

The Persian Gulf Ten Years After

While military professionals tend to look askance when they hear the phrase that “generals always prepare to fight the last war,” the final battle serves as a guide for the future. Soldiers have always prepared for the next conflict by taking the measure of their last victory or defeat. During

this process those lessons which appeared vivid and unquestionable at the end of a war become the focus of debate as poised intellects and the gift of hindsight offer new meaning. The lessons of Operation Desert Storm have been subjected to the same type of scrutiny in the decade since 1991.

Ten years ago America led a coalition of 32 nations. The conflict arose when Iraq invaded Kuwait on August 2, 1990. Five days later, U.S. troops began deploying to Saudi Arabia as part of Operation Desert Shield. In November, the United Nations set a deadline of January 15, 1991, for the withdrawal of Iraqi troops. Saddam Hussein refused to comply. Desert Storm then

Getting to the Fight

The greatest challenge initially was balancing the force such that it could function for its intended purpose. Now, what do I mean by this? We have all the warlords who fully understand how many air wings you need, how many battleships and aircraft carriers and everything else, and how many Marine divisions and Army divisions you need. Everybody understands that, and they sit around discussing it; it's like they're arguing about a haircut policy. How long should the hair be cut? They'll all have an opinion. So you don't have to worry about that part. You just lay a requirement on them. The real challenge is balancing the force in the early stages and over time, so that you can go from a demonstrated commitment or decision to get involved (I'm talking now about the first weeks of August), to establishing a credible deterrent to enemy attack, and finally to generating overwhelming offensive power. In essence this entails the continuous evaluation of the mission, the enemy, all the troops involved, the time available, and the terrain over which you're going to fight. This process of evaluation is a very basic exercise that is done from the lowest force levels to the top.

—Lieutenant General John J. Yeosock, USA
Commander, Army Forces Central Command (1990–1991)

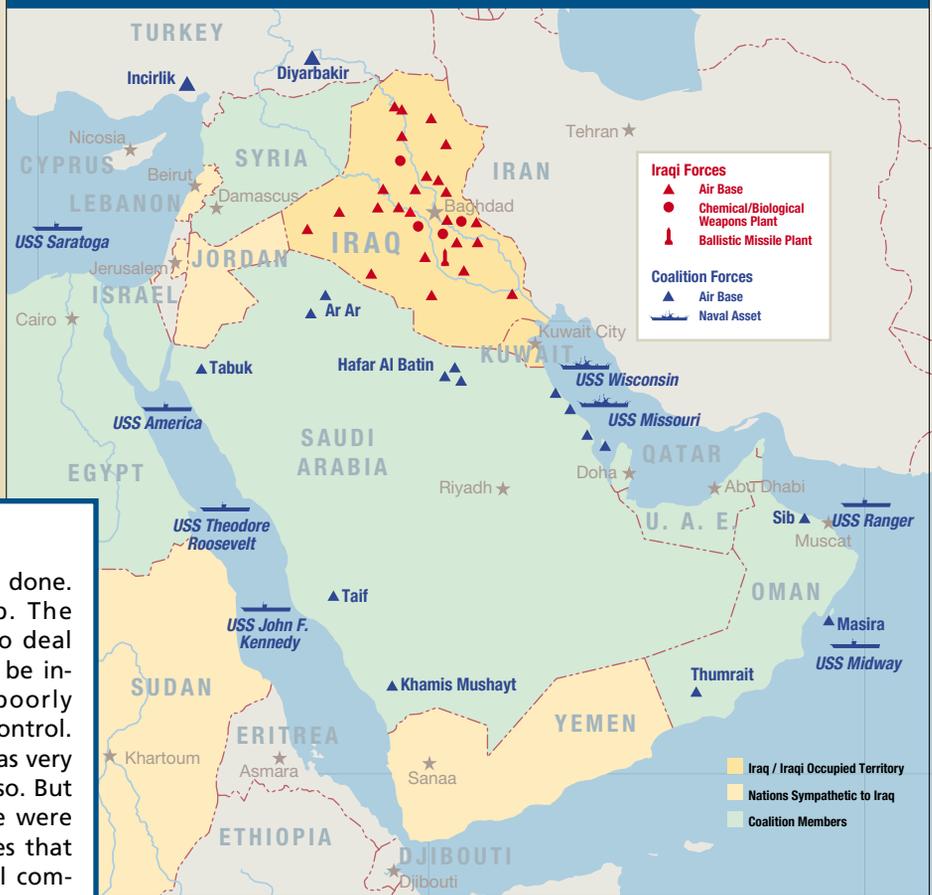


Refueling
F-16Cs.

