

United states' attack of baghdad international airport

[Environment](#), [Air](#)



On the morning of April 3, 2003 United States troops marched on Baghdad International Airport, this decision would set the tone of the Battle of Baghdad and the rest of Operation Iraqi Freedom. Striking the airport first proved to be crucial to the success of Operation Iraqi Freedom for three main reasons. First, the airport was the most heavily defended portion of the Baghdad and striking there first was crippling to the enemy. Second, logistically the Baghdad International Airport was the ideal location, and served as the United States central hub for seven years. Most importantly though was the resupply capability the airport offered. The Iraqi Army and leadership were not expecting the United States to strike the airport, and when the United States did march on the airport the Iraqi resistance was caught off guard. While the Iraqi troops put up a formidable fight at first, as the United States swung the battle in favor of the US troops, the Iraqi militants were left scrambling and unable to assemble a strong counter attack. Shortly after securing the airport, the United State marched into the city and captured Baghdad. In the overall strategy for the Battle of Baghdad, the choice to make Baghdad International Airport the first point of attack and ultimately first secured location of the battle was the cornerstone of a successful mission because securing the airport early in the battle gave the United States troops access to resupplies and denied aerial resupply for the enemy.

The Baghdad International Airport was a crucial point of attack from the beginning of the mission to take the city of Baghdad. Having secured airfields to resupply troops was monumental in the overall battle strategy of the war. A prolonged engagement, especially overseas meant getting troops

the proper gear, food, ammunition, and vehicles was a huge obstacle. In the OPORD (Operational Order), which is the official plan of the military, one of the first mission goals stated was “ BPT establish and operated secured airfields in Iraq IOT establish alternate APODs in support of CFC ops” (USCENTAF, 2003). In more direct terms, be prepared to establish and operate secure airfields in Iraq in order to establish alternate aerial ports of debarkation in support of combined forces command, simply put, take the airport so it can be used for the purposes of the United States and her allies. The advantage of taking the airport was the ability to get men, supplies, and aircraft into the city of Baghdad to help support the ground forces efforts. Without this tactical advantage the United States and her allies would have had to wait weeks for resupply from a remote base, or have a smaller amount come through via helicopter; neither of these options would have been sustainable. Firstly, the goal to capture the city and the TST (time sensitive targets) in the city was quick and hard strikes. The United States wanted to get in, secure the city and the TST and get out. Economically a prolonged engagement, coming off the engagement that was still happening in Afghanistan, was not going to be sustainable for the United States. Secondly, having to make multiple trips via helicopter to resupply both bodies and gear would have posed a severe threat to the pilots. According to USCENTAF (2003):

The initial Iraqi air threat consisted of an Integrated Air Defense System incorporating early warning radars, visual observers, surface to air missiles and fighter/attack aircraft. Overall operational capability of Iraqi aviation was

low while the surface-to-air threat was assessed as medium to high. Primary concerns were concentrated strategic SAMs around Baghdad and large numbers of unlocated tactical SAMs and AAA throughout the AOR.

The anti-air capability of the Iraqis was high; this meant that anytime a pilot took off, the pilot's life, cargo, and helicopter were at risk. Ultimately helicopters and supplies can be replaced, but a human life cannot. The United States did not want to be in a position where the Commander in Chief, along with the generals had to make the ethical decision of "the few for the many", by taking the airport, this allowed the United States to avoid that dilemma and set the United States up for military success. The ability to not only transport large amounts of bodies but also large amounts of supplies heavily aided the United States in the Battle of Baghdad, by allowing for a rapid response to supply requests, and therefore allowing a rapid advancement of the mission. The airport being taken by the United States also meant that the Iraqi forces could not use it. This allowed for a depletion of supplies, and made resupply of the enemy a much more difficult task; securing the airport, thus allowing aerial resupply for the United States, and denying resupply for the Iraqi coalition, proved to be enormous in the success of the mission.

The United States choice to attack the Baghdad International Airport first not only allowed the ability for resupply missions but also helped secure air supremacy, as well as delivering a crippling blow to the Iraqi forces.

