

Epilogue From The Swimming Pool: Operational Art

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The Gulf War was fairly complex and took place in one of the world's most strategic locations. As such, geopolitical considerations were dominant. Hence, when the country decided to go to war (not just the Armed Forces) the right to intervene was quickly decided upfront. This action coupled with the early use of reserves and their eventual mobilization provided the political glue cementing the national will.

Iraq sought and briefly achieved a military solution to its border dispute with Kuwait. Iraq's short-term victory spawned an unanticipated international reaction; resulting in the ejection of Iraq from Kuwait in the world's longest conga line of POWs. Much of the war's success involved a way of thinking centered on the operational art and maneuver warfare.

Fred Kaplan of the Boston Globe writes maneuver warfare was once espoused by a clique of renegades and reformers, this philosophy has percolated through the ranks of a new generation of intellectual officers...in this sense the Gulf War displayed not only new technologies in American weaponry but also a new breed of American warrior.

Operational art and maneuver warfare thinking was ushered into the Marine Corps over 13 years ago by Gen Al Gray, John

Boyd, Col. Mike Wyly, and Bill Lind. Maneuver warfare took root in 1981 in the 2nd Marine Division with the appearance of the maneuver warfare board composed of "Young Turks". Only three documents existed then: Gray's Battle Book, Boyd's "Patterns of Conflict", and Lind's writings later becoming the "Maneuver Warfare Handbook".

In 1989 Capt. John Schmidt codified this philosophy for the Marine Corps in FMFM 1 **Warfighting**. Moreover, maneuver warfare and operational art became Marine Corps doctrine. The success of this doctrine now finds itself in the classic Schwarzkopf brief of 27 Feb 1991. It is all there : the refusal to join ground combat prematurely, amphibious deception operations, multiple simultaneous thrusts, collapse of a flank by deep sweeping forces, firepower in a maneuver context creating ambiguity, uncertainty, hesitation, and psychological operations shattering unit cohesion.

In the Gulf War operational art used tactical events (i.e. battles, engagements) and the refusal to join battle, to strike directly at Iraq's strategic center of gravity. The idea was to win strategically without resorting to a prolonged ground war. It was a matter of deciding where and when to fight, and where and when not to fight.

The heart and soul of the operational art was the correct identification of Iraq's center of gravity. It was not Kuwait but Baghdad itself. The refusal to enter a ground war

prematurely let military planners shape the operation and focus on winning the war at the highest possible level, the strategic level.

War-winning operational art centers on achieving a decisive outcome quickly without visiting the butcher shop of a nasty ground war. The application of the operational art and the correct identification of Iraq's strategic center of gravity proved central to the maneuver style success.

The strategic center of gravity, Baghdad, was much more than a geographic location on a map. It was the nerve network and infrastructure of Iraq's political-military organization. By throwing strength against weakness, allied air against Iraq's weak air and air defense, Iraq's command, control, and communication capability was effectively erased.

This helped the coalition forces to stay one step ahead of Iraqi forces. Deprived of the ability to communicate and exercise command and control at the highest levels prevented Iraq from coordinating the defense of the Hussein Line and counterattacking.

Early naval actions and blockade set the stage for developing the operation to our advantage. From the beginning the UN sanctions and naval blockade quietly and insidiously tightened the vise on Iraq's logistics system.

The overall effect of naval actions and air served us well in preparing for the ground action vice ground warfare. As a

consequence of cutting off all viable logistics to Iraqi troops, coalition forces rapidly flushed the Iraqis out of Kuwait without having to dig them out in a mutual bludgeoning contest.

Carrying the war directly to Baghdad and refusing to commit ground forces prematurely in Kuwait enabled the warfighters to shape the operation and decide where and when to undertake ground actions. Iraq had the initial advantage of choosing the ground over which to fight. This defense ultimately fixed the Iraqi forces in place limiting any military options other than defense for them.

The fixing of a large Iraqi force in Kuwait was in part due to the presence of a formidable amphibious force in the Gulf and a carefully conceived deception plan. Additionally, CNN followed the preemptive artillery raids by Marines which kept the Iraqis off balance and guessing where the Marines were to come from ...land or sea ... or both !