DOD (E. Lee Corkran)

War

Map 1. Iraqi and Coalition Forces, January 15, 1991



Organizing the Force

We knew what needed to be done. We knew how to lash up. The French were the hardest to deal with, not because they didn't want to be involved, but because they were so poorly equipped in terms of command and control. We had to work around them and it was very hard for a big navy such as ours to do so. But because we were such a big force, we were able to give everyone meaningful roles that were within keeping of their national command authority releases relative to the rules of engagement, and also to accommodate any differences of opinion that arose. We were able to work through those issues. For example, when [General] Sir Peter [de la Billière, British Forces Commander Middle East] expressed some concerns about the vulnerability of British minesweepers operating so far north so early, we put EA6s on top of them to make sure that there couldn't be a stray shot from shore . . . command and control at sea was exceptional. However, some countries are now falling way behind in our ability to lash up our command and control nets, and we've really got to work on that.

—Vice Admiral Stanley R. Arthur, USN
Commander, Naval Forces Central Command
(1990–1991)

Source: Mark Grossman, *Encyclopedia of the Persian Gulf War* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 1995).



Task Force 155 during Desert Storm.

U.S. Navy (William A. Ipsick)

Preparing for Battle

It's a matter of perspective, but the greatest challenge I had was simply to develop a plan of attack that would enable us to accomplish our mission and get as few marines and soldiers killed as possible in the conduct of that attack. The planning process was not an easy one because we believed from day one that there was a possibility that the Iraqis were going to use chemical weapons. So how do you breach a significant minefield? And while you're conducting your breach, how do you deal with the possibility that you might be attacked by chemical weapons?

The other issue I faced, which was one that even to this day is still rather distasteful to me, occurred within my own service. And it has to do with jointness, because in this case jointness worked. I was not at the table in Riyadh every night and the Marines in Washington were absolutely beside themselves because, supposedly, we were being left out of the picture. It was alleged in Washington that John [Yeosock] and Chuck [Horner] were conspiring against the Marines in some way. Of course, I knew that was not the case. Still, Headquarters Marine Corps in Washington said, "Boomer, you need to be in Riyadh, and if you aren't going to go there, then we are going to try to put another three-star in Riyadh" (we did have a very competent major general there the entire time).

