

~~We are at the brink of war. In the next hours or days, a horrifying conflict may erupt in the Persian Gulf. The American people have been asked to support military action without a clear purpose or an understanding of the costs in human lives. Young and old people from many countries will be maimed and die. For what?~~

The Conventional Scenario: War by the Books

Things are going to happen to people in this war that have never been seen before. Previous wars have seen mostly blast injuries, but in this war combination injuries from blast, penetrating wounds, and burns will be caused by modern high intensity weapons. Medical personnel will face such new traumas as "metal fume fever" and "blast lung."

This is how the U.S. is expected to conduct the war. First, over 900 warplanes, flying 2,000 sorties per day, will attack missile and air fields. Next, air and naval forces will try to isolate the 450,000 dug-in Iraqi troops in Kuwait and destroy their ability to conduct the war. Low level bombing will target chemical, biologic, and nuclear weapons facilities. Many of these targets are in or near population centers. High level "carpet bombing" by B-52s will decimate the area between Basra and the Kuwait border. In Bagdad, Saddam's headquarters would be flattened. Most military experts believe a ground offensive will be launched about a week after the air campaign begins. A ground assault to liberate Kuwait would be one of the largest and bloodiest tank battles fought in a desert.

In the most optimistic scenario, the casualties and destruction are immense - both to the men and women of each countries forces, and to innocent civilians caught in the paths of war. Pentagon experts estimate 1,200 to 3,000 military deaths and 7,000-16,000 wounded *in the first ten days*. Others predict 45,000 total U.S. casualties in an all out conventional war with Iraq; U.S. deaths could hit 10,000. Iraqi losses may reach 150,000, with 35,000 deaths and 100,000 possible civilian casualties in a battle for Bagdad (nearly half of all Iraqis are children under 15 years old).

These figures are high, because military technology has become more efficient at killing combatants than protecting them. Fragmentation bombs and artillery shells will spin out thousands of metal fragments capable of inflicting multiple wounds in a single soldier. One cluster bomb containing multiple "bomblets" now has the effect of 600 WW II mortar rounds. Fuel-air bombs are some of our deadliest weapons. They produce large vaporized gas clouds that are ignited just above the surface of the ground, causing blast and burn effects approaching that of a small nuclear weapon.

The level of severe trauma and burn injuries will be on a massive scale, even without chemical or biologic weapons. The number of burn injuries, averaging 13% of casualties in past wars, will be much higher in this conflict due to fuel-air bombs, white phosphorous artillery shells, and heavy reliance on tanks that become blazing infernos when struck by explosive weapons. Multiple penetrating injuries, complicated by a high incidence of severe burns, will make care and treatment extremely complex,