

NORTHERN SAUDI ARABIA

While U.S. combat commanders plan the intricacies of a ground war, other military officials are wrestling with equally complex issues, some having life-and-death implications.

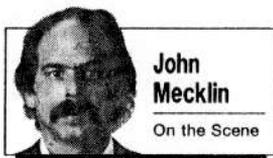
How will civilians caught in the cross-fire of ground combat be evacuated? What will happen to civilians who are killed in the fighting? How will governments be created in parts of Kuwait or even Iraq occupied during the expected allied offensive?

In recent weeks, the civil affairs section of the 3rd Armored Division has been busy moving Bedouins from firing ranges and other operational areas near the northern Saudi border. Two live-fire exercises were delayed for hours this week while a civil affairs officer fluent in Arabic negotiated with Bedouins camped near the landing zone for tank and artillery rounds.

Once combat begins, civil affairs teams will be responsible for moving some, but not all, civilians from the war zone. If areas of Kuwait and Iraq are subsequently occupied, civil affairs personnel also must install temporary civil-military governments to maintain order and minimize civilian suffering.

Protecting civilians engulfed in the ground war, while analogous to allied efforts to limit civilian damage in the air war, is a far more complex undertaking.

During ground combat, the primary mission of civil affairs will be evacuation of civilians. Not all civilians in the line of advance will be moved, however, said Maj. Frederick Phillips, a civil affairs expert attached to the 3rd Armored Division.



John Mecklin
On the Scene

ernment plan for administering Basra, Iraq, if it is captured, Batchelder said.

Asked whether such a plan also exists for Baghdad, Batchelder said, "No matter how I answer that, that will tell you part of the (combat) plan."

The major did, however, repeat assertions by President Bush that U.S. aims in the gulf war do not include the destruction of Iraq.

As much as possible, civil-military governments will work through existing governmental structures, Batchelder said.

Although it might seem difficult to use Iraqi officials in a U.S.-controlled civil government, Phillips said past experience has shown that mid- and low-level bureaucrats can be helpful in restoring basic services in a war zone, even in enemy territory. "But strictly political (Iraqi) figureheads will be removed from their positions."

If civil-military governments do result from a ground offensive, it will mark their first large-scale use since World War II, Phillips said.

Civil affairs units consist largely of military reserves who, in peacetime, hold jobs relating to civil administration. For instance, civil affairs units to be attached to the 3rd Armored Division include engineers, health professionals (among them, a veterinarian), policemen and specialists in power, transportation and water systems.

Even so, problems in protecting civilians from the expected ground offensive pop up almost daily. Recently, this civil affairs unit has been seeking volunteer military personnel who are female to help search female Kuwaitis who must be evacuated from the war zone. Kuwait advisers have said American males searching Kuwaiti females could cause social or cultural misunderstandings.

Meanwhile, this civil affairs unit has had to take precautions regarding the Kuwaiti translators who will be used during the screening process for civilians taken from the battlefield. "In fact, we've got a rule," Phillips said. "The Kuwaiti interpreters we have cannot be (left) alone with an Iraqi."

If civilians are normally residents of an area being occupied and do not wish to move, Phillips said, "We don't mess with them."

Civilians who impede a military advance, who ask to be evacuated or who are deemed a security risk will be moved, said Phillips, 39, of Kalamazoo, Mich. A screening process has been devised to separate Iraqi agents or sympathizers from other civilians. Those deemed security risks will be handled as prisoners of war, Phillips said.

The remainder will be moved to a collection point to the rear, where most will simply be released.

There is at least one exception to this system for handling battlefield civilians, according to a draft civil affairs plan for the 3rd Armored Division made available to the U.S. media pool. Saudi or Kuwaiti government officials encountered during an offensive are to be treated as "VIPs," the plan states.

That detailed plan, still under revision, also calls for civilians inadvertently killed during the offensive to be buried where they are found. This policy was requested by the Saudi government, Phillips said, and the civil affairs unit in this division is now appraising the identification problems on-the-spot burials may cause.

The plan sets out rules for protection of civilian property, as well, including art, monuments, archives and religious sites. Saudi property may not be confiscated by the U.S. military for any purpose, the plan states, and it sets out strict guidelines for the use of Iraqi or Kuwaiti property. For example, destruction of medical resources is not allowed, and civilian buildings can be taken for use as defensive barricades only if confiscation is "essential" to a mission.

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If the 3rd Armored Division occupies portions of Iraq or Kuwait, civil affairs expects to set up civil-military governments. "Wherever the 3rd Armored Division is, we will be responsible for that area," said Maj. Chris Batchelder, 36, of Syracuse, N.Y.

He said there are hundreds of civil affairs experts waiting in Saudi Arabia to set up governments in occupied areas. A task force for restoring government to Kuwait has been set up, Batchelder said.

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