

THE VICTOR

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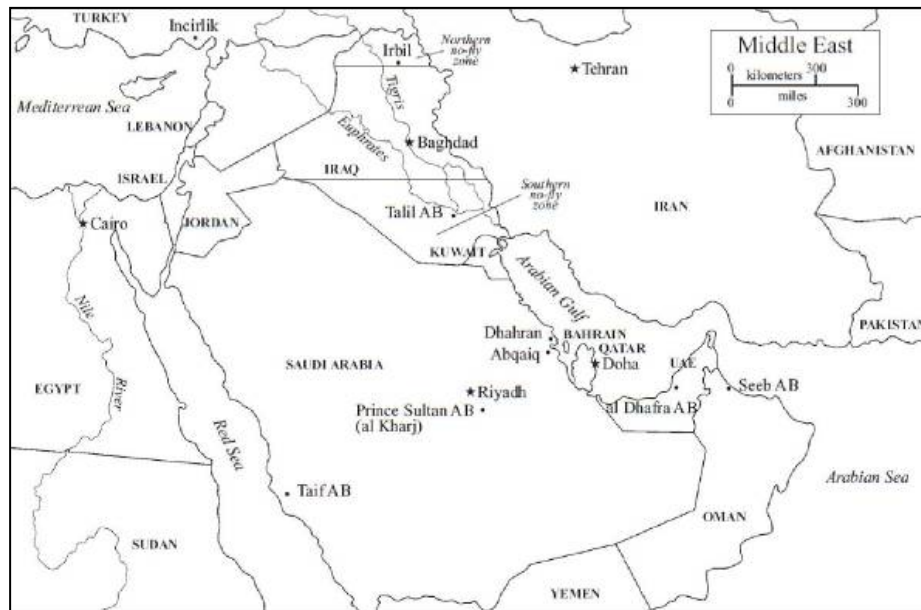
(U) A coalition of the United States and thirty-eight other nations scored impressive achievements during the Gulf War from January 17 through February 28, 1991. The air campaign that devastated Iraqi military forces occupying the nation of Kuwait took less than a month and a half to prepare the battlefield for victory, and the ground campaign that drove the Iraqi army out of Kuwait and freed its people required only four days to complete. The Gulf War ended with a permanent cease-fire signed at Safwan, an Iraqi air base just north of the Kuwaiti border.

(U) During the war, Safwan had been little more than a strip of asphalt in a barren desert but, within forty-eight hours of occupying it, U.S. soldiers transformed the facility into a meeting site worthy of the occasion—the ending of a war. By Sunday, March 3, Safwan featured a helicopter landing zone and a well-organized collection of temporary structures. A twelve-foot-high olive drab tent dominated the center of the area. Here, the U.S., Saudi, and Iraqi generals conferred. Soldiers had also prepared a podium bracketed by the flags of the United States and Saudi Arabia, which provided the setting for the press conference following the signing of the surrender. Three additional tents played significant roles in the ceremony. In the first tent, the delegates, observers, and interpreters gathered to be searched for weapons. In the second, they waited for the session to begin. Inside a third tent, a comprehensive collection of communications gear formed a command post for General H. Norman Schwarzkopf, commander

of United States Central Command (CENTCOM), and leader of the multinational UN coalition forces that had just executed Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm.¹

(U) General Schwarzkopf flew to Safwan from his CENTCOM Headquarters in Riyadh,

Image 1



Map of the Middle East and Southwest Asia

Saudi Arabia, by way of Kuwait City, Kuwait, during the morning of March 3. A few uneasy minutes passed when the other senior coalition military leader, Saudi Lt. Gen. Prince Khalid bin Sultan al-Saud, commander of the Joint Arab Forces, arrived late. Moving quickly, the two allies reached the search tent just seconds before the Iraqi delegation arrived. Its representatives included Lt. Gen. Sultan Hashim Ahmad, chief of staff of the Iraqi Ministry of Defense, and Lt. Gen. Sala Abud Mahmud, commander of the Iraqi III Corps.²

(U) Lieutenant General Ahmad, whom General Schwarzkopf later described as “a stocky fellow with a heavy Saddam-style mustache,”³ refused at first to be searched. After the U.S. general set the example, however, Ahmad complied. Both parties then moved to the central tent where journalists photographed Schwarzkopf, Khalid, Ahmad, and Mahmud seated at the

meeting table. Press representatives were excused and formal discussions began shortly after 1130.⁴

