

WHY WE LOST

A GENERAL'S INSIDE ACCOUNT
OF THE IRAQ AND AFGHANISTAN WARS

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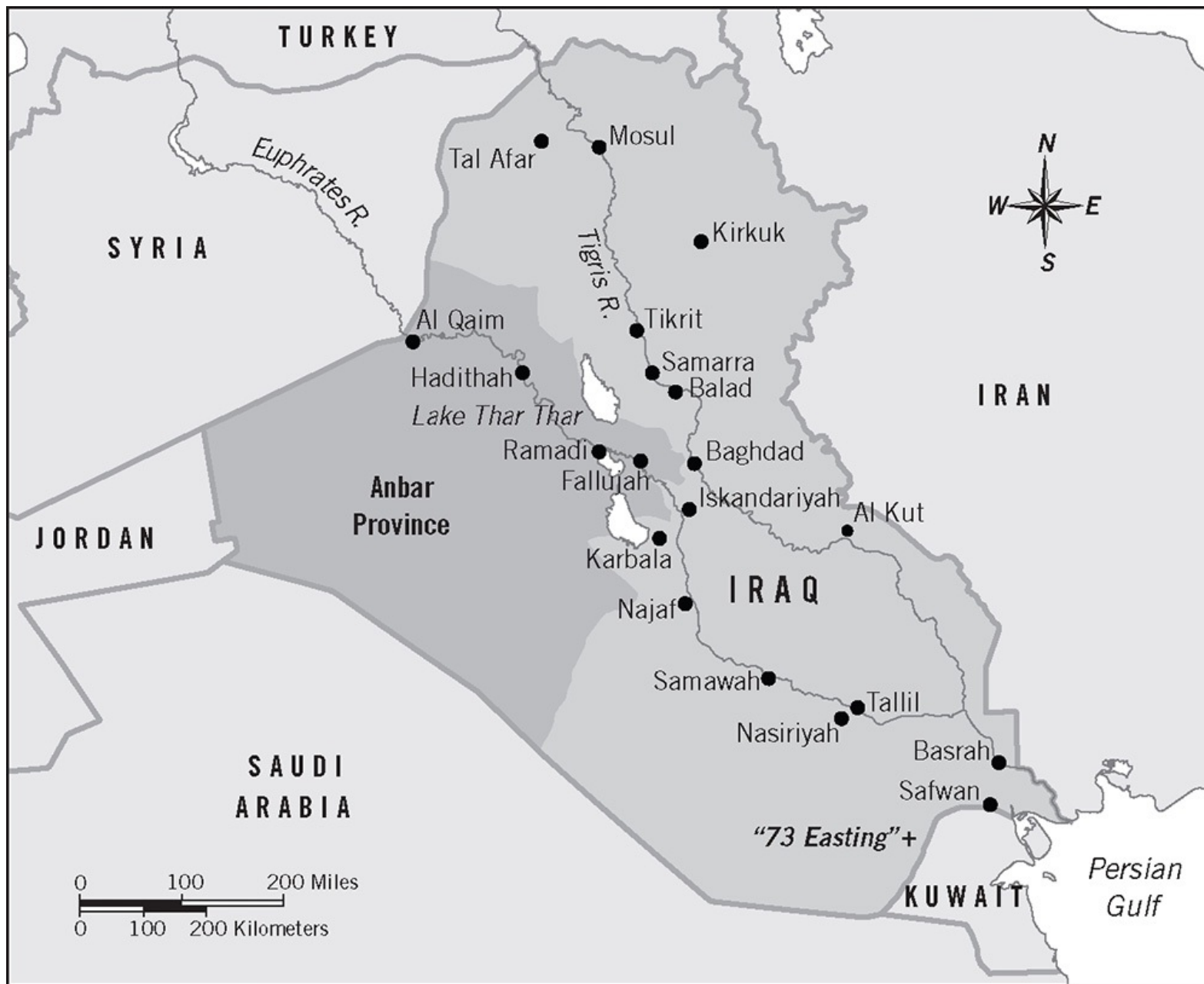
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The views expressed herein are those of the author and do not reflect the official positions of the Department of the Army, the Department of Defense, and the United States government.

*For Joy, who knew
For Philip, who fought
For Carolyn, who learned
For our honored dead, lest we forget*







I am a United States Army general, and I lost the Global War on Terrorism. It's like Alcoholics Anonymous; step one is admitting you have a problem. Well, I have a problem. So do my peers. And thanks to our problem, now all of America has a problem, to wit: two lost campaigns and a war gone awry.

We should have known this one was going to go bad when we couldn't even settle on a name. In the wake of the horrific al-Qaeda attacks on September 11, 2001, we tried out various labels. The guys in the Pentagon basement at first offered Operation Infinite Justice, which sounded fine, both almighty and righteous. Then various handwringers noted that it might upset the Muslims. These were presumably different kinds of followers of Islam than the nineteen zealots who had just slaughtered thousands of our fellow citizens. Well, better incoherent than insensitive, I guess.

So we settled on Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF). Our efforts in Afghanistan certainly lived up to the "enduring" part, dragging out longer than the ten-year Trojan War as we desperately tried to impose "freedom" on surly Pashtuns. The big guys in Washington then riffed off that OEF theme. We embarked on OEF-CCA (Caribbean and Central America), OEF-HOA (Horn of Africa, run out of Djibouti), OEF-K (Kyrgyzstan), OEF-P (the Philippines), OEF-PG (Pankisi Gorge, in the Caucasus republic of Georgia), and OEF-TS (Trans-Sahara, in northern Africa), among others not publicly acknowledged. We even found time, and nomenclature, for loosely related campaigns. One was the 2011 imbroglio in Libya known at the outset as Operation Odyssey Dawn, a good name for a Las Vegas pole dancer but a bit exotic for a military campaign. Cooler heads at NATO headquarters quickly substituted the boring but less provocative Unified Protector. We are a long way from Korean War operations like Killer and Ripper. You didn't have to guess what those names meant.

Still, that Enduring Freedom idea reflected the preferred brand. Few could have been much surprised when, in 2003, the next major campaign in the ill-named war drew the title Operation Iraqi Freedom. As in World War II, the Iraq intervention was seen, rightly, as yet another theater in what the military formally called the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT). Like many veterans, I earned campaign ribbons with that designation.

Other names were tried for the parts or the whole of the conflict. These included the Long War (true enough), the Afghan War, the Iraq War, the 9/11 War, the War on Terrorism (minus the *Global*), the War on Terror (minus the *-ism*), and a real bureaucratic gem the Overseas Contingency Operation. That inane euphemism arose as a result of a related phrase, the "man-caused disaster" on 9/11. Not one title for this war identified the enemy: anti-Western Islamists and the ramshackle, quasi-fascist Middle East states that enabled them.

So instead we waged a Global War on Terrorism against enemies referred to vaguely as terrorists, cowards, evildoers, and extremists. Although those descriptions were rather generic, somehow we always ended up going after the same old bunch of Islamists and their ilk. Our opponents had no illusions about who our targets were, even if some of us did. This GWOT sputtered along for years, with me in it, along with many others much more capable, brave, and distinguished.

I was never the overall commander in either Afghanistan or Iraq. You'd find me lower down on the food chain, but high enough. I commanded a one-star advisory team in Iraq in 2005-06, an Army division (about twenty thousand soldiers) in Baghdad in 2009-10, and a three-star advisory organization in Afghanistan in 2011-13. I was present when key decisions were made, delayed, or avoided. I made, delayed, or avoided a few myself. I got out on the ground a lot with small units as we patrolled and raided. Sometimes, I communed with the strategic-headquarters types in the morning and at sunset grubbed through a village with a rifle platoon. Now and then, Iraqi and Afghan

insurgents tried to kill me. By the enemy's hand, abetted by my ignorance, my arrogance, and the inexorable fortunes of war, I lost eighty men and women under my charge; more than three times that number were wounded. Those sad losses are, to borrow the words of Robert E. Lee on that awful third day at Gettysburg, all my fault.