Unbeknownst to the American forces at the time of the initial attack, the airport was the most heavily defended area of the city, an Iraqi militant

stronghold. The American soldiers walked, almost unknowingly into the most heavily defended and fortified area of Baghdad. " It was not until a chemical reconnaissance vehicle was fired on, and a Bradley actually was hit by a T-72 main gun round, that the battalion became aware of its peril" (Lacey 2007). On April 3, 2003 after an intense battle, a brief respite and a swift counterattack by the Iraqi forces, the United States forces were able to officially call the Baghdad International Airport secure. Two days later on April 5, 2003 US forces entered the city of Baghdad. " On April 5, Task Force 1-64 Armor of the U. S. Army's 3rd Infantry Division, 2nd Brigade, executed a raid, later called the " Thunder Run", to test remaining Iraqi defenses. The operation began south of Baghdad and went through main roads to the newly secured airport" (Gordon and Trainor 2007). Three days after that on April 8, 2003 the first fixed wing airplane lands at the airport, bringing with it more personnel and supplies, and finally on April 9, 2003 the city of Baghdad fell. By April 14, 2003 all major military operations had ended (USCENTAF, 2003). The rapid nature in which the United States forces were able to conquer Baghdad and subsequently the Saddam Hussein regime was hugely made possible by the Battle for Baghdad International Airport. By striking there first, taking out a huge number of the Iraqi opposition, the city was left relatively unguarded. " Now the regime's military forces were literally falling apart at the seams, no longer possessing the ability to put together anything resembling an effective defense" (Woods, 2009). Taking the airport proved to be the cornerstone of a successful campaign of Baghdad, not only because of the breakdown of troops on the Iraqi side, but also having the airport gave the United States the support of extra man power and extra

supplies to make the final push through Baghdad fully stocked with personnel, ammunition, and appropriate gear. This factor helped set the stage for the successful mission objectives, and without the airport would not have been possible, and very well could have led to a much longer engagement.

The airport was a centralized hub of logistical fortitude, which was heavily utilized by the Iraqi coalition. When the United States' forces pushed the objective of securing the airfield that inherited that logistical fortitude, which would remain an American logistical headquarters for the next seven years. The airport is centrally located and connects to all major roads in Baghdad, which was crucial when the United States were running Thunder Raids, missions to test Iraqi fortitude in the city before it was captured; as well as Operations Moe, Curly and Larry, missions to capture central travel points for the boots on the ground. When the United States acquired the airport the Iraqi troops began to scramble. " Most of the Iraqi army were voting with their feet. Those who still desired to fight had to do so in small groups with no coordination and little leadership" (Woods, 2009). Without that central locale for coordination and intelligence the Iraqi leadership fell apart, which ended up playing a key factor in the success of the Battle of Baghdad, by inheriting the airport, with rapid resupply capabilities, neutralizing the Iraqi forces ability to use the airport for resupply; and gaining the invaluable logistical stronghold that the airport proved to be, allowed the United States and her allies to swiftly staunch the Iraqi counter attacks, and take the city within two weeks. The United States could not afford, on a political,

economic, or militaristic level a long and drawn out engagement. The fighting in the Battle of Baghdad was rugged, and brutal, but securing the Baghdad International Airport helped the United States find huge success in capturing Baghdad and defeating the Saddam regime.

The Battle of Baghdad was a crucial point in Operation Iraqi Freedom, and because of the United States' ability to take the airport swiftly, the battle went about as smoothly as it could have gone. The ability to have resupply, and a logistical stronghold set the foundation for the United States' success, not only for the capture of Baghdad, but for the next seven years of the war. Without the airport, and without the ability to bring supplies in and out quickly, safely, and efficiently, the war could have gone very differently. While gaining air superiority and taking the airport was at the top of the list in the OPOD, just how important the airport would become would not actually be known until long after the battle had ended. Looking back now, it is clear that without the resupply capabilities, and logistical clinch of the airport, the United States may very well not have had success in the Battle of Baghdad. Furthermore, the crippling blow to the Iraqi forces, both in personnel, logistics, and in the Iraqi ability to resupply via air; proved to be invaluable to the United States. The Battle for Baghdad International airport set the stage for a strong foundation for military success by allowing the United States to have strong, reliable, and quick resupply; as well as logistical leverage, and thusly taking those aspects away from the Iraqi forces.

In recent news the Baghdad International airport is still playing an important role. On January 2, 2020, with orders from the Commander in Chief, the U. S. military took defensive action, by ordering a drone strike to kill Qasem Soleimani. Qasem Soleimani was the head of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps-Quds Force, which was a U. S. designated Foreign Terrorist Organization, which was actively forming plans against the American diplomats and service members in Iraq. This strike took place near the Baghdad International Airport, and as of now the U. S is preparing to send more troops into the Mideast. (Statement by Department of Defense, 2020)

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