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GULF WAR TERMINATION REVISITED

by

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Professor Jeffrey Record's excellent Air War College course on the Persian Gulf War piqued my interest on the subject. His views on the Gulf War termination, although somewhat misguided, motivated me to investigate the topic.

Abstract

Frustration over Saddam's Hussein's longevity can reinforce the theory that the Gulf War ceasefire was premature. By continuing attacks against the Iraqi Republican Guards, we would have precipitated Saddam's fall from power. If this speculation is accepted as a matter of faith, it may impact how future wars are fought.

Arguments for extending hostilities another 24-48 hours fail to consider the "fog of war," the military and political constraints operating at the time of the ceasefire, the security of Saddam's regime, and the questionable desirability of Saddam's fall. A potentially costly assault on Basra would probably not have resulted in the destruction of the three or four escaping Republican Guards divisions. Continuing to press the attack in spite of international pressure might have resulted in a backlash from the Arab world, our Allies, and the fragile Soviet Union. There's no convincing evidence that destruction of Republican Guards would have produced the desired overthrow of Saddam by Iraq's ruling elite, or that it would have changed the outcome of the Kurd and Shiite rebellions. In either case, Saddam's fall may not have served U.S. interests. The low probability and questionable utility in further destruction of escaping divisions simply doesn't justify the military and political risks in extending the war. The Gulf War ceasefire was the right call.

While the timing of the Gulf War ceasefire was appropriate, it was by no means a premeditated act. Clearly, the ceasefire was a spur-of-the-moment decision and the U.S.

was unprepared for the post-ceasefire political, military, and civil situation. Critics contend that the haphazard Gulf War termination resulted from lack of a commonly understood and well-defined end state. There was, in fact, a commonly understood desired end state. In addition to expelling Iraqi forces from Kuwait and the destruction of Iraq's offensive military capability, the U.S. sought a unified Iraqi state with Saddam Hussein removed from power. The fundamental problem during the Gulf War was a disconnect between the means we were willing and able to employ and our desired end state. Limited in its means, the U.S. took various half-measures to achieve its desired end state. Instead of achieving their objectives, these half-measures resulted in unforeseen and tragic consequences. Without a clear link between goals and means, the ends were inevitably unpredictable, confused, and undesirable.

Introduction

When the eighth anniversary of the Gulf War ceasefire arrives, we will see a recalcitrant Saddam Hussein still in power in Iraq. Years of sanctions, U.N. inspections, and aerial occupation have been debilitating for the U.S. military and administration. With no end in sight, it's tempting to renew claims that the Gulf War ceasefire was premature. The proposition is that by "extending the ground war for another 24-48 hours" we could "have broken the back of the Republican Guards, the true mainstay of Saddam Hussein's regime".[1] In doing so, we would have precipitated Saddam's fall from power and saved ourselves a great deal of grief in the long run. If this speculation is accepted as a matter of faith, it may impact how future wars are fought and terminated. Therefore, it's important to discuss the Gulf War ceasefire. Was it premature, resulting in missed opportunities, or the right call? Chapter One will argue that the timing of the Gulf War ceasefire was appropriate given military and political constraints, the difficulties in disposing of Saddam Hussein, and the questionable desirability of doing so. The belief that the premature ceasefire was a critical mistake is so widely-held that it must be addressed before confronting the real problem impacting the Gulf War termination.

Although the timing of the Gulf War ceasefire was appropriate, it was nonetheless an impulsive decision. Political and military leaders hadn't planned for the ceasefire or the

military and political events that followed. They didn't know where or when the military campaign should stop. Coalition forces weren't ready for the transition from a military to a political focus. The U.S. and its allies failed to anticipate or prepare for the uprisings within Iraq. General Schwarzkopf was given no political guidance prior to the ceasefire negotiations. Altogether, the Gulf War termination was a mess. Chapter One argues that the problem wasn't one of timing. Nor was the problem fundamentally a lack of prior planning, although very little was evident. Chapter Two asserts that the underlying problem was a disconnect between goals and the means to pursue them. The coalition was fighting a limited war in the sense that, for various reasons, it would not invade and subjugate Iraq. In spite of limited measures, the U.S. established a goal, or desired end state, that involved the removal of Saddam Hussein. The pursuit of an ambitious end state without the means to directly effect it resulted in a confused and unpredictable war termination. The Gulf War termination was further complicated by a variety of half-measures designed to indirectly achieve the desired end state. These measures failed to achieve their objective, and instead produced tragic unintended consequences.

Notes

[1] Bard E. O'Neill and Ilana Kass, "The Persian Gulf War: A Political-Military Assessment," *Comparative Strategy* II, no. 2 (April-June 1992): 231-232.

Chapter 1

Gulf War Ceasefire: Missed Opportunities or the Right Call?

> *But if the administration's aim was also to undermine the Saddam Hussein regime…the failure to complete the destruction of the Republican Guard detracted from those goals since it gave Saddam Hussein more loyal troops to suppress his enemies.*
>
> —Michael Gordon and General Bernard Trainor
> *The Generals' War*

Critics of the ceasefire decision cite the number of surviving Republican Guards divisions as the unfortunate result of an early war termination. Estimates are that "about 4 1/2 of Saddam Hussein's eight Republican divisions—the Adnan, the Nebuchadnezzar, the Al Faw, the 8th Special Forces, and part of the Hammurabi—escaped the Allied onslaught".[1] This count matches CIA photo analysis which determined at least 365 of escaping tanks were T-72s belonging to the Republican Guards. Since the CIA estimates that the Republican Guards began the war with 786 T-72s, roughly half got away.[2] In assessing the ceasefire decision, the question isn't how many got away, but how many could we have stopped and at what cost? The situation on the battlefield during 24-28 February 1991 makes these difficult questions.