This history does not purport to tell the whole story of the war. At best, it's a start. A century hence if our society still exists and still cares, much better chroniclers than I will still be laboring to render complete account. All I can offer at this point is a study in what went right and what went wrong, colored—perhaps too much—by experience.

What went right involved the men and women who fought. Most of them were not Americans, as these wars among the people always feature a lot of locals helping the cause. Like our enemies, our regional comrades were almost all Muslims. In addition, both the Afghan and Iraq campaigns included partner countries, from old allies like Australia, Britain, and Canada to newer teammates like El Salvador, Korea, and Mongolia. All of that help meant a lot, and although we didn't always appreciate it enough at the time, we can never forget those others and their sacrifices. But in the end, the outcome rode on the United States.

This look at the war focuses on us, the Americans. We didn't start it, but once it began, we drove the pace and course of the conflict. At the tactical level—Army-speak for the realm of vicious firefights and night raids—the courage, discipline, and lethality of our Americans in uniform stand with anything accomplished in the Civil War, both world wars, Korea, or Vietnam. That all went very right.

What went wrong squandered the bravery, sweat, and blood of these fine Americans. Our primary failing in the war involved generalship. If you prefer the war-college lexicon, we—guys like me—demonstrated poor strategic and operational leadership. For soldiers, *strategy* and *operational art* translate to “the big picture” (your goal) and “the plan” (how you get there). We got both wrong, the latter more than the former. Some might blame the elected and appointed civilian leaders. There's enough fault to go around, and in this telling, the suits will get their share. But I know better, and so do the rest of the generals. We have been trained and educated all our lives on how to fight and win. This was our war to lose, and we did.

We should have known better. In the military schools, like West Point, Fort Leavenworth, Quantico and Carlisle Barracks, soldiers study the work of the great thinkers who have wrestled with winning wars across the ages. Along with Thucydides, Julius Caesar, and Carl von Clausewitz, the instructors introduce the ancient wisdom of Sun Tzu, the Chinese general and theorist who penned his poetic, elliptical, sometimes cryptic *Art of War* some twenty-three centuries ago. Master Sun put it simply: “Know the enemy and know yourself; in a hundred battles you will never be in peril” We failed on both counts. I know I sure did. As generals, we did not know our enemy—never pinned him down, never focused our efforts, and got all too good at making new opponents before we'd handled the old ones.

We then added to our troubles by misusing the U.S. Armed Forces, which are designed, manned, and equipped for short, decisive, conventional conflict. Instead, certain of our tremendously able, disciplined troops, buoyed by dazzling early victories, we backed into not one but two long, indecisive counterinsurgent struggles ill suited to the nature of our forces. Time after time, despite the fact that and my fellow generals saw it wasn't working, we failed to reconsider our basic assumptions. We failed to question our flawed understanding of our foe or ourselves. We simply asked for more time. Given enough months, then years, then decades—always just a few more, please—we trusted that our great men and women would pull it out. In the end, all the courage and skill in the world could not overcome ignorance and arrogance. As a general, I got it wrong. And I did so in the company of my peers.

Just as the soldiers, sailors, airmen, Marines, and coastguardsmen of this conflict very much resembled ~~Johnny Reb, Billy Yank, the frontier regulars, the doughboys, GI Joe, and the grunts of Southeast Asia~~, our generals also often ran true to types and archetypes. The American character has not changed all that much in two centuries and a few decades, and so we see more than a few echoes of our military heritage. Certainly in David Petraeus there is something of the innovative yet overly ambitious Douglas MacArthur. Tough Marine Jim Mattis filled the role of a latter-day George Patton or, if you prefer, Mattis's fellow Marine Lewis B. "Chesty" Puller. Stan McChrystal definitely evoked hard-bitten Matthew Ridgway, come to energize a floundering war effort. George Casey conjures up the thoughts of the stolid U. S. Grant, and John Allen's overriding regard for the alliance reminds one of the collegial Dwight D. Eisenhower. Ray Odierno mirrors Omar Bradley, schooled in this hard war he rose to run. And there are others—the strong, the middling, the overmatched, the unappreciated—good people, hard-working, tough-minded, fair, and mostly honest and decent. Yet in the end, collectively, we all proved unequal to the moment.

As for myself, I make no excuse. I'm just a soldier who tried, got a few things right, but, in the end, failed. If I remind you of anyone at all, maybe it's Joe Stilwell, "Vinegar Joe," of the China-Burma-India theater in World War II. He told it like it was, eventually got sent home for it, and deserved a better war.

APOCALYPSE THEN

First we're going to cut it off, and then we're going to kill it.

—GENERAL COLIN POWELL, JANUARY 23, 1991

“CONTACT, FIVE ARMORED vehicles direct front. Three more off to the left.”

Captain Herbert R. “H.R.” McMaster and his troopers had been looking for the enemy. And now, here they were, just past this shrug of a rise on the hardpan desert floor. You could barely make them out: ragged lines of fuzzy black spots, swimming up like sharks out of the gray murk of blowing sand and fine, spitting rain.

There were a lot of them. It was a spectacle no American had seen since World War II: a row of eight enemy tanks arrayed for action, stationary, their long cannon slowly turning toward the advancing Americans. The Iraqis were lining up to shoot. McMaster and his men could see only a fraction, but they knew more were out there. The entire Iraqi Republican Guard Tawakalna Division waited, hidden in that shadowy, gritty mist. You could feel it.

Now it would come down to training, discipline, and timing. It always did. In contact, the side that acted first gained the advantage. Many of the Iraqis had fought in the grinding eight-year war with Iran. McMaster's tank crew, like most on his side, had never been under fire. Only a few U.S. senior officers and sergeants had served in Vietnam. None of the Americans had ever been in a tank battle. The Iraqis had fought in plenty. But the Americans knew what to do. The Iraqis did not.

As McMaster sounded off with his report, Sergeant Craig Koch, his tank gunner, pressed a button. An invisible laser lanced out through the gloom, and the number came up: 1,420 meters, almost a mile away. He stated, as he had on dozens of gunnery exercises on U.S. Army tank ranges, “Identified.” But this was not a range, and these were not plywood targets.

The loader, Specialist Jeffrey Taylor, checked to ensure a 120 mm tank round was seated in the big bore. It was. Ideally, to blow holes in hostile tanks, you'd prefer to use a sabot round, a vicious, super-hardened heavy-metal spear that can rip through almost anything. But aboard McMaster's tank that late afternoon in the soup, the men had already preloaded a HEAT (high-explosive antitank) round, which used a molten-metal chemical mix to burn through the foe's armor. It wasn't as sure as a sabot slug; HEAT was better for trucks and lightly plated vehicles, but it would have to do. Taylor said: “Up.”

McMaster commanded, “Fire.” Koch did.

The HEAT round proved more than good enough, ripping through the Iraqi T-72 tank. Shards of metal sparked and spiraled out of the smoking hull. A shape, a man, maybe, rolled out and over the front slope of the stricken tank. But McMaster, Koch, and Taylor had already moved on.

The second shot—a deadly sabot penetrator—hit the second T-72. The turret and its encased 125 mm Russian-made cannon popped off like a hot frying pan knocked from a stove. McMaster's crew fired again, blowing open another Iraqi tank. Flames burned bright and hot. It had been ten seconds since the first sighting.

The Republican Guard tried to fire back. Their wildly mis-aimed 125 mm shots churned dirt on either side of McMaster's tank. Iraqi machine-gun fire zipped overhead, uselessly high. Meanwhile,

the other American crews in their M1A1 Abrams tanks also went to work. They rolled on, firing on the move with computer-stabilized main guns, blowing right through what the Iraqis styled as a defensive position. For the tanks, it was barely a speed bump.

