

# THE PERFECT ENEMY:

## ASSESSING THE GULF WAR

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IT IS RATHER common for American military analysts substantially to ignore the enemy when they assess a war, and this pattern seems to hold for the Gulf War of 1991. When asked why the war had come out the way it did, commanding General H. Norman Schwarzkopf neglected the enemy entirely, crediting America's great success in the conflict to weapons, modern technology, excellent training, high troop quality, and "fantastic host nation support."<sup>1</sup>

Wars, of course, have at least two sides, and to assess them fully it is vital systematically and directly to deal with the policies, strategies, and

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1. H. Norman Schwarzkopf, *Operation Desert Shield/Desert Storm. Hearings before the Committee on Armed Services, United States Senate* (Washington, D.C.), 12 June 1991, 354. Similarly, analyses by such well-known military commentators as Harry Summers and William Taylor and James Blackwell explain the American military success in the Gulf War with scarcely any attention whatever to the state of Iraqi morale. Harry G. Summers, Jr., *On Strategy II: A Critical Analysis of the Gulf War* (New York: Dell, 1992); William J. Taylor and James Blackwell, "The Ground War in the Gulf," *Survival* 33, no. 3 (May/June 1991): 230-245. Philip Towle attributes success in the war to "superior intelligence and airpower" and to "new allied tactics and weapons": *Pundits and Patriots: Lessons from the Gulf War* (London: Institute for European Defence and Strategic Studies, 1991), 35. Similarly, see Kenneth P. Werrell, "Air War Victorious: The Gulf War vs. Vietnam," *Parameters* (summer 1992): 41-54; Wayne K. Maynard, "Spears vs. Rifles: The New Equation of Military Power," *Parameters* (spring 1993): 49-58; Rick Atkinson, *Crusade: The Untold Story of the Persian Gulf War* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1993), 494. The same pattern can often be found for the Vietnam War (see n. 154).



tactics of both combatants. This seems particularly important for the Gulf War because, as another senior U.S. commander has suggested, it proved to be "the perfect war" in part because the United States and its allies were confronted with "the perfect enemy."<sup>2</sup>

Thus to deal with the Gulf War – indeed, in order to determine whether what took place at the time should be called a war at all – it is essential to estimate the size of the enemy force and to assess its strategies, tactics, defense preparations, leadership, and morale. Also, in order fully to evaluate the war and the military accomplishment, similar estimates and assessments about the consequences and aftermath of the war ought to be incorporated into the consideration – something military analysts also frequently ignore.

I attempt this task here. I begin by evaluating the size and capabilities of the Iraqi forces, concluding that they were far smaller than the United States military continues officially to maintain. It also appears that Iraqi military casualties were very low – probably no more than a few thousand died in the war. I assess Iraqi strategic and tactical thinking, concluding that there was very little there. I also evaluate civilian and postwar losses, concluding that postwar costs were extensive and far higher than those directly caused by the war itself.

The lopsided outcome of the war was quite surprising: as Schwarzkopf put it at the end of the war, "We certainly did not expect it to go this way."<sup>3</sup> It seems that this result was determined far more by the low state of Iraqi morale and by the remarkable inadequacy of the Iraqi leadership than by precise American firepower or by the exceptional cleverness and effectiveness of U.S. strategy and tactics. Essentially, the Iraqi forces seem mainly to have been going through the motions and had little or no real intention of fighting a war, and their will to fight, if any, had been substantially broken before a shot was fired or a bomb dropped. There has been a great deal of postwar discussion and lesson-drawing which has concluded that the war showed "the revolutionary potential of emerging technologies"<sup>4</sup> or the "power of

2. Les Aspin and William Dickinson, *Defense for a New Era: Lessons of the Persian Gulf War* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. House of Representatives, Committee on Armed Services, 1992), 3.

3. H. Norman Schwarzkopf, "Briefing," 27 February 1991; see also Thomas A. Keaney and Eliot A. Cohen, *Gulf War Air Power Survey Summary Report* (Washington, D.C.: Department of the Air Force, 1993), 237-38.

4. Andrew Krepinevich, "Cavalry to Computer," *National Interest*, no. 37 (fall 1994): 40. For a more skeptical view, see Keaney and Cohen, *Summary Report*, chap. 10.



coherence and simultaneity."<sup>5</sup> It seems, rather, that the war chiefly showed how easy it is to run over an enemy that has little in the way of effective defenses, strategy, tactics, planning, morale, or leadership.<sup>6</sup>

The overestimates of Iraqi abilities and of their military casualties seem to have had opposite effects. On the one hand, they inspired a huge amount of bombing against Iraq and Iraqi forces which was almost certainly not required militarily. This included an unnecessary bombing of Iraq's electrical and other facilities which in turn contributed importantly to the postwar civilian death toll. Moreover, the overestimates unnecessarily delayed the ground offensive, and they helped to bring about what is usually taken to have been the chief mistake in the prosecution of the war – halting it before it inflicted maximum damage on Iraq's army. On the other hand, the overwhelming and intimidating force required by these overestimates helped to facilitate the real achievement for allied forces which was the way they routed their confused and terrified, but fairly well-armed, enemies without killing many of them.

I speculate about why the military often seems to want to believe it inflicted massive slaughter and about where the erroneous image of slaughter came from – mostly, it seems, from exaggerated, insufficiently contextual, early claims by the military and by the press (but not from pictures). I also argue that a full evaluation of the war should include its aftermath: although it is commonly held that the Gulf War was a triumph of careful planning, by leaving the endgame to the end, its planners failed at one of their own central precepts.

#### ESTIMATING IRAQI TROOP STRENGTH

AMERICAN COMMANDERS have, as Eliot Cohen observes, "ostentatiously, indeed obsessively, abjured Vietnam-style body counts."<sup>7</sup> Schwarzkopf declares, "I tell you, if I have anything to say

5. Jeffrey R. Cooper, *Another View of the Revolution in Military Affairs* (Carlisle Barracks, Pa.: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 1994), 29.

6. No Arab army has ever done well in conventional war against a reasonably skilled European-style army. At the battle of Tel-el-Kebir between Britain and Egypt in 1882, for example, some 10,000 Egyptians surrendered to a sergeant from the Shropshires who was armed with nothing but a stick: E. W. Polson Newman, *Great Britain in Egypt* (London: Cassell, 1928), 113. In the Gulf War remnants of an entire Iraqi company surrendered to a female newspaper reporter from suburban Virginia who was armed, presumably, only with a pencil: Martin Weil, "Iraqis Surrender to Reporter: Loudoun County Woman Encounters Remnants of a Company," *Washington Post*, 27 February 1991, A32.



about it, we're never going to get into the body-count business...I'm anti-body count. Body count means absolutely nothing."<sup>8</sup> Or, in the testy response of a British briefer: "I am not here to discuss the pornography of war."<sup>9</sup>

It is essential, however, to estimate the Iraqi death figure as well as Iraqi troop strength in order to determine what happened in the war. As a postwar analysis done for the House Armed Services Committee under Congressmen Les Aspin and William Dickinson points out, "Knowing how many of the enemy were killed is politically important; knowing how many Iraqi troops were in theater when the ground attack began is militarily important for future contingencies."<sup>10</sup>

Military estimates of Iraqi troop strength at the start of the war in the Kuwait Theater of Operations (KTO), which included not only Kuwait, but also substantial portions of southern Iraq, were 545,000 arrayed in what was said to be some 42 or 43 divisions.<sup>11</sup> By comparison, coalition forces numbered 605,000,<sup>12</sup> and at their peak reached 795,000.<sup>13</sup> In making estimates, intelligence wanted, of course, to err on the safe side. It may also have been influenced by various extravagant prewar statements by Iraqi president Saddam Hussein who, as

7. Eliot Cohen, "The Mystique of U.S. Air Power," *Foreign Affairs* 73, no. 1 (January/February 1994): 122.

8. Roger Cohen and Claudio Gatti, *In the Eye of the Storm* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1991), 270. See also H. Norman Schwarzkopf, *It Doesn't Take a Hero* (New York: Bantam, 1992), 252-53.

9. James Gerstenzang, "Tens of Thousands of Iraqi Soldiers' Bodies Left Behind," *Los Angeles Times*, 1 March 1991, A8; see also Youssef M. Ibrahim, "General's Star Feat: Desert Armies Come, and Go," *New York Times*, 8 November 1991, A4.

10. Aspin and Dickinson, *Defense for a New Era*, 30-31.

11. Bob Woodward, "100,000 Iraqi Troops May Have Deserted," *Washington Post*, 17 March 1991, A24; James F. Dunnigan and Austin Bay, *From Shield to Storm: High-Tech Weapons, Military Strategy, and Coalition Warfare in the Persian Gulf* (New York: Morrow, 1992), 86; Christopher Bellamy, "Arithmetic of death in wake of the Gulf conflict," *The Independent*, 20 March 1991, 18. For an account of an Iraqi brigade that apparently only existed in the minds of U.S. intelligence, see Molly Moore, *A Woman at War: Storming Kuwait with the U.S. Marines* (New York: Scribner's, 1993), 317.

12. Eric Schmitt, "U.S. Battle Plan: Massive Air Strikes," *New York Times*, 10 January 1991, A17.

13. Lawrence Freedman and Efraim Karsh, *The Gulf Conflict, 1990-1991: Diplomacy and War in the New World Order* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 407; Aspin and Dickinson, *Defense for a New Era*, 34. Charts displayed in Schwarzkopf's famous "mother of all briefings" at the end of the war indicated a huge disparity in numbers in Iraq's favor: 623,000 for Iraq and only 443,000 for the opposing coalition. See Norman Friedman, *Desert Victory: The War for Kuwait* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1992), 411. Pointing to these numbers, the General went out of his way to proclaim that "we were outnumbered, as a minimum, 3 to 2," stressing that the ratio of combat troops was even more in Iraq's favor since it had fewer support troops: "as far as fighting troops, we were really outnumbered 2 to 1." Even well after the war Schwarzkopf continued to claim that his forces were "outnumbered": *Hearings*, 336; Atkinson, *Crusade*, 342.



Norman Friedman notes, presumably "actively promoted exaggerated accounts of Iraqi military strength in hopes of deterring the United States" from launching war.<sup>14</sup>

Aspin and Dickinson conclude in their report, issued a year after the war, that this estimate of Iraqi troop strength "was never very good...because...many units were substantially understrength."<sup>15</sup> Although it is often maintained that in the Gulf, unlike Vietnam, the military commanders were left free to fight the war as they saw fit, this intelligence error came about in large part because of a restricting political decision: Washington was concerned about avoiding a situation that could lead to war prematurely, and it therefore ordered that no reconnaissance aircraft be flown over Iraq or occupied Kuwait before the war.<sup>16</sup>

14. *Desert Victory*, 367. See also Towle, *Pundits*, 20; Norman Cigar, "Iraq's Strategic Mindset and the Gulf War: Blueprint for Defeat," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 15, no. 1 (March 1992): 14-15.

15. *Defense for a New Era*, 30. This report goes on to estimate that there were some 183,000 troops present at the start of the ground war. It makes no estimate about how many were there at the start of the war itself. For a similar conclusion, see Michael R. Gordon and General Bernard E. Trainor, *The Generals' War: The Inside Story of the Conflict in the Gulf* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1995), 354.

16. Aspin and Dickinson, *Defense for a New Era*, 30; Atkinson, *Crusade*, 31. Similarly, Washington had been concerned in Vietnam about bombing too close to China for fear of provoking that country into war: see Mark Clodfelter, *The Limits of Air Power: The American Bombing of North Vietnam* (New York: Free Press, 1989), 118-25. Bombing in Vietnam was also to be carried out to minimize civilian casualties and to avoid certain targets, but there were similar political prohibitions in the Gulf where civilian casualties were also to be minimized and targets like mosques and monuments to Saddam Hussein were to be avoided: see John Simpson, *From the House of War: John Simpson in the Gulf* (London: Arrow, 1991), 38; Michael Evans, "Civilian risks keep strategic sites off allied target list," *Times* (London), 15 February 1991, 11; *Gulf War Air Power Survey* (GWAPS) (Washington, D.C.: Department of the Air Force, 1993), vol. 2, pt. 1, 245-46; Department of Defense, *Conduct of the Persian Gulf War: Final Report to Congress* (Washington, D.C., April 1992), 98-100. After the bombing of a shelter in Baghdad, "politically-motivated controls reduced the number of targets to the barest handful," as Eliot Cohen observes ("Mystique," 121; see also Christopher Bellamy and Patrick Cockburn, "Allies Assess Precision of Bomb Raids," *The Independent*, 19 March 1991, 10; Atkinson, *Crusade* 288-90). Moreover, planes the Iraqis flew to sanctuary in Iran were not to be hit because the politicians were concerned such strikes might outrage the Iranians. Because of Washington's fear that SCUD missile attacks on Israel might bring that country into the war, tremendous resources were diverted to knocking out Iraq's missiles - a political restriction that makes little military sense because the SCUDs were militarily insignificant as Schwarzkopf points out: *It Doesn't Take a Hero*, 417; see also GWAPS, vol. 2, pt. 1, 182. Indeed in one important respect, the political restrictions in the Gulf War were much more severe than in Vietnam. In the Gulf, the politicians in Washington explicitly limited the numbers of American casualties that would be tolerated: no more than the equivalent of "three companies per Coalition brigade," or about 9,000 (Department of Defense, *Final Report*, 70; see also John H. Cushman, "Pentagon Report on the Persian Gulf War: A Few Surprises and Some Silences," *New York Times*, 11 April 1992, 1-4).