Fog of War

As the ground war progressed, the ferocity of the coalition offensive, the collapse of the Iraqi army, and its rapid withdrawal from Kuwait created substantial confusion

abut the location and status of Iraqi units. General Powell had anticipated the chaos and warned the press prior to the ground offensive: "A land offensive will not be like the air campaign. The battlefield would be a swirl of dust and confusion."[3] By midday on 27 February 1991, General Powell advised the White House "that the Iraqi Army was so thoroughly dismembered that allied intelligence can't find divisions, can't find brigades, can't find battalions. It's all just shattered."[4] As evidence of this "fog of war," the 24th Mechanized Infantry Division (Mech) fought one of the biggest battles of the war *two days after* the ceasefire. The "Battle of Rumalah" began when U.S. forces were suddenly engaged by an "Iraqi brigade-sized armor and mechanized force (composite of Hamurabi and regular forces) that was making an attempt to escape".[5] Historical accounts of 3rd Army's operations during the final days and hours of the ground campaign contain no mention of the location of the escaping Republican Guards divisions, with the sole exception of part of the Hammurabi division, reported in and around Basra on the morning of 1 March.[6] In light of this confusion, it's hard to tell how many Iraqis, let alone particular units, could have been prevented from escaping.

Race to the Euphrates

At 73 Easting and Medina Ridge, VII Corps fought Republican Guards units that had assumed blocking positions to allow other Iraqis to escape through Basra. "The 'Mother of All Battles' had turned into a race to the Euphrates, and the Iraqis had a big head start. The question was whether CENTCOM could catch the Iraqis…"[7] Major General Barry McCaffrey's 24th Mech was in the best position to attack east toward Basra and block the retreat of any Iraqi still in Kuwait.[8] While the 24th Mech could have beaten a number of Iraqis to Basra, very few of them would have been Republican Guardsmen.

At the ceasefire, the 24th Mech was still 40 miles from Basra.[9] According to Army Lt. Col. John S. Brown, commander of an armored battalion during Desert Storm: "Of the vehicles that escaped through Basra, most would have slipped the noose before the 24th Infantry Division could possibly have closed it. The bulk of three Republican Guards infantry divisions, roughly aligned on the An Nasiriyah to Basra highway, fled precipitously just ahead of the 24th's advance."[10] Based on his experience and interviews with other Desert Storm veterans, Brown is convinced that Iraqi units (including three Republican Guards infantry divisions and perhaps the equivalent of one Republican Guards armored division) couldn't have been intercepted. Units further south were not as lucky. Iraqis that were beyond 50 miles from Basra when they began their retreat escaped "in tattered shreds, having lost or abandoned virtually all their equipment to ground pursuit, air interdiction, and maintenance collapse".[11] Brown's assessment is supported by the experience of a surviving Iraqi officer: "We were anxious to withdraw, to end the mad adventure, when Saddam announced withdrawal within 24 hours—though without any formal agreement with the allies to ensure the safety of the retreating forces. We understood that he wanted the allies to wipe us out: he had already withdrawn the Republican Guard to safety. We had to desert our tanks and vehicles to avoid aerial attacks. We walked 100 kilometers towards the Iraqi territories; hungry, thirsty and exhausted."[12]

VII Corps, have decimated those Republican Guards units blocking for the Iraqi retreat, was attacking eastward in the area south of Basra when the ceasefire was declared. General Franks, VII Corps commander, answering whether or not postponing the ceasefire would have destroyed more of Saddam's army, writes: "Absolutely (though

not much in our sector)".[13] Mr. Richard M. Swain, author of the history of Third Army in Desert Storm published by the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, agrees with General Franks. He believes that if the ground offensive had been allowed to continue, "more Iraqis might have been killed, but it seems unlikely that any major formations would have been cut off".[14] Brigadier General Scales, director of the U.S. Army's Desert Storm Study Project, reports that "by March 1, Republican Guard armored and mechanized units had reached as far north as al-Quarnah, almost 100 kilometers north of Basra… To have reached so far north on the 1st, the Guard armor had to have moved into Basra on the 27th, if not the 26th".[15] In other words, by the 28 February ceasefire, there was little organized Iraqi resistance south of Basra. Units and individual soldiers that continued to escape were no longer combat effective, and the surviving Republican Guards had escaped before Basra could have been captured.

Given the disintegration of the Iraqi army and the confusion on the battlefield, we can never know the outcome of a 24-48 hour ceasefire postponement. However, the claim that three to four Guards divisions could have been stopped is doubtful. Turning to the question, would it have been worth a try? We must first examine the military price of securing Basra.

Basra

The tactical problem at Basra was much different than the open desert. "The Basra area is a complex sprawl of marsh, river, irrigation canals, villages, and jumbled- together city featuring building separated by twisted streets." To make matters worse, "one well-reputed Republican Guards division had dug into the defense of the town".[16] As the battles at Medina Ridge and 73 Easting demonstrated, Republican Guards were willing to

fight. General Franks describes their performance: "These soldiers were disciplined, had good equipment and uniforms, were well fed, and fought hard till they were killed or surrendered. Those surrendering were in uniform, had weapons, and were under control of their officers. They did not, as advertised, merely fire a few rounds and give up."[17] The 24th Mech faced the task of securing difficult terrain from tough, dug-in defenders. Our soldiers would have been in their fifth day of continuous combat. Given their fatigue, performance would have been degraded and the "capacity for error—or lapse—would have been very great indeed".[18] Casualty estimates vary depending on the tenacity of the Iraqi defenders. If General Franks' assessment of the Republican Guards is correct, Basra may have cost as many as 200 killed in action.[19] The battle of Basra had the potential to be the riskiest and costliest operation of the war.

Highway of Death

Continued hostilities, even if limited to air attacks on retreating Iraqis, would have been expensive in political terms. The U.S. administration was deeply concerned about the perceived slaughter of Iraqis. Reports of the "Highway of Death" from Navy pilots were quickly forwarded to CENTCOM and on to the White House. The reaction of U.S. decision makers was similar to AWACs crewmember Major John Kinser: "That was the low point of the war for me. A couple of times I found myself thinking, 'Man, this is just a slaughter down there'".[20] Army attack helicopter pilots shared this feeling. "Aviators from the 101st and 12th Aviation Brigades expressed concern that they were having problems discriminating between armed and unarmed soldiers in the fleeing mass…"[21] This sensitivity weighted heavily on the decision to end hostilities on 28 February. At the White House meeting that decided the ceasefire, President Bush was concerned that "we

do not want to lose anything now with charges of brutalization".[22] Motives were not simply humanitarian. Political pressures were behind the desire to avoid charges of slaughtering Iraqis.