In twenty-three minutes, McMaster and fewer than a hundred men of Troop E, Second Squadron, Second Armored Cavalry Regiment knocked out twenty-eight T-72 tanks, sixteen armored infantry fighting vehicles, and thirty-nine trucks of the Eighteenth Brigade, Third Tawakalna Division. A reinforced Iraqi battalion of more than nine hundred men could muster only forty after the clash. Those forty stood near their confused commander, grouped in threes and fours, uncertain, dazed, helmetless, with hands up. The Iraqis never even hit a U.S. vehicle.

The Americans were veterans now. They kept going.

In later years, it became fashionable to denigrate the inept Iraqi performance in the 1990–91 war. The old cliché holds that hindsight is 20/20. It might be as good as 20/10—Ted Williams eyeing a curve ball—inside the Washington, DC, establishment press. All the smart guys always knew (didn't they) that the Iraqis were lightweights, sad sacks, and comic-opera extras. They were a bunch of superstitious, ignorant misfits led, when they were led at all, by buffoonish, cowardly officers. Their Russian gear was no damn good. As for their once celebrated combat experience against the even more incompetent Iranians . . . well, don't even talk about that. The overwhelming success of Operation Desert Storm in 1991, the devastating air campaign followed by the hundred-hour blitzkrieg through Kuwait and southern Iraq, ruined the Iraqi reputation as the battle-hardened fourth-largest army in the world. No wonder the Israelis routinely mopped the floor with opponents like this. Yes, the clever set found it all very amusing once it ended like it did.

Things did not seem quite so clear-cut at the outset. On August 2, 1990, as Iraq seized Kuwait between dawn and sunset, America's Saudi Arabian friends were not making any jokes. Iraq's bombastic dictator Saddam Hussein looked and acted like Joseph Stalin of Soviet Russia, and he consciously emulated Adolf Hitler of Nazi Germany in his pitiless slaughters of his own and his steady aggression on his borders. Between 1980 and 1988, Saddam and his substantial forces waged a bitter attrition bloodbath against revolutionary Persian Iran to the east. Now this vile and violent maximum leader turned his attention to the south. Kuwait ceased to exist, absorbed as the nineteenth province of Saddam's Iraq. Would Saudi Arabia be next?

Saddam's Republican Guard T-72 tank battalions needed only to refuel to begin a strong lunge down the Saudi coast. That would do it for much of the developed world's oil supply. The Saudis had no illusions about their own military. Fresh from their murderous struggle with Iran, the Iraqis would not be delayed long by untested, unsteady Saudi units. King Fahd and his brother princes pleaded for immediate U.S. help, the more the better.

The U.S. had a plan to defend Saudi Arabia from a Soviet Russian invasion. It would work well enough against Russian-equipped Iraqis. The U.S. Central Command (USCENTCOM) oversaw the entire Middle East and so prepared and maintained war plans to address potential threats affecting dozens of countries, Saudi Arabia among them. Our man in Saudi Arabia was thus the USCENTCOM commander at the time, General H. Norman Schwarzkopf Jr., U.S. Army. This large, forceful Vietnam veteran, a West Point graduate like his father, who was a World War II-era general, had lived in Iran from 1946 to 1947 while his father reorganized the shah's police. The shah was long gone, and the Iranians anything but friendly, but the experience made Schwarzkopf unique among senior American officers. He had lived in a Muslim country. True, it wasn't an Arab country, but it still counted for something. Schwarzkopf knew the region, knew the Saudis, and knew the plan. According to journalists hungry for color, the troops supposedly called him "Stormin' Norman" and "the Bear." Most military men and women who later served under Schwarzkopf had never heard of those

nicknames or of him either.

As for the soldier who was backing Schwarzkopf from Washington, DC, almost every American in uniform, and most citizens, knew his name quite well. General Colin L. Powell was the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the senior military officer in the U.S. Armed Forces, and the highest-ranking African American officer in the country's history. Powell's station reflected his talent and experience. It especially demonstrated his patience and self-discipline; in 1958 in Fort Benning, Georgia, Lieutenant Powell, wearing his country's uniform, suffered the humiliation of being shunted to the dirty back rooms of segregated diners and hotels. Although clearly not the first important black general officer in the U.S. Army, Powell certainly became the most widely known and influential one of his time, admired across the country as an exceptionally able manifestation of how far the country had progressed in race relations. If you asked an American in 1990 to name a serving general, he or she would say, "Powell." He stood out.

Yet in many ways, he was very much like Schwarzkopf. Powell shared Schwarzkopf's background as a lifelong infantryman and Vietnam veteran. Powell had also done a memorable stint as national security adviser for President Ronald W. Reagan from 1987 to 1989, and so he was seen by some as a political general. That was unfair to Powell, who had certainly done all the hard jobs at battalion, brigade, and division levels coming up through the ranks. That recent high-profile detour to the inner circle of the White House was unusual. It suited Powell well, however, to play Mr. Inside in Washington to Schwarzkopf's very much Mr. Outside in Southwest Asia.

There were other key common threads. Both men had served as small-unit advisers to the doomed South Vietnamese. Both had done their second assignments in Vietnam with the ill-starred Twenty-Third Americal Infantry Division. Major Powell held things together as the division G-3 (the G-3 is the operations chief, usually a lieutenant colonel's job) in the wake of the awful My Lai massacre of Vietnamese villagers by vengeful Americal soldiers. He went through a wringer of stringent investigations that cleared him completely of any wrongdoing but nonetheless put his judgment under a microscope and, at times, a proctoscope. About that same time, Lieutenant Colonel Schwarzkopf commanded an infantry battalion during a tough stretch of combat operations cursed by an ugly accidental-firing incident dissected in C.D.B. Bryan's haunting book *Friendly Fire*. In a 1979 film of that book, the character based on Schwarzkopf, Lieutenant Colonel Byron Schindler, was played by a journeyman character actor opposite the popular beloved Carol Burnett as the dead soldier's grieving mother. Audience sympathies aligned about as you'd expect. Powell, who gritted his teeth through the excruciating Iran-Contra scandal in the latter days of the Reagan administration and bore the coincident rehash of what he'd done and had not done regarding the My Lai war crime, understood what it meant to have one's failings held up to the hot glare of public scrutiny. Such episodes injected a degree of useful humility into both generals.

Yet, whatever else they did or did not share, the two men, like their lesser-known contemporaries, were bound as brothers by one thing: they were sons of the long, failed Vietnam War. They did not accept the breezy assurances of figures like their former theater commander General William C. Westmoreland, who wrote, "Despite the final failure of the South Vietnamese, the record of the American military services of never having lost a war is still intact." Maybe he thought so. Schwarzkopf and Powell knew they had lost the war. They did not intend to lose another.

Within days of the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, as Powell set the strategic framework in Washington, Schwarzkopf joined an American delegation flying to the Saudi summer capital in Jiddah to meet the king and his key princes. Secretary of Defense Richard B. Cheney headed the group, accompanied by deputy national security adviser Robert M. Gates. Both men knew the Saudis, and both would have a lot more to do with the region in future years. This amounted to an opening round in a very, very long fight. Nobody could see that yet. It was just as well. The immediate challenge of Iraqis massing on the

Saudi border more than sufficed to hold their attention.

On August 6, 1990, the senior American officials arrived in Jiddah on the Red Sea coast. They carried a clear message, the same one stated forcefully by President George H. W. Bush in public the day before: "This will not stand." The Americans intended to defend Saudi Arabia and, in time, liberate Kuwait.

King Fahd certainly wanted defenders. Whether or not Kuwait would be reclaimed remained to be seen. More immediate matters had to be settled. How many Americans would come? More than a hundred thousand to start, Cheney answered, followed by as many as were needed to win the war. The actual number, counting Coalition elements on land, sea, and air, eventually reached nearly ten times that first figure.

