

THE MOTHER OF WARS



NO BLOOD FOR OIL

BY MICHAEL McCUSKER

"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 you, but 'twas a famous victory."

~ROBERT SOUTHEY (1798)
THE BATTLE OF BLENHEIM

The victory parades were massive and expensive, staged like opera. The President who made the war a personal test of his power, relit the dimmed marquee of the 'American Century', and America beamed with yellow ribboned patriotism and a collective thrill of feeling 'Number One'. Ancient Rome, Byzantium, not even the British Empire at its imperial height could match the USA at this moment as Guardian of the West; and not since World War 2, the real triumph of American arms and civilization, had the nation so dominated world affairs, reigning unchallenged and supreme.

The war started just when it seemed as if the world was taking off its helmet and emerging with a sigh of relief from its Cold War bunker. A nation suddenly attacked another nation in the savage old way. In response dozens of other nations led by the USA rushed their armed forces to the battlezone in fear of losing their heartlines of oil which the invasion threatened and vindicated their warlike reaction with pieties of maintaining peace and thwarting aggression.

Though it should already have been apparent a decade ago that the oil age was nearing its end, the irony is that the Western nations and their Arab suppliers fought to preserve their supplies of fossil fuels by squandering vast quantities in their immense war machines, which is why the defeated enemy set the liberated oil fields afire to deny the victors the spoils of their victory.

Barrels of blood were offered in exchange for barrels of oil. The world has a glut of human blood but oil is finite and will likely dry up sometime in this new century. (An American military nurse interviewed in Saudi Arabia said that she did not want to die for an oil well.)

The 1991 war in the Persian Gulf was reminiscent of traditional warfare in which armies moved enmass and one or two major battles completed a war. The fast moving legions of tanks and armored troop carriers that roared across the Arabian Desert into Kuwait and Iraq acted with the same purpose as ancient war chariots and later cavalry. It was in support arms that major shifts

were evident, though not in purpose from rock hurling catapults or Greek Fire, which is to crush or incinerate enemy positions or fortifications. The change in the Persian Gulf War 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 operation.

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, supersedes the infantry rifleman. The enduring image of the war against Iraq a decade later is that of a missile going straight through the 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 — which gave the USA its first overseas empire consisting primarily of islands (European flags dominated the large landmasses). T.R. would say the same thing of the Persian Gulf War, known also by the Pentagon inspired cachet "Desert Storm." The excitement was high, the losses low, the gains immense.

Although a large number of the nearly 350 American dead in the Gulf War were from "friendly fire," and perhaps more than a hundred others died in accidents ("collateral losses") while in Saudi Arabia waiting nearly six months for the war to begin, allied troops were spared the tens of thousands of deaths to disease that even the cheap little war with Spain produced. Perhaps the greatest revolution in military arms is its medical care. Far fewer combat wounded die and epidemics seldom ravage modern armies. Ironically, although the threat of the spread of disease has been virtually eradicated in the ranks, it is the military itself that presents the gravest threat of epidemic with its production and stockpiling of biological and chemical weapons.

POP QUIZ

The scene: thousands upon thousands of human beings are killed. Their corpses are slopped onto one another like compressed disposable diapers. The bodies are shoveled and scraped into countless anonymous pits, then efficiently and surgically covered.

This is all done in the name of a superior nation and an eventual tidy and moral victory. A god is named to be on the side of the victors, Architects of Fashionable Atrocity.

Many citizens of the Politically Correct Nation are too numbed or afraid or ashamed to speak out or attempt to interfere for fear of appearing not to support the omnipresent mass hysteria currently rated Best Opinion by the latest government sponsored poll. (Now we can understand Polled Herefords a little better.)

Pop Quiz: The year and place is: (a) 1944 Germany; (b) 1991 Iraq; (c) 1952 Siberia; (d) all of the above; (e) not applicable, doesn't matter, what's on TV tonight, support our god.

