

## **Bin, Alberto, Richard Hill and Archer Jones, Desert Storm: A Forgotten War. Westport, CT: Praeger, 1998.**

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Bin, Alberto, Richard Hill and Archer Jones, *Desert Storm: A Forgotten War*. Westport, CT: Praeger, 1998.

At first glance the title of this book is puzzling; a strong case could be made for "misleading advertising." To call the Second Gulf War "a forgotten war" less than a decade after its conclusion is akin to claiming that the People's Republic of China is an insignificant player in international politics. There has been a seemingly unrelenting avalanche of titles on or relating to Operation Desert Storm and its aftermath continues to figure in daily news coverage. Aside from the confusion surrounding the title, which is never fully explained, the authors decided to publish this work as a single-volume reader on the Second Gulf War. Other reasons for creating this volume were threefold: to redress what the authors saw as shortcomings in the literature previously published; to challenge conventional assumptions about why the war was fought; and, to show that the war was far from the "video game" conflict perceived by the American public.

The authors go about their task by looking at both the reasons why Iraq invaded Kuwait, how the various state actors reacted to the invasion and then conclude this section by answering the question about the inevitability of the war. Two large factors stand out in the countdown to the conflict. First, the United States was guaranteed to take an active role in removing Iraq from Kuwait given its unique status as sole remaining superpower and its national interests in the region related to oil. The second factor, related to the last point, was the importance of oil to the economies of all of the major parties involved, especially Iraq, Kuwait and the US. The authors go to great lengths to stress the impact of Iraq's actions on the countries of the Gulf; oil did play its part in mobilizing the US-led coalition but the Arab members of that coalition were motivated largely because of the way in which Saddam Hussein threatened their interests. In the end, the authors conclude that Saddam was unwilling to make the necessary sacrifices to prevent the war and grossly overestimated the support he could derive from neighbouring Arab countries as the self-perceived leader of the pan-Arab movement.

The remainder of *Desert Storm* is devoted to examining how the military campaign was conducted. In addition to the recognized primary sources on the conflict, including the voluminous and heavily-censored Gulf War Air Power Survey (GWAPS), the authors use material gathered from interviews conducted with 50 military officers and non-commissioned officers. The quotations taken from these interviews are perhaps the most interesting part of this book and reinforce the importance of the human dimensions of conflict, such as fear and exhaustion, in what is often viewed as "aseptic" modern war. To reinforce the impact of the war, the authors discuss the effect that the military campaign had on Iraqi civilians. The sections devoted to the military campaign conclude with quotes from the autobiographies of Generals Norman Schwarzkopf and Khaled bin Sultan that reinforce the point that the coalition formed against Iraq never considered a subsequent drive on Baghdad at the end of the 100-hour campaign. To do so, the authors speculate, would have invited heavy casualties as the Iraqis defended their homeland instead of occupied territory.

The book finishes with an analysis of the economic, political and military consequences of the war. The authors point to a number of "decisive advantages" possessed by the coalition in training, morale, firepower, logistics, weapons systems and leadership. Perhaps the most contentious issue of the war, the number of Iraqis killed during the air and ground campaign, is also scrutinized. Given the self-professed claim to be "controversial" in their assessments, it is unfortunate that the authors opt for the statistical "safe ground" and suggest "we can only conclude that a total between 30,000 and 150,000 Iraqi soldiers were killed or wounded, with somewhere between 10,000 and 100,000 dead, about 50,000 being a probable best estimate." The authors end the chapter by assessing some of the military lessons learned during the campaign and by posing ten questions for future researchers to consider. The questions range from the arcane ("Is the very advanced AH-64 Apache really much more effective than the most modern version of the older AH-1 Cobra?") to the sort of questions currently being asked in the wake of the air campaign in Kosovo ("How effective would Coalition forces have been in less favorable climate and/or terrain?").

In one respect, the authors of Desert Storm have achieved their goal: they have provided a "comprehensive history addressed to the general public." The work is highly readable and contains a number of charts, graphs and maps that explain visually some of the events being discussed. But Desert Storm also contains some substantial flaws. For the most part, the cooperation between the authors is beneficial, highlighting their individual areas of expertise: Middle Eastern studies in the case of Bin, the economic and statistical analysis of Hill and Jones' insights into strategy and how the war was conducted. Where this cooperation breaks down, it does so noticeably. The preface, for example, is a mismatch of methodological apologia containing the eye-opening statement that "we would be highly surprised if any data reported here are subject to less than 20 % error" (*italics added*). It also seems as if the book would have been more path-breaking and "controversial" had it been written by a single author rather than by a triumvirate. Most surprising of all, it is difficult to imagine why perhaps the most exhaustive survey on the military aspects of subject, *The Lessons of Modern War, Volume IV: The Gulf War* (by Andrew Cordesman and Abraham Wagner), would not be included in the bibliography or used as a source. It is conceivable that the latter was published after the manuscript for Desert Storm was submitted but odd that the authors would not have amended in the intervening two years since Desert Storm was published. Such criticisms aside, for those unfamiliar with the literature on the Second Gulf War, *Desert Storm: A Forgotten War* is a solid general history of the issues and events.

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