King Fahd liked what he heard. The U.S. was committed. This meant the Iraqis could not succeed. The details of how quickly the Americans arrived, where they staged, and how they operated all needed to be settled. Unlike Emir Jaber of Kuwait, holed up with his retinue in Dhahran on the Saudi shore of the Persian Gulf, Fahd and his brothers no longer needed to fear the unpleasant fate of hiding out in a foreign hotel room hoping somebody else would get their country back. Saudi Arabia would endure.

But there was a problem. Like his fellow members and his predecessors in the House of Saud, Fahd played a double (or triple, or quadruple) game, doing business with the U.S. and the rest of the Western powers—and sometimes the Communist Russians and Chinese—while simultaneously paying off and playing off fundamental Islamists throughout the country and region. The severe, uncompromising Wahhabi sect received favored treatment. The king's mouthpieces decried Israel and warned of the perils of godless Western evils even as the king and his brothers, sons, nephews, and cousins enjoyed Mercedes sedans, Hollywood films, and Jack Daniel's whiskey courtesy of boundless oil revenues. Apparently, Allah could not see into modern garages and houses very well.

The House of Saud claimed the mantle of the protector of the holy places of Mecca and Medina. Muslims from Morocco to Indonesia, Kazakhstan to Yemen, longed to make the haj to Mecca. Thousands did every year. Five times a day, all practicing Muslims faced the city in Saudi Arabia as they prayed. King Fahd did more than run a country. He ruled the central physical manifestation of a vibrant, proselytizing world religion. Fahd's tightrope scimitar dance between infidels and believers was about to get very, very dicey as thousands of Americans and other nonbelievers poured into the Arabian Peninsula. An obscure former jihadist who fought the Soviets in Afghanistan, a wealthy young fellow from Jiddah named Osama bin Laden, watched all of this with great interest. He was not alone.

So, to appease his Arab and other Muslim supporters and to placate his Islamist clients, King Fahd made three decrees. First, General (and Prince) Khalid bin Sultan, his kinsman, would be co-commander with Schwarzkopf. Khalid had attended the British Royal Military Academy at Sandhurst, Auburn University in Alabama, the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College at Fort Leavenworth in Kansas, and the U.S. Air War College at Maxwell Air Force Base in Alabama. Khalid understood his new comrades pretty well.

By agreement, Schwarzkopf directed the U.S. forces and most of the other allies while Khalid led the Saudi units as well as the Arab and Muslim contingents and, for their own perverse reasons, the French. Of course, in the real world, Schwarzkopf ran the preparation, the defense scheme, and, eventually, the offensive. In the never-never land of Saudi Arabia's princely courts, out in the souks (markets) that made up the so-called Arab Street across North Africa and Southwest Asia, and in the anxious capitals in much of the Third World, Khalid held equal if not greater authority than Schwarzkopf. Nobody believed it. Everybody believed it. This is the sort of thing that passes for cooperation between infidels and believers.

Along with appointing Khalid to co-command, King Fahd insisted on keeping the Americans far out in the desert. It would not do for his faithful subjects to see female Marine truck drivers and Air Force C-130 transport pilots boldly unhidden by full-body black chadors, lacking even hijab headscarfs. The Americans and their European partners probably carried Bibles and rosary beads, might well gawk at Saudi women, and seemed unlikely to heed calls to prayer from the local minarets. No, these outlanders had to go way out into the wilderness. That accorded well with Schwarzkopf's plan anyway. Saudi Arabia had to be defended along its desolate border with Iraq and Kuwait. When the time came to attack by air and ground, that, too, would have to originate far out in the distant hardscrabble or far off the coast at sea.

Finally, Fahd insisted on, and the Americans agreed to, a very strict code of conduct. As a former adviser to the Vietnamese airborne troops, Schwarzkopf remembered only too well that in Southeast Asia, the ugly American was more than just a clever title for a novel. Incidents involving drunken, violent off-duty GIs poisoned many relationships with the already suspicious Vietnamese villagers. When the strict Saudis said no alcohol, Schwarzkopf agreed, a major departure from the practice in other American wars. Long-standing and extensive drug testing made Vietnam-era marijuana and hard-drug use very rare in the American ranks. Some raised eyebrows when Schwarzkopf and his staff curbed the chaplains' display of Christian and Jewish insignia and carefully concealed religious services, all at the request of the Saudi "hosts."

The Saudis did not see themselves as hosts. In their own eyes, they were customers, buying Americans and other defenders in much the same way they hired hundreds of thousands of Filipino, Bangladeshi, and Pakistani contract laborers to build their homes, run their oil wells, and clean their streets. Islamic practice allowed and even encouraged such relationships as part of the proper order of life. Those outsiders who were not Muslims lived as dhimmis, second-class folk who paid due tribute to local Islamic traditions. Schwarzkopf agreed to the king's directives, and the Americans accepted substantial Saudi financing and, later, material support like tentage, bottled water, trucks, and fuel, so the transactional relationship looked very clear to the Arab authorities. From this viewpoint, the House of Saud, in the happy spirit of the famous Arab traders of history, had rented the best armed forces in the world.

King Fahd got his money's worth. The Coalition forces arrayed for what was briefly Operation Peninsula Shield, then Desert Shield (defense), and finally Desert Storm (attack) proved to be both vast and powerful, totaling nearly a million armed combatants from thirty participating countries. The Americans provided 73 percent (almost 700,000) of the air, sea, and land contingents. The Saudis fielded about 100,000. The British sent 45,400. Egypt provided 33,600. France and Syria each sent about 14,500; in the end, the French agreed to place their forces under U.S. orders for the actual fighting. Morocco deployed almost 13,000. Some 10,000 Kuwaitis, reequipped and zealous, participated in the liberation of their country. Pakistan put nearly 5,000 in theater. Even the Afghan jihadist fronts, not yet in charge of their fractured state, cooperated enough to send about 300 riflemen. Other contingents came from Argentina, Australia, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Korea, the Netherlands, Niger, Norway, Oman, Poland, Qatar, Senegal, Spain, and the United Arab Emirates. The Coalition employed almost 4,600 fixed-wing aircraft and helicopters, about 100 major warships, and nearly 3,400 tanks. Many other countries furnished money, overflight rights, port rights, and diplomatic backing. It was indeed a large and impressive coalition.

Yet the existence of Prince Khalid as co-commander and the odd relationship of the Saudis' guests to their hosts exemplified the major fissure in the alliance. The Coalition included the able and the not so able, the willing and the not so willing, those inclined to fight hard and those hardly inclined to

fight. The British and French certainly took it all seriously and drew on their strong military traditions. But even they depended wholly on the will and skill of the U.S. forces. As went Schwarzkopf's Americans, so would go the war. Many of the rest were along for the ride.

The ride's course was not preordained. What of the other side? As the Coalition built up strength and spread out to defend Saudi Arabia, various intelligence entities studied the Iraqis. They, too, had impressive roll-ups: eleven hundred warplanes (including helicopters), fifty fighting ships (admittedly, small missile boats and minelayers), and fifty-eight hundred tanks, all parts of an organization that fielded more than a million men. Their weapons came from Russian factories and were pretty much what American battalions might have faced if the Cold War had ever gotten hot. In addition, these guys possessed and used chemical weapons inside Iraq to suppress the Kurds and in barrages inflicted on the hapless Iranians during the 1980–88 war. Iraq had thousands of howitzers and rockets, ranging from little frontline models to big, long-range surface-to-surface missiles that NATO referred to as Scuds. All could deliver nerve gas. The daunting Iraqi numbers corroborated with the usual summary: fourth-largest army in the world, backed by a big air force and a coastal defense navy. *Plus chemicals*, whispered the analysts. *Don't forget those.*

This massive tabulation seemed reasonable to those who received it in Washington and at USCENTCOM headquarters in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. It accorded well with common U.S. military practice. In the West, military intelligence (MI) analysts have long followed a simple premise: Assess enemy capabilities, not intentions. Put another way, look at what an opponent *can* do rather than what you think he *will* do. American intelligence experts preferred to stick to hard numbers that could be verified by photographs, signal intercepts, and visual sightings. Non-intelligence types called this bean counting and implored the MI people to go beyond tallying and guess what the enemy would do.

