

No 'clean' air strikes

Take out Iraq's Saddam Hussein and his war machine with "surgical strikes." That is the current line being advocated by the bomb Baghdad crowd in the U.S.

Hawks in the Pentagon, military-industrial complex and American partisans of Israel are urging that the U.S. unleash its mighty air power and remove the threat of Saddam once and for all.

The notion of "surgical air strikes" sounds nifty. It's a way of removing assorted miscreants around the world with only minimal stress or damage. Hi-tech U.S. strike aircraft, notably Stealth fighters and bombers, swoop in and beam bombs right into the laps of malefactors like Saddam.

What is known as "collateral damage" — i.e. innocent civilians or buildings — remains untouched. Call this Washington's mighty, swift scalpel.

The Pentagon has spent hundreds of millions on laser-guided bombs, automated targeting devices and night-vision systems that are supposed to make precise bombing a guaranteed success. More than 600 U.S. strike aircraft, fighters and bombers are now poised, ready, says the Pentagon, to bomb Iraq back to the Bronze Age.

More precise details of Pentagon plans were given by the former Air Force chief of staff in a recent interview. He said that Israel had advised the USAF to try to assassinate Saddam while he was visiting his mistress, of all things, and to kill, as well, Saddam's family and the entire Iraqi leadership. Baghdad was slated for carpet bombing along with every major military, industrial and communications target in Iraq and occupied Kuwait.

The general was fired for revealing Pentagon war plans.

One wonders what the reaction would be if an Iraqi general threatened to blow up George Bush in his girlfriend's apartment. Is nothing sacred?

I had the opportunity to view first-hand the effects of precise, surgical strikes when I visited Tripoli, Libya three years ago. The USAF had tried an air assassination against Moammar Khadafi in his home using F-111s equipped with laser-guided bombs.

It was a clear, moonlit night over Tripoli. Target co-ordinates were precise. There was no anti-aircraft fire or electronic jamming. Surprise was complete. The laser-guided bombs missed Khadafi, but managed to kill his infant daughter and seriously injure his two young sons.

I viewed the nearby French Embassy, which was demolished by stray "precision" bombs. I inspected houses miles away that were also hit, killing about 80 civilians.

A surgical strike it was not.

In Panama, U.S. air strikes killed an estimated 1,000 civilians — and missed Gen. Manuel Noriega. This was in spite of U.S. homing beacons on the ground and military air controllers in Panama City vectoring in the strikes.

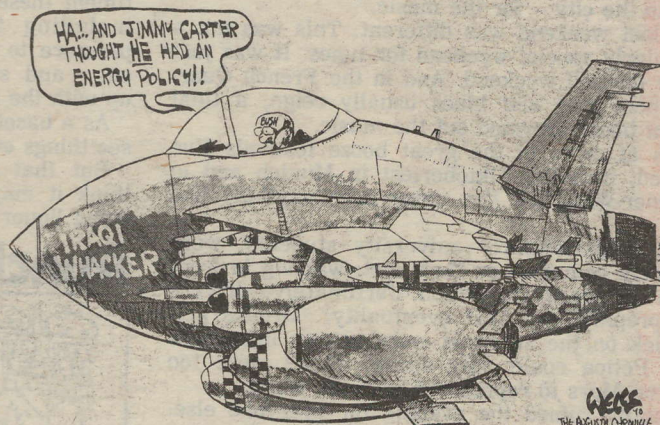
Even the Israeli Air Force, probably the world's finest, failed to assassinate Yasser Arafat when it

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bombed PLO headquarters in Tunis. Hundreds of Tunisian civilians were killed or injured. Its destruction of Iraq's Osirak nuclear reactor, one of the few successful surgical strikes on record, was not repeated in Tunis.

Those hawks who now advocate surgical strikes against Iraq as a way of solving the current military stalemate, are whistling *Dixie*. There will be no bloodless, laser surgery. Certainly not over Iraq, which has moderate anti-aircraft defences and enough fighters to disrupt some U.S. air attacks. And there is simply no way of taking out key targets without causing heavy collateral damage to innocent civilians.



The utter failure of the U.S. Air Force to defeat North Vietnam or even stop it from sending troops into the south showed the limitations of air power.

Of course, a lucky air strike might succeed in killing Saddam, but this is unlikely. The Iraqi leader, who has survived innumerable assassination attempts, is not about to make himself a target for the U.S. Air Force. He moves constantly from one protected bunker to another. So the bomb-Baghdad partisans are going to have to face the hard fact that any air assault on Iraq will mean heavy casualties on the ground and not a few on the American side.

As experience in Germany and Vietnam showed, bombing people just makes them angrier and more determined. There are no clean air strikes, only bloody, messy ones.

In the 13th century, Baghdad was the world's grandest city. It was razed by the Mongols and all of its million inhabitants slaughtered. The Mongols made a pyramid out of 100,000 heads in front of the ruins.

Baghdad has seen worse than Bush's bombers.