(U) General Schwarzkopf began by raising the subject of prisoners of war (POWs), a compelling issue for the United States, given the nation's experience during and after its last major conflict, in Southeast Asia. The CENTCOM commander wanted Red Cross workers to have access to coalition POWs held by the Iraqis as soon as possible, and he also sought the release of all prisoners held by each side.⁵ It surprised General Schwarzkopf when Lieutenant General Ahmad quickly accepted both points. Beyond the significance of these immediate concessions, the Iraqi general's response revealed, early in the conference, that he possessed authority to agree to terms on the spot, without consulting Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein.⁶

(U) The CENTCOM commander moved to a second topic—establishing a permanent cease-fire line. The combatants had declared a temporary end to hostilities at 0800 on Thursday, February 28, but on the morning of Saturday, March 2, a sharp fight had taken place in which the 24th Mechanized Infantry Division destroyed 346 Iraqi armored vehicles, including thirty T-72 tanks.⁷ General Schwarzkopf referred to this incident when he introduced the need for a permanent cease-fire line. Lieutenant General Ahmad complained that the U.S. soldiers shot Iraqi vehicles in the process of withdrawing. Both sides realized, however, that the immediate issue was not who bore responsibility for the previous day's episode, but how to prevent another such event. Once Ahmad understood that he would not be asked to accept a new national border or a permanent line of any kind—a serious concern since coalition ground forces occupied nearly one-fifth of Iraq—he agreed to a fixed cease-fire line across the southern part of his country.⁸

(U) Coalition air forces had controlled Iraqi airspace since early in the Gulf War, and General Schwarzkopf suggested that precautions now be taken so the allies would not

accidentally shoot down any innocent aircraft. Lieutenant General Ahmad questioned why coalition airplanes needed to continue flying over Iraq. Schwarzkopf explained that the flights represented only a safety measure and a defensive operation.⁹ The generals discussed requiring vehicles entering the cease-fire zone to display orange flags to alert patrolling coalition aircraft of their peaceful intentions.¹⁰

(U) General Schwarzkopf then asked Ahmad whether there were any other matters he wanted to discuss. The chief of staff of the Iraqi Ministry of Defense responded with one request. The coalition air campaign had inflicted tremendous damage to roads, bridges, and communications in Iraq, and he said: “We would like to agree that helicopter flights sometimes are needed to carry some of the officials, government officials, or any member that is needed to be transported from one place to another because the roads and bridges are out.”¹¹ General Schwarzkopf agreed to the flights of Iraqi military helicopters, emphasizing that the provision was limited to helicopters: “Not fighters, not bombers.”¹²

(U) Lieutenant General Ahmad was surprised that he had gained this concession so easily and made it clear that the Iraqis wanted to fly armed helicopters. This clarification, as General Schwarzkopf wrote in his memoirs soon after the war, “should have given me pause.”¹³ At the time, however, the CENTCOM commander gave the request no second thought: “I will instruct our Air Force,” he answered, “not to shoot down any helicopters that are flying over the territory of Iraq where we are not located.”¹⁴

(U) General Schwarzkopf later recounted this episode in blunt words. “In the following weeks,” he related, “we discovered what the son of a bitch had really had in mind: using helicopter gunships to repress rebellions in Basra and other cities.”¹⁵ With the end of the Gulf War, Shiite Muslims in southern Iraq rose against Saddam Hussein. Soon the Kurds in northern

Iraq also rebelled.¹⁶ In part by taking advantage of the Safwan loophole on armed helicopters, Hussein ruthlessly crushed both of these uprisings.¹⁷ His forces killed an estimated 20,000 Shi'a indiscriminately, including women and children.¹⁸ Then Hussein turned his full attention to the Kurds, sending several divisions against them. By mid-April tens of thousands had fled into the mountains of Turkey, where many died from exposure.¹⁹

(U) In his memoirs General Schwarzkopf put his armed-helicopter concession at Safwan into a larger context: "it was up to the White House to decide how much the United States wanted to intervene in the internal politics of Iraq."²⁰ He also contended that grounding Saddam's rotary-winged aircraft would have made little difference, since the dictator devastated the insurgents with the tanks and artillery of twenty-four of his divisions that had not fought in the Gulf War. Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Colin L. Powell agreed with his theater commander's contention that the helicopters were relatively unimportant in the dictator's suppression of the rebellions.²¹

