lives.

Most of the garment workers are from rural areas. Of course they have little or no work in the villages. But if they return back to their villages, they would survive as once they survived there. But what would happen to the garments industries? The owners and government always think they are the main players in the sector. They never consider the contribution of the workers. The workers are always at their mercy. Please, don't exploit them. They are not begging, they are giving their physical labour for their survival. A garment worker doesn't dream of a flat or a house in the city -- their only dream is to have a square meal and fulfill other basic needs.

When the garment workers were being beaten up or harassed, another marginalised section, the rickshawpullers, were being driven out from Dhaka city. Interestingly, all these happened during holy Ramadan, the month of restraint, and at a time when a famine-like situation (which is termed as munga) was prevailing in some northern districts.

Not only this year, almost every year in October/November, the city experienced an influx of migrants who come from northern districts falling to get any work in their areas. Most of the newcomers engage themselves in rickshaw pulling. They earn some extra money in two months, send this to their families and go back home at the end of November to catch harvesting season.

This year, their destiny was different. In the middle of the Ramadan, I saw a man begging for collecting money to return home. When I asked, he told me that he came to

Dhaka from Roumari of Kurigram borrowing money from moneylenders in hoping to pull rickshaw. But after two days in the city, police seized his rickshaw from Shyamoli area, forcing him to out of job. Now, he had no money to return back home. Not only he, most of the munga-stricken migrants returned back home empty-handed this year,

thanks to the city father and policymakers for their bid to eliminate environment-friendly rickshaw from the city street.

The other day, another migrant rickshaw puller asked me: why the government does not impose ban on private cars as these occupy more road space and cause traffic jam in most of the rickshaw-free VIP streets?

Again he answered his own question: the government will not do that or does not have the courage to do that because all of you are rich. You can maltreat the poor but you can't enrage the rich. I could say nothing in argument.

Naazrul Islam is a journalist and an environmentalist.

Advertisement for Dhaka Electric Supply Company Ltd. (DESCO) regarding a Special Notification on Electricity Bill. Includes contact information for various divisions and a motto: 'Better consumer service is our motto'.

Advertisement for Study in Australia, featuring Central Queensland University. Lists advantages, scholarships, and contact information for the Australian Centre For Education.