Despite the Aspin and Dickinson report, the notion about the half-million Iraqi troops persists (as does the related exaggeration that Iraq possessed at the time the world's fourth largest military).<sup>17</sup> Schwarzkopf's best-selling autobiography, published a year and a half after the war, continues to insist without qualification that the Iraqis had 545,000 troops in the theater at the start of the war.<sup>18</sup> The Pentagon's *Final Report to Congress*, submitted over a year after the war and a month after the Aspin and Dickinson report, repeats this estimate,<sup>19</sup> as does a book issued by the Department of the Army a year later.<sup>20</sup> The Gulf War Air Power Survey (GWAPS), an excellent study done for the Air Force, concludes that Iraqi troop strength in the KTO at the start of the war was "no more than 336,000,"<sup>21</sup> but its statistical compendium puts total Iraqi troop strength at that time at 1,100,000 arrayed in 66 divisions,<sup>22</sup> and suggests that more than half were in the Kuwait Theater of Operations.

At the end of the war the Iraqi army was forced from almost the entire KTO. Accordingly, Iraqi troop strength in the KTO at the start of the war must be a sum of the following:

1. The number who defected during the war to the enemy
2. The number who deserted during the war and fled back home
3. The number who surrendered to advancing allied troops
4. The number who escaped, successfully retreating, in a manner orderly or disorderly, from advancing and enveloping forces
5. The number who died during the war

17. According to the International Institute for Strategic Studies' *The Military Balance 1990-1991* (London: Brassey's, 1990), Iraq came in sixth at best, after the USSR, China, the U.S., India, and Vietnam. Moreover, Iraq's supposed military strengths included hundreds of thousands of hastily called-up reserves and recruits, many of whom never actually showed up (see GWAPS, vol. 1, pt. 1, 67-68). If reserves are excluded in all cases, Iraq's forces were also smaller than those of Turkey, Iran, and Pakistan.

18. *It Doesn't Take a Hero*, 385

19. Department of Defense, *Final Report*, 71, 85, 254. The photocopied version of the *Report* does contain a parenthetical comment at one point that "The true number of Iraqi troops in the KTO remains unknown," but that comment is missing from the final printed version. The *Report* had apparently once included an indication that Iraqi troop strength was much lower, but this observation was excised before it was sent to Congress: Jack Anderson and Michael Binstein, "Operation Intelligence Breakdown," *Washington Post*, 13 February 1992, B23.

20. United States Army, *Certain Victory: The U.S. Army in the Gulf War* (Washington, D.C., 1993), 116, 161. A monograph by a RAND analyst published by the U.S. Army War College in 1994 proclaims Iraqi forces to have been "much larger" than American ones: Bruce Hoffman, *Responding to Terrorism Across the Technological Spectrum* (Carlisle Barracks, Pa.: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 1994), 1. See also Summers, *Strategy II*, xv; and Maynard, "Spears and Rifles," 56.

21. Keaney and Cohen, *Summary Report*, 10. GWAPS, vol. 2, pt. 1, 254.

22. GWAPS, vol. 5, pt. 1, 18; see also vol. 4, pt. 1, 1.



## DEFECTIONS

At no time were there substantial Iraqi defections. This is not because the troops were intensely loyal to Saddam Hussein, it appears, but because to cross over to the enemy side they would have to traverse mine fields and trackless desert, because they would have to walk into enemy guns, and because they were of the impression that the Saudi frontier was three to four days' march away.<sup>23</sup> Beyond that, they would have had to know where to go and, as Freedman and Karsh observe, "Most Iraqi soldiers had little idea of where their own forces were, never mind those of the enemy."<sup>24</sup> One estimate concludes that some 800 defected during the five-week air war that preceded the ground offensive,<sup>25</sup> while another comes up with a figure of about 600, most of whom were engineers who knew the layout of the minefields.<sup>26</sup>

## DESERTIONS FOR HOME

By contrast, huge numbers of Iraqi troops did desert for home. It seems likely, however, that these desertions mainly occurred before the war began, not during the war itself.

It was not very easy to desert simply by walking north. It was a long way – most Iraqi soldiers were more than 100 miles deep into a foreign and unfamiliar country. Moreover, they were told there were mine fields behind their lines,<sup>27</sup> and execution squads were formed in each unit to shoot troops trying to sneak away.<sup>28</sup> A trek home would either have to be along the few north-south roads which were, of course, easily policed, or through the trackless desert, and a deserter would have to know where he was and where home was. Even if he had some idea about that, he was likely to realize (or to discover to his dismay) that

23. Friedman, *Desert Victory*, 408–9; Peter de la Billière, *Storm Command: A Personal Account of the Gulf War* (London: HarperCollins, 1992), 218.

24. *Gulf Conflict*, 387. Moreover, if, as discussed below, they generally expected Hussein to pull them out rather than risk a war against a patently superior enemy, there would be little incentive to undergo the risks of defection before the war began.

25. Ronald V. Dellums, *Intelligence Successes and Failures in Operations Desert Shield/Storm* (Washington, D.C.: House of Representatives, Committee on Armed Services, 1993), 26.

26. Tony Horwitz, "On a Bleak Frontier, Allied Sentries Wait For Iraqi Deserters," *Wall Street Journal*, 22 February 1991, A1.

27. Friedman, *Desert Victory*, 408.

28. GWAPS, vol. 1, pt. 1, 78. See also Molly Moore, "Porous Minefields, Dispirited Troops and a Dog Named Pow," *Washington Post*, 17 March 1991, A1; Dunnigan and Bay, *From Shield to Sword*, 292; Freedman and Karsh, *Gulf Conflict*, 390.



navigation in a desert can be extremely difficult. To help with this standard problem of desert warfare, the U.S. military had developed its global positioning system in which a vehicle or soldier equipped with a receiver can find its location by communing with a satellite in space.<sup>29</sup> Without this aid, observes the commander of the British forces, "accurate navigation would have been extremely difficult even by day."<sup>30</sup> Navigation in the desert was such a problem for Iraqi forces, even those within Iraq itself, that they were nearly always stationed near roads and desert trails for fear of getting lost.<sup>31</sup> This had the added (and perhaps unintended) effect of putting them in position to nab any deserters who were trying to use the roads to sneak back home.

As it happens, however, the Iraqis had a very generous leave policy before the war, often allowing a week at home for every three or four at the front.<sup>32</sup> Indeed, Iraqi officers were reportedly paid extra when they could arrange for their troops to go home on leave.<sup>33</sup> It appears that the chief decline of troops from whatever strengths Iraq could muster came from men who were sent home on leave and simply never returned – they deserted, or were absent without leave.<sup>34</sup> There were so many deserters, in fact, that after the war they were all pardoned because it would have been impossible to put the country back together again with that many people branded as criminals.<sup>35</sup>

Once the bombing started, however, the anticipation was that the ground war could erupt at any time and the generous leave policy was canceled.<sup>36</sup> Moreover, the massive air bombardment kept many men from being able to return to their units,<sup>37</sup> and it obviously made a trek

29. Friedman, *Desert Victory*, 224; Michael Russell Rip and David P. Lusch, "The Precision Revolution: The Navstar Global Positioning System in the Second Gulf War," *Intelligence and National Security* 9, no. 2 (April 1994): 167–241.

30. Billière, *Storm Command*, 319.

31. U.S. News and World Report, *Triumph Without Victory: The Unreported History of the Persian Gulf War* (New York: Times Books/Random House, 1992), 290. Gordon and Trainor, *Generals' War*, 353.

32. Keaney and Cohen, *Summary Report*, 9; Gordon and Trainor, *Generals' War*, 185, 351; Edward N. Luttwak, "The Gulf War in Its Purely Military Dimension," in John O'Loughlin, Tom Mayer, and Edward S. Greenberg, eds., *War and Its Consequences: Lessons from the Persian Gulf War* (New York: HarperCollins, 1994), 41.

33. *Times* (London), 10 July 1991, 5.

34. Secretary of State for Defence, *Statement on the Defence Estimates: Britain's Defence for the 90s* (London: HMSO, 1991), 23; Woodward, "100,000 Iraqi Troops,"; Dunnigan and Bay, *From Shield to Sword*, 292; U.S. News, *Triumph Without Victory*, 405; Gordon and Trainor, *Generals' War*, 351.

35. Friedman, *Desert Victory*, 409.

36. Woodward, "100,000 Iraqi Troops"; *Times*, 10 July 1991, 5.

37. Dunnigan and Bay, *From Shield to Sword*, 292. Luttwak, "Military Dimension," 41. Keaney and Cohen, *Summary Report*, 9.



through the desert even more hazardous. Thus, while desertions for home severely depleted Iraqi troop strength, this would mainly have happened before the war began, not during it.

#### PRISONERS

For an Iraqi soldier who had not managed to desert while on leave and who wanted to get out, therefore, the best prospect was to surrender. A standard strategy was to hunker down during the air war and to surrender to ground forces when they got there – which, generally, it seems, was expected to be a matter of days. Accordingly, when the ground war finally began at the end of February, the campaign quickly became a matter more of crowd control than anything else – “desert roundup,” one writer has called it.<sup>38</sup>

There are exact numbers for the prisoner count. Some 63,948 (including 1,492 displaced civilians) surrendered to the Americans during the war, and 22,795 others surrendered to other coalition forces, for a total of 86,743.<sup>39</sup>

#### ESCAPEES

Once the ground war began, those who did not surrender or fight, fled. For most of the Iraqi troops in the KTO, however, a run for home was a difficult option. Of the forty-three Iraqi divisions, thirty-six were in Kuwait or along the distant Iraq-Saudi frontier, and only seven were in southern Iraq where escape was comparatively easy. The rear divisions were at fuller strengths, but it seems reasonable to assume that perhaps two-thirds of Iraqi forces were in no easy position to escape.<sup>40</sup>

38. Richard P. Hallion, *Storm Over Iraq: Air Power and the Gulf War* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992), 231. Some of the Iraqi soldiers who adopted this survival strategy apparently abandoned their units in order to seek safety, and they accordingly are sometimes labeled as “deserters.” They should not, of course, be confused with deserters who made it back home. The “deserters” who didn’t get out of the KTO eventually were either killed or taken prisoner. To label them both as “deserters” and as “prisoners” is to double count them – which is what Aspin and Dickinson and others seem to do: Aspin and Dickinson, *Defense for a New Era*, 32–33; Dunnigan and Bay, *From Shield to Sword*, 363; U.S. News, *Triumph Without Victory*, 405; Anthony H. Cordesman, *After the Storm: The Changing Military Balance in the Middle East* (Boulder: Westview, 1993), 465; GWAPS, vol. 2, pt. 2, 220; James A. Winnefeld, Preston Niblack, and Dana J. Johnson, *A League of Airmen: U.S. Air Power in the Gulf War* (Santa Monica: RAND, 1994), 159.

39. Department of Defense, *Final Report*, 578.

40. See Freedman and Karsh, *Gulf Conflict*, 387–90.



Some, however, presumably did make it to the north and many of these as well as many of the remaining third of troops who were already there did escape. It was not easy, however. The allied strategy, after all, was to cut the army off, and much of its efforts were devoted to enveloping the Iraqi forces in the Kuwait theater. One of the main objectives of the ground campaign, which moved very quickly, was to cut off the main highway route that led from southern Iraq to Baghdad and this was accomplished on the second day of the four-day offensive.<sup>41</sup> (Although the best Iraqi troops were apparently ordered to begin withdrawing from Kuwait before the allied ground offensive began, they were not ordered to withdraw from Iraq.)<sup>42</sup> Moreover, there was constant interdiction of bridges and of hastily-built pontoon bridges.<sup>43</sup>

Estimates about escapees are hard to come by. Aspin and Dickinson observe at one point that "At the end of the fighting, one intelligence estimate based on aerial reconnaissance of the fleeing troops placed the number of escapees at 100,000." They go on, however, to observe, "because people cannot be accurately counted from the air, that number was more guessed at than scientifically derived."<sup>44</sup> GWAPS, also guessing, arrives at the same number.<sup>45</sup> The guess may be high. As noted, there were only seven divisions in the north. Even if each of these was as fully-staffed as intelligence believed at the time (which is almost certainly not true), there would only have been a total of 84,000 troops in the north, though their numbers may have been increased by troops who managed to flee or retreat from Kuwait – particularly by officers who presumably had readier access to vehicles.<sup>46</sup> Moreover, at that time U.S. intelligence still believed that the Iraqis had over half a million troops in the KTO. Given that perception, given the general propensity to exaggerate the size of the enemy, and given the difficulty of such aerial estimates, it seems reasonable to suggest the admittedly "guessed at" estimate would be substantially high. Moreover, another military "guess" at the end of the war was that only 60,000 escaped.<sup>47</sup>

41. Rick Atkinson, "Outflanking Iraq: Go West, 'Go Deep'," *Washington Post*, 18 March 1991, A1.

42. Dilip Hiro, *Desert Shield to Desert Storm: The Second Gulf War* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 371.

43. Schwarzkopf, *It Doesn't Take a Hero*, 382, 464, 471; Keaney and Cohen, *Summary Report*, 91.

44. *Defense for a New Era*, 32.

45. GWAPS, vol. 2, pt. 2, 262n.

46. According to George T. Raach, who headed the team which produced the Pentagon's Report to Congress, of the 69,822 prisoners in American and British custody, only 2,940 (4 percent) were officers (personal communication).

47. U.S. News, *Triumph Without Victory*, 403.



It is often argued that the war ended too soon because its early conclusion allowed two Iraqi divisions to escape.<sup>48</sup> That would represent a maximum of only 24,000 troops, however. Another estimate suggests that about 4½ divisions managed to escape in various ways, representing possibly 60,000 troops or more, and that, in addition, at least half of the soldiers in Iraq's eight to ten armored and mechanized divisions managed successfully to flee, for a total of 110,000 – the highest estimate I have found on this difficult issue.<sup>49</sup> This assumes, however, that these divisions were at full strength and there may be some double counting since many of the rearward divisions were mechanized.