Arab reaction to the killing of fellow Arabs had to be considered. On 24 January, the New York Times reported that the Egyptian public, "shocked by the force and breadth of the allied bombing" was becoming more sympathetic to Iraq. Three days later "the Egyptian government announced that it favored neither the destruction of Iraq nor the elimination of Saddam Hussein".[23] On 3 February, The New York Times reported the concern of a prominent Arab political scientist, Kamel Abu Jaber: "If the United States continues with what it's doing…, there is no question that the region is in for a long period of terrorism, Islamic fundamentalism, and terrific hatred".[24] Sensitive to the public opinion in their countries, Arab coalition partners, primarily Saudi Arabia and Egypt, were pressuring President Bush "to bring the fighting to an end quickly. The pressure from the Saudis had been especially intense".[25] Media reports of civilian casualties didn't help matters. The 13 February raid on the "civilian air raid shelter" in Baghdad produced the New York Times headline, "Carnage in Baghdad Erases Image of an Antiseptic War". Two days later the Times reported "that within the U.S. government the result of all the negative publicity was to increase pressure to step up the timing of the planned ground assault in an effort to bring the war to a speedy conclusion".[26] Arab reaction wasn't the only issue. General Schwarzkopf recalls General Powell's concern prior to the ceasefire: "He told me that in Washington the controversy over wanton killing had become uncomfortably intense—even the French and the British had begun asking how long we intended to continue the war."[27]

Soviets' Reaction

President Bush's top foreign policy concern prior to the war had been relations with Gorbachev and events in the crumbling Soviet Union. Iraq still had support within the Soviet Union, particularly from the military. Strobe Talbott writes on the impact of the Gulf War: "The Soviet Military, which had been grumbling about the Kremlin's acquiescence in U.S. policy for months, was now fulminating against the ground war. The total and almost instantaneous collapse of the Iraqi army was not just an extremely unpleasant surprise for the Soviets but a humiliation—another piece of evidence that Gorbachev's opponents on the right could cite in accusing him of having squandered Soviet power."[28] On the 13th of February, Gorbachev's advisor on military affairs, Marshall Akhromeev, spoke on behalf of senior army political officers and KGB border guards: "Strikes are being launched against the people and the Iraqi economy. This cannot be tolerated any longer."[29] By 26 February, the pressure on Gorbachev was showing. In a speech, "he expressed alarm over the 'fragility' of U.S.-Soviet relations and hinted broadly that unless the coalition leaders showed 'responsible behavior', by which he clearly meant restraint, relations between Washington and Moscow would be in serious jeopardy".[30] Brent Scrowcroft, the National Security Advisor, was sensitive to Mr. Gorbachev's position: "I believe these attempts by Gorbachev to mediate were aimed primarily at salvaging some influence and bolstering his ever-weakening political strength at home. He was fighting for his political survival… It was a dilemma. Gorbachev had done so much to help us rally the international response to Iraq, and to isolate their former client, and we felt tremendous sympathy for him and his plight."[31]

Skilled in foreign policy, President Bush would have appreciated the impact of the Golf War on future U.S.-Soviet cooperation, and on the future of the Soviet Union itself.

In assessing the timeliness of the Gulf War ceasefire, political factors weighted in favor of an early ceasefire. The expectation of significant casualties in the next 24-48 hours is an issue, as well as uncertain impact on the military target, the Republican Guards. However, even given the military and political risks, wouldn't the **chance** of further destruction of Republican Guards warranted continuing? Perhaps, if crippling the Republican Guards would have led to a post-war situation favorable to U.S. interests.

Removing Saddam

Although not stated in national or military objectives, the ouster of Saddam Hussein was an implicit war aim. Air planners operated with an "intent to convince the Iraqi populace that a bright economic and political future will result from the replacement of the Saddam Hussein regime".[32] On 15 February, President Bush made the objective clearer: "There's another way for the bloodshed to stop, and that is for the Iraqi military and the Iraqi people to take matter into their own hands, to force Saddam Hussein, the dictator, to step aside."[33] Mr. Talbott clarifies this statement: "According to what several of his aides said later, the president was addressing anti-Saddam Hussein elements in the ruling Ba'ath Party and military, who he was hoping would take power and maintain a strong central government in Baghdad. But dissident Kurds and Shiites took Bush's message more literally."[34] Unfortunately for Mr. Bush, neither the Ba'ath party nor the Iraqi military was about to overthrow Saddam. Unfortunately for the Shiites and Kurds, they were incapable of overthrowing Saddam without U.S. support, which we weren't

going to provide. The fate of those three of four escaping Republican Guards divisions wasn't going to change these realities.

A Coup within the Ruling Elite

Expectations of a military or Ba'ath party-sponsored overthrow of Saddam were extremely unrealistic. Samir al-Khalil describes the unimaginable internal controls and pervasive fear that enables Saddam's survival. "Fear is the cement that holds together this strange politic in Iraq. All forms of organization not directly controlled by the party have been wiped out."[35] Saddam's reorganization of the party created "a whole hierarchy of bosses controlling those above. The result was virtually absolute control by the party through its own intelligence and the formalization of a system of spying on spies".[36] Similar restructuring ensured absolute party control over the Iraqi army. A comprehensive series of purges and the installation a political officers produced an army "metamorphosed into a creature of the Ba'ath party".[37] For 20 years, Hussein had built an internal security apparatus that would have made Stalin proud.