Like economists and weathermen, intel guys rendered forecasts. They began with the most likely enemy course of action. But they also added in the most dangerous enemy course of action. It led to comments like this: "He will probably go right . . . but he might go left, which would be, of course, much worse . . ." Then the staff experts would throw in a few more warnings: there might be counterattacks, land mines, sea mines, chemical strikes, biowarfare, nuclear radiation, and so on; almost everything except locusts and fiery hail. You learned to expect the intelligence community to predict disaster ten out of every three times.

Infantrymen like Norman Schwarzkopf and Colin Powell might well object, but the MI officers had sound reasons to stick to counting real beans and only real beans. In the living memory of many in 1990, including World War II veteran President George H. W. Bush (himself a former CIA director), some of the intel folks had strayed too far from hardware metrics to software opinions. In 1941, experts believed the Japanese could not fly modern fighter-bombers hundreds of miles from their strange-looking aircraft carriers. The men from Nippon, it was believed, surely suffered from poor night vision, allegedly caused by too much rice in the diet and not enough vegetables. These prejudices were overturned in blood and fire, beginning at Pearl Harbor and then in many battles to follow. The Imperial Japanese Navy proved quite capable, by day and by night, on the sea, in the air, and beneath the waves.

Even chastened by Pearl Harbor, Bataan, and Savo Island, American MI elements fumbled again and again when they went beyond the numbers game. They insisted that the peasant North Koreans could not be so tough; they were. They were sure that the Chinese Communist regiments could never cross the Yalu River undetected; they did. They believed the North Vietnamese must fold under U.S. bombing; they did not. Any excursions into the cultural stuff tended to reinforce biases. No good intelligence professional dared to chance such errors, nor could America.

By comparison, the bean counting that characterized the Cold War with the Soviet Union was touted as a great success. Year after year, using aircraft, agents, and "national technical means," the U.S. an

its allies built a very reliable picture of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and its armed forces. Of course, that country's rapid collapse in 1991 caught us by surprise. But we sure knew how many missiles, bombers, and tanks it had, and where to find them, even while the whole lash-up went under.

In addition to counting the beans and checking the bean counts, the MI units learned a great deal about each kind of bean. Our collectors vacuumed up a lot of technical intelligence. H. R. McMaster and his cavalry troopers at 73 Easting knew exactly what a T-72 tank looked like, how fast it drove, and how far its 125 mm cannon shot. That kind of information had been incorporated in training for all U.S. services, with specially schooled units actually playing surrogate Russian air, land, and sea threats. As the Iraqis used almost the same equipment, so much the better. War games such as the Air Force Red Flag series, the Navy's Top Gun courses, and the Army's National Training Center unit rotations taught hard lessons about how to battle the Russians and thus the Iraqis. McMaster, Koch, and Taylor had been running practice plays against their enemies every time they'd gone to the gunnery range or played full-up laser-tag tactical exercises. The real clash matched the U.S. drills, and that did great credit to years of hard, drudging intelligence analysis.

Yet in this mass of numbers and weapons facts and figures, one looks for a glimpse of the Iraqis as people and soldiers. Would the Republican Guardsmen fight? How about the regular line infantry? What of the Iraqi air force? The Americans and their Coalition friends just stuck to the numbers and calculated that tanks were tanks were tanks. They ran computer models of the campaign and came back with predictions of U.S. casualties ranging as high as ten thousand, with fifteen hundred dead. In all of those crunched numbers, the programmers assumed the Iraqis would fight.

Some said otherwise. The Israelis, naturally, thought little of Iraq's military and said so to anyone who would listen. British officers with extensive Middle Eastern time made the same observations. A look at the Coalition partners from the region told the tale. Could the Iraqis really be all that different or better, than the Egyptians, Syrians, or Saudis? Schwarzkopf had been careful to assign them rather minor roles as they struggled with logistics, combined-arms tactics, close air support, and small-unit discipline. No, the Iraqis appeared unlikely to operate up to Western standards. Despite the Iraqis' outward appearances and bold aspirations, it just wasn't in their culture. People in USCENTCOM sensed it, but the older ones remembered Vietnam and what those allegedly pissant hostile riflemen had accomplished.

American military leaders with long service in the region, such as Colonel Norvell B. De Atkine, knew what to expect: "over-centralization, discouraging initiative, lack of flexibility, manipulation of information, and discouragement of leadership at the junior level." In essence, the Iraqis had been forced to play by foreign rules and Western norms that didn't align with their upbringing and experience. The Arab world, and indeed the larger Islamic realm, at times resembles what we think we know of life in prescientific Europe during the Middle Ages. Uneducated Iraqis tended to be overly accepting of natural and manmade events, deferential to distant authorities, subservient to family and clan elders, suspicious of outsiders, and strongly influenced by their pervasive religious faith. It all made for an interesting and rich civilization. But it didn't teach anyone how to repair a tank, trust a laser-range finder, or practice marksmanship until you got it right. *Inshallah*, God willing, if the bull was supposed to hit the target, it would hit. If not, move on.

The Iraqis did have a preferred fighting style, but it did not involve attack helicopters or main battle tanks, let alone uniforms and sergeants barking orders. Eccentric British guerrilla leader Colonel T. E. Lawrence made much of this preferred Arab way of combat while fighting the Germans and Turks during World War I. In a series of actions not far north and west of the main ground battles of Desert Storm, Lawrence of Arabia, lionized in print and on film, lived with the tribal warriors and spoke their language. Schooled in history and archaeology, he found that the locals preferred raids and ambushes, short skirmishes, and quick hit-and-run escapades to Western maneuvers. They disdained uniforms,

discipline, and stand-and-fight tactics. But they could make entire desert districts wholly untenable for conventional adversaries, demolishing rail lines, blowing out bridges, sniping, stealing, and slowly bleeding the big regiments to death. Lawrence called it “winning wars without battles.” That method did not apply in the 1990–91 campaign. In one of his dumber decisions, Saddam Hussein chose to make war in the Western style. It destroyed his military and damn near finished him.

That the Iraqis were playing the wrong game in the wrong league occurred to some in the Coalition especially after Coalition members had spent a few months dealing with the Iraqis’ cousins on their own side. Yet maybe, just maybe, all those tanks and guns on the Kuwaiti border constituted the real deal. Burned badly in Vietnam, the Americans stuck to the bean counting, the worst-case scenarios. General Colin Powell in particular emphasized the use of overwhelming force and numbers, hence the massive buildup. In football terms, the Americans were not playing to win by a field goal; if the Iraqis cracked—as a few thought they might—Powell and Schwarzkopf intended to run up the score.

The Iraqis cracked, all right. They folded over like cardboard in the rain. Their vaunted air force mounted a pathetic 910 sorties (individual aircraft flights), compared to more than 69,000 by the Coalition. Iraqi pilots lost every single air-to-air encounter, and 132 planes roared off to unfriendly Iran rather than staying and getting blown off their runways. The tiny Iraqi navy swung at anchor and waited to get sunk, which occurred in due course. As for the Iraqi army and Republican Guard, the best summary comes from the end of the 1933 version of the movie *King Kong*: “Well, Denham, the airplanes got him.”