In all, then, the number of escapees doubtless runs into the tens of thousands, perhaps surpassing the 100,000 mark.

#### DEATHS

An estimate of Iraqi battle deaths is important to determine how big the Iraqi army in the KTO was at the start of the war, and also to assess what happened during the war. Such estimates have frequently gone as high as 200,000, and a few weeks after it was all over, Schwarzkopf, apparently briefly departing from his anti-body count pose, reportedly estimated that "as many as 150,000" might have died.<sup>50</sup>

Shortly after the war, the Pentagon's Defense Intelligence Agency "tentatively" estimated that 100,000 Iraqi troops had been killed in action, another 300,000 had been wounded, and some 150,000 had deserted. To stress its uncertainty, it said these numbers had an "error factor of 50 percent or higher."<sup>51</sup> Numbers in that order of magnitude continued to be supported. A year after the war, *Newsweek* magazine, citing the Department of Defense, U.S. Central Command, U.S. intelligence agencies, and Greenpeace USA as its sources, suggested that the Iraqis had suffered between 70,000 and 115,000 military deaths during

48. Douglas Waller and John Barry, "The Day We Stopped the War," *Newsweek*, 20 January 1992, 18; Schwarzkopf, *It Doesn't Take a Hero*, 471.

49. U.S. News, *Triumph Without Victory*, 405–6. Another estimate suggests that 70,000 to 80,000 escaped into the Iraqi city of Basra: Atkinson, *Crusade*, 476. Gordon and Trainor estimate that about half the Republican Guard managed to escape (*Generals' War*, 429, 476), but that would represent only about 30,000 or 40,000 troops.

50. Hiro, *Desert Shield to Desert Storm*, 396; see also *New Statesman and Society*, 21 June 1991, 26; Caryle Murphy, "Iraqi Death Toll Remains Clouded," *Washington Post*, 23 June 1991, A1.

51. John G. Heidenrich, "The Gulf War: How Many Iraqis Died?" *Foreign Policy* (spring 1993): 109.



the war.<sup>52</sup> Other estimates have been 20,000 to 30,000, 82,500, 35,000, 25,000 to 55,000, and 19,000 to 22,000.<sup>53</sup>

In large measure, it seems, such estimates arise from the overestimate of enemy troop strength at the start of the war. If there were few defectors, some 87,000 prisoners, and not all that many escapees or war-time desertions, and if prewar Iraqi troop strength had stood at around 540,000, it followed that, as Schwarzkopf put it in his famous final war briefing, there must be "a very, very large number of dead in some of these units – a very, very large number of dead."<sup>54</sup>

Others, however, come up with remarkably small numbers of Iraqi dead. One of the best discussions is found in a book put out a year after the war by the editors of *U.S. News and World Report*. Using estimates of the number of Iraqi injured to extrapolate the number of dead, the book concludes that, if there were 250,000 troops in the KTO and if the number of Iraqi wounded was in the tens of thousands (which it finds plausible), "the air and ground campaigns against the Iraqi forces in the Kuwait Theater of Operations may have accounted for a maximum total of perhaps 8,000 to 18,000 Iraqi dead."<sup>55</sup>

Even this may be high. In particular, it is unlikely tens of thousands of Iraqis were wounded. The Pentagon's 1992 *Report* observes that only eight of the 63,948 prisoners in U.S. custody died and that only five of these died "from combat injuries."<sup>56</sup> Although the *Report* does not indicate how many Iraqi prisoners were wounded, some numbers on this have been assembled by John Heidenrich, a former military analyst with the Defense Intelligence Agency who had analyzed the Iraqi army during the Gulf crisis and who puts the death toll at well under 10,000.<sup>57</sup> In particular, he seizes upon a Pentagon announcement at the end of the war reporting that some 37,000 Iraqi prisoners were in U.S. custody at that time and that, of these, only 800 required medical attention. Moreover, of these 800, fully 20 percent were suffering

52. Waller and Barry, "Day We Stopped the War," 18.

53. Respectively: Dunnigan and Bay, *From Shield to Sword*, 342, 376; Hiro, *Desert Shield to Desert Storm*, 396; Freedman and Karsh, *Gulf Conflict*, 408; Cordesman, *After the Storm*, 444; Keaney and Cohen, *Summary Report*, 249, n. 19. At one point, GWAPS suggests 14,000 to 34,000 Iraqis were killed in the ground war (vol. 2, pt. 2, 262n).

54. On this issue, see also Freedman and Karsh, *Gulf Conflict*, 408; Bellamy, "Arithmetic of death."

55. U.S. News, *Triumph Without Victory*, 406–8. See also Murphy, "Iraqi Death Toll;" Simpson, *From the House of War*, xv.

56. Department of Defense, *Final Report*, 578.

57. Heidenrich, "How Many Iraqis Died?" 123–124. Although he relies on unclassified sources in his published analysis, Heidenrich read interrogation reports of Iraqi prisoners and defectors: John G. Heidenrich, "Reply," *Foreign Policy* (summer 1993): 188. These materials unfortunately remain classified.



from such noncombat afflictions as malnutrition and dehydration.<sup>58</sup> If that ratio held true for the entire collection of 86,743 prisoners, it would indicate that some 1,500 were suffering from battle wounds. Even that number may be high. According to George T. Raach, head of the Pentagon's Report to Congress, of the 69,822 prisoners in U.S. or British custody, around 2,000 were "seen by physicians." Although precise information is not readily available, the sense is that "there weren't very many that were actually wounded," and that most were suffering from dehydration or malnutrition.<sup>59</sup>

Of course, some of the injured whose lives might have been saved by timely treatment might have died before being collected by the invading U.S. ground troops, and it is conceivable that others may have been left behind to expire in bunkers as their mates rushed to surrender. Perhaps the wounded count is low also because some of those lightly injured in the early part of the air war had already healed by the time they surrendered a month or more later – though the figures for those who needed medical attention would include the changing of dressings or the administering of tetanus shots. Moreover, some wounded prisoners who might otherwise have died were perhaps saved by the first class medical treatment they received at the hands of American medics who were well equipped and hardly burdened by huge casualties of their own to worry about. Perhaps, despite the air bombardment designed to sever communications and transportation, some of the wounded were evacuated – however, it should be noted that, although hospitals in Baghdad were ready for an overflow of military casualties, none materialized at any time during the war,<sup>60</sup> and there were few wounded even in the hospitals in Basra which was near the front.<sup>61</sup> Moreover, as indicated above, escape was difficult for the uninjured; it would have been obviously even more difficult for the lame and the halt.

Even taking all that into consideration, however, that out of 63,948 prisoners only five had received fatal combat injuries and that among all prisoners only 1,500 (or, probably, even fewer) suffered battle wounds at all certainly suggests that huge numbers of Iraqis were not killed in the war. Heidenrich observes that the ratio of wounded to

58. Heidenrich, "How Many Iraqis Died?" 110.

59. Personal communication. Thomas McNaugher, who was with the troops entering Kuwait City at the end of the war, says there were forty-four wounded Iraqis in the country's seven hospitals (personal communication).

60. Murphy, "Iraqi Death Toll"; Patrick Cockburn, "Lower Death Toll Helped Saddam," *The Independent*, 5 February 1992, 11.

61. Cockburn, "Lower Death Toll Helped Saddam."



killed in modern war tends to be around 3 to 1, and he suggests that ratio may hold for the Gulf War as well.<sup>62</sup> This ratio would suggest, then, that, among those Iraqi units represented by the prisoners, some 500 Iraqi soldiers or fewer were killed in the war. Presumably there were also some hundreds of dead suffered by the troop units which managed to escape. One may also want to dilute the 3 to 1 ratio to account for the fact that American firepower on Iraqi tanks was often devastating and that Iraqi tanks were not as well armored as U.S. tanks.

One is left in any case, with a remarkably low number that, however, dovetails rather well with one other one. Whatever Schwarzkopf's antipathy to body counts, the Pentagon has given out – as required by the Geneva Convention – one very literal “body count”: the number of Iraqi soldiers actually buried by U.S. forces. It, too, is remarkably low: 577.<sup>63</sup> Moreover, not all of these represented combat deaths: many probably died from accidents, disease, and dehydration. Other coalition forces also buried Iraqi dead, but since the U.S. did the vast majority of whatever fighting there was, the total number of buried Iraqis may well be under 1000.<sup>64</sup>

Such numbers seem feasible. When U.S. soldiers spoke of seeing dead Iraqis they mainly numbered in the tens or scores, not thousands or even hundreds.<sup>65</sup> As one U.S. soldier remarked, “I was in Vietnam, and I expected the area where they breached the line to be a lot different than it was. I expected to see bodies laying around inside the trenches, but I didn't see any or any sign of wounded. It was strange. I can't figure it out.”<sup>66</sup> Also relevant are the experiences of a U.S. chaplain who drove around the battlefields of southeastern Iraq and northern Kuwait for a few weeks in the immediate aftermath of the war looking for dead Iraqis to bury with due ceremony. He came across one or two Iraqi corpses a day.<sup>67</sup>

62. Heidenrich, “How Many Iraqis Died?” 111–12.

63. Murphy, “Iraqi Death Toll”; Heidenrich, “How Many Iraqis Died?” 120.

64. The United States buried Iraqi soldiers in fifty-five sites while the Saudis used “five major burial sites,” according to U.S. military officials (Murphy, “Iraqi Death Toll”). It may be, however, that the Saudis did the bulk of the burying. Although they are required as a party to the Geneva Convention to report how many people they buried, they have apparently not done so (on this issue, see William M. Arkin, “Letter to the Editor,” *Foreign Policy* (summer 1993): 183; Heidenrich, “Reply,” 189). On the burying of bodies by the British, see Allen Nacheman, “Peace under the desert sun,” *The Independent*, 16 March 1991, 12.

65. U.S. News, *Triumph Without Victory*, 408.

66. Heidenrich, “How Many Iraqis Died?” 122.

67. Rick Atkinson, “Tending to Iraq's Dead: Chaplain Prays for Souls, Digs Graves,” *Washington Post*, 19 March 1991, A1.



There were very few pitched battles in the war, and in its biggest tank engagement, in which some 100 Iraqi tanks and armed personnel carriers were destroyed, an intelligence officer from the U.S. tank division estimated that about 340 Iraqis had died.<sup>68</sup> Even that number may be an overestimate. In a couple of instances, the U.S. Army used tanks equipped with earth movers to plow through Iraqi defense lines. In one case, the American commander estimated that between 80 and 250 Iraqis had been buried. After the war, however, the Iraqi government found only 44 bodies.<sup>69</sup>

In the battle of Khafji, a rare case of a battle instigated by the Iraqis, some 700 Iraqis accompanied by tanks took a deserted Saudi Arabia border town briefly. They were quickly routed: more than 400 surrendered and many of their tanks were destroyed before the rest fled back to Kuwait.<sup>70</sup> A body count was made, and about 100 Iraqi dead were tallied.<sup>71</sup> Additional casualties were inflicted on an estimated two Iraqi divisions positioned well to the north of the Khafji battle but apparently in (potential) support of it. They were systematically bombed for eight hours during the night of 30–31 January and were in full retreat in the morning,<sup>72</sup> and then were bombed repeatedly. Overall, the Iraqis may have suffered several hundred dead in this engagement.<sup>73</sup>

Then there was the famous “highway of death” in which vehicles were strewn along a road heading north to Basra in Iraq. The highway was more appropriately a road of destruction: most Iraqis “had jumped out of their vehicles and run away,” recalls Schwarzkopf.<sup>74</sup> American bombing methods made this quite easy. The head of the improvised convoy, and then, to prevent retreat, its tail, were first bombed in the middle of the night, trapping hundreds of vehicles. The bombing of the convoy began in earnest only at daylight, giving the panicky retreaters several hours to abandon the highway and thus to remove themselves as targets from the air assault they surely must have known

68. U.S. News, *Triumph Without Victory*, 408.

69. Heidenrich, “How Many Iraqis Died?” 121. Another estimate is that 150 enemy soldiers were buried: Atkinson, *Crusade*, 397. See also Gordon and Trainor, *Generals’ War*, 383.

70. U.S. News, *Triumph Without Victory*, 270; Department of Defense, *Final Report*, 131.

71. Gordon and Trainor, *Generals’ War*, 286.

72. Department of Defense, *Final Report*, 131–32.

73. Gordon and Trainor, *Generals’ War*, 286–87.

74. *It Doesn’t Take a Hero*, 468; see also Steve Coll and William Branigin, “U.S. Scrambled to Shape View of ‘Highway of Death’,” *Washington Post*, 11 March 1991, A1.



was coming.<sup>75</sup> Journalists who inspected the site said the most bodies they saw at any one place was 40 and estimated that a total of 200 to 300 may have died.<sup>76</sup>

There was another highway leading north from Kuwait City and it, too, was used for an escape route. In this case, there apparently was no traffic jam, but hundreds of Iraqi vehicles were "strafed, smashed and burned beyond belief" for some 60 miles along its length. The number of bodies, however, is put at "scores"<sup>77</sup> or at "more than three dozen."<sup>78</sup> Another reporter who visited both highways estimates the number of dead on the roads as "certainly under a thousand, and probably only several hundred."<sup>79</sup>

Something similar happened in the north. After the ceasefire, several hundred Iraqi vehicles made a run for a causeway. They were spotted, and the procession was halted when a helicopter used missiles to knock out the lead vehicle. U.S. troops moved in later to destroy the stalled vehicles, but they discovered that the Iraqis "had stripped off their gear and swam the waterway to escape." All that remained of the Iraqi division were the vehicles (engines still running), and "hundreds of pairs of combat boots and piles of web gear and other personal equipment."<sup>80</sup>

There was also the bombing in which a total of 90,549 tons was dropped.<sup>81</sup> How could the Iraqis avoid being annihilated in this devas-

75. Waller and Barry, "Day We Stopped the War," 20-23.

76. Coll and Branigin, "U.S. Scrambled." Anthony Cordesman, who walked the highway after the war, observed that the "vast majority" of the vehicles in the colossal traffic jam "suffered no combat damage of any kind and were simply abandoned": "Rushing to Judgment on the Gulf War," *Armed Forces Journal International*, June 1991, 66. Moreover, he reports, "there weren't that many bodies" and "on the other vehicles, there certainly wasn't any blood" (U.S. News, *Triumph Without Victory*, 409; see also Freedman and Karsh, *Gulf Conflict*, 408). In addition, the image of an endless line of destruction is vastly exaggerated. Reports estimate its length at one mile: William Claiborne and Caryle Murphy, "Retreat Down Highway of Doom: U.S. Warplanes Turned Iraqis' Escape Route Into Deathtrap," *Washington Post*, 2 March 1991, A1. Or around two or three miles: Friedman, *Desert Victory*, 234; Heidenrich, "How Many Iraqis Died?" 122; Bob Drogin, "On the road: Bodies of Iraqi soldiers lie beside the booty they tried to take," *Los Angeles Times*, 2 March 1991, A1; Keaney and Cohen, *Summary Report*, 113.