In addition to installing an elaborate formal security regime, Saddam has surrounded himself with his own clansmen. "As a result, Saddam's own family, which had been gathering wealth and influence since the '70s, mostly behind the scenes, came to the fore and started to occupy all the top positions relating to state security." Saddam knows the value of keeping his subordinates happy, and provides ample rewards and privileges. "This was particularly important after the end of the war, not only to shield the defenders of the regime from the worst shortages ordinary Iraqis have suffered…but also to maintain his own personal credibility."[38]

A final factor operated in Saddam's favor against a military or party-led challenge. As far as the ruling elite was concerned, they would rather keep Saddam, with all his faults, than face a post-Saddam Iraq. Their wealth, prestige, and lives were at risk if Saddam was removed. The post-ceasefire uprisings demonstrated this very real threat to Iraq's ruling class. The rebels immediately engaged in "mass revenge killings of Ba'thists—to some extent in the north and to a great extent in the south—(which) rallied the majority of party cadre behind Saddam Hussein. These random killings were a clear message to Ba'thists that they were wanted dead not alive, and they predictably resisted to the end."[39] For Iraqi military and party leadership, the post-Saddam scenarios weren't pleasant. Iraq, without Hussein, could face civil war and chaos, a rise in Shiite power at the expense of the ruling Sunni elite, and the real possibility of increased Iranian, Syrian, and U.S. influence.[40]

Saddam Hussein is protected by a brutally effective security network and is surrounded by a ruling elite that depends on his longevity. The Iraqi party and military leadership have tolerated a brutal dictator, an eight year war with Iran and 300,000 Iraqi dead, six weeks of continuous air attacks, the rout of an army with tens of thousands of casualties, and (by 1999) eight years of severe international sanctions. Postponing the Desert Storm ceasefire another 48 hours wouldn't have changed their minds.

While it was overly optimistic to expect the Iraqi elite to act, there's no guarantee that internal coup would have served our long-term interests. Dr. William Dowdy, Associate Research Professor of National Security at the Army War College, suggests that Saddam's successor might have been just as hostile to U.S. interests. That successor, "by repudiating Saddam's aggression against Kuwait and declaring himself free of

responsibility for the actions of the previous government, might have escaped the sanctions, scrutiny, and suspicions of the world community". Saddam, because he's Saddam, still "rivets the attention and sustains the resolve of the erstwhile enemies".[41] An equally malignant successor, because he wasn't Saddam, might have avoided the years of U.N. inspections and international sanctions that have at least postponed Iraqi rearmament. Conversely, a benign successor may have lacked the ability to hold Iraq together. "The installation of a leader acceptable to all parties—the coalition nations Iraq's Sunni Arabs, Iraq's powerful neighbors, and Iraq's restive minorities was and is an impossible dream."[42] A weaker replacement would likely have had a very short tenure, during which the fragmentation of Iraq may have been inevitable.

Kurd and Shiite Uprisings

This brings us to the uprisings that did occur. As the coalition offensive ended, Kurds in the north and Shiites in the south responded to Bush's call to action. The rebellions failed for three reasons. First, they lacked organization. Second, with or without the Republican Guards, Saddam retained the ability to suppress the uprisings. Third, not wanting the rebels to succeed, the U.S. stayed out of the fight.

The uprisings suffered from a lack of leadership, organization, and coordination. "It was the 'popular uprising' for which every opposition leader, from modern leftist to traditional cleric, had been calling throughout the first Gulf war. Yet most had given up hope of it ever happening and none were remotely prepared for putting it into practice."[43] The unplanned rebellions in the south "did not have a well forged leadership, an integrated organization, or a political or military program". Disgruntled soldiers involved in the uprisings "lamented the fact that cannons, tanks and other weapons were scattered

here and there with no plan to move to Baghdad and no contact with other officers and soldiers in other units…"[44] Communication was not only non-existent between rebels in adjacent towns, "but frequently adjacent neighborhoods within the same town could not know what was going on in each other's quarter".[45] Following the initial outburst against Saddam and violence directed at local authority, the rebellions turned to anarchy. "Refugees fleeing south continued to report 'chaotic conditions' in the towns under rebel control. No effort appears to have been made to restore order and organize a defense against the suppression that was inevitably to come."[46] Lack of coordination between southern Shiite and northern Kurdish uprisings benefited Saddam. "The rebellion in the Kurdish areas did not begin until after suppression of the southern revolt was well under way." This allowed the transfer of two Republican Guards brigades from the north to participate in suppressing southern uprisings.[47]

Anticipating internal unrest, Saddam Hussein hedged his bets by keeping the bulk of his army out of the Kuwait Theater of Operations (KTO). At the eve of the ground offensive, only 26 divisions were inside the KTO while 42 divisions were in reserve. Units in central reserve included a mechanized division, a Republican Guards motorized division, and the Iraqi helicopter fleet.[48] These forces were more than adequate to deal with unsupported uprisings that "appeared to lack the organization, unity, and power deemed necessary to topple a weakened but still entrenched dictatorship".[49] As Defense Intelligence Agency historian Brian Shellum put it: "Well-led soldiers with rifles in trucks—and Saddam had plenty of those—would have been enough in the end to do the job."[50]

Lt. Col. Brown, commander of 2-66 Armor posted in southern Iraq following the ceasefire, witnessed the uprising in the town of Umm Qasr and was not impressed. "With or without KTO escapees, the surviving Iraqi army was more than sufficient to suppress domestic opposition. One should not overrate the military sophistication necessary to win an Iraqi civil war. Indeed, American forces seem to have sat through he battle of Umm Qasr without particularly knowing that it was going on."[51] Michael Sterner, former Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Near East and South Asian Affairs, supports Col. Brown's observations:

> From what we now know about the uprisings that did take place, and about the internal situation in Iraq, it is hard to make the case that another day of fighting would have made the difference between Saddam's survival and ouster. No doubt the task of suppression would have taken somewhat longer if the regime had been deprived of the use of heavy armor and helicopters; but the ultimate outcome of a battle between battered but still disciplined troops and a rebellion that was disorganized and lacking in overall leadership or any plan of action beyond taking revenge on local officials was never in doubt.[52]

The uprisings were doomed to fail without U.S. support. Unfortunately for the rebels, neither the U.S. nor its coalition partners wanted them to succeed.