(U) Regardless of their relative significance, the fact remained that these aircraft contributed to Hussein's slaughter of the Shiite population, and the CENTCOM commander's concession that allowed them to fly drew criticism accordingly. Brig. Gen. Buster C. Glosson, director of the U.S. Air Force's special planning group at CENTCOM, strongly believed that granting the Iraqi request was a mistake that could have been avoided. "The only reason we gave them permission," he believed, "was that there was no Airman in the tent at Safwan."²² Brigadier General Glosson went further, asserting that if Lt. Gen. Charles A. Horner, the U.S. Central Command Air Forces (CENTAF) commander, "had been at Safwan, he would not have given the Iraqis permission to fly, except for a few flights around Baghdad. We would not have agreed to give them a field day against the Shiites."²³ Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, Paul D.

Wolfowitz argued later that regardless of the Safwan pledge the United States should have shot down any helicopters that attacked the Shi'a or the Kurds.²⁴

(U) Whatever the importance of the Iraqi helicopters in crushing the rebellions, larger issues lingered long after the generals left the meeting tent at Safwan, and they gave the Gulf War an untidy ending. During the conflict, in mid-February 1991, President George H. W. Bush exhorted the Iraqi people, “to take matters into their own hands and force Saddam Hussein, the dictator, to step aside.”²⁵ But at the end of the war, when the Shi'a and Kurds rebelled, the United States failed to support them. In a bitter irony, the cease-fire tent at Safwan was overshadowed by a refugee camp in the town itself, which harbored 11,500 Shi'a fleeing the Iraqi dictator's brutal repression. One of these refugees said plaintively: “Bush told us to revolt against Saddam. We revolt against Saddam. But where is Bush? Where is he?”²⁶

(U) Many U.S. leaders and policymakers hoped the victory in the Gulf War would end Saddam Hussein's regime and were disappointed when it did not. In a 1994 letter President Bush recalled: “I did have a strong feeling that the Iraqi military, having been led to such a crushing defeat by Saddam, would rise up and rid themselves of him.”²⁷ Four years later, in a joint memoir with National Security Adviser Brent Scowcroft, the President reflected: “We were disappointed that Saddam's defeat did not break his hold on power, as many of our Arab allies had predicted and we had come to expect.”²⁸



Iraqi dictator, Saddam Hussein

(U) Furthermore, many of the Republican Guards, the elite army units that served as the mainstay of Saddam Hussein's power, survived the Gulf War. The 1993 *Gulf War Air Power Survey* commented: “The disquieting aspect of any analysis of the air campaign against enemy ground

forces is the fact that the Republican Guard, which received a disproportionately heavy emphasis in CENTAF's targeting, suffered less damage than the other units of the Iraqi army. Moreover, they seem to have kept their morale in better shape throughout the attacks."²⁹ The unclassified version of a Central Intelligence Agency study, published the same year, concluded that "almost 50 percent of the Republican Guards major combat equipment escaped destruction and remained under Iraqi control."³⁰ Col. John LeMoyne, commander of the 24th Mechanized Infantry Division's 1st Brigade, spoke forthrightly about the flight of the elite Adnan and al Faw Divisions: "We hadn't gotten them all. You know, those bastards got away."³¹

(U) Even more significant than the escape of the Republican Guards was Saddam Hussein's conclusion that he had won the Gulf War. The Iraqi dictator viewed the outcome of the conflict far differently than his opponents did. Foremost, while coalition leaders saw the Gulf War air campaign as a stunning success that allowed their ground forces to advance rapidly and with relatively low casualties, Saddam Hussein believed it demonstrated a U.S. weakness. In his disparaging assessment, the United States was willing to risk land operations only after an inordinately long bombardment of Iraq from one end to another. Nor was Hussein impressed by the coalition's ground campaign. A 2006 Joint Forces Command study concluded that in the dictator's opinion: "Once American ground troops were committed, American irresolution allowed the bulk of the elite Republican Guard forces to escape; left the oil exporting city of Basra unoccupied; and, most critically, failed to do anything that threatened the regime's survival."³²