77. Bob Drogin, "On Forgotten Kuwait Road, 60 Miles of Wounds of War," *Los Angeles Times*, 10 March 1991, A1. Amazingly, this newspaper report has been used to conclude that "thousands" or "tens of thousands" of bodies were found along this road: Ramsey Clark, *The Fire This Time* (New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 1992), 17, 90-93.

78. William Branigin and William Claiborne, "Deathly Quiet Shrouds Site of 2nd Convoy Hit by Jets," *Washington Post*, 11 March 1991, A14.

79. Michael Kelly, *Martyrs' Day: Chronicle of a Small War* (New York: Random House, 1993), 229.

80. Dennis Steele, "Tanks and Men: Desert Storm From the Hatches," *Army* (June 1991): 34.

81. Luttwak, "Military Dimension," 36.



tating six week onslaught which war planners had estimated would kill 100,000 to 120,000?<sup>82</sup> Quite easily, in fact. Between air strikes helicopters with loudspeakers blasted the Iraqis with recorded messages in Arabic telling them that they could save their lives by deserting their vehicles.<sup>83</sup> Planes dropped not only bombs, but 29 million leaflets<sup>84</sup> that said, in effect, as one military spokesman put it, "Tonight we have dropped a leaflet, tomorrow it will be a bomb. Don't sleep in your tank."<sup>85</sup> Iraqi troops, it seems, generally quickly grasped the remarkably unsubtle point that lingering in or near obvious targets like tanks or defensive bunker complexes meant likely death. Moreover, there was little they could do by staying with their equipment since they had little or no defense against air attack.<sup>86</sup> They didn't need to be rocket scientists to realize that they could substantially reduce their chances of being killed by walking a respectful distance from such targets and digging in: as one tank battalion commander recalled: "I stayed out of [my tank] as much as I could and slept as far away as possible."<sup>87</sup> Distancing oneself from an obvious target was not a terribly difficult task. Gravity bombs in the war were not very precise, but half of any bombs dropped from an altitude of 5,000 feet still landed within 200 feet of their target.<sup>88</sup> Most bombs were apparently dropped from much higher – 15,000 feet.<sup>89</sup> Nevertheless, a fifteen minute stroll across the desert would put a soldier thousands of feet away, far outside the destructive envelope of even inaccurate bombing.

Once dug in, one was fairly safe. As Admiral William Crowe observed after visiting the battlefield after the war, "I think you could see from the crater patterns how hard it is to destroy a trench or a bunker – an individual bunker – with gravity bombs. You can live in those

82. Gerstenzang, "Tens of Thousands of Iraqi Soldiers' Bodies Left Behind." Melissa Healy and John M. Broder, "Number of Iraqis Killed in War May Never Be Known," *Los Angeles Times*, 8 March 1991, A7.

83. Schwarzkopf, *It Doesn't Take a Hero*, 466.

84. GWAPS, vol. 4, pt. 1, 336.

85. Woodward "100,000 Iraqi Troops"; see also Billière, *Storm Command*, 218; Keaney and Cohen, *Summary Report*, 108. For a discussion with illustrations of the leaflets, see Jay M. Parker and Jerold L. Hale, "Psychological Operations in the Gulf War: Analyzing Key Themes in Battlefield Leaflets," in Thomas A. McCain and Leonard Shyles, eds., *The 1,000 Hour War: Communication in the Gulf* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1994), 89–109; GWAPS, vol. 4, pt. 1, 335–42, 369–76.

86. Something similar presumably happened during the ground war. Since Iraqi tanks could be destroyed by U.S. tanks firing far outside the range of Iraqi counterfire, it was eminently sensible to abandon the inferior equipment.

87. Schwarzkopf, *It Doesn't Take a Hero*, 466. See also GWAPS, vol. 2, pt. 1, 321, 324.

88. Hallion, *Storm Over Iraq*, 283.

89. Moore, *Woman at War*, 316; Keaney and Cohen, *Summary Report*, 16.



trenches for a long time and not get hit, but the psychological pressure and the fear that you're going to be hit at any moment is really quite overwhelming and particularly when it goes on for six weeks."<sup>90</sup>

Indeed, while prisoners did report being terrified by the bombing raids, they did not report being slaughtered by them.<sup>91</sup> On average, Aspin and Dickinson report, captured senior officers reported a death rate from bombing of from 1 to 6 percent – that is, one that was remarkably small.<sup>92</sup> This could be taken to suggest a few thousand died from the bombing, but even this rate is likely to be high: as Heidenrich suggests, it would imply a far higher wounded rate than was actually found among the prisoners. More realistic may well be the captured commander of a heavily bombed battalion who said, "To be honest, for the amount of ordnance dropped, not very many [were killed]. Only one soldier was killed and two were wounded."<sup>93</sup>

One U.S. general, Charles Horner, chief of the air campaign, allowed himself to get into the numbers game in a 1992 television interview. He seems to have come to the conclusion that no more than a few thousand Iraqis died in the war: "I think the eyewitness accounts on the battlefield support probably less than 10,000 casualties.... We didn't find any mass graves. We didn't find any large numbers of people dead from attacks."<sup>94</sup> A comparison with the battle of Khe Sanh in 1968 in Vietnam suggests this estimate is sound – and perhaps even high.<sup>95</sup> At

90. William Crowe, "Admiral William Crowe: Lessons of War," (PBS, 1993); see also Luttwak, "Military Dimension," 39–40; GWAPS, vol. 2, pt. 1, 249–50. The reaction B-52 raids induced among the Viet Cong in Vietnam is described by one veteran: "The terror was complete. One lost control of bodily functions as the mind screamed incomprehensible orders to get out. On one occasion a Soviet delegation was visiting our ministry when a particularly short-notice warning came through. When it was over, no one had been hurt, but the entire delegation had sustained considerable damage to its dignity – uncontrollable trembling and wet pants the all-too-obvious outward signs of inner convulsions": Truong Nhu Tang, *A Vietcong Memoir* (New York: Vintage, 1985), 168–70. Nonetheless, the Communists endured years of such trauma.

91. U.S. News, *Triumph Without Victory*, 408.

92. *Defense for a New Era*, 32; see also Luttwak, "Military Dimension," 40; Gordon and Trainor, *Generals' War*, 352; Cockburn, "Lower Death Toll Helped Saddam"; GWAPS, vol. 2, pt. 2, 220. Although Aspin and Dickinson refer to the captured officers as "a good sample" of "all the Iraqi forces in the KTO" (p. 34), these officers were presumably among those who stayed with their troops and kept their units together. The ones who bugged out early, leaving their troops to spread to the wind and thus present an even smaller target to the bombers, are not represented.

93. Heidenrich, "How Many Iraqis Died?" 115–16. Moreover, that death occurred only because "the vibrations of the bomb caused a bunker to cave in on top of him" (Vern Liebl, "The View From the Other Side of the Jebel (Hill)," *Command Magazine* (November–December 1991): 33).

94. Heidenrich, "How Many Iraqis Died?" 110; Harvey M. Sapolsky and Sharon K. Weiner, "War Without Killing," *Breakthroughs* (winter 1992/93): 4.

95. I am indebted to Peter Braestrup for suggesting this comparison.



Khe Sanh the enemy, concentrated in a single area around a U.S. base and determined to fight, was pounded by more tonnage than was dropped in the entire Gulf War: "over 100,000 tons of bombs and 150,000 artillery rounds were delivered – and delivered intelligently – by the Americans during the siege."<sup>96</sup> The estimates are that a total of some 10,000 enemy soldiers died in that battle which also included violent ground combat.<sup>97</sup> A comparable amount of ordnance dropped on, or at, an enemy that was widely dispersed, deliberately separated from obvious targets, dug in, and seeking to avoid combat could be expected to kill far fewer.

In addition to those killed by bombs and bullets and other projectiles, some Iraqis probably died from accidents and from disease and dehydration during the war and were presumably buried by their comrades. Accidents, too, however, should furnish wounded. That only one of the prisoners in U.S. custody died of dehydration – even though most of the Iraqis captured were from among those least well provided for – suggests that food and water supplies were adequate to sustain the Iraqis through the six week's siege.<sup>98</sup>

In assessing the Iraqi military dead, thus, the numbers keep coming out remarkably low.<sup>99</sup> For there to have been tens of thousands of dead, the numbers of wounded must be at least as large, and far more corpses should have been found. As Heidenrich observes, one must explain why "hundreds of journalists roaming throughout the KTO after the Allied ground offensive neglected to photograph the tens of thousands of Iraqi corpses or grave sites that supposedly littered the battlefield."<sup>100</sup> Some Iraqis doubtless were buried in their dugouts by bomb attacks, other dead may have been buried by their comrades, and some may have been burned to the point of vaporization in their devastated tanks and vehicles. Even taking this all into account, it seems likely that the number of Iraqis who died in the Kuwait theater of operations during the war numbered no more than a few thousand.

96. Moyers S. Shore, II, *The Battle for Khe Sanh* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Marine Corps, Historical Branch, 1969), 145.

97. Stanley Karnow, *Vietnam: A History* (New York: Penguin, 1991), 553.

98. On this point, compare Luttwak, "Military Dimension," 41. GWAPS finds that "allied interdiction operations notwithstanding, the Iraqi Army was adequately provisioned when the ground offensive commenced." The Iraqi logistical system was something less than ideal, however. Well before the war began, there were spotty shortage problems: vol. 2, pt. 2, 197. The principal problem would have been water. A healthy individual can live for several weeks without food.

99. These estimates are for Iraqi military deaths in the Kuwait theater of operations. Additional troops, presumably, were killed in bombing raids upon Iraq itself.

100. "Reply," 190.



## SUMMING UP IRAQI TROOP STRENGTH

The results of this exercise suggest that the number of Iraqi troops in the Kuwait theater of operations at the start of the war was much lower than U.S. intelligence estimated. There were few defectors or deserters, 88,000 prisoners, a few thousand killed, and some tens of thousands who may have managed to escape during the war. Even if one accepts higher estimates of Iraqi military dead – the 20,000 figure of some recent studies, for example – and a high estimate for the number of escapees, the total Iraqi troop strength at the start of the war may well have been under 200,000 which is less than two fifths of the number still officially promulgated by the Department of Defense and the U.S. Army to have been there, and less than one-third the number on Schwarzkopf's charts in his briefing at the end of the war.<sup>101</sup>

## IRAQI LEADERSHIP, STRATEGY, AND TACTICS

ALTHOUGH THEY were considerably outnumbered by coalition forces, the Iraqis could still have visited significantly painful damage on their enemy. Even if their troop strength has been substantially overestimated, they still had a rather sizable army in the field when the war began. Moreover, while their equipment was no match for that of their enemy, they were nonetheless equipped with a lot of lethal (if second-rate) gear. To be militarily effective, however, they would have had to be well led, well positioned, and well motivated.

## STRATEGIES

Schwarzkopf says he “could conjure up a dozen scenarios in which the Iraqis would make victory extremely costly.”<sup>102</sup> It is to the great fortune of the United States and its allies, therefore, that Iraq did not have Schwarzkopf, or someone like him, commanding its side. As it tran-

101. As noted earlier, GWAPS estimates there were “no more than 336,000” Iraqi troops at the start of the war. To reach this number it notes that prisoner reports indicate that Iraq divisions were considered at full strength with 10,000 troops (not around 12,000 as U.S. intelligence had believed) and that 20 percent were on leave when the war began and could not return. Hence: 420,000 minus 20 percent (84,000) equals 336,000 (vol. 2, pt. 2, 166–69). Thus the estimate leaves out two well-known facts: Iraqi forces were deployed at below – often far below – full strength (see Gordon and Trainor, *Generals' War*, 354), and many soldiers who had gone home on earlier leaves had never returned (see note 34 above).

102. *It Doesn't Take a Hero*, 439, 467.



spired, however, there is little evidence that the Iraqi leadership, such as it was, gave a great deal of coherent thought to how it might devise an effective strategy.