Lebanonization of Iraq

The U.S. administration and its Arab allies wanted to see Saddam replaced by a benign central authority able to hold Iraq together. The Kurd and Shiite uprisings threatened to divide Iraq and potentially spread trouble to other states. According to Mr. Talbott: "Few if any of the allies wanted to see the dismemberment of (Saddam's) country. The governments in Ankara, Damascus, and Tehran were concerned that if the Kurds in northern Iraq succeeded in freeing themselves from Baghdad's rule, they would stir up the Kurdish minorities in Turkey, Syria, and Iran."[53] Dr. Dowdy adds: American

interests in the area would not have been served by a sustained Kurdish rebellion that not only tore Iraq apart but almost certainly would have spread to our ally, Turkey, where millions of nationalistic Kurds reside".[54] The Saudis shared a similar concern over the Shiite uprising in the south. "The last thing King Fahd wanted on his northern border was an Iraq suddenly in the advanced stages of disintegration. Fahd was especially concerned that in such a situation, the Shiite Muslim majority of Iraq…might split from Iraq and establish its own state, modeled more or less on the radical Shiite regime in Tehran."[55] The U.S. and its Arab allies were justified in their concern about Iranian influence:

> In 1991 Iran played a role in making propaganda and it provided weapons to some Iraqi rebel groups, particularly to the Badr Brigade… The Brigade was composed of Iraqi Shi'is recruited from among refugees expelled to Iran by the Baath in the late 1970s and early 1980s, and it appears that several thousand of the entered Iraq a few days after the insurrection had started. In training and arming these refugees, Iran demonstrated the continuity of its traditional aspirations to gain leverage over Iraq by influencing Shi'i affairs in the country.[56]

As the uprising gathered force, the overthrow of Saddam by the ruling elite didn't occur. In order to avoid precipitating the breakup, or "Lebanonization" of Iraq, the U.S. stayed out of the fight. "In a series of meetings at the White House, Bush made clear, emphatically and repeatedly, that he saw what was happening in Iraq as a 'civil war', in which the United States must not, under any circumstances, become involved."[57] Had the rebellions won, the impact of a divided Iraq and its effect on our allies' internal stability could have been profound, if not disastrous. Colonel Norvell B. DeAtkine, director of Middle East Studies at the JFK Special Warfare Center, argues that continued attack against the Republican Guards would have had serious consequences for regional stability:

> In short, a further and prolonged military campaign in Iraq would have ultimately ended in disaster. The 'missed opportunity' to totally destroy the nucleus of Saddam's power, the Republican Guard, is viewed by the 'not enough' detractors as the major error of the war. In my view this would have resulted in the inability of Saddam and his coterie of followers to hold on to Iraqi Kurdistan and the Shia south, resulting in a fragmented Iraq and a power vacuum. A more dismal prospect from the vantage point of stability is hard to imagine.[58]

Given the risks, the U.S. reluctance to support the rebels was understandable. Since the uprisings were likely to fail without direct U.S. participation, and their success wasn't in our interests, they shouldn't be used in arguing that the Desert Storm ceasefire was premature.

Summary

Arguments for extending hostilities another 24-48 hours fail to consider the "fog of war," the military and political constraints operating at the time of the ceasefire, the security of Saddam's regime, and the questionable desirability of Saddam's fall. A potentially costly assault on Basra would probably not have resulted in the destruction of the three or four escaping Republican Guards divisions. Continuing to press the attack in spite of international pressure might have resulted in a backlash from the Arab world, our Allies, and the fragile Soviet Union. There's no convincing evidence that destruction of Republican Guards would have produced the desired overthrow of Saddam by Iraq's ruling elite, or that it would have changed the outcome of the Kurd and Shiite rebellions. In either case, Saddam's fall may not have served U.S. interests. The low probability and questionable utility in further destruction of escaping divisions simply doesn't justify the military and political risks in extending the war. The Gulf War ceasefire was the right call.

Notes

[1] U.S. News and World Report, *Triumph Without Victory* (New York, NY.: Times Books, 1992), 405.

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[15] Brigadier General Robert H. Scales, Jr., *Certain Victory* (Washington, DC.: Office of the Chief of Staff, United States Army, 1993), 316.

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[24] Alan Cowell, "Understanding Hussein: An Orphan Who Fights to Be Remembered," *New York Times International Section*, 3 February 1991, 17.

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[31] George Bush and Brent Scowcroft, *A World Transformed* (New York, NY.: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998), 490.

Notes

[32] Thomas A. Keaney and Eliot A. Cohen, *Gulf War Air Power Survey Summary Report* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1993), 44.

[33] Hilsman, 118.

[34] Talbott, 24.

[35] Samir al-Khalil, *Republic of Fear, The Politics of Modern Iraq* (New York, NY.: Pantheon Books, 1990), 275.

[36] Ibid., 16.

[37] Ibid., 25.

[38] Riadh Abed, "How Saddam's Regime Survived the War," *Middle East International*, 2 April 1993, 15.

[39] al-Jabbar, 13.

[40] Steve A. Yetiv, *The Persian Gulf Crisis* (Westport, CN.: Greenwood Press, 1997), 111.

[41] William L. Dowdy, *Second Guessing the End of Desert Storm*, Research Report (Carlysle, PA.: Army War College Strategic Studies Institute, 1992), 2.

[42] Norvell B. DeAtkine, "The Middle East Scholars and the Gulf War," *Parameters*, Summer 1993, 59.

[43] Al-Jabbar, 8.

[44] Al-Jabbar, 10.

[45] Al-Jabbar, 9.

[46] Michael Sterner, "Closing the Gate: The Persian Gulf War Revisited," *Current History* (January 1997): 17.

[47] Ibid., 18.

[48] Frank Chadwick and Matt Caffrey, *The Gulf War Fact Book* (Bloomington, IL.: Game Designers Workshop, 1991), 68-69, 98.

