

Chairman's Summary

The First Gulf War in Historical Perspectives

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The FY2021 International Forum on War History was held under the theme of “The First Gulf War in Historical Perspectives.”

Three decades have passed since the 1991 Gulf War. The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, which triggered the war, was the first test for the world following the end of the Cold War. The international response to this challenge impacted the subsequent course of world history in many aspects, such as politics, diplomacy, and military affairs. The purpose of this forum was to conduct an extensive study of the Gulf War from both political and military perspectives in order to assess the historical significance of this war in a broader context.

The forum was comprised of Part 1, which dealt with military aspects, and Part 2, which dealt with political aspects. Each part consisted of (1) a keynote speech, (2) presentations by panelists, and (3) an overall discussion, in that order.

In Part 1, “Military Aspects of the Gulf War,” Lt Gen David A. Deptula, United States Air Force (Ret.), delivered the keynote speech. Presentations were then made by Dr. Carter Malkasian, Dr. Williamson Murray, and Dr. Tsukamoto Katsuya.

In his keynote speech entitled, “Planning and Executing the Desert Storm Air Campaign: An Effects-Based Approach,” Lt Gen Deptula noted that the execution of an air campaign from an effects-based perspective contributed significantly to Operation Desert Storm’s success, and stressed the effectiveness of operation planning from an effects-based perspective. He underscored that stealth and precision strike technologies, in conjunction with an entirely new concept of operations, i.e., attacking multiple targets simultaneously and in parallel, were key to the success of an effects-based operation. Noting that the military objectives of effects-based operations are determined in light of the political objectives, Lt Gen Deptula pointed to the importance of maintaining linkage in decision-making from the strategic to the tactical levels via a top-down chain of command. Lastly, he contended that the utility of an effects-based approach is not limited to the military, saying that the approach was a springboard for an integrated response that cuts across diplomacy, economy, information, and military elements to further ensure national security.

In the presentations by panelists, the first presenter, Dr. Malkasian, delivered a presentation entitled, “Long-term Implications of Gulf War on US Strategy and Concepts.” He stated that the Gulf War demonstrated an effectiveness in air power and advanced technology, which continues to strongly influence U.S. strategists and policymakers to this day. Specifically, he noted that the realization of ceasefire agreements as a result of the air strikes in the Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo wars gave U.S. policymakers greater confidence that political objectives could be achieved through air power. He mentioned that reliance on air power and

advanced technology was conspicuous in Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan and Operation Iraqi Freedom in Iraq, and that an intention to use air power and technology was upheld in the 2018 National Defense Strategy, which calls for offsetting China's anti-access and area denial (A2/AD) strategy with advanced technologies such as artificial intelligence, autonomous robots, and hypersonic weapons. In conclusion, Dr. Malkasian noted that the Gulf War was a defining event in U.S. strategy and its thinking, and that U.S. defense strategy today cannot be correctly understood without understanding the Gulf War.

Next, Dr. Murray gave a presentation entitled, "Thoughts on RMAs and the Rise of the West: Implications for the Future." He noted that the rise of the West in the modern era took place against the backdrop of Revolutions in Military Affairs (RMA) in a broad sense, and that the RMA seen in the Gulf War was part of the achievements of rapid technological innovation in the aftermath of World War II. In regard to the Gulf War, he highlighted that the use of advanced technology dramatically improved the utility of conventional weapons, and that there were people in the U.S. military who correctly foresaw the potential of RMAs. Lastly, he emphasized the importance of viewing the technological innovations at hand from a historical and relative perspective, stating that excessive attention should not be given to the technological innovation aspect so as to overlook the true nature of warfare, i.e., the "human-on-human actions."

Dr. Tsukamoto gave a presentation titled, "The Gulf War and the Military Innovation." He described that the dramatic victory of the coalition force in the Gulf War was characterized by minimal coalition losses, which was made possible by an RMA consisting of (1) stealth technology, (2) laser-guided bombs, (3) aerial refueling aircraft, (4) high-speed anti-radar missiles, and (5) third generation Secure Telephone Unit (STU-III). He noted that China had learned the most from the Gulf War of any country and was well-positioned to demonstrate the effectiveness of RMAs in terms of developing precision-guided weapons and making the Rocket Force centered on land-based missiles an independent military service.

The overall discussion for Part 1 was then held based on the presentations. First, Dr. Malkasian asked Dr. Tsukamoto about the relationship between the progress of RMAs and the rise of China. Dr. Tsukamoto responded that, while the U.S. still has the advantage in overall technological level and innovation potential, China is in a favorable position in the application of technology to military operations.

In the context of discussing the rise of China, Dr. Murray raised the importance of Taiwan in the future. Dr. Tsukamoto noted that the military value of Taiwan was estimated to be small about a decade ago, and that from around then the military balance between China and Taiwan shifted toward Chinese dominance. He contended that the focus will be on how Taiwan responds based on the current level of technology.

Regarding the argument that "the American Way in Warfare" often tends to overemphasize exploitation of technological advantages, Lt Gen Deptula acknowledged that such aspects exist while stressing that technology played a role in enabling the execution of ideas in the Gulf War. As a contrasting example, he assessed that the U.S. erred in Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan by overemphasizing military concerns and overlooking the "human" factor.