(U) Saddam Hussein believed that by carrying out a skillful strategic retreat from Kuwait, he had won the ground campaign. He maintained enough of his Republican Guard to crush the Shi'a and Kurds, who—not the coalition—threatened his hold on power. He inflicted far greater

losses on these internal enemies than the United States and its allies had on him. In Hussein's view, the "real" war was the one against the Shi'a and Kurds, and he had won.³³

(U) In any objective analysis, the coalition achieved remarkable successes on the ground and in the air over Kuwait and Iraq, but Saddam Hussein, as military historians Michael R. Gordon and Bernard E. Trainor wrote, turned "history on its head."³⁴ His assessment of the outcome of the Gulf War was the polar opposite of his opponents'. Hussein maintained his political, military, and security infrastructure and, all-important to him, he remained in power. Viewed from his perspective, he had won the Gulf War.³⁵ Encouraged by the coalition's failure to inflict maximum damage on his basis of power during Operation Desert Storm, Saddam Hussein continued to pose problems for the United States into the next century.

¹ (U) Book, H. Norman Schwarzkopf with Peter Petre, *The Autobiography: It Doesn't Take a Hero* (New York: Bantam Books, 1992), p 483; Book, Rick Atkinson, *Crusade: The Untold Story of the Persian Gulf War* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1993), p 2. [Note: There is a substantial body of literature on Operation Desert Storm, the Gulf War. A good starting place is Rick Atkinson, *Crusade: The Untold Story of the Persian Gulf War* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1993); an important revisionist work is Michael R. Gordon and Bernard E. Trainor, *The Generals' War: The Inside Story of the Conflict in the Gulf* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1995). The planning and execution of the air campaign are covered in three volumes published by the Air Force History and Museums Program: Diane T. Putney, *Airpower Advantage: Planning the Gulf War Air Campaign 1989-1991* (Washington: Air Force History and Museums Program, 2004); Richard G. Davis, *On Target: Organizing and Executing the Strategic Air Campaign Against Iraq* (Washington: Air Force History and Museums Program, 2002); Perry D. Jamieson, *Lucrative Targets: The U.S. Air Force in the Kuwaiti Theater of Operations* (Washington: Air Force History and Museums Program, 2001). The Air Force published its official assessment in classified and unclassified editions of Eliot A. Cohen, ed., *Gulf War Air Power Survey*, 5 vols. (unclassified edition, Washington: USAF, Government Printing Office, 1993). Two memoirs among several valuable ones are Schwarzkopf with Petre, *The Autobiography: It Doesn't Take a Hero*, and Tom Clancy and Chuck Horner, *Every Man a Tiger* (New York: Putnam, 1999).]

² (U) Book, Schwarzkopf, *It Doesn't Take a Hero*, pp 481-84; Book, Gordon and Trainor, *The Generals' War*, p 443.

³ (U) Book, Schwarzkopf, *It Doesn't Take a Hero*, p 484-85; Book, Gordon and Trainor, *The Generals' War*, p 444.

⁴ (U) Book, Schwarzkopf, *It Doesn't Take a Hero*, p 485. The published accounts of the Safwan meeting cited here were supported by a classified document prepared by CENTCOM's Forward Command Center.

⁵ (U) Book, Schwarzkopf, *It Doesn't Take a Hero*, p 485, p 488; Book, Gordon and Trainor, *The Generals' War*, p 444.