Firepower of artillery, naval gunfire, and air was used in a maneuver context. The disruptive and destructive effect of fire and movement tied up and diverted the Iraqis as we stretched out the Iraqi reaction time to our actions. BGen. "Butch" Neal, USMC, in a Riyadh briefing noted how the Iraqis were in severe trouble because "we're inside his (the Iraqi) decision making cycle".

Not only was air used to help cut inside the Iraqi decision making cycle it also was integrated and sequenced to throw strength against weakness. The technological strength of our air was leveraged against the technologically weak and relatively unsophisticated Iraqi air and air defense. Air swiftly eliminated most of the Iraqi command and control capability and continued to disrupt logistics that were already suffering from sanctions and the naval actions.

Disposing of Iraq's command and control and strangling its logistics provided the means to checkmate any Iraqi offensive actions. It nullified any Corps level Iraqi fire support coordination capability. With fire support in check the chemical threat from artillery was measurably reduced.

While air pounded away, preparing the KTO for a ground offensive, Iraq tried unsuccessfully to draw Marines into a premature battle. Refusing battle may have been as important to the Marines ground success as actually joining battle. In refusing to enter into the fight too early it became apparent that the coalition was truly in control of time and space in the KTO.

Iraq had selected the terrain to defend. This tactical advantage eventually worked against the Iraqis. Iraq was overwhelmed by the day and night operations and the precise application of violence. Defending the KTO literally tied the Iraqi Army to terrain and fortifications thus fixing them in place. As a result the Army lost its mobility to

offset a static defense in depth. The Iraqi Army could not maneuver. It had been robbed of time and space which in turn made it even more vulnerable.

The Iraqi Army was thrust upon the horns of a dilemma; if it tried to move out of its static positions it was exposed to increased and precision allied air and artillery, and certain death. If the Iraqi Army stayed in its defensive positions it was vulnerable to attack by maneuvering forces from the west, the south, and the sea. This dilemma exacerbated by the lack logistics and intelligence set the Iraqi Army up for a decisive blow from a swift ground action.

The Iraqi nerve network in Baghdad was massively damaged; unable to see, sense, or coordinate its combatant arms. The Iraqi Army in the KTO was like a clenched fist amputated from the rest of the Iraqi body. A body that no longer had a central nervous system.

General Schwarzkopf commented, "We knew that he had very, very limited reconnaissance means. And therefore when we took out his air force we took out his ability to see what we were doing down here in Saudi Arabia. Once we had taken out his eyes...When we knew that he couldn't see us anymore, we did a massive movement..."

As a result of the Iraqi Army not being able to see the field of battle and communicate, Hussein could not exercise

command and control of his forces. The coalition outmaneuvered Iraq by creating and posing dilemmas which happened unexpectedly and faster than Iraq could keep pace with.

A threatened amphibious assault on Kuwait forced the Iraqis to concentrate a reinforced Corps along the coast. This significantly tied up well armed Iraqi forces allowing allies to shift to the west and collapse an exposed flank. At the same time the 1st and 2nd Divisions penetrated seams in the Hussein line at weak points as Saudi forces pushed up the coast.

The success of Marine forces breaching the barrier on 24 February 1991 stemmed partially from bold actions by 2nd LAI on 21 February 1991 when raiding deep into Kuwait. This action diverted the Iraqis' attention from the actual breaching points. The deception worked well in throwing the Iraqis off. The ground war started 3 days later and ended as abruptly as it began in a 100-hour blitz crushing Saddam's forces and freeing Kuwait.

The Gulf War capitalized on the maneuver warfare philosophy of generating the greatest decisive effect against the enemy and his plan with the least possible cost to ourselves. The operational art as embodied in Operation Desert Shield/Storm represents the practical application of this philosophy. By any measure the Marines brand of maneuver warfare was very

successful with two Divisions of Marines gobbling up 13
Iraqi Divisions !

"While we should be proud of what we have done, I don't
think it's wise to get a big head about this war," reflects
LtGen. Walt Boomer in the Wall Street Journal. To be sure
there will be a next war and "Insight" writer Phil Gold
cautions, "All that can be said of the next war_____ and
there will be a next war_____ is that it is probably
unimaginable today." Nevertheless, even in the next war let
us not overlook the operational art and maneuver warfare.

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