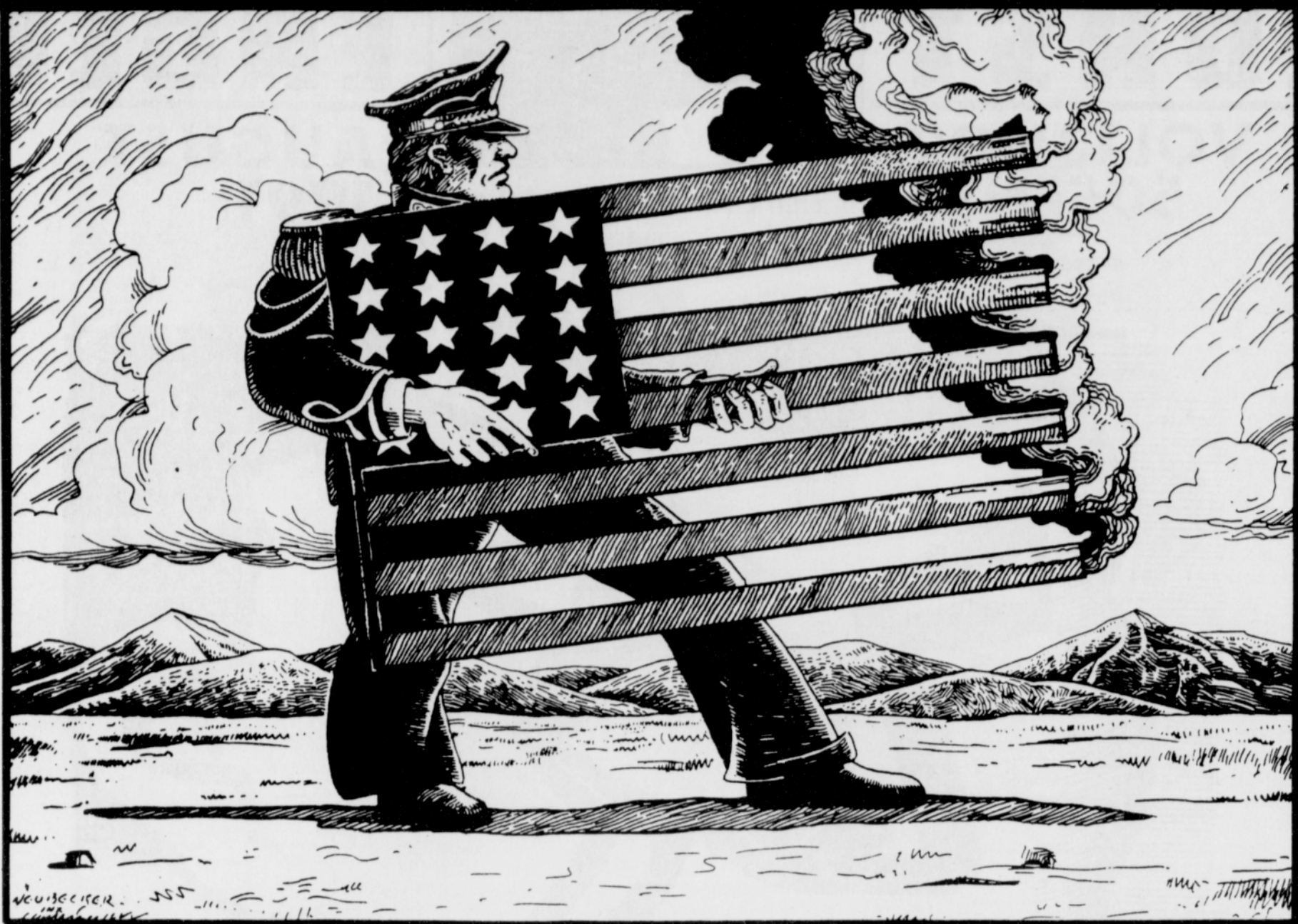


ONE YEAR LATER



ROBERT NEUBECKER

"What is evil?" the baby is asked.
The baby thinks: "Evil is power."

— Arabic folksaying

"But what good cause came of it at last?"
"Why, that I cannot tell, but 'twas a famous victory."

— Robert Southey, (1798)
"The Battle of Blenheim"

The war in the Persian Gulf was reminiscent of traditional warfare in which armies moved enmasse and one or two major battles completed a war. The fast moving legions of tanks and armored troop carriers that roared through the Arabian Desert into Kuwait and Iraq acted with the same purpose as ancient war chariots and later cavalry. It was in supporting arms that major changes were evident, though not in purpose from rock hurling catapults or Greek fire, which is to crush or incinerate enemy positions. The change in the Persian Gulf was that artillery and aerial bombardment were the primary force of the allied war effort against Iraq and its army. The ground forces were for the first time in land warfare relegated to a subsidiary role which amounted to little more than a mop-

up action. Gunpowder in the hands of Europeans ended the military supremacy of the mounted nomad archer; the smart bomb, which some pundits claim is capable of tracing its victim to his favorite club, supercedes the infantry rifleman. The enduring image of the war against Iraq might be of a missile going right in through a door of its target.

"A splendid little war," Theodore Roosevelt called the short, decisive and incredibly profitable war against Spain's decrepit colonial empire in 1898. Roosevelt would say the same of the Persian Gulf war. The excitement was high, the losses were low, the gains immense. Though a large number of the nearly 100 American dead in the Gulf War were from "friendly fire," and perhaps a hundred others died in accidents ("collateral" losses) while in Saudi Arabia waiting for the war to begin, allied troops were spared the tens of thousands of deaths to disease that even a cheap little war with Spain produced. Perhaps the greatest revolution in military arms is the development of its medical care. Far fewer combat wounded die and epidemics seldom ravage modern armies. Ironically, though the threat of the spread of disease has been virtually eradicated in the ranks, it is the military itself which presents the gravest threat of epidemic with its production and stockpiling of biological and chemical weapons.

As the United States and its former adversary the Soviet Union attempt to end the nuclear arms race which defined the Cold War with a treaty that might truly end it, the threat of toxic warfare grows and was a forceful rationale for making war against Iraq which had used such weapons in its eight-year war with Iran and against Kurds. These weapons were a major fear to the allied forces gathering at the borders of Iraq and Kuwait. The second most enduring image of the Gulf War might be the nightmarish eeriness of soldiers and civilians

moving about in gas masks and spacesuit-like protective clothing. Virtually the entire population of Israel was issued gas masks and instructed how to seal off rooms of their home and offices against chemical attack, though it was longer before the Israeli government reluctantly included Palestinians living in Israel and the occupied territories.

The real terror, however, was the possibility of crossing the nuclear threshold, which a few advocated as a response if Iraq used chemical or biological weapons. Concern was also shown about Iraq's possible capability of producing nuclear weapons, and particular attention was paid to intelligence targeted nuclear installations during the three-week airwar. The claimed success of cruise and "Patriot" missiles in offense and defense pumped up ambitions to revive Star Wars, a hugely expensive pork-barrel antiballistic nuclear defense against nuclear attack, which the Soviets have always perceived as an offensive, first-strike system.

The relatively cheap victory in the Gulf War raises the stock of the military in the United States. Exultant voices proclaim an end to the cultural self-laceration caused by the nation's failure in Viet Nam. But Viet Nam went deeply into the society's vein and its effects have been profound, which includes the organization and skill of the present war machine. The Gulf War was somewhat microwave in its effect and consequences. The U.S. emerged as the world's



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