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- ⁶ (U) Book, Schwarzkopf, *It Doesn't Take a Hero*, p 485.
- ⁷ (U) Book, Jamieson, *Lucrative Targets*, p 162; Book, Gordon and Trainor, *The Generals' War*, pp 436–37.
- ⁸ (U) Book, Schwarzkopf, *It Doesn't Take a Hero*, p 488; Book, Gordon and Trainor, *The Generals' War*, p 445; Book, Atkinson, *Crusade*, pp 8–9.
- ⁹ (U) Book, Gordon and Trainor, *The Generals' War*, pp 445–46.
- ¹⁰ (U) Book, Schwarzkopf, *It Doesn't Take a Hero*, p 448.
- ¹¹ (U) Book, Gordon and Trainor, *The Generals' War*, p 446.
- ¹² (U) Book, Gordon and Trainor, *The Generals' War*, p 446.
- ¹³ (U) Book, Gordon and Trainor, *The Generals' War*, p 446; Book, Schwarzkopf, *It Doesn't Take a Hero*, p 449.
- ¹⁴ (U) Book, Gordon and Trainor, *The Generals' War*, p 446.
- ¹⁵ (U) Book, Schwarzkopf, *It Doesn't Take a Hero*, p 489; Book, Gordon and Trainor, *The Generals' War*, pp 448–49; Book, Thomas E. Ricks, *Fiasco: The American Military Adventure in Iraq* (New York: Penguin, 2006), p 5.
- ¹⁶ (U) Book, Ricks, *Fiasco*, p 5; Book, Gordon and Trainor, *The Generals' War*, p 448, p 457.
- ¹⁷ (U) Book, Gordon and Trainor, *The Generals' War*, pp 448–49.
- ¹⁸ (U) Book, Ricks, *Fiasco*, p 5; Book, Gordon and Trainor, *The Generals' War*, p 449.
- ¹⁹ (U) Book, Gordon and Trainor, *The Generals' War*, p 457; Book, Atkinson, *Crusade*, p 489; Book, Ricks, *Fiasco*, p 5.
- ²⁰ (U) Book, Schwarzkopf, *It Doesn't Take a Hero*, p 489.
- ²¹ (U) Book, Schwarzkopf, *It Doesn't Take a Hero*, p 489; Book, Atkinson, *Crusade*, p 490.
- ²² (U) Book, Gordon and Trainor, *The Generals' War*, p 448; Book, Atkinson, *Crusade*, p 490.
- ²³ (U) Book, Gordon and Trainor, *The Generals' War*, p 448; Book, Atkinson, *Crusade*, p 490.
- ²⁴ (U) Book, Gordon and Trainor, *The Generals' War*, p 448; Book, Atkinson, *Crusade*, p 490.
- ²⁵ (U) Book, Atkinson, *Crusade*, p 488.
- ²⁶ (U) Book, Atkinson, *Crusade*, p 488; Book, Ricks, *Fiasco*, p 5; Book, Gordon and Trainor, *The Generals' War*, p 450.
- ²⁷ (U) Book, Gordon and Trainor, *The Generals' War*, p 517; Book, George Bush and Brent Scowcroft, *A World Transformed* (New York: Knopf, 1998), p 488.
- ²⁸ (U) Book, Gordon and Trainor, *The Generals' War*, p 517; Book, Bush and Scowcroft, *A World Transformed*, p 488.

²⁹ (U) Book, Cohen, ed., *Gulf War Air Power Survey*, 5 vols., *Operations*, I: p 319; Report, Central Intelligence Agency, Directorate of Intelligence, "Operation Desert Storm: A Snapshot of the Battlefield [March 1, 1991]," Sep 1993; Book, U.S. News & World Report, *Triumph Without Victory: The Unreported History of the Persian Gulf War* (New York: Times Books, 1992), p 398.

³⁰ (U) Book, Cohen, ed., *Gulf War Air Power Survey*, 5 vols., *Operations*, I: p 319; Report, Central Intelligence Agency, "A Snapshot of the Battlefield [March 1, 1991]"; Book, U.S. News & World Report, *Triumph Without Victory*, p 398.

³¹ (U) Book, Cohen, ed., *Gulf War Air Power Survey*, 5 vols., *Operations*, I: 319; Report, Central Intelligence Agency, "A Snapshot of the Battlefield [March 1, 1991]"; Book, U.S. News & World Report, *Triumph Without Victory*, p 398.

³² (U) Study, Kevin M. Woods, Michael R. Pease, Mark E. Stout, Williamson Murray, and James G. Lacey, Joint Center for Operational Analysis, Joint Forces Command, "Iraqi Perspectives Project: A View of Operation Iraqi Freedom from Saddam's Senior Leadership" (unclassified edition, Washington: Government Printing Office, 2006), p 16. This study is based on audio tapes of discussions among Saddam Hussein and other Iraqi leaders, captured during the Iraq War.

³³ (U) Study, Woods, et al, Joint Center for Operational Analysis, "A View of Operation Iraqi Freedom from Saddam's Senior Leadership," p 25.

³⁴ (U) Book, Gordon and Trainor, *The Generals' War*, quotation, p 466, and p 477. See also Ricks, *Fiasco*, pp 4-7.

³⁵ (U) Book, Gordon and Trainor, *The Generals' War*, quotation, p 466, and p 477. See also Ricks, *Fiasco*, pp 4-7.