[49] Bard E. O'Neill and Ilana Kass, "The Persian Gulf War: A Political-Military Assessment," *Comparative Strategy* II, no. 2 (April-June 1992): 232.

[50] Sterner, 19.

[51] Brown, 17.

[52] Sterner, 19.

[53] Talbott, 23.

[54] Dowdy, 1.

[55] U.S. News an World Report, 395.

[56] Yitzhak Nakash, *The Shi'is of Iraq*, (Princeton, NJ.: Princeton University Press, 1994), 277.

[57] Talbott, 25.

[58] DeAtkine, 59.

Chapter Two

Gulf War Termination: Lessons Learned

> *…unless the goal of the war is total annihilation of the opponent and subjugation of his country, it is inherently difficult to determine where and when to cease hostilities… And, as the experience of Desert Storm clearly demonstrates, it is far easier to compel an opponent to sue for peace than to modify his behavior in the aftermath. Thus, the fog of war thickens at war's termination, exacerbating the effort to translate battlefield victories into political realities.*
>
> Bard E. O'Neill and Ilana Kass
> "The Persian Gulf War: A Political-Military Assessment"

While the timing of the Gulf War ceasefire was appropriate, it was by no means a premeditated act. Clearly, the ceasefire was a spur-of-the-moment decision and the U.S. was unprepared for the post-ceasefire political, military, and civil situation. As General Schwarzkopf's chief foreign policy advisor at CENTCOM stated: "We never did have a plan to terminate the war".[1] Critics contend that the haphazard Gulf War termination resulted from lack of a commonly understood and well-defined end state. This argument doesn't ring true. There was, in fact, a commonly understood desired end state. In addition to expelling Iraqi forces from Kuwait and the destruction of Iraq's offensive military capability, the U.S. sought a unified Iraqi state with Saddam Hussein removed from power. This chapter will argue that the fundamental problem during the Gulf War was a disconnect between the means we were willing and able to employ and our desired end state. Limited in its means, the U.S. took various half-measures to achieve its desired

end state. Instead of achieving their objectives, these half-measures resulted in unforeseen and tragic consequences. Without a clear link between goals and means, the ends were inevitably unpredictable, confused, and undesirable.

Limited War, Limited Objectives?

The Gulf War was a limited war in the sense that the U.S. never intended to invade the whole of Iraq and subjugate its government and people. The limitation stemmed from the U.N. mandate, our coalition partners, and the U.S.' distaste with the prospect of invading Iraq. In his memoirs, General Schwarzkopf argues against the notion of capturing Baghdad, citing the inevitable fracturing of the coalition, the cost of occupying Iraq, and the certainty "that had we taken all of Iraq, we would have been like the dinosaur in the tar pit".[2] General Powell explains that "the U.N. resolution made it clear that the mission was only to free Kuwait… In none of the meetings I attended was dismembering Iraq, conquering Baghdad, or changing the Iraqi form of government ever seriously considered".[3] General Khaled, Commander of Joint Forces during the Gulf War and member of the Saudi royal family adds: "There was never any suggestion of marching on Baghdad nor, so far as I know, was the subject ever discussed. Needless to say any such move was out of the question for the Arab members of the coalition, and indeed would have been vigorously opposed by Saudi Arabia."[4] Given the limited scope of the war, our objectives should have been limited accordingly. U.S. national objectives during the Gulf War were:

1. Immediate and unconditional withdrawal of Iraqi forces from Kuwait.
2. Restoration of the legitimate government of Kuwait.
3. Security and stability of Saudi Arabia and the Persian Gulf.
4. Safety and protection of Americans abroad.[5]

Objectives one, two, and four are clear, limited, and easily translated into achievable military objectives and a recognizable and obtainable end state. Objective number three is problematic. The problem began when its associated desired end state exceeded our ability and commitment to achieve its effect.

Desired End State

Joint Pub 3-0 defines an end state as "the set of required conditions that achieve the strategic objectives" and stresses that defining the desired end state is the critical first step in the planning process.[6] During the Gulf War, one of our strategic objectives was "security and stability of Saudi Arabia and the Persian Gulf". The desired end state involved a weakened, yet intact Iraq, and the removal of Saddam Hussein by Iraq's ruling elite. While this end state was never formally stated, it was widely understood:

- President Bush: "While we hoped that a popular revolt or coup would topple Saddam, neither the United States nor the countries of the region wished to see the breakup of the Iraqi state."[7]

- General Powell: "What was hoped for frankly, in a postwar Gulf region was an Iraq still standing with Saddam overthrown."[8]

- CENTCOM: "The military strategy saw regional stability in terms of an Iraq whose military capability had been so degraded that it could not threaten its neighbors but not a dismembered Iraq…"[9]

- CENTAF: "The strikes, in coordination with others, would not just neutralize the government but change it by inducing a coup or revolt that would result in a government more amenable to Coalition demands."[10]

This end state entailed the disposal of an entrenched dictator, but only by particular elements within Iraq, and only in a manner that enabled Iraq to remain a unified state. Unfortunately, the U.S. was willing neither to pursue this goal through direct means nor to pay the associated price of nation-building and humanitarian relief. Instead, the U.S.

attempted a variety of half-measures to achieve its desired end state. Given modest means and ambitious goals, it's not surprising that the Gulf War termination would be immersed in confusion, ambiguity, and unintended consequences.