That is not to ignore the ground campaign that swiftly liberated Kuwait. Actions like the clash at 7 Easting ripped apart Saddam Hussein’s divisions. Later accounts made much of the great western flanking maneuver that Schwarzkopf labeled his Hail Mary pass, referring to a long throw toward the end zone in football that’s often made in desperation. The Coalition effort was anything but desperate. Later books and documentaries described battles and firefights, aerial dogfights and naval encounters, all real enough, yet all largely one-sided. The Americans and their partners maneuvered and closed. The Iraqis shot back a little, then died or ran away.

Conservative estimates of Iraqi casualties ran about 20,000 dead and up to 75,000 wounded; nobody on the Coalition side really knew. Prisoners were counted precisely as 86,743, with 63,948 taken by U.S. units. The Iraqis tried to shoot back; they killed 148 Americans, wounded 458, and captured 21, all of whom were repatriated. The number of Iraqi tanks, artillery, armored personnel carriers, and trucks destroyed ran into the thousands. Today, their torn, blackened, abandoned hulks still dot the Kuwaiti and southern Iraq deserts.

When the cease-fire came at Powell’s urging after forty-two days of conflict, Schwarzkopf moved immediately to meet with the Iraqi commander at the crossroads of Safwan, just inside Iraq, north of the Kuwaiti border. In truth, Schwarzkopf’s counterpart was Saddam Hussein himself. Like his idol Hitler in the Wolfschanze (Wolf’s Lair) bunker in mid-1944, sticking pins in the map and issuing detailed orders to individual battalions as the Allied forces closed the ring, Saddam liked to keep his hands on all the controls and buttons even as the plane of state spiraled into a death dive. He alone directed the movements of Iraqi units great and small.

Yet as an ultimate survivor, Saddam knew better than to trust Schwarzkopf’s flag of truce. The Iraqi dictator did not wish to get snagged in Safwan, placed in handcuffs and an orange jumpsuit, and, like former Panamanian strongman Manuel Noriega, hauled to the docket of a U.S. courtroom. Already beset with rebellions in the Kurdish north and Shiite Arab south, the Iraqi president squatted safely in his Baghdad enclave. He dispatched two senior representatives: Lieutenant General Sultan Hashim Ahmad, the deputy chief of the general staff, and Lieutenant General Salah Abud Mahmud, the commander of Third Corps, or what remained of it. It wasn’t quite the Japanese motoring out to the

battleship USS *Missouri* to meet Douglas MacArthur on September 2, 1945, but it would do.

At half past eleven on the morning of March 3, the two Iraqis arrived to meet Schwarzkopf and General Khalid, the Saudi co-commander. American soldiers escorted the Iraqis. They walked past U.S. tanks and tracked infantry carriers, the slab-sided armored vehicles fronted by lines of troops. Apache attack helicopters clattered overhead. The Iraqis looked small, old, and nervous. One trembled a bit, but maybe it was just due to the desert breeze.

The Iraqis moved into the tent and sat down. Behind the Iraqis sat a few of their subordinate officers, taking notes. Schwarzkopf and Khalid entered and took their seats. They also had their people behind them.

After some photographs for posterity, the big American spoke. It was 11:34 a.m. "The purpose of this meeting," said Schwarzkopf, "is to discuss and resolve conditions that we feel are necessary to ensure that we continue the suspension of offensive operations on the part of the Coalition." The agenda adhered to military matters. Someday, the diplomats hoped to hammer out a true peace treaty or a pact, or a convention, or whatever. It never happened.

"We are authorized," replied Ahmad, "to make this meeting a successful one in the spirit of cooperation." He spoke deliberately, careful to make eye contact.

Schwarzkopf nodded and pressed on. He talked about the cease-fire boundary, referring to a map. The Iraqis leaned forward as the American confirmed their fears. The Coalition held the southern fifth of Iraq. Schwarzkopf made it clear that the U.S. had no permanent territorial designs provided the Iraqis met their obligations regarding withdrawal of the surviving Iraqi forces, return of prisoners, transfer of the dead, and marking of minefields. "But until that time we intend to remain where we are," noted the U.S. general.

Discussion continued for a while on details of unit positions and movements, then broadened to the other agenda items. The American went down the list. Those present later remembered that the USCENTCOM commander did almost all of the talking. The Iraqis listened. Subordinates took notes. The tent heated up. The air grew stuffy. Finally, Schwarzkopf finished.

Ahmad spoke up. He pressed on the Iraqi prisoners. How many?

"We have, as of last night, sixty thousand," replied the American. "Sixty thousand plus." Ahmad looked stunned.

His comrade Mahmud, who had watched his units shredded by the American Marines and soldiers, offered: "It's possible. I don't know."

An awkward silence ensued.

Schwarzkopf broke it, trying to wrap up. "Are there any other matters the general would like to discuss?"

There were. Ahmad said, "We have a point, one point."

Schwarzkopf waited.

"You might very well know," Ahmad continued, "the situation of our roads and bridges and communications." The USCENTCOM commander definitely knew. On his orders, his airmen had severed most of those links.

Ahmad went on. "We would like to agree," he offered, "that helicopter flights sometimes are needed to carry officials from one place to the other because the roads and bridges are out." That seemed reasonable enough, though it was anything but a casual request.

Thus far, the Safwan conference had been all about sticking it to the Iraqis in a most public way. It featured Vietnam veteran H. Norman Schwarzkopf making sure that this time, this war, ended in the old style, with the beaten foe hangdog and helpless, at the mercy of the victor. America had suffered through the humiliation of North Korean and Chinese propaganda ploys at the truce talks in Panmunjom, Korea, from 1951 to 1953 and the North Vietnamese bluster and circumlocutions in Paris.

from 1968 to 1973. Working from battlefield parity or worse, the Americans in those conflicts got bamboozled and hoodwinked, strung along, and embarrassed over and over; they were played for fools and suckers by the much more savvy enemy negotiators, who had a simple premise: What was theirs was theirs. What was America's was negotiable. Well, in Desert Storm, America crushed Iraq. This time, nobody would play Norm Schwarzkopf for a fool or sucker.

The wily Arab trader, however, has many means to address his infidel mark. Ahmad and Mahmud, well briefed in Baghdad, figured on a bit of magnanimity from Schwarzkopf as long as they asked for only one thing. After all, in the iconic surrender at Appomattox, Virginia, in April of 1865, hadn't Union general Ulysses S. Grant agreed to Confederate general Robert E. Lee's request that his men be allowed to keep their horses so they could do their spring plowing? The Iraqis wanted to keep their modern horses, the helicopters. But they wouldn't be used for agriculture.

Schwarzkopf walked right into the snare. "As long as the flights are not over the part we are in, that is absolutely no problem." Ahmad pushed a bit: "So you mean even armed helicopters can fly in Iraq skies?" Schwarzkopf agreed. "You have my word," said the American.

As the meeting concluded, Ahmad saluted and offered his hand. Schwarzkopf returned the salute and shook the Iraqi general's hand. "As an Arab, I hold no hate in my heart," Ahmad said.

He did hold those helicopters, though.

The Iraqi authorities needed them, every airframe, in order to keep their heads connected to their bodies. The huge, diverse Desert Storm Coalition wasn't who scared them. That group had agreed on defending Saudi Arabia, mostly concurred with liberating Kuwait, and split completely on ousting Saddam Hussein. Wiser heads like Colin Powell's kept the strategy limited and focused on clearing Kuwait. Although some plans were made, few displayed interest in marching on to Baghdad. Enough was enough.

Some strong rhetoric, though, encouraged the Iraqis to take advantage of Desert Storm, wash their dirty laundry, and toss out Saddam with the resultant wastewater. In a February 15, 1991, Voice of America broadcast, President Bush asked "the Iraqi military and Iraqi people to take matters into their own hands." Plenty of them did so. The ethnic minority Kurds and downtrodden Shiite Arabs needed little encouragement to rise against a man who'd killed their families in droves. In the north and in the south, they gave it a shot.