One possibility that was at least technically within Iraq's means would have been to make an Alamo-like fortress of populated (and therefore hostage-filled) areas like Kuwait City and to take a stand there, perhaps with only a few thousand, or even a few hundred, dedicated troops. This would have required the United States to destroy the city in order to save it, and U.S. casualties could have been considerable. Indeed, the American military was deeply concerned that something like this might come about.<sup>103</sup> Some few Iraqi troops, after all, did stand and fight. If these stalwarts had been stationed in Kuwait City rather than in the desert where they were hopelessly outclassed and outnumbered, they could have raised the stakes considerably.<sup>104</sup>

Instead, the Iraqis played to American strengths by putting their faith entirely on defensive battles in the desert or along the coast,<sup>105</sup> a strategy that was destined to fail even if the Iraqi troops fought bravely. After all, Iraqi forces were decidedly inferior in numbers – something the Iraqis were obviously in a position to appreciate if they had bothered to count their forces and to compare that number with

103. See Gerald F. Seib and Andy Pasztor, "Baghdad Radio Calls For Iraqi Retreat, but U.S. Spurns Move," *Wall Street Journal*, 26 February 1991, A1; U.S. News, *Triumph Without Victory*, 69; Friedman, *Desert Victory*, 215–16, 234; Bob Woodward, *The Commanders* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1991), 280; Freedman and Karsh, *Gulf Conflict*, 398; Moore, *Woman at War*, 287; Richard Beeston, "Bitter fight for city expected," *Times* (London), 20 February 1991, 3; Evans, "Civilian risks keep strategic sites off allied target list"; see also Towle, *Pundits*, 22. Anticipating that the Iraqis might "defend Kuwait City as a means of prolonging the war and inflicting heavy casualties," planners were prepared to "conduct a siege of the city for an unspecified time" that would include an armor attack and the "clearing and security of zones outside the city" (Department of Defense, *Final Report*, 516). The military was confident of victory – see Shibley Telhami, "Between Theory and Fact: Explaining American Behavior in the Gulf War," *Security Studies* 2, no. 1 (autumn 1992): 111–12, 115. It could not be so confident, however, that victory could be achieved at a politically acceptable cost.

104. Before the war, Saddam Hussein argued that once 5,000 American troops die, Bush "will not be able to continue the war" (GWAPS, vol. 1, pt. 1, 64). Analysis suggests that casualties like that would indeed very likely have inspired massive disaffection with the war (led by the Democrats who had mostly voted against it in Congress). This would likely have ruined George Bush's presidency and perhaps forced him to compromise embarrassingly with the Iraqis. With U.S. troops fully engaged, however, it would not necessarily have led to effective political demands to withdraw from the war. See John Mueller, *Policy and Opinion in the Gulf War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 128–29. See also Cigar, "Iraq's Strategic Mindset," 23.

105. GWAPS, vol. 1, pt. 1, 75. Cigar, "Iraq's Strategic Mindset," 17–18. U.S. News, *Triumph Without Victory*, 290. Freedman and Karsh, *Gulf Conflict*, 386–87. James W. Pardew, Jr., "The Iraqi Army's Defeat in Kuwait," *Parameters* 21, no. 4 (winter 1991–92): 21. Murray Hammick, "Iraqi obstacles and defensive positions," *International Defense Review* (September 1991): 989–92. Gordon and Trainor, *Generals' War*, 353.



the size of the enemy force conveniently and repeatedly published in newspapers and magazines, and on international television.<sup>106</sup> Moreover, it should have been easy for the Iraqis to determine that Iraqi equipment was vastly inferior to that of the opposing forces. The best Iraqi tanks, for example, had a firing range of perhaps fifteen hundred meters – something they were obviously in a good position to know – while U.S. tanks had a well-publicized range of better than two thousand meters.<sup>107</sup> Simple arithmetic, however, does not seem to be Saddam Hussein's strong suit.

Nor, it seems, did Hussein or his commanders trouble themselves to think very deeply about what their opponents might do: as Freedman and Karsh put it, "There was no serious intelligence operation to assess the enemy's likely strategy."<sup>108</sup> Although the Iraqi leaders did pay some attention to commercial broadcasts,<sup>109</sup> there is little evidence they gained anything from such exposure. After all, their position in Kuwait left their right flank open for hundreds of miles and, as arm-chair strategists in the West continuously pointed out in the press and on television, a sensible strategy for coalition forces would be to sweep around that flank – exactly what happened. A book published and widely available before the war, for example, candidly discussed several possible strategies, most of them involving air strikes followed by enveloping movements around the Iraqis' right flank.<sup>110</sup> In an article pub-

106. Such counts, however, would not have been easy. Aspin and Dickinson report that "Interviews with captured Iraqi officers revealed that many of them lied about their daily strength so their superiors would not know how miserably they had failed in keeping their units intact" (*Defense for a New Era*, 31). GWAPS notes that "Commanders frequently misrepresented the condition of their units – particularly readiness and maintenance problems, low morale, and widespread desertion – for fear of retribution" (vol. 1, pt. 1, 72). Some of Hussein's bravado apparently came from his belief that the allies couldn't attack unless they had a numerical superiority of 3 to 1 (Pardeu, "Iraqi Army's Defeat," 23, n. 6). In fact, it appears, they did – though, given the state of Iraqi morale and leadership, they hardly needed it.

107. These ranges are from a popular book available in U.S. bookstores well before the war: Frank Chadwick, *Desert Shield Fact Book* (Bloomington: Game Designers' Workshop, 1991), 37, 56. The probable kill range of the best American tanks is variously given as 3,000 meters (U.S. News, *Triumph Without Victory*, 364) or 4,000 meters or more (Dunnigan and Bay, *From Shield to Sword*, 19). For an open discussion before the ground war of the vast U.S. qualitative superiority in tanks, see John Mearsheimer, "Liberation in Less Than a Week," *New York Times*, 8 February 1991, A31; and Bob Davis, "A Tank Commander Hones His Battalion As Ground War Nears," *Wall Street Journal*, 19 February 1991, A1. On the inadequacy of Iraq's "mixed bag of equipment" which had been bought from "half-a-dozen suppliers," see Simpson, *From the House of War*, 334, 337.

108. *Gulf Conflict*, 387.

109. Freedman and Karsh, *Gulf Conflict*, 387.

110. Trevor N. Dupuy, *How to Defeat Saddam Hussein: Scenarios and Strategies for the Gulf War* (New York: Warner Books, 1991). Three months before the war, a war-game was played out on the popular *Nightline* show of ABC in which the key military



lished in the *New York Times* on 6 February 1991, two-and-a-half weeks before the ground attack (and reprinted a few days later in the *International Herald Tribune*), columnist Leslie Gelb wondered aloud about how "everyone seems to know that the likely scenario calls for American and British forces to wheel around Kuwait and cut across the southern part of Iraq toward Basra."<sup>111</sup> Meanwhile other newspapers were commenting on "the speculation that American and British forces might be involved in a flanking maneuver to the far west, across the Saudi-Iraq border, bypassing the 'Magenot Line' in southern Kuwait and advancing into Iraq to cut off the Republican Guard divisions from the rear," or they were simply declaring "it is now no longer a secret" that mechanized forces "are to bypass virtually all Iraqi fortifications on their way to the Basra area, thus slicing Kuwait from Iraq."<sup>112</sup> Or, further, on page twenty-four of its 11 February issue, *Newsweek* magazine helpfully published a map "almost exactly depicting our flanking plan," as Schwarzkopf recalls. His reaction at the time, he says, was "This stinks! *Newsweek* has printed our entire battle plan."<sup>113</sup> Iraq scarcely needed the amateurs, however. Weeks before the war Chairman of the Joint Chiefs Colin Powell had publicly telegraphed the essence of American strategy: "First we are going to cut [the army] off and then we are going to kill it."<sup>114</sup>

The Iraqis, however, as Norman Friedman observes, "unbelievably, left their western flank entirely unprotected....General Schwarzkopf could not believe that the Iraqis had not seen the same opportunity he had."<sup>115</sup> Or, as Schwarzkopf puts it: Hussein and his generals "seemed oblivious of their exposed flank,"<sup>116</sup> or "I couldn't conceive of a commander of any type leaving that flank exposed."<sup>117</sup> Not only did the Iraqis ignore the possibility that they might be flanked, but they ap-

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scenario included a "wide left hook" that became characterized as "the optimal move" (Dunnigan and Bay, *From Shield to Sword*, 414).

111. "Gulf Military Questions," *New York Times*, 6 February 1991, A21.

112. Philip M. Taylor, *War and the Media* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992), 234.

113. *It Doesn't Take a Hero*, 440. One suspects his actual language at the time was somewhat more colorful.

114. Elaine Sciolino, *The Outlaw State* (New York: Wiley, 1991), 257.

115. *Desert Victory*, 220, 224.

116. *It Doesn't Take a Hero*, 408.

117. *General Norman Schwarzkopf talking with David Frost* (PBS, 22 March 1991). Indeed, Friedman observes that military planners feared the crafty Iraqi might have left their flank open "as a deliberate attraction to some sort of allied disaster" (*Desert Victory*, 221-24). Schwarzkopf also writes, "I kept asking myself, 'What does Saddam know about that flank that I don't? Why doesn't he have any forces out there?'" (*It Doesn't Take a Hero*, 439).



parently carried out little or no reconnaissance on their flanks to evaluate this crucial assumption.<sup>118</sup>

It has been suggested that the Iraqi commanders neglected the possibility of a flanking attack because they thought an army would get lost in the large desert areas in that locale. If so, this means they completely and casually discounted the value of the well-known global positioning system technology which the well-budgeted Iraqi forces, busily at work on missiles and nuclear weapons, had never bothered to purchase even though it had been readily and cheaply available for years and was in wide use in the west by truckers and boaters.<sup>119</sup>

It has also been argued that the Iraqi leadership was surprised because it reasonably assumed vehicles would get bogged down in the loose sand of the desert. Indeed, at one point the American command was itself concerned about whether the area was "trafficable."<sup>120</sup> Since most of the area of concern was within Iraq itself, it would have been possible, one would think, for the Iraqis at their leisure some time during the five months of war preparation to drive a few trucks and tanks over there (if they could avoid getting lost) to check the terrain out.

#### DEFENSES

Although they apparently expected to be attacked only along or near the Kuwait and Iraq border with Saudi Arabia or from the sea, the Iraqis showed very little ability to plan for the defensive battles they apparently assumed would characterize the war there.

They had five months to build defenses along the Saudi border, but the result proved to be utterly ineffective. One analyst observes that, although some of the rearward defenses were "well prepared," the defenses on the anticipated front lines were "static, linear and lacked depth," and the Iraqis "failed to observe a basic principle of defense: obstacles should be covered by fire." Some seaward defenses might have "seriously inconvenienced" a light invasion force such as a feint attack, but they were filled with "deficiencies which were becoming the hallmark of the Iraqi army" and the defenses of Kuwait City were "haphazard."<sup>121</sup> GWAPS concludes that: "Although the plan was well

118. James J. Cooke, *100 Miles from Baghdad: With the French in Desert Storm* (Westport: Praeger, 1993), 101.

119. See, for example, George Marsh, "GPS Sets Course," *Space* (November-December 1990): 21-26. See also Gordon and Trainor, *Generals' War*, 353, 384-85.

120. Atkinson, *Crusade*, 109.

121. Hammick, "Iraqi Obstacles". As Admiral Crowe observes, "I couldn't detect a great deal of pattern in their defense. There was some evidence of haphazard defense



conceived, it was poorly implemented. Many positions were poorly designed and constructed and lacked mutual support, with gaps along sector boundaries, and obstacles were often not covered by fire. Defenses in some areas, moreover, had been neglected – alternate fighting positions and trenches filled up with sand while some mine fields had been exposed by the wind and the mines could be seen by air and ground forces.”<sup>122</sup> Defensive trenches were shallow while mine fields were sparse – indeed, U.S. unexploded munitions left over from pre-attack bombardments often posed a larger hazard.<sup>123</sup> Anthony Cordesman observes, “Maintenance was poor and completion of defense lines erratic..., and the sand blew off many minefields.”<sup>124</sup> The Iraqis also conveniently marked paths through the minefields with wire: as one U.S. officer put it, “Once we found that, the only thing missing was the neon sign saying, ‘Start here’.”<sup>125</sup>

Moreover, allied troops found Iraqi defenses to be “surprisingly thinly manned,”<sup>126</sup> and those defending troops who did happen to exist were, according to one Army analyst, “ill-trained and ill-prepared to execute this defense,” and “consisted largely of conscripts and mobilization veterans with marginal leaders.”<sup>127</sup> The defenders reportedly were 20 percent Kurds and 70 percent Shiites,<sup>128</sup> representing groups that revolted against Saddam Hussein at the first opportunity after the war – and this certainly suggests that a tenacious defense was hardly in the cards. “They were like civilians thrown into a military environment,” observed a member of a reconnaissance team. “They milled

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planning and not a great deal of thought. It seems so random to me, and so easy to avoid for attacking forces” (“Lessons of War”). See also Friedman, *Desert Victory*, 229–30; GWAPS, vol. 2, pt. 1, 299; Schwarzkopf, *It Doesn't Take a Hero*, 452–53.

122. GWAPS, vol. 1, pt. 1, 74.

123. U.S. News, *Triumph Without Victory*, 359. Although he had been led to believe that Iraqi defensive positions consisted of “miles of sophisticated underground fortifications, mine fields, tank traps and razor wire behind a wall of sand four stories high and a deep trench full of burning oil,” reporter John Chancellor says, “the wall of sand I saw in southern Iraq was no great obstacle; the fire in the trench had been snuffed out by napalm. Many defense lines there and in Kuwait were rudimentary”: “War Stories,” *New York Times*, 1 April 1991, A17.

124. *After the Storm*, 463; see also Freedman and Karsh, *Gulf Conflict*, 394.

125. Moore, “Porous Minefields.” The British commander observes, “Even with my knowledge of Saddam Hussein’s military incompetence, it seemed incredible that all the Iraqi guns and tanks had been dug in to face a frontal assault from the south and had not been able to turn round when they found enemy coming at them from behind” (Billière, *Storm Command*, 319).