In Part 2, "Political Aspects of the Gulf War," Dr. Lawrence Freedman delivered the

keynote speech. Presentations were then made by Dr. Hew Strachan, Dr. Tadokoro Masayuki, and Dr. Stephen Badsey.

In his keynote speech entitled, “The International Politics of the Gulf War,” Dr. Freedman presented that the Gulf War was a transition, the start of an optimistic period marked by multilateralism and international cooperation. However, the optimistic period came to an end with the 9/11 attacks, with the aftermath of the Gulf War bringing the United States more intimately into the affairs of the Middle East, aggravating relations with Iran, and inspiring the formation of al Qaeda. Dr. Freedman stated that all of these events reflected a broader trend—the steady loosening of the colonial ties, of which the dismantling of the Soviet bloc and the buildup to the Gulf War were the most striking symptoms. He noted that the war aim of the realist-centered Bush administration was limited to the liberation of Kuwait and did not extend to the liberation of the oppressed Iraqi people or the rescue of the Kurds. He concluded his speech by describing the “New World Order” concept of the Bush administration as an expression of its desire to manage structural changes in the post-Cold War world.

In the presentations by panelists, the first presenter, Dr. Strachan, delivered a presentation entitled, “Britain and the First Gulf War.” First, he explained that many British people supported Britain’s participation in the Gulf War, but that avoiding the prolongation of the war and minimizing injuries and casualties were essential for maintaining domestic support. He mentioned that, against this backdrop, Britain’s participation in the Gulf War was facilitated by: the Falklands War in 1982 through which the broad public understood the significance of military power in foreign policy; the premiership of Margaret Thatcher when the Gulf crisis broke out; the fact that the United Nations (UN) functioned; and the end of the Cold War which allowed Britain to redirect its forces from Europe to the Middle East. Dr. Strachan stated that, meanwhile, the British military, which until the war had placed the defense of Europe at the center of its strategy, was forced to rely on foreign merchant ships to transport its forces to the Middle East, and that British weapons and fighting methods which had been anticipated for battles on the German border were unsuited for fighting in the desert. Lastly, he discussed the impact of the Gulf War on Britain, namely: the war’s consideration as a model of UN-led conflict resolution; and the popularization of the idea that the use of military force in the short term was an effective means of diplomacy.

Next, Dr. Tadokoro gave a presentation titled, “Japan and the First Gulf War.” He described that the Gulf War represented a major setback for Japan, which was even comparable to its defeat in World War II. He noted that postwar Japan, which was lightly armed and economically oriented, was in fact conditioned by structural factors—the Cold War and the Japan-U.S. Alliance. The Gulf War occurred amid the structural changes arising from the end of the Cold War, and Japan was confronted with the new challenge of engaging in international security, which exposed the inherent contradictions between the leftists and rightists. The recognition that Japan cannot contribute to the world via economic power alone, together with a sense of defeat, pervaded the public’s perception. This gave a critical impetus to the subsequent overseas deployment of the Japan Self-Defense Forces and the debate on constitutional revision that has continued to this day. Dr. Tadokoro reviewed these developments and concluded that, as the world undergoes a major shift in the balance of power 30 years after the Gulf War, Japan is still

only halfway through resolving its security challenges.

Dr. Badsey gave a presentation entitled, “The First Major Media War.” He noted that the relationship between war and the media changed significantly since the Gulf War, making it essential to consider the role of the media in the execution of war, whether it be ground war or air war. In the Gulf War, the trail of wreckage of Iraqi military vehicles on a highway was reported as the “Highway of Death,” which led to President Bush’s decision to declare a unilateral ceasefire 100 hours after the start of the ground war. The Iraqi side, for its part, attempted to turn the U.S. public opinion against the war by releasing videos of captured U.S. prisoners of war. Dr. Badsey argued that whether countries can get the media on their side in portraying the battlefield now influences the outcome of a war. Furthermore, he noted that the 24-hour news blackout imposed by the U.S. Central Command prior to the start of the ground war ultimately led to drawing media interest in the “Highway of Death.” The importance of the media’s response in wartime has come to be recognized as a lesson from such failed cooperation between the military and the media.

The overall discussion for Part 2 was then held based on the presentations. Dr. Freedman began by discussing the “Highway of Death” from the perspective of the relationship between the Gulf War and the Iraq War, and noted that the Gulf War ended halfway through due to the reports on the “Highway of Death.” He emphasized that it is highly difficult for actors to predict the long-term impact of their decisions when such decisions must be made under time constraints.

Dr. Strachan pointed out the similarities between the U.S. and British militaries in their failure to deal with the media in wartime. After the Gulf War, Britain saw various distorted reporting, such as belittlement of the navy and overemphasis on the air force as well as underestimation of the manpower of the army and overestimation of its mobility. Dr. Strachan noted that the British military was unable to establish proper relations with the media, and its strained relations with the media indirectly caused such distorted reporting. In response, Dr. Badsey said that the confusion surrounding the recent withdrawal of U.S. troops from Afghanistan may also embody such aspects of failed cooperation between the military and the media.

Dr. Tadokoro mentioned that public support is essential in the execution of war, especially in democracies, and that the tone of reporting presents an enormous challenge as it influences a war’s success or failure. He then noted that cyberspace has grown in importance in recent years, and moreover, that the apparent asymmetries between democracies and authoritarian states in cyberspace makes it an increasingly difficult challenge to conduct military operations while maintaining democracies.