The helicopter ploy alone did not save Saddam Hussein's regime from the twin revolts. Combined with the rapid U.S. departure from Iraq, though, the use of attack helicopters gave hope to Saddam's faithful. Though they'd fumbled and stumbled in engagements with determined armed men like H. R. McMaster's Troop E, the battered remnants of the Republican Guard brigades confidently gunned down Kurd and, especially, Shiite rebels. AK-47s and hand grenades availed the rebels little against tanks and heavy artillery. The helicopters reinforced the government's morale and momentum. Altogether, it did the job.

In the north, under the rubric Operation Provide Comfort, U.S. and NATO airpower staged out of Turkey to keep Saddam's armored elements and helicopters out of the mountainous Kurdish homeland. Above the Kurds, even Saddam's rotary-wing fleet dared not fly. Some NATO units went in on the ground. The intervention offered significant succor to Kurdish refugees and helped stabilize a place often battered by Saddam Hussein's vengeful military. Participants included American paratroopers commanded by Lieutenant Colonel John Abizaid, an Arabic-speaking battalion commander of Lebanese ancestry. Colonel James L. Jones led the Marine expeditionary unit. Like Cheney, Powell, and Gates, Abizaid and Jones would have future business in the area. Abizaid's airborne battalion, Jones's Marines, and the other NATO ground units stayed only three months, but the air cap remained up until the second U.S. war with Iraq, in 2003. It allowed relative security in a

semiautonomous Kurdistan, one persistent rollback of Saddam in the aftermath of Desert Storm. The Kurds enjoyed only a partial respite as long as Saddam remained in power and mounted some incursions. But thanks to Provide Comfort, the Kurds developed a degree of trust with the U.S. and its allies. Kurdistan offered a potential springboard for future operations, as did newly restored Kuwait in the south.

Shiite southern Iraq, however, went under in a welter of blood and fire. While U.S. units stood by, Iraqi battalions moved methodically up the Euphrates and Tigris River Valleys, shooting as they went. Tanks bulldozed houses. Artillery barrages smashed villages. Street fighting erupted in the city of Basrah, but Iraqi military machine guns and cannon put paid to that. Above it all, those helicopters buzzed and darted, dropping down to disgorge raiding teams or pump rockets into burning houses. By the end of March 1991, the major spasm was over. Follow-up operations continued into the summer of 1992, when President Bush finally extended a Kurdish-type no-fly zone over the Shiite south. By then, however, the allied aircraft flew cover for gravesites. Some ten thousand Shiites died in Saddam's brutal riposte. Whereas the Kurds saw reason to work with Americans after Desert Storm, the Shiites of the south found the U.S. unreliable, a suspicious view gleefully encouraged by their Persian Shiite benefactors in Iran.

The two upheavals, both contained, left Saddam Hussein in charge in Baghdad. That became evident by the summer of 1991, not long after the welcome-home banners came down and the yellow ribbons faded all across America. In the usual late-twentieth-century American way, Bush's great victory of the winter begat a summer of reassessment and, soon enough, recriminations.

Some of the inside baseball truly got petty. The services endured a seemingly endless debate over how many tanks the Air Force had killed versus the number taken out by the Army. The Navy felt unloved and unappreciated for its long vigil out in the Persian Gulf. The Marines argued that they had won the war by freeing Kuwait. Prince Khalid emphasized his clearly critical and obviously equal command role and received a promotion to field marshal, a validation of his claims. Various random colonels and generals complained that Schwarzkopf "stormed" too much at his fellow generals in Riyadh and across the theater. All of this stirred some interest but in the long run meant little.

A more serious debate began regarding the end of the war. The abortive Kurdish and Shiite revolts emphasized the incomplete nature of the victory. Saddam Hussein remained in power, and although most U.S. troops departed in 1991, a strong air component stayed behind to patrol the no-fly zone over the Kurdish north and eventually the Shiite south. Some former senior officers, such as Lieutenant General Jack Cushman of the Army and Lieutenant General Bernard Trainor of the Marines, pulled out their maps, reviewed reports, questioned participants, and figured out what the Iraqis had known as early as the Safwan armistice meeting: a large portion of the Republican Guard—enough to menace the Kurds and shred the Shiite rebels—escaped the firepower of Desert Storm. As a result, oppressed groups inside Iraq and, soon enough, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and the U.S. faced an Iraqi threat that appeared to regain strength during the 1990s. So the war was over, but it wasn't over. Not that it mattered in hometowns across America. A win was a win. This one looked, smelled, and played out like a win.

That view also prevailed at the Pentagon, where little time was spent agonizing over how many Republican Guard tanks had or had not escaped across the Basrah causeway. Operation Desert Storm freed Kuwait, the mission's goal. Doing more inside Iraq, hanging around in a very rough neighborhood, appeared to be a bad bet for American forces. For leaders such as Powell and Schwarzkopf, men scarred by Vietnam, the boiling blood stew of quarrelsome Kurdish factions and squabbling Shiite Arab religious elements looked like a bottomless pit of pain, as indeed it was, and they had no desire to plunge into it. Leave some airpower, leave some equipment and a few support troops in Kuwait, but mostly just leave. If Iraq demanded another beating, we knew just how to do it.

Indeed, the scale and speed of the U.S. victory brought a degree of certainty to American military leaders ~~confronted with defining their role in a post-Soviet world. The same guys who wanted to count every Iraqi T-72 in January of 1991 now spoke of “Desert Storm equivalents” in war planning, as if one could just package up the thing and drop it on the miscreant du jour in North Korea, Iran, or wherever—even in Saddam’s Iraq, should he try some new mischief.~~ The U.S. Department of Defense leadership began talking about maintaining a capacity to fight two such operations at once, or nearly at once. This construct endured throughout the 1990s even as the American forces drew down almost 40 percent. By this arithmetic, 60 percent of a Desert Storm should do the trick. After all, hadn’t we learned that these Third World opponents really weren’t all that good? Somewhere in the afterworld former members of the Imperial Japanese Navy, the North Korean People’s Army, and the North Vietnamese Army must have been laughing ruefully.

Three ideas emerged from the blitzkrieg in the desert: the value of a volunteer military, the key role of information technology, and the utility of joint decisive operations. The U.S. Armed Forces expected to get smaller as the Soviet Union went away. Operation Desert Storm showed how to do that wisely. Investing in these three areas meant the country would have the capacity to replicate the Gulf War when any threat arose.

The volunteer armed forces avoided the mess of draft calls and pleas for deferments and exemptions. Volunteers *wanted* to join. The military could get by with fewer recruits because more in the ranks reenlisted. The quality of the volunteers turned out to be good, because the services insisted on drug-free high-school graduates with clean criminal records, criteria that ruled out 70 percent of American youth. (There is an unfortunate message in that statistic.) Smarter, tougher, and willing, volunteers trained and worked to their limits. The volunteer Marine Corps, U.S. Navy submarine and aviation arms, and U.S. Army Airborne of 1941 to 1945 proved to be the elite during World War II. Now the entire armed forces followed that model.

The volunteer approach had only two drawbacks. As it outsourced defense to the willing, going to war no longer involved a large portion of the entire population of U.S. citizens. In addition, if you needed to expand the force, it took a long time. You could not mass-produce highly trained, well-led, technically educated modern units, especially the ones you really needed, like bomb-disposal detachments, helicopter companies, and Special Forces teams.

The volunteers made up an armed force that increasingly adopted civilian information technologies to make unit movements more certain, weapons more accurate, and resupply more effective. The U.S. Air Force and Navy had pioneered these ideas as early as the 1940s with radar and early large-capacity calculating machines. By the Gulf War, the entire architecture was coming together nicely. Primitive e-mail disseminated orders. Global positioning systems facilitated navigation that had previously depended all too much on the fabled well-meaning second lieutenant with a map and a compass. Captured Iraqis marveled that the Americans came at them out of the open desert, unbound to roads. Early multiservice tracking screens showed the blue (friendly) units, although the red (enemy) kind stubbornly refused to play along except as placed by intelligence staffers. Computers integrated IT into weapons, vehicles, planes, ships, and many missiles, bombs, and artillery shells. The American troops called the devices smart, in that the things recognized where they were and went where they were pointed. The U.S. military knew their location, knew the enemy location (almost), and delivered weapons that went exactly where they were sent. It greatly multiplied U.S. firepower.