Half-measures

The U.S. attempted to achieve its desired end state by encouraging a coup by the Iraqi military or Ba'ath party. Instead, we encouraged Kurds and Shiites to rebel against Saddam. According to Bob Woodward, during an 3 August 1990 National Security Council meeting, President Bush "ordered the CIA to begin planing for a covert operation that would destabilize the regime and, he hoped, remove Saddam from power. He wanted an all-fronts effort to strangle the Iraqi economy, support anti-Saddam resistance groups inside or outside Iraq, and look for alternative leaders…"[11] By mid-August, "Bush signed a top-secret intelligence 'finding' authorizing CIA covert actions to overthrow Saddam".[12]

Although little is known about the CIA's actions, Gordon and Trainor report CIA support of a Saudi-operated network of radio stations, "dubbed the Voice of Free Iraq, which urged the Iraqi people to topple Saddam Hussein." USAF aircraft, code-named Volant Solo, also broadcasted into Iraq. Unfortunately, because of range limitations, both sources were unable to reach Baghdad, the intended target. Their range was limited to "the Iraqi ground troops in the Kuwaiti theater of operations and the Shiite-dominated area of southern Iraq, a group Washington knew little about and was reluctant to support".[13]

While the effects of U.S. propaganda broadcasts are unknown, President Bush's 15 February 1991 speech calling on the Iraqi people to take matters into their own hands was

heard. Brent Scowcroft, dismayed at charges that President Bush provoked, then abandoned, the uprisings answers: "It is true that we hoped Saddam would be toppled. But we never thought that could be done by anyone outside the military and never tried to incite the general population. It is stretching the point to imagine that a routine speech in Washington would have gotten to Iraqi malcontents and have been the motivation for the subsequent action of the Shiites and Kurds."[14] According to the rebels, it wasn't a stretch. One told a New York Times reporter: "Bush said that we should rebel against Saddam. We rebelled against Saddam, but where is Bush?"[15] "It was not unreasonable to read the president's previous call for Saddam Hussein's overthrow as a pledge of American support and protection, and his subsequent stance of non-intervention as a betrayal of that pledge. Shivering on their bleak mountaintops, and dying at a rate of one to two thousand a day, every Kurd interviewed by the western media thought so."[16]

During the uprising and brutal suppression, the State Department estimated that "Kurds are dying at a rate of 600 a day on the Turkish border. Another 1,000 or more may be dying on the Iranian border, the victims are the weakest, the children and the aged".[17] An estimated two million Kurdish refugees languished on the borders of Turkey and Iran, while hundreds of thousands of Shi'a fled to the marshlands of southern Iraq.[18] "Having failed to anticipate either the rebellion or the subsequent repression, the United States was unprepared for the humanitarian crisis that followed."[19] Instead of achieving its desired end state, the U.S. incited rebellions it neither expected nor desired. The staggering human tragedy and the long-term impact on U.S. credibility were unintended consequences of pursuing disproportionate ends through limited means.

Gulf War air planners developed an air campaign to achieve the desired end state. One of the goals of the Instant Thunder strategic air campaign was to "create conditions conducive to the overthrow of the Saddam Hussein regime by patriotic Iraqi elements…"[20] Iraq's economic infrastructure, to include electrical power, was targeted for its psychological impact on the Iraqi people in order "to convince the Iraqi populace that a bright economic and political future would result from the replacement of the Saddam Hussein regime".[21] The strategic air attacks failed to incite an insurrection in the Baghdad area, the focus of the bombing. The attacks also failed to prevent Saddam Hussein from suppressing the uprising that did occur. The disruption of Iraq's electrical generating capability did have an impact on Iraqi civilians. While the precision attacks produced few direct collateral civilian casualties, the indirect effects may have been substantial. A Harvard Study Team report estimated "that infant and child mortality would increase by some 100 percent during the first year following the ceasefire, or by some 70,000, as a result of gastroenteritis, cholera, typhoid, and malnutrition, and many thousands more aged and infirm Iraqis almost certainly succumbed to the same causes".[22] In fairness, the Gulf War Air Power Survey argues that these estimates are high because they did not anticipate the "rapid resumption of electrical power in Iraq".[23] To some extent, Iraqi civilian casualties were an unfortunate by-product of failed U.S. efforts to effect an elusive desired end state.

Destruction of the Republican Guards was another means of producing that end state. "The Republican Guard received particular attention in Central Command planning… Not only did the Guard serve as the strategic reserve of the Iraqi forces in Kuwait, it also provided essential support to Saddam Hussein's regime. Schwarzkopf's planners

intended to rout them so that they could not help Saddam Hussein retain order in the country."[24] Attacks on the Republican Guards were necessary in pursuing the objectives of liberating Kuwait and reducing Iraq's offensive capability. However, the issue of the escaping Guards divisions (the subject of Chapter One) and their impact on the desired end state complicated the Gulf War termination decision and has been the subject of debate ever since.

Lessons Learned

In the Gulf War, the U.S. faced the unusual prospect of overwhelming defeat of the enemy's military in the confines of a limited war. With military victory assured, we sought to reorder the Iraqi government in a manner favorable to U.S. interests. However, we were unwilling and/or unable to pay the military, political, and financial costs needed to directly secure that objective. The result was an imbalance in the goals-ways-means elements of strategy. When means are insufficient to directly achieve desired goals, it's likely that results will be undesirable, uncertain, and unforeseeable. This situation makes war termination a difficult and confused process and encourages half-measures with associated unpredictable consequences.

The implicit objective of encouraging the overthrow of Saddam Hussein complicated the war termination. In hindsight, this goal should have generated several questions prior to the war:

- What happens if the Iraqis are expelled from Kuwait and Saddam is still in power?
- How long will we pursue measures designed to topple Saddam?
- Do we expect a political backlash if we continue hostilities after Iraqi forces in Kuwait are defeated?

- Is it possible the Kurds and Shiites might rebel, if so, how will we react? Are these rebellions counter to U.S. interests? Are we obligated to provide military or humanitarian assistance?

These would have been difficult questions to answer. If asked, they might have warned us of the problems inherent in our strategy.

U.S. objectives might have been limited to the removal of the Iraqi military from Kuwait and elimination of Iraq's offensive capability. In this case, the desired end state would be the rout of the Iraqi army, establishment of a U.N. peacekeeping and WMD inspection regime, and destruction of Iraq's war machine on the order produced during the war:

> By the war's end, the world's sixth largest air force had been severely damaged, and Iraq's army was halved in size. Iraq lost an estimated 2,633 tanks out of 5,800, 2,196 artillery pieces out of 3,850, and 324 fixed-wing combat aircraft out of an estimated 650-700.[25]

War termination planning and decision-making would have been greatly simplified. More importantly, measures aimed at toppling Saddam, and the unforeseen cost in human suffering, might have been avoided.