126. “How Many Iraqi Soldiers Died?” *Time*, 17 June 1991, 26; Moore, *Woman at War*, 267, 275, 291, 288.

127. Pardew, “Iraqi Army’s Defeat,” 21, 23.

128. U.S. News, *Triumph Without Victory*, 404.



around, we never saw them carrying rifles, they had no patrols, they had no reaction to the air power flying over them."<sup>129</sup>

#### TACTICS

If Iraq's strategic thinking was opaque and uncomprehending and if its defensive preparations were often rather meager, its tactics once the war began were not much better. Asked about tactics, one Iraqi artillery officer said, simply, "There were no tactics....We are not like the Americans; we are not logical. We do not plan; we do not train....On a busy day we might train for one hour, but not hard. They just told us to shoot to the last bullet and the last man."<sup>130</sup>

Many officers, it seems, abandoned their troops early,<sup>131</sup> leaving their charges to fend for themselves. Since the Iraqi leadership, however, seems to have had no feasible idea about how to deal with its opponent, this was probably best for all involved: thus the most popular "tactic" was to surrender which in an important sense was indeed sound policy.

The few battles organized by tank forces of the Republican Guard showed little coherent thought. One foray sought to block the American VII Corps in the north, setting up a delay which could allow more Iraqis to flee, and one American commander has praised the move: "We may look at these guys and say they're a third-rate outfit, but I'll tell you that whoever made that decision to block the VII Corps was a first-rate strategist."<sup>132</sup> The praise seems ill-deserved. Whoever planned the engagement apparently still assumed, despite all the public commentary noted above, that the VII Corps was planning to hook down into Kuwait rather than going on across Iraq to the Basra area. (Something that is also suggested by the fact that to escape the enemy onslaught, the Iraqis were ordered on 17 February to begin to withdraw their best troops from Kuwait, but not from southern Iraq.)<sup>133</sup> Consequently the Iraqis took up defensive positions that were too far to the south, allowing the brunt of the American offensive to flank them to the north to cut off fleeing Iraqi forces. Even on its own terms

129. Moore, "Porous Minefields."

130. Liebl, "The View From the Other Side."

131. Dunnigan and Bay, *From Shield to Sword*, 75; Sciolino, *Outlaw State*, 259; Cordesman, *After the Storm*, 443. See also note 46 above.

132. U.S. News 1991, *Triumph Without Victory*, 335-36.

133. Hiro, *Desert Shield to Desert Storm*, 371.



the defensive battles hardly caused much delay: one lasted 75 minutes, another, 22 minutes, and the biggest, 40 minutes.<sup>134</sup>

#### CIVILIAN AND POSTWAR DEATHS

IF MILITARY DEATHS in the Kuwait theater of operations were far lower than has often been suggested, civilian deaths from the massive bombing campaign of Iraq itself – which also sought to avoid casualties – were also much lower than is often assumed. They have been carefully estimated to have an “upper limit of perhaps between 2,500 and 3,000” by Middle East Watch.<sup>135</sup> The Iraqi government, with little record for accuracy in such matters, but also with little incentive to underplay its losses, has put the number of civilians killed by the bombing at 2,278.<sup>136</sup> A painstaking analysis by Beth Osborne Daponte puts the figure only somewhat higher: 3,500.<sup>137</sup>

Civilian deaths in Kuwait during Iraq’s occupation were also rather limited. The occupiers committed atrocities, and reports of these – some of them substantially exaggerated – severely exercised George Bush and the American people.<sup>138</sup> Middle East Watch, however, estimates that only 500 to 700 were killed during the invasion and occupation.<sup>139</sup> The claims of the Kuwait government, unlikely to be cautious in its calculations, are not all that much higher: 1,000 or more were murdered, it says, with hundreds still unaccounted for and 2,000 still

134. U.S. News 1991, *Triumph Without Victory*, 340, 355, 385.

135. *Needless Deaths in the Gulf War: Civilian Casualties During the Air Campaign and Violations of the Laws of War* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 1991), 19; see also U.S. News, *Triumph Without Victory*, 409–10; Simpson, *From the House of War*, 5; Heidenrich, “How Many Iraqis Died?” 118–19.

136. Freedman and Karsh, *Gulf Conflict*, 329; Beth Osborne Daponte, “A Case Study in Estimating Casualties from War and Its Aftermath: The 1991 Persian Gulf War,” *PSR Quarterly* 3, no. 2 (June 1993): 63.

137. “Estimating Casualties,” 63.

138. Mueller, *Policy and Opinion in the Gulf War*, 39, 144; see also John R. MacArthur, *Second Front* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1992), chap. 2.

139. Alexander Cockburn, “Beat the Devil,” *Nation*, 4 February 1991, 114. The head of the Kuwait morgue told one reporter, “Well, I would say we had more than four hundred bodies here during the occupation, and probably as many as seven hundred” (Kelly, *Martyrs’ Day*, 219–20).



being detained by Iraq.<sup>140</sup> By 1994 Kuwait had lowered the number of missing citizens to 609.<sup>141</sup>

After the liberation, various Kuwaitis and Kuwaiti groups went on murderous rampages of vengeance directed particularly at resident Palestinians. During the first two weeks, according to a U.S. official, between 200 and 600 Palestinians, almost all of them young men, disappeared. In the two months after liberation, one cemetery buried fifty-four unidentified bodies which its log lists as "killed" or "executed."<sup>142</sup> A Kuwait government official estimated that the number summarily executed "might actually be as high as a thousand."<sup>143</sup> Thousands more were detained by government agencies, and tens of thousands were forced into exile.

Although the deaths in the Gulf War itself were probably not nearly as high as it first seemed, the war did lead to many deaths in Iraq. This came about in its bloody, catastrophic aftermath (see Table 1).

The war helped to trigger uprisings against Saddam Hussein by the Kurds in the north and by the Shiites in the south. As the Gulf War victors stood on the sidelines, Hussein's forces regrouped and put these risings down at what appears to be great loss of life. Tens of thousands – two sources arrive independently at an estimate of 35,000<sup>144</sup> – apparently died, and some two million people were displaced.<sup>145</sup> Baghdad hospitals, which had been unnecessarily braced for an overflow of military casualties during the war, became swamped two weeks after it was over from the violent civil conflicts the war had spawned.<sup>146</sup>

Moreover, because of the bombings, the uprisings, Saddam Hussein's obstructionism, and the continued economic sanctions, health and sanitation services were severely degraded in Iraq, especially

140. Department of Defense, *Final Report*, 27. An unreleased Pentagon report from January 1992 alleges that 1,082 Kuwaitis were killed by execution and torture during the occupation: Gordon and Trainor, *Generals' War*, 459.

141. Chris Hedges, "Hope and Anxiety for Kin Of Those Missing in Iraq," *New York Times*, 13 October 1994, A17. Some of the missing may, of course, be among those who Middle East Watch estimates were killed during the occupation.

142. Ann M. Lesch, "Palestinians in Kuwait," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 20, no. 4 (summer 1991): 47–48.

143. Milton Viorst, "After the Liberation," *New Yorker*, 30 September 1991, 59.

144. Daponte, "Estimating Casualties," 65.

145. Alberto Ascherio and others, "Effect of the Gulf War on Infant and Child Mortality in Iraq," *New England Journal of Medicine* 327, no. 13 (24 September 1992): 931.

146. Murphy, "Iraqi Death Toll."



Table 1

## DEATHS IN THE GULF WAR

Kuwaiti citizens and residents killed by the Iraqis in their invasion and occupation	500-700
Americans who died in Desert Shield and Desert Storm from accidents	108
American battle deaths	146*
Non-American coalition battle deaths	63
Iraqi battle deaths in Gulf War	Probably a few thousand
Iraqi civilians killed by bombing of Iraq	Some 3,000
Kuwaiti citizens and residents killed or executed by Kuwaitis in vengeance in the aftermath of the war	A few hundred
Iraqis killed in Kurdish and Shiite uprisings triggered by the war or died as the result of breakdowns in sanitation and health facilities in the aftermath of the war	Tens of thousands, perhaps over 100,000

\* Of these, 11 were killed by unexploded allied munitions, 18 by unexploded Iraqi munitions, 28 by a SCUD strike on barracks in Dhahran, and at least 35 by friendly fire (U.S. News, *Triumph Without Victory*, ix). This leaves a maximum of 54 killed directly by Iraqi defenders.

during the war and in the months after it. One study of the consequences of this concludes that during the first eight months of 1991 there was an excess of 46,900 deaths among Iraqi children under the age of five.<sup>147</sup> Another study calculates that, overall, 111,000 Iraqis - 70,000 of them children under the age of 15 - died from the health

147. Ascherio and others, "Effect of the Gulf War," 933-34. See also Harvard Study Team, "The Effect of the Gulf Crisis on the Children of Iraq," *New England Journal of Medicine* 325, no. 13 (24 September 1991): 977-980; Patrick E. Tyler, "Health Crisis Said to Grip Iraq In Wake of War's Destruction," *New York Times*, 22 May 1991, A16; Simpson, *From the House of War*, 6; H. Jack Geiger, "Bomb Now, Die Later: The Consequences of Infrastructure Destruction for Iraqi Civilians in the Gulf War," in O'Loughlin, Mayer and Greenberg, *War and Its Consequences: Lessons from the Persian Gulf War*, 51-58.



effects of the war,<sup>148</sup> while an earlier U.S. Census Bureau study concludes there had been 70,000 excess deaths from health effects.<sup>149</sup>

#### COMPARISONS AND CONCLUSIONS

**T**HUS IT SEEMS that the enemy in the Gulf War was indeed "perfect": it was mainly a deeply confused and remarkably ill-led rabble, far smaller in numbers than prewar (and postwar) estimates suggested. This is a key concern for assessing and evaluating the war.

#### THE CHIEF DETERMINANT OF THE OUTCOME OF THE WAR

It seems clear that the outcome of the war was chiefly determined by the low state of Iraqi morale and by the considerable inadequacy of their leadership, not by the precision or effectiveness of American firepower or by the ingeniousness of the strategies and tactics of their enemy.<sup>150</sup> As one American Marine suggested, "On a combat scale of 1 to 10, it was a 1."<sup>151</sup> Saddam Hussein had promised the mother of all battles, but his troops and commanders delivered instead the mother of all bug-outs.<sup>152</sup> To a substantial degree, the Americans gave a war and no one showed up.<sup>153</sup> In the Gulf War the Americans faced an opponent

148. Daponte, "Estimating Casualties," 62.

149. Daponte, "Estimating Casualties," 66. GWAPS points out that these effects would have been substantially smaller if Saddam Hussein (like the Argentine officers who had begun the Falklands War of 1982) had been swept from office as expected at the end of the war, allowing the victors to help the new government reconstruct: vol. 2, pt. 2, 307. See also Andrew Rosenthal, "U.S. Expecting Hussein To Be Out by Year's End," *New York Times*, 18 March 1991, A8; Freedman and Karsh, *Gulf Conflict*, 417.

150. As Keaney and Cohen point out, the loss of equipment in the bombing "was not decisive in any direct way" since the Iraqis still had plenty left (*Summary Report*, 117).

151. Moore, "Porous Minefields." Or: "the Iraqis are so bad. We planned like they were going to fight to the death. But they didn't. Just an inferior enemy" (Kelly, *Martyr's Day*, 174).

152. A measure of the inadequacy of the Iraqi military is furnished by the incredibly small numbers of coalition forces it managed to kill. Only 146 Americans died in action and of these a maximum of 54 were killed directly by the Iraqi defenders (see Table 1), a figure that may be high because the number of friendly fire deaths may be understated due to a natural desire to attribute ambiguous cases to Iraqi fire. The aircraft loss rate - 38 out of some 109,876 flights - was lower than the normal accident rate in combat training (Cordessman, *After the Storm*, 444).

153. As Schwarzkopf put it, "You know, a football game can be over very quickly if the other team decides not to play. And that's what you had in this case. When the kickoff came, okay, our team was there to play. Our team came to play ball. And they were not willing to fight" ("Talking With David Frost").



who was militarily incompetent – or militarily “oblivious” to use Schwarzkopf’s term – to a truly impressive degree.<sup>154</sup>

In fact, it rather seems that the Iraqis were planning to do little if any fighting – to a considerable degree they did not plan to wage a war at all and were simply going through the motions.<sup>155</sup> The troops in Kuwait City “lacked direction, and were unconcerned about preparing proper defenses” – something that was further hampered by the perhaps-revealing fact that the Iraqis had removed “most of the civil construction machinery which might have assisted in putting up barricades and bunkers.”<sup>156</sup> Their best troops were the Republican Guard, often branded “elite” in the Western press.<sup>157</sup> These troops, however, were based in southern Iraq, not in Kuwait at all, leaving mainly an under-prepared and substantially demoralized band of conscripts to defend the territory Iraq had so alarmingly occupied several months earlier. It may have been expected that the rearward troops could serve as a strategic reserve if the troops in Kuwait somehow held.<sup>158</sup> If things became too hot, however, they were also positioned to withdraw north to protect Saddam Hussein’s government. As Schwarzkopf pointed out in his final briefing, they “were well to the rear here, okay, so they could be

154. There is an important similarity here with the Vietnam War. The unexpected outcome of that conflict was chiefly determined not by the American ability to inflict slaughter on the Communists but by the astounding ability of the Communists to maintain morale and fighting cohesion despite losses that, as a percentage of the population, were virtually unprecedented historically. See John Mueller, “The Search for the ‘Breaking Point’ in Vietnam: the Statistics of a Deadly Quarrel,” *International Studies Quarterly* 24, no. 4 (December 1980): 497–519; John Mueller, *Retreat from Doomsday: The Obsolescence of Major War* (New York: Basic Books, 1989), chap. 8. The equally unexpected outcome of the Gulf War was chiefly determined not by the quality of the American machines or by the craftiness of their military planning and maneuvers, but by the inability and sensible unwillingness of the Iraqis to fight for Saddam Hussein’s peculiar ambitions.