An air example illustrates the advantage. In 1944, B-17 bomber formations dropped 9,070 bombs in order to hit one German building. In 1967, F-105 jet fighter-bombers used 176 munitions to knock out a single North Vietnamese building. By 1991, a smart F-16 fighter-bomber could do the job with three bombs, or just one, if the bomb was smart too. Similar improvements applied to sea and ground armament enhanced with IT. It meshed smoothly when used by tech-savvy, educated volunteer

soldiers, sailors, airmen, and Marines.

Composed of quality men and women, equipped with the fruits of U.S. information technology, the U.S. Armed Forces developed joint (multiservice) decisive operations to win quickly against most enemies. General Colin Powell sometimes got tagged as the author of this doctrine, but he merely expressed it better than most. Working as a team, America's armed forces would take the strategic objective given by the U.S. president (liberate Kuwait), fashion an operation (Desert Storm), and then execute (73 Easting). Powell and his fellow generals and admirals expressed no inclination to have the U.S. military diddle with long, tit-for-tat attrition contests or unending "we're here because we're here because we're here" peacekeeping missions. Those might happen—things you didn't expect always happened, like the Kurdish business—but they would be lesser included cases, not the real thing. Those "operations other than war" did not form the basis for force sizing or war planning. No, you didn't waste time monkeying around in the bush leagues. You opened the cage, the pit bull came out, ripped the head off the snake, then went back in its cage to get ready for the next time.

Operation Desert Storm represented the favored American way of war, all right. From now on, that was the way to go. As President Bush put it, "By God, we've licked the Vietnam syndrome once and for all." So we hoped. But as the U.S. Army chief of staff at that time, General Gordon R. Sullivan, liked to remind his soldiers, hope is not a method.

Hope had a short half-life in Baghdad too. Saddam Hussein and his Baathist Party inner elite, having just barely survived "the Mother of All Battles," took stock. Objectively, Iraq lost the war in a most humiliating fashion. In the rubble, Saddam, like the Americans, discerned the future. He identified three key lessons.

First, at the strategic level, Saddam Hussein realized that victory came from persistence, not a beach count or a flashy road race. The Americans just did not stick with it; the energetic but quickly-played-out hares were eventually overtaken by the plodding Iraqi tortoises (with apologies to Aesop). Saddam chose to define his regime's continued existence as a victory over the vast American-led Coalition. At the wags put it when President Bush lost the 1992 election, "Saddam still has his job. How about you?" The Arab Street bought it, as did many in the U.S. tired of President Bush and his foreign adventures. By the mid-1990s, the containment of Iraq got harder and harder as Saddam claimed to be the victim of the infidels. By the late 1990s, with the Kurds boxed, the Shiites blasted, and Saddam rearming, Desert Storm looked like it had been a lot less decisive.

Second, at the operational level, Saddam figured out that propaganda trumped reality. The Vietnam War featured the first comprehensive television coverage of an ongoing conflict. The Gulf War expanded and deepened that trend. Intense media interest focused on the Gulf War. CNN introduced a twenty-four-hour news cycle for viewers hungry for pictures, interviews, and on-the-spot reporting, courtesy of miniaturized cameras and satellite uplinks based on the same IT that made the smart bombs so smart. Soon to be joined by Fox, MSNBC (formed by Microsoft and NBC), a revitalized BBC, Al Jazeera (out of Qatar on the Persian Gulf), and others, CNN blazed the trail in 1990. The infant Internet promised to expand that media aperture even more, but those days had not yet arrived. In the meantime, CNN had to fill a whole day. Old soldiers like Schwarzkopf kept their intentions to themselves—"loose lips sink ships" and all of that—adhering to traditional operational security. Why give the enemy free intelligence?

Saddam and his Baathist cronies didn't see it like Schwarzkopf—quite the opposite, in fact. Iraq's biggest successes of the war involved actions of minimal military utility that created maximum disruption in U.S. and world public opinion. Early on, his men seized Western civilians and used them as hostages and human shields in Kuwait. Saddam foolishly released them without gaining anything but time. He did a lot better in subsequent rounds.

As the airstrikes started on January 17, 1991, Saddam found his surface-to-air missiles wanting, his fighter jets incapable, and his airspace porous. Then he discovered a more useful countermeasure in CNN reporter Peter Arnett. Saddam's subordinates carted Arnett and other journalists to the site of purported American aerial atrocities: bunkers full of civilians immolated, baby-formula factories ravaged, hospitals hit, and the like. Some events really had happened due to U.S. mistakes or stray munitions. Most had not. A good number actually resulted from the large, burned-out carcasses of Iraqi air-defense missiles falling to the ground. But like Hollywood moguls determined to milk one good first weekend out of a turkey movie, Saddam didn't much care if the stories were truth or lies, as long as they opened well. At one point, as a result of this Iraqi media stream, President Bush severely limited air attacks in Baghdad, thereby achieving something for Saddam that Iraq's air force could not. In a similar way, the final cease-fire on February 28, 1991, followed concerns in Washington about relentless CNN images depicting the destruction wrought along the "Highway of Death" leading north out of Kuwait City. Rarely have rapists and pillagers garnered such thoughtful consideration. On the Arab Street, they really ate it up.

A strategy of hanging in there and an operational approach of highlighting propaganda matched well with the favored local fighting style of winning wars without battles. Hit and run, opportunism, and wearing out the opponent trumped trying to stand and fight like Western battalions. Terror tactics paid off when Saddam's rocket men responded to the Coalition aerial onslaught by launching eighty-eight Scud missiles, split about evenly between Israel and Saudi Arabia. The ungainly, inaccurate Scuds mostly turned dirt, killing one Israeli and one Saudi. But the rockets nearly brought Israel into the war, and that guaranteed trouble with the Coalition's Muslim members. The U.S. sent air-defense assistance to Israel and diverted thousands of air sorties and a major special operations force to hunt the Iraqi rocket launchers hopscotching around the western desert.

Indicative of why all this got Schwarzkopf and his people excited, a single Scud struck a warehouse in Dhahran, killing twenty-nine and wounding ninety-nine Army reservists from Pennsylvania. The things mostly missed population centers, but if they hit, casualties followed. Had any of the Scuds carried poison gas—they didn't—valid fears might have transformed into outright hysteria. By any measure, attacking civilians advanced Saddam's goals of protracting the war and harming Coalition public support. If some Coalition soldiers got it too, that helped the Baathist cause. Terrorism worked. Saddam and his key people kept all of this in mind going forward.

Another interested observer drew conclusions of his own. Osama bin Laden, "the Contractor" to his clandestine al-Qaeda network, objected most strongly to the huge number of infidels that entered Saudi Arabia and thereby polluted the holy land of the Prophet Muhammad and the venerated cities of Mecca and Medina. Bin Laden thought little of the secular Saddam Hussein, whose wartime embrace of Islam struck many as a cynical subterfuge to gain popular support in Iraq. But at least the Iraqi president actually fought the West. Saddam's thoughts regarding persistence, propaganda, and terror tactics against civilians made a lot of sense to the al-Qaeda leader.

Saddam showed what did not work: tank battles, jet dogfights, and the like. Bin Laden knew from his time in Afghanistan that pious Muslims, especially Arabs, worked better in small groups, wearing civilian clothes, mixed into the wider populace of believers. The Americans brought impressive weapons and large numbers, but they lacked faith and staying power. That's what Osama bin Laden learned from the 1990–91 Gulf War.

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