~ALAN RICHARDS, 1991

Simultaneous with the initial stages to end the nuclear arms race by the USA and its former global adversary the Soviet Union (which was dissolved later that year, a Christmas present for the world), the threat of toxic warfare was a forceful rationale for making war against Iraq, which had used such weapons in its eight-year war with Iran and against indigenous Kurds. These weapons were a major threat 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 (as well as journalists filming them) 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 homes 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 was optioned as a response if Iraq used chemical or biological weapons, and particular attention was paid to possible Iraqi nuclear installations during the three-week airwar. The claimed success of cruise and 'Patriot' missiles in offense and defense pumped up ambitions to revive pork-barrel anti-ballistic nuclear defenses against nuclear attack, which the Russians, then and now, have always perceived as an offensive first-strike system.

The almost seamless victory in the Gulf War raised the stock of the military in the USA. Exultant voices proclaimed an end to the self-laceration that psychologically haunted the country since its dramatic failure in Vietnam. But Vietnam went deeper into the society's vein and its effects have been profound beyond purely military or ideological considerations. The reorganization of the military into the all-volunteer force that fought the Gulf War was, however, a distinct result of the Vietnam perception.

The Gulf War was somewhat microwave in its effect and consequences. The USA emerged as the world's supreme military power as a result of the war and imminent collapse of Communist Russia. Yet, similar to Saddam Hussein's Iraqi Army which invaded small neighboring Kuwait on August 2, 1990 to pay a huge military debt from the war with Iran through theft of its victim's large oil treasury, the U.S. was unable to financially support the war's exigencies upon its military colossus. The European and Arab nations that acted as its coalition partners in the Gulf War were quickly pressured to pay their shares of the war's expenses.

In the meantime the American war industry, overjoyed that most of its products seemed to work reasonably well in the war, hosted arms bazaars and strenuously lobbied for billions more dollars to replenish the nation's armory, hundreds of millions of dollars of which were expended over Baghdad and Iraqi Army bunkers in Kuwait. A baroque chorus of arms merchants chanted for more and better Nintendo weapons, big ticket stuff to keep the USA 'Number One', insisting to a parsimonious Congress (a majority were members of the party out of power) that military installations (obsolete and vulnerable) be sacrificed to ensure continuance of high-tech weapons programs (the biggest of them, 'Star Wars', still boondoggling taxpayers a decade later).

Iraq's invasion of Kuwait unleashed a frenzy of bellicose patriotism in the USA. Prejudice, always waiting with its intolerant leer, leaped into the dialogue. Whatever people in the Middle East called the massive influx of Westerners into their deserts, some words that quickly became current in the USA to describe the diverse types of humanity in the Arab lands were "ragheads" and "desert niggers." Pundits assured listeners that rabid religious beliefs and hotheaded passions were traditional Mideast traits. Propaganda machines rapidly responded to the crisis, erasing the ambiguities of everyday civilization to present immediate contrasts devoid of shades: extremes overpowered dialogue: Us against Them, good versus evil, black and white the only acceptable tones of public conversation.

The Iraqi dictator who sent his heavily mortgaged army to seize a neighboring country the size of an average city parking lot but rich enough to bankroll the invading force, was demonized and compared to the 20th century's worst citizen, Hitler. The American President (George Bush Sr.) for his part assumed the mantle of the first Roosevelt and dispatched a very Big Stick of military might to the Middle East, in particular to Saudi Arabia which for several months acted as nervous host to the hordes of Western crusaders protecting the indispensable Saudi oil fields, building strength and momentum to wrest back the rich Kuwaiti fields. The Iraqi leader howled for a holy war against the Satans poised at his borders and acted to free half his army from guard duty by making a temporary peace with his arch enemy Iran with whom he had fought a war for almost a decade at a mutual cost of a million lives.

Despite boisterous and belligerent joint denunciations, Saddam Hussein and George Bush had similar aims of imposing political power over a vital juncture of world commerce, and each was capable and willing to expend masses of human lives to obtain or defend his goal. Bush represented a corporate arrangement of often conflicting multi-international interests (a 'New World Order Army' in the vein of Cromwell's 'New Model Army') that did not desire their supply of oil controlled by a regional despot who was not a member of their global hegemony. Hussein exerted (and continues to exert) an archaic personal tyranny. He is even now a decade after the war a man of bluster and bombast who seems at least forthright in his savage avarice, in contrast to the sinewy sales manager guile Bush manifested.

By seizing Kuwait, Hussein was reminiscent of local emirates or bandits who occasionally and ruthlessly choked off the ancient Silk Road and extorted tariffs and tolls until either

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