The final issue is a moral one. Robert Tucker and David Hendrickson raise this concern in *The Imperial Temptation*. The authors soundly criticize the U.S. for creating enormous devastation and misery in Iraq and not following through with post-war reconstruction and aid.

> We have fastened upon a formula for going to war—in which American casualties are minimized and protracted engagements are avoided—that requires the massive use of American firepower and a speedy withdrawal from the scenes of destruction…. Its peculiar vice is that it enables us to go to war with far greater precipitancy than we otherwise might while simultaneously allowing us to walk away from the ruin we create without feeling a commensurate sense of responsibility. It creates anarchy and calls it peace. In the name of order, it wreaks havoc. It allows us to

> assume an imperial role without discharging the classic duties of imperial rule.[26]

Clearly, U.S. measures to overthrow Saddam constituted a substantial intervention in Iraqi internal affairs. The tragic consequences of that intervention and subsequent 'hands off' policy is an embarrassing, if not shameful chapter in U.S. history.

There is a middle ground between non-intervention and total commitment to post-war involvement in the World War II model. Tucker and Hendrickson suggest "that had the United States refrained from destroying Iraq's infrastructure and had it not called for the overthrow of Saddam by the people of Iraq, the weight of the obligation to reconstruct and rehabilitate would have been considerably lessened".[27] When the means are limited, so must be the objectives. The result will be a more predictable war termination with less risk of undesirable unintended consequences.

Notes

[1] Michael R. Gordon and General Bernard E. Trainor, *The General's War* (Boston, MA.: Little, Brown and Company, 1995), 461.

[2] General H. Norman Schwarzkopf, *It Doesn't Take a Hero* (New York, NY.: Bantam Books, 1992), 579.

[3] Colin L. Powell, *My American Journey* (New York, NY.: Random House, 1995), 490.

[4] Khaled B. Sultan, *Desert Warrior: A Personal View of the Gulf War by the Joint Force Commander* (New York, NY.: Diane Pub., 1997), 426.

[5] U.S. Department of Defense, *Final Report to Congress: Conduct of the Persian Gulf War* (Washington, D.C.: 1992), 19.

[6] Joint Publication 3-0, *Doctrine for Joint Operations*, 1 February 1995, III-2.

[7] George Bush and Brent Scowcroft, *A World Transformed* (New York, NY.: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998), 489.

[8] Powell, 490.

[9] John T. Fishel, *Liberation, Occupation, and Rescue: War Termination and Desert Storm*, Research Report (Carlisle Barracks, PA.: U.S. Army War College, 1992), 61.

[10] Thomas A. Keaney and Eliot A. Cohen, *Gulf War Air Power Survey Summary Report* (Washington, DC.: Government Printing Office, 1993), 61.

[11] Bob Woodward, *The Commanders* (New York, NY.: Simon and Schuster, 1991), 237.

[12] Ibid., 282..

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[13] Gordon and Trainor, 317.

[14] Bush, 472.

[15] Yitzhak Nakash, *The Shi'is of Iraq* (Princeton, NJ.: Princeton University Press, 1994), 276.

[16] Robert W. Tucker and David C. Hendrickson, *The Imperial Temptation* (New York, NY.: Council on Foreign Relations Press, 1992), 79.

[17] Peter W. Galbraith, "The Persian Gulf War Resulted in Disaster for the Kurdish People," in *Iraq: Current Controversies*, ed. Bruno Leone et. Al. (San Diego, CA.: Greenhaven Press, Inc., 1991) 197.

[18] Tucker and Hendrickson, 78.

[19] Galbraith, 197.

[20] Robert A. Pape, *Bombing to Win* (Ithaca, NY.: Cornell University Press, 1996), 222.

[21] Keaney and Cohen, 44.

[22] Jeffrey Record, *Hollow Victory, A Contrary View of the Persian Gulf War* (McClean, VA.: Brassey's Inc. 1993), 113.

[23] Keaney and Cohen, 75.

[24] Ibid., 46.

[25] Steven A. Yetiv, *The Persian Gulf Crisis* (Westport, CN.: Greenwood Press, 1997), 41.

[26] Tucker and Hendrickson, 162.

[27] Ibid., 144.

Conclusion

Frustrated by Saddam Hussein's longevity, future U.S. strategists may be tempted to draw the wrong lessons from the Gulf War and its termination. Advocates of the "missed opportunity" theories ignore the complexity and risks associated with removing the Iraqi dictator. The fact is the U.S. underestimated the endurance of Saddam's regime. Saddam's overthrow by the ruling elite, and only the ruling elite, and only in a manner that kept Iraq intact, was an unrealistic dream. Pursuit of that dream through indirect half-measures risked unintended consequences, the least of which was a world-wide political backlash. The more significant was a bloody civil war. The deaths of thousands of Shiites and Kurds in a doomed rebellion are a tragic consequence of American optimism and naivete. Reflections on the Gulf War should not involve speculation on the outcome of additional application of half-measures. There is no evidence that a marginal extension of the ground war, bombing, or propaganda efforts would have achieved our desired end state.

The appropriate lesson for the Gulf War is the danger inherent in pursuing ambitious objectives with limited means. The U.S. attempted to reorder and reform Iraq's government, but was unwilling to impose that goal militarily, or pay the price of occupation and rehabilitation. The disconnect between goals and means, and the temptation to employ half-measures, resulted in an unpredictable, confused, and undesirable end state. On a practical level, this situation creates a nightmare for war termination planners. On a moral level, the massive intervention in an enemy's internal affairs imposes an obligation for post-war assistance and reconstruction. Prior to the next

conflict, Desert Storm should remind us not only to ask “in what ways **can** we impose our will on the enemy?” but also “in what ways **should** we impose our will?

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