
Defense Report

AUSA



Did The Desert Storm Abate Too Soon?

While it is no longer front page news, the continuing malevolence of Saddam Hussein has stirred some public irritation and has re-kindled the discussion about whether we should have continued fighting in Iraq until Saddam was annihilated. Hindsight leads many to believe that Desert Storm should have raged at least to the point that Saddam's ability to flaunt the clear mandate of the cease fire was paralyzed.

Not everybody agrees that the war should have gone on. Quite a few polls show overwhelming support for President Bush's decision to terminate combat when the primary mission of kicking Iraq out of Kuwait was accomplished. Nowhere in the United Nations' resolutions was there a stated mission to kill Saddam or to occupy any portion of Iraq. Given the ethnic and tribal frictions which have long disturbed the region; the increased preoccupation with Islamic Fundamentalism; and the long-standing, unsettled issues of territorial sovereignty, many felt that a worst possible scenario would have been to martyrize Saddam by killing him.

Westerners and Arabs alike who have expressed concern over Persian Gulf regional security, feared that the full defeat of Iraq and the total decimation of its armed forces would leave Iran as the strongest power in the region. Such a prospect would be acceptable to no one other than Iran. Then too, the low threshold of patience in the American psyche for prolonged periods of conflict is well known. Had we continued the fighting in Iraq, with a concomitant increase in casualties, the whole operation would have very quickly worn thin with the American people. That is especially true in view of the fact that we would have exceeded our mission charter. Even though the bulk of our troops were in the Gulf for slightly over six months, a steady drumbeat for their early return was heard in growing crescendo.

The question of how to deal with Saddam's continuing intransigence and his willful violations of the cease fire terms are matters separate from Desert Storm. The American troops and their coalition partners carried out their assigned missions superbly. Though we may still hear the roll of distant thunder, it is not the original Desert Storm.