155. A conclusion that also occurred to a couple of *Wall Street Journal* reporters during the war itself: “Iraq has offered virtually no resistance – perhaps an indication that it hasn’t ever intended to engage American forces” (Seib and Pasztor, “Baghdad Radio Calls”). According to a reviewer of this article, some Jordanian officers believe that Hussein was planning to withdraw from Kuwait, but, in order to save face, to do so a few days after the UN deadline of 15 January. Alternatively, one could brand the high and low level commanders with an “almost criminal incompetence,” as Murray Hammick (“Iraqi Obstacles”) has done.

156. Hammick, “Iraqi Obstacles”.

157. That characterization seems valid only in a very relative sense. While these troops were better paid and provided for than the rest of Hussein’s army, they were, as Dunnigan and Bay note, largely “a political symbol, patronage machine, and insurance policy for the ruling Baath party.” They had performed poorly in the Iran-Iraq war of 1980–88, and many key positions “were filled with officers noted more for loyalty than military skill” (*From Shield to Sword*, 91, 357–58; see also Simpson, *From the House of War*, 334).

158. Cigar, “Iraq’s Strategic Mindset,” 17.



the first ones to bug out when the battlefield started folding....Well, it didn't happen."<sup>159</sup>

Contrary to their expectations, as Schwarzkopf suggests, the allies did not cooperatively launch the preferred frontal assault which would have given the Republican Guard the luxury of orderly retreat as troops on the front crumbled. Instead, allied forces largely bypassed the frontline troops and trapped the rear guard where it stood. Thus although the rearward troops did end up fighting a bit, that was only because the war was brought to them.<sup>160</sup> Indeed, virtually no fighting took place in Kuwait at all; combat, such as it was, came about mainly in Iraq itself and the bulk of that consisted of a few very brief and ineffective battles that were apparently designed to slow the American advance enough so that more Iraqi troops could flee its grasp.

#### WHEN WAS THE WAR WON?

If the outcome of the war was chiefly due to the collapse of Iraq's morale and to its inadequate leadership, an evaluation of the military prosecution of the war requires an estimation of when it came about that this morale broke and when it happened that the leadership failed.

The credit for cracking Iraqi morale has commonly and routinely been given to American technology and particularly to air power. Thus: "superior U.S. technology allowed the coalition to attack Iraqi forces and facilities with such precision that it broke their will."<sup>161</sup>

It seems more likely that the Iraqi will to fight, if any, had been substantially broken before a shot was fired or a bomb dropped. John Simpson of the BBC frequently reported from Iraq both before and dur-

159. Moreover, the Iraqis kept all their major supply depots in Southern Iraq (GWAPS, vol. 1, pt. 1, 74).

160. See Peter Tsouras and Elmo C. Wright, Jr., "The Ground War," in *Military Lessons of the Gulf War*, ed. Bruce W. Watson, Bruce George, Peter Tsouras and B. L. Cyr (Novato, Calif.: Presidio Press, 1991), 112.

161. Bobby Inman, Joseph S. Nye, Jr., William J. Perry, and Roger K. Smith, "U.S. Strategy After the Storm," in Joseph S. Nye, Jr. and Roger K. Smith, eds., *After the Storm: Lessons from the Gulf War* (Lanham: Madison Books, 1992), 284. See also Simpson, *From the House of War*, 335; Friedman, *Desert Victory*, 447; Hallion, *Storm Over Iraq*, 217, 232, 252; Department of Defense, *Final Report*, 144; Freedman and Karsh, *Gulf Conflict*, 390; Pardew, "Iraqi Army's Defeat," 18, 20; *Aviation Week and Space Technology*, 27 January 1992, 65; Keaney and Cohen, *Summary Report*, 107; U.S. Army, *Certain Victory*, 367; GWAPS, vol. 2, pt. 2, 225; Winnefeld et al., *League of Airmen*, 159-60. See also Luttwak, "Military Dimension." GWAPS, however, does acknowledge that morale had been significantly undermined "even before the eruption of hostilities" and observes that "the regular army - recently bolstered with large numbers of untrained recruits - was weary from a decade of combat against Iran and the Kurds and demoralized by the prospect of a war against the coalition" (vol. 1, pt. 1, 77, 81).



ing the war, and it is his firm belief that "the population of Iraq as a whole had no interest in Saddam's holy war and simply wanted to be left alone to get on with their lives in peace." Most people, he concludes, "wanted to say exactly the same thing: how they hated the system in Iraq and the man who had created it, how wrong they felt the invasion of Kuwait had been, how crazy they thought the decision to oppose the West was." During the nearly five months he spent in Baghdad, "not a single Iraqi had defended Saddam Hussein to me in private, with the exception of two or three ministers and officials whose fate was closely bound up with Saddam's own." In result, Hussein took "an almost entirely unwilling country into war."<sup>162</sup>

Supporting this point of view is the fact that discontented Iraqis rose against Hussein as soon as he seemed sufficiently weakened from the war.<sup>163</sup> The rebels tragically miscalculated his residual strength and perhaps also the degree to which they could expect support from George Bush and the Americans. Clearly, however, huge portions of the population were (and presumably still are) deeply desirous of pitching the tyrant out.

Despite Simpson's impressions, there may have been some degree of enthusiasm in Iraq for taking over Kuwait. The Kuwaitis are considered arrogant and contemptible by many other Arabs, and some Iraqis may have bought the notion that Kuwait should be a province of Iraq. That does not mean, however, that they were willing to fight for it. One senior U.S. official who debriefed Iraqi prisoners of war summarized their attitudes this way: "While there was a feeling that it was worth occupying Kuwait, there was a widespread feeling that it was not worth fighting for. [The Iraqi military] felt Saddam would avoid a war and even up to the end there was a feeling he would find some way to pull out and save face." Consequently, "There was no strategic design in the Iraqi troop development and the military debriefed say they thought they would go in, dig in and then withdraw if the coalition was serious about war." Not surprisingly, the troops became "plagued by a sense of defeatism as soon as the bombardment began."<sup>164</sup> Similarly, GWAPS found that "many of his commanders did not seriously believe that Saddam would lead Iraq to war and felt that he would withdraw from Kuwait at the last moment."<sup>165</sup> Army intelli-

162. *From the House of War*, 182, 210, 267, 270.

163. Freedman and Karsh, *Gulf Conflict*, 410.

164. Woodward, "100,000 Iraqi Troops." On the support of most senior military officers for the takeover of Kuwait, see GWAPS, vol. 1, pt. 1, 59n.

165. Vol. 1, pt. 1, 71. Pointing out that "Everyone knows we cannot win a war against the whole world," an Iraqi artillery officer said, "We all thought Saddam



gence reports that most of its captured Iraqi commanders "simply accepted the fact that they were pawns in a gamble that would not result in hostilities, rather than commanders of units about to engage in the 'Mother of all battles'."<sup>166</sup> The condition of the defenses along the border with Saudi Arabia certainly suggests an army that was not expecting to fight: as the Defense Department's report on the war notes, "Obstacles dug in September and October had been neglected in the following weeks."<sup>167</sup>

A reporter who interviewed fifteen Iraqi prisoners said they "sketched a picture...of soldiers demoralized and war-weary long before the Jan. 17 start of the allied bombing campaign and impatient for the ground offensive to begin so that during the confusion of battle they might run to the nearest U.S. outpost and surrender."<sup>168</sup> Another interviewed a group of officers, some of whom had been in the army for six years. They all agreed, in the words of one, "From the beginning of the war, I didn't agree with the ideas of the president at all, but we were obliged to stay in the war because if we tried to desert they would hang our families....We do not wish to fight....And my company, I ordered them not to fight too, and they all agreed. Why to fight? For what?"<sup>169</sup> As one Iraqi general put it, "I remember [Hussein] saying that Americans would not be able to stand the loss of even hundreds of soldiers, that Iraqis were prepared to sacrifice thousands. Our soldiers heard this too. It had a very bad effect you see, for they figured out that he was talking about them – and they weren't ready to sacrifice for Kuwait."<sup>170</sup>

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Hussein would withdraw from Kuwait on maybe 14 January" (Liebl, "View From the Other Side"). A senior Iraqi officer said, "we didn't expect a war – we thought it was all a political maneuver" (Cockburn, "Lower Death Toll Helped Saddam").

166. Gordon and Trainor, *Generals' War*, 185.

167. Department of Defense, *Final Report*, 84. The apparently widespread belief that Hussein would withdraw rather than risk a war also helps to explain why there were so few defectors before the war began.

168. William Claiborne, "We Thought of Nothing but Escape," *Washington Post*, 3 March 1991, A35. As two other reporters put it, morale was "badly hit by the knowledge that the army was about to engage in a war which it could not possibly win in defence of an Iraqi province – Kuwait – from which Saddam Hussein had promised to withdraw. Not surprisingly, many Iraqi soldiers did not find this an alluring prospect": Bellamy and Cockburn, "Allies Assess."

169. Kelly, *Martyrs' Day*, 158–59. GWAPS observes that "It was the effectiveness of the air campaign in breaking apart the organizational structure of enemy forces and in reaching the *mind* of the Iraqi soldier that counted" (vol. 2, pt. 1, 343; emphasis in the original). On the same page (albeit in a footnote) the study indicates, essentially, that such minds had already been reached well before the war began: "most of the soldiers that Iraq deployed to Kuwait, certainly in the regular army, were conscripts who had not wanted war, had little desire to fight, and for the most part despised the regime."

170. Gordon and Trainor, *Generals' War*, 185.



Thus it seems that, for the most part, there was little, if any, morale in the Iraq army for U.S. bombing raids, artillery barrages, or tank forays to break, and as demonstrated above, there was little Iraqi strategy for the allies to outwit.<sup>171</sup> That is, to a considerable degree, the war was over before it began.

#### THE ORIGINS OF THE IMAGE OF MASS SLAUGHTER

Because of first impressions, the image of the Tet offensive in Vietnam remains, despite the work of a generation of debunkers, one of communist military success. Similarly, it may be that, because of vivid first impressions left both by the media and by the military, the lasting image of the Gulf War will be, depending on one's perspective, that it was either one of devastating craft and wizardry or that it was one of horrendous slaughter. By contrast, the analysis here suggests that the war was actually a far more modest enterprise and that neither the wizardry nor the slaughter theorists really have it right. There was a great deal of maneuvering, but very little fighting, and, although a lot of ordnance was exploded, remarkably few people on either side were killed during the war.

The impression of mass slaughter stems in part from an inadequate appreciation – perpetuated, it seems, both by the media and by exuberant, adrenalized flyers – of what happened during the air campaign. Bombs did rain from the skies, but because they were dropped on reasonably predictable targets, soldiers and civilians could easily move out of the danger area.

171. As Schwarzkopf pointed out in his final briefing in response to a reporter's question: "A great deal of the capability of an army is its dedication to its cause and its will to fight. You can have the best equipment in the world, you can have the largest numbers in the world, but if you're not dedicated to your cause, if you don't have a will to fight, then you're not going to have a very good army.... The Iraqis brought down execution squads, whose job was to shoot people, okay, in the front lines. Now, I've got to tell you that a soldier doesn't fight very hard for a leader who is going to shoot him, okay, on his own whim. That's not what military leadership is all about. And so I attribute a great deal of the failure of the Iraqi Army to fight to their own leadership. They committed them to a cause that they did not believe in. They all are saying that they didn't want to be there, they didn't want to fight their fellow Arab, they were lied to, they were deceived, and when they went into Kuwait they didn't believe in the cause. And then, after they got there, they had a leadership that was so uncaring for them, okay, that they didn't properly feed them, they didn't properly give them water, and in the end, they kept them there only at the point of a gun." Marine General Walter Boomer observed, "Their heart just wasn't in it," adding "that many troops simply didn't know why they were fighting fellow Arabs and never supported the invasion of Kuwait" (Andy Pasztor, "Iraqis Smashed in Tank Battles; Bush Sets Conditions for Cease-Fire," *Wall Street Journal*, 28 February 1991, A3; see also Moore, *Woman at War*, 224, 275, 280).



