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President's Notes

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President's Notes

NOW THAT THE WAR in the Arabian Gulf has been terminated, all of our Services are quite properly examining our recent operations there in some detail to ascertain how we might have done them better. This is as it should be since there is no better opportunity than actual combat to measure the effectiveness of our people, equipment and tactics. To ignore this opportunity to learn from our mistakes would be the height of folly.

Having said that, we should not allow ourselves to be mesmerized by what may have gone wrong and overlook the fact that the United States and our coalition partners achieved a tremendous victory during operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm. Far more went right than went wrong to enable us to defeat so soundly a battle-hardened country boasting the world's fourth largest army.

Admiral Strasser holds a B.S. from the Naval Academy, two master's degrees from the Fletcher School, Tufts University and, from the same school, a Ph.D. in political science. He was graduated from the command and staff course at the Naval War College in 1972. He commanded the USS *O'Callahan* (FF 1051), Destroyer Squadron 35, Cruiser-Destroyer Group 3, and Battle Group Foxtrot. His seven years in Washington include two years in the office of the Chairman, JCS.
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We won and the other guy lost; we shouldn't let the country and particularly certain sectors of our news media overlook that.

As I read the newspaper and listen to the evening news, I have to keep reminding myself that we are the victors. The advice that the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff did or did not give the President with respect to Desert Storm is being closely and publicly dissected as though it somehow will, after the fact, have a bearing on how well our military did in combat. The contributions of the Navy and Marine Corps to the total war effort have been criticized by some armchair strategists who simply are not aware of the total role played by our maritime forces in what was essentially a land and air campaign. I think it useful to review briefly the important capabilities provided by the Navy-Marine Corps team in the immediate aftermath of the brutal 2 August Iraqi invasion of Kuwait as well as the major impact that these forces had on the overall results of the war.

Operating in the vicinity of Diego Garcia at the time Saddam Hussein's troops crossed the Kuwaiti border, the *Independence* battle group was in the Northern Arabian Sea and within strike range of Iraqi forces by 5 August. Three days later the *Dwight D. Eisenhower* and her escorts were in the Red Sea providing, with *Indy*, a combat-ready force of 164 aircraft and scores of Tomahawk missiles capable of hitting Iraq from two directions.

The Second Maritime Prepositioning Squadron (MPS) ships loaded with Marine Corps equipment arrived in Al Jubail, Saudi Arabia on 15 August. The First Marine Division, airlifted to Saudi Arabia on 249 C-141's, joined up with its equipment and by 10 September was in place and combat ready with 60 days of combat supplies. By that time, the *Saratoga* and *Kennedy* battle groups were in the area, and shortly thereafter the two hospital ships *Comfort* and *Mercy*, activated in response to the invasion, were en route to the Arabian Gulf. Each of these ships provided 500 hospital beds. In conjunction with two fleet hospitals ashore possessing an additional 1,000 beds, they were responsible for the majority of the medical support in the early phases of Desert Storm.

United Nations economic sanctions against Iraq were implemented on 6 August and were continued throughout the war and during the postwar period. This embargo has been enforced exclusively by United States and coalition maritime forces and by April was responsible for challenging 8,500 ships at sea. Of that number, some 1,100 were boarded to examine their papers and cargo, and about 60 en route to ports of Iraq or Iraqi-sympathizers were diverted. These sanctions eliminated over 90% of Iraq's imports and almost 100% of her exports during this period, causing a reduction of about 50% in that nation's GNP.

By mid-January naval strength in theater had grown to six carrier battle groups and two Marine Expeditionary brigades afloat plus the already mentioned First

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Division ashore. This force of approximately 75,000 sailors aboard some 110 ships and 82,000 marines both ashore and afloat amounted to 56% of our Navy's amphibious forces, 38% of the Marine Corps and 54% of the deployable carrier fleet.


The United States air campaign enjoyed tremendous success. It began with the launch of Tomahawk land attack missiles fired from cruisers, destroyers and battleships, and later by submarines as well, in the Persian Gulf and Red Sea. These missiles, the first of nearly 300 expended as part of the carefully crafted integrated air campaign, were successful in eliminating Iraqi air defenses and the ability to control aircraft from the ground. Naval aviation, with approximately 25% of the combat aircraft in theater, was responsible for an equal percentage of the strike sorties flown in Iraq. Four carriers operated *inside* the Arabian Gulf, and together with the two in the Red Sea, coalition air forces in Saudi Arabia and USAF units in Eastern Turkey effectively surrounded Iraq with a strike capability from four major axes. In addition to the tremendous demoralizing and destruction effort of the air campaign on Iraqi forces and equipment, it virtually eliminated Iraq's electrical power generating capability and destroyed her command and control structure as well as the capability to produce chemical, biological and nuclear weapons.

In evaluating the total contribution of naval forces to the defeat of Saddam Hussein, the demonstrated ability of Marine Corps forces afloat to tie down enemy units can not be discounted. At one point 11 Iraqi divisions were committed to defend against amphibious attacks that never came. This diversion of forces was a critical element of the overall campaign plan and key to the success of the ground attack to free Kuwait.

Sealift also had a major role to play and was one of the real success stories of Desert Shield and Desert Storm. While there is no denying that our airlift was terribly effective, sealift moved 90% of the cargo to the arena. More than 2.4 million tons of cargo was moved by sea during Desert Shield, an amount more than four times that moved across the English Channel to Normandy during the D-Day invasion in 1944. By way of comparison, the equipment moved by the Maritime Prepositioned Ships alone during the first part of August would have required 2,100 sorties by C-5 aircraft, the largest in our transport force.

As I have attempted to show, U.S. naval forces as well as those of our coalition partners contributed mightily to our resounding victory over Iraq. While this operation should *not* be considered a model for future military campaigns, it does again point out the important role that maritime forces will play in future joint and combined operations. In the throes of crises over the years, many United States Presidents have repeatedly asked the questions, "Where is the nearest aircraft carrier?" or "Where are the closest amphibious forces?" While the threat has changed recently, and instability rather than the Soviet Union now appears to be our most immediate concern, there is little doubt that present and future

leaders will continue to rely on naval forces in times of international turmoil. We have always been ready in the past; our challenge is to maintain our readiness to engage in prompt and sustained combat operations at sea in support of national policy.


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