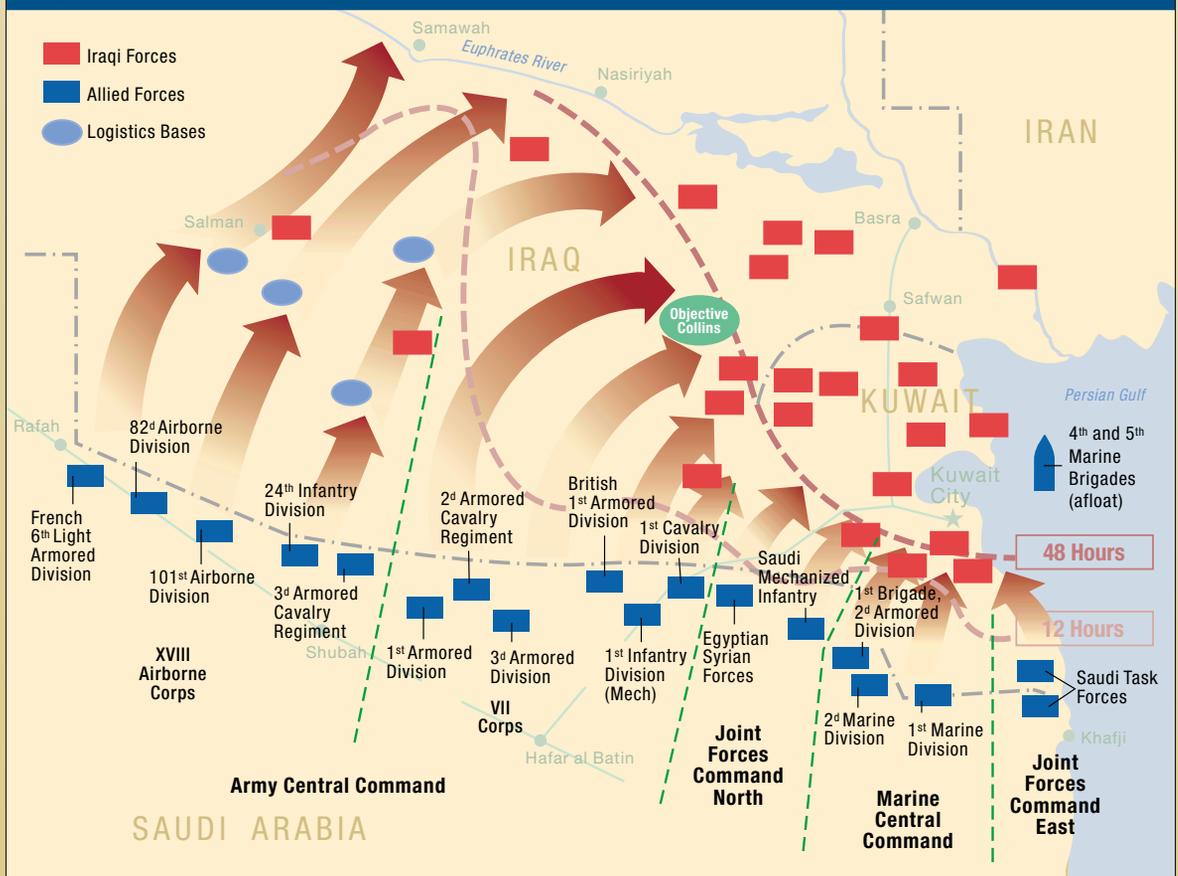
—Lieutenant General Walter E. Boomer, USMC
 Commander, U.S. Marine Forces Central Command (1990–1991)

F/A-18s aloft during Desert Storm.



DOD (Scott Stewart)

Map 2. Coalition Ground Operations, February 24–28, 1991



M1A1 tanks crossing desert in Kuwait.



DOD (Robert L. Reeve)

Learning from Victory

It's easy for me to say this, not being in the Army, but I think the Army—and I use that term in the collective sense—has a doctrinal problem with regard to headquarters. I think Army doctrine really never officially recognized Third Army as an echelon above corps. So Schwarzkopf had the corps commanders thinking they were doing something that was their responsibility, and then you had the division commanders—I just think we had too many staffs.

As the guy trying to interface with those staffs, I'd tell them that I needed their number one priority. I wouldn't bother John [Yeosock] with this, because John was having his gall bladder taken out, so I'd call [Brigadier General] Steve Arnold. What does the Army regard as its number one priority? I'd always get five number ones. Finally I just turned the job over to Lieutenant Colonel Bill Welsh, an Army officer in D.C., and I said, "You tell us what the number one priority is for the Army."

Army organizational doctrine needs to be reexamined. If I had my way, I would give the corps commander a couple of ivory-handled 45s, a set of goggles, a map with plastic on it, and a driver and a riding crop, and I'd send him out there and say, "Make it happen." And then I'd just let the divisions and the echelon above corps level do the planning.

—Lieutenant General Charles A. Horner, USAF
Commander, U.S. Central Command Air Forces (1989–1992)

began on January 18 with massive air attacks. Coalition ground forces assaulted on February 24 and within four days encircled and liberated Kuwait, soundly defeating the Iraqi military. Though Baghdad agreed to the peace terms offered by the coalition, it failed to fully comply with weapons inspections. As a result, the United Nations continues to impose sanctions against the regime.

Analysts have disputed the decisiveness of the victory and the wisdom of containing Iraq. The debate continues as the defense establishment ponders the challenges posed by a new century.

This JFQ Forum contributes to the debate with six articles that assess what can be learned from the American contribution to the victory and postconflict efforts to strengthen security and stability in the region. The authors address a range of issues from the improvement of joint capabilities to rethinking national strategy.

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