Interestingly, if the most vivid impression of the war is that it visited massive military slaughter upon the Iraqis, this impression was formed with only limited benefit of pictures, including televised ones. Except for the single instance of the "highway of death," the war generated few pictures that could suggest vast slaughter of Iraqi soldiers for the simple reason that no such slaughter appears to have taken place.<sup>172</sup>

The impression of devastation, thus, was chiefly created by words. Some of these were issued by the military, particularly in briefings at the end of the war by Schwarzkopf and others. The rest have come from the media which, for sensible journalistic reasons, generally find death and destruction more vivid and notable than their absence. Consider, for example, the front page description of the "highway of death" in the *Washington Post*. Under a headline, "Retreat Down Highway of Doom," the reporters begin with these vivid words: "As far as the eye can see along this road to Iraq lies a tangled sea of scorched, twisted metal littered with bodies of Iraqi soldiers...." Later in the report, however, the reporters incidentally record that, so far, only forty-six bodies had been found "littered" among the "scorched, twisted metal."<sup>173</sup> It would have been possible to place the story in a wider frame: despite the appearance of massive destruction, the story might stress, the attack appears to have caused remarkably few Iraqi casualties.<sup>174</sup> Similarly, a *Los Angeles Times* report discusses another road on which "Iraqi military units sit in gruesome repose, scorched skeletons of vehicles and men alike, black and awful under the sun." The report goes on to note, essentially, that there were only one or two vehicles per mile along this particular road and that the number of "scorched skeletons" numbered in the "scores."<sup>175</sup> Again, vividness is stressed over proportion or context.<sup>176</sup>

172. The much-covered bomb shelter raid in Baghdad mainly caused civilian, not military, deaths.

173. Claiborne and Murphy, "Retreat Down Highway of Doom."

174. On the length of the "highway of death," see n. 76 above.

175. Drogin, "Forgotten Kuwait Road."

176. This hardly seems to be a new phenomenon in war reporting. The destruction inflicted by the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor was really quite limited, and it scarcely affected the pace of the ensuing war. Moreover, unlike the Gulf situation, official reports about the Pearl Harbor attack, including those by the president, tried to downplay the damage, claiming quite accurately that the Japanese had, for the most part, merely "temporarily disabled" ships and aircraft there and that these had been quickly repaired or replaced. Despite such early, authoritative, and basically accurate debunking, words like "catastrophe" and "disaster" continue to be applied even in works which detail how limited the damage was, how quickly it was repaired, and how irrelevant it was to the later war effort. It seems that writers simply find their fingers tapping out the words, "Disaster at Pearl Harbor" because the more nearly accurate "Inconvenience at Pearl Harbor" simply does not get the juices flowing: see John



At the same time, it appears that the media have been far less interested in the real slaughter of the Gulf War. Hasty early estimates that the Iraqis suffered tens or even hundreds of thousands of deaths in battle were played on the front page. By contrast, careful studies concluding that tens of thousands of Iraqi children died – individually and less picturesquely – in the aftermath of the war have received only secondary treatment.

#### THE CONSEQUENCES OF OVERESTIMATION

The major intelligence error in the Gulf War – overestimating the size, abilities, and effectiveness of the Iraqi force – came out on the safe side, and it did not adversely affect the prosecution of the war. As Norman Friedman points out, however, such overestimates in other circumstances could have considerable consequences since they could make “offensive operations impossible” by diverting too many forces “against what turned out to be non-threats.”<sup>177</sup>

It seems clear that the overestimate unnecessarily extended the length of the air campaign. Partly because it was felt ground troops would be outnumbered, the ground war was delayed until there was good flying weather for air support.<sup>178</sup> As one Marine commander would put it later, however, “In retrospect, we could have come in a long time ago.”<sup>179</sup>

Moreover, it was the overestimate of the numbers of Iraqi troops and the concomitant conclusion that the U.S. must have been killing huge numbers of them, that helped to inspire what is usually considered to be the major mistake in the prosecution of the war – bringing the offensive to an end before it inflicted maximum damage on Saddam Hussein’s army. The administration apparently became convinced that further warfare would simply be senseless death – “piling on,” as one administration official put it.<sup>180</sup> Powell felt that to press the attack

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Mueller, “Pearl Harbor: Military Inconvenience, Political Disaster,” *International Security* 16, no. 3 (winter 1991/92): 172–203; John Mueller, *Quiet Cataclysm: Reflections on the Recent Transformation of World Politics* (New York: HarperCollins, 1995), chap. 7. In a similar manner, analysts after the Gulf War were soon casually referring to the destruction on the “highway of death” as a “classic slaughter” (Tsouras and Wright, “The Ground War,” 115).

177. *Desert Victory*, 9.

178. Atkinson, *Crusade*, 376.

179. Moore, *Woman at War*, 269.

180. Freedman and Karsh, *Gulf Conflict*, 405. The decision to stop the war also seems to have been influenced by the aesthetic appeal of being able to say that the ground war lasted exactly 100 hours (U.S. News, *Triumph Without Victory*, 397). As Schwarzkopf says of White House decisionmakers, a bit derisively perhaps, “I had to hand it to them: they really knew how to package an historic event.” If the war had



"would be un-American and unchivalrous," and he and the White House became concerned that further "slaughter" would adversely affect American public opinion.<sup>181</sup>

The overestimate of Iraqi capabilities had another effect, one which helped bring about the major loss of life in the war. Since American intelligence had posited that the Iraqis might have huge forces and crafty strategy, the destruction of Iraq's communications and logistics capabilities and "decapitation" became central to the American war effort. Iraq's problems as a military force, however, were far more fundamental. When an army has no will to fight, an incompetent and uncaring leadership, and a substantial absence of thought-out strategy, and when tactics largely consist of the command "shoot to the last bullet and the last man," it is hardly necessary to devastate communications and logistics capabilities to prevail militarily.<sup>182</sup> The unnecessary destruction of these facilities, however, helped to cause the greatest loss of life – indirectly – in the crippling of health and sanitation facilities.

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gone as long as originally planned, it would have been more like a "five-day war," as Schwarzkopf pointed out to Colin Powell at the time: Schwarzkopf, *It Doesn't Take a Hero*, 471. Since the Israelis had won a Six-Day (144 hour) war against the Arabs in 1967, the White House was perhaps looking for a label that seemed substantially, not marginally, shorter than the Israeli effort. See also Gordon and Trainor, *Generals' War*, 416, 423.

181. Waller and Barry, "Day We Stopped the War," 18, 23. Relatedly, some members of the administration felt that the bombing of a shelter in Baghdad, killing hundreds of civilians, was "a potentially devastating blow to the American public's support for the war" (U.S. News, *Triumph Without Victory*, 272). In this, ironically, the administration was subscribing to the beliefs of Saddam Hussein who had apparently been of the opinion that a couple of well-publicized and suitably destructive air raids on Baghdad would cause American popular support for the war to crumble in revulsion (Simpson, *From the House of War*, 273, 281–82, 348). As Schwarzkopf puts it disgustedly, "Washington was ready to overreact, as usual, to the slightest ripple in public opinion" (*It Doesn't Take a Hero*, 468; see also Simpson, *From the House of War*, 7). Schwarzkopf may be correct, but public opinion data suggest that no such ripple existed. The public's view of Iraqi civilian deaths and its unalarmed reaction to the bombing of the Baghdad air raid shelter during the war suggest that the American people were quite insensitive to Iraqi casualties, even though they appear to have harbored little ill-will toward the Iraqi people. See Mueller, *Policy and Opinion in the Gulf War*, 121–23; GWAPS, vol. 3, pt. 2, 145–52. Also relevant is the public's bland reaction to early estimates suggesting that 100,000 or more Iraqis had died in the war. These grim statistics, it appears, hardly dented the victory euphoria in the United States.

182. An Army report argues that it was important to "sever the linkages between Saddam and his commanders in the field" because then "the army would probably be incapable of large-scale maneuver" (*Certain Victory*, 117). An Air Force study, however, observes, in essence, that such severing was never really necessary: "Commanders were hampered by a lack of detailed planning guidance. Corps commanders provided division commanders with only general mission-type orders (such as 'defend in sector') and very little additional guidance. Most detailed planning occurred at the division level and below, with very little coordination between echelons or adjacent units" (GWAPS, vol. 1, pt. 1, 71).



That so few Iraqis were killed in the war itself may also be contributed to the overestimate of Iraqi troop strength. Partly because the allied forces were so overwhelmingly superior in size and competence, they were able to intimidate any potential resistance (however small this was likely to be) and thus were able to prevail with remarkably low loss of life both to themselves and to the enemy. It is similar to the "wall-to-wall cop" technique developed to quell urban riots in the United States in the 1960s: if there is an armed policeman or national guardsman on every corner, nobody shoots and nobody gets killed.

#### THE MILITARY ACHIEVEMENT

As noted at the outset, the official histories of the Gulf War put out by the Department of Defense and by the Department of the Army still continue to obfuscate and to exaggerate on the matters of Iraqi troop levels, and this requires them in turn to imply that huge casualties were suffered by the Iraqis and, in effect, severely to distort what actually happened in the war.

This reluctance to count enemy losses presumably is due in part to an understandable unwillingness, after the Vietnam experience, to get involved once again in a dispute about the "body count." It seems reasonable to speculate that it also stems from a belief that the number cannot come out right: if it is high, the episode could seem to be "arguably more slaughter than war," as journalists Peter Goldman and Tom Mathews characterized it a year and half after its completion;<sup>183</sup> if it is low, this would suggest that Iraqi strength in the war was severely overestimated. Also, military leaders perhaps simply do not want officially to admit they made substantial intelligence errors or that so many of the public statements made so boldly and confidently by their revered commander at the end of the war were incorrect – that is, they do not want to admit their episode in the desert was different from how they once depicted it. Also, in a time of budget cutbacks, they may not want to consider that their victory in the Gulf could in all probability have been achieved with a smaller – and far less expensive – force. In addition, they often seem to want to believe that the outcome of the war was principally determined by their own abilities rather than by the weakness and incompetence of the enemy. As Michael Gordon and Bernard Trainor observe, important Army analyses of Iraqi prisoners "have been kept classified, apparently out of concern

183. "America Changes the Guard," *Newsweek*, November/December 1992, 22; see also Clark, *Fire This Time*.



that the unflattering portrait of its adversary would diminish the Army's victory in the Gulf."<sup>184</sup> There is also the appeal of what might be called the "Agincourt syndrome" in which the defeated side suffers high casualties to the victor's almost unbelievably small ones.<sup>185</sup>

It is for these reasons, perhaps, that they seek to project the image of a vast killing machine rather than of a smoothly coordinated one that can win wars at low cost not only to itself but also to its terrified, demoralized, and outclassed foe. Although the chief military lesson of the prosecution of the Gulf War is, in John Heidenrich's words, that "military effectiveness is not synonymous with human slaughter,"<sup>186</sup> the U.S. military often seems to want to believe that military effectiveness is synonymous with kicking butt.

The real achievement for U.S. combat forces in the Gulf War, however, may well be in the way they routed their confused, ill-led, terrified, but rather well-armed, enemies without killing many of them.<sup>187</sup> As previously discussed, many of the overpowered Iraqis survived the air war because they were allowed time and opportunity to give in to their natural instincts to abandon targeted vehicles and fortifications. A similar approach was shown in the ground war. The U.S. and its allies had the Iraqis outnumbered, outtrained, outled, outclassed, outplanned, and, above all, outmotivated. In part because of the intelligence misestimates detailed in this article, however, they went into battle expecting the enemy to be numerous, dedicated, and tenacious on the defense. Some analysts, including the Defense Intelligence Agency's Walter Lang, who had predicted the Iraq invasion of Kuwait in August (and had been just about the only person to do so), anticipated that a war with Iraq would be long and difficult.<sup>188</sup> A study conducted by the U.S. Army War College of Iraq's conduct in its recent war with Iran concluded that Iraq is "formidable" and "superb" on the

184. *Generals' War*, 184.

185. See John Keegan, *The Face of Battle* (London: Penguin, 1976), 113–14.

186. "How Many Iraqis Died?" 124

187. Another impressive achievement is that American troops managed to kill so few of each other. Indeed, the number of American troops who died in the Middle East between August 1990, when the Gulf buildup began, and March, 1991, when the war ended, was about the same as would have been expected to have died in peacetime from accidents (Dunnigan and Bay, *From Shield to Sword*, 342; Simpson, *From the House of War*, xv). Also, twice as many troops sustained injuries requiring hospitalization from playing sports with each other as were injured in the war (Dunnigan and Bay, *From Shield to Sword*, 396). It appears that far more Americans were conceived during the Gulf affair than were killed in it – one report puts the number of pregnancies among American personnel at over 1,200 (Dunnigan and Bay, *From Shield to Sword*, 386).

188. Woodward, *The Commanders*, 216–17, 360.



defense.<sup>189</sup> American forces and their partners were also primed by overestimates of the quality of Iraqi equipment,<sup>190</sup> and they were expecting that the Iraqis might deceptively feign surrender.<sup>191</sup> Given such a perspective, the attackers were certainly entitled to be edgy and trigger-happy. Moreover, much of the ground war was fought at night and in the midst of ferocious weather and of smoke from oil fires, further confusing things. Yet, despite all this, massive firepower was kept in check and, while a great deal of Iraqi equipment was destroyed, there was a conscious, and apparently quite successful, effort to avoid the unnecessary killing of enemy troops.

Some of this came about because of the low levels of American casualties: since few were killed, there was little feeling of outraged vengeance to get back at the enemy: as one Vietnam veteran observed, "Because not many of us got killed, it never got to the point where there were scores to settle."<sup>192</sup> Much must, of course, be credited to excellent training, discipline, and leadership.

A full evaluation of the war and of the military accomplishment, however, must also take into account the war's aftermath. The war failed to bring about the demise of the vicious regime which had caused the problem in the first place, and it helped to trigger two civil wars and directly caused a breakdown in sanitation facilities in Iraq. These consequences, together or individually, brought about human losses that far outstripped those suffered in the war itself.

In contemplating other military interventions after the Gulf War, Colin Powell became fond of insisting that they should not be attempted unless one can supply a satisfactory answer to such questions as "How might the situation that we seek to alter, once it is altered by force, develop further and what might be the consequences?"<sup>193</sup> or, more tersely, "what is the endgame?"<sup>194</sup> Those questions, it appears, were never adequately answered in planning the Gulf War.

189. Stephen C. Pelletiere and Douglas V. Johnson, II, *Lessons Learned: The Iran-Iraq War* (Carlisle Barracks, Pa.: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 1991), ix, 61.

190. U.S. News, *Triumph Without Victory*, 364.

191. Friedman, *Desert Victory*, 200; Davis, "A Tank Commander Hones His Battalion."

192. Atkinson, "Outflanking Iraq."

193. "U.S. Forces: Challenges Ahead," *Foreign Affairs* 72, no. 5 (winter 1992/93): 38.

194. Elaine Sciolino, "Christopher Explains Conditions For Use of U.S. Force in Bosnia," *New York Times*, 28 April 1993, A1.