



A Tale of Two Wars

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While we remember on Memorial Day events of the Korean War 50 years ago, we can also pause for the 10-year anniversary of the Gulf War, in which the enemy capitulated after 38 days of air war and 100 hours of air-ground war. When our chapter met on January 25, 2001, it was the 10th anniversary of the 10th day of Coalition strikes against the forces of Saddam Hussein. During these air strikes the coalition gained mastery of the air and knocked out Iraq's air defense system; Saddam's command, control, and communication network; and a good percentage of Iraqi electrical power generation and distribution. The United States also started to work on deployed ground forces and their logistic support. It was a textbook application of airpower that warmed the hearts of Companions and brought cheers to our lips, as we watched the war unfold on the evening news.

Contrasts are sharp in looking at both the Korean and Gulf conflicts from a historic perspective. In the opening days of the Korean War, South Korea was being overrun in a surprise attack for which U.S. forces were ill-prepared. We rushed the forces we had into the breach, mostly airpower left over from World War II. They slowed the advance and threw the North Koreans off their timetable, as we deployed the ground forces we could muster from occupation duty in Japan, Okinawa, and the Philippines.

By contrast, in the Gulf War, Saddam Hussein gave two weeks notice of his intent to invade Kuwait, while he still conferred with Middle Eastern leaders on a conciliatory note. During that two weeks, the United States was developing contingency plans for the defense of Saudi Arabia by a coalition of concerned nations. No attempt was made to defend the tiny country of Kuwait directly when it was invaded, but the aggression brought an immediate response from the United States and its allies. Naval carrier battle groups steamed to the

Persian Gulf, the Gulf of Oman, and the north Arabian Sea. Saudi Arabia agreed to the stationing of coalition forces in the kingdom. F-15s deployed over the next 5 1/2 months. Coalition forces steadily built land, sea, and air power in the region. While diplomatic efforts to get Saddam to withdraw from Kuwait continued, President George Bush obtained the backing of coalition leaders and his own Congress to use force if necessary. Plans were drawn and refined for the best employment of the incredible hammer of coalition military power, poised to strike.

In the Gulf conflict, the coalition held the initiative as to when, where, and how a strike would take place. The objectives were clear-cut and agreed to beforehand: to defend Saudi Arabia against attack, to bring about the complete withdrawal of Iraqi forces from Kuwait, to reinstall Kuwait's legitimate government, to stabilize the region, and ensure the continued flow of oil to the world's consumers.

In Korea, though, U.S. policy was hazy. We had excluded Korea from America's line of defense in the Pacific in January 1950, an open invitation to the Russians or Chinese to take it over. When the Russian puppet regime in North Korea accepted the invitation, it was the United Nations that felt attacked, not the United States. President Truman's initial response was to protect the lives of American citizens in South Korea, not the South Korean government.

Many other differences exist between the two conflicts, but the final, major difference is that in the Gulf, when the Iraqis got out of Kuwait and the legitimate government was reinstated, the United States called a halt to the ground war. It was tempting to expand the war to eliminate Saddam, but we stuck to our original goals. We failed to do that in Korea, and paid a high price for our adventurism. We are still in both theaters "stabilizing" the situation, but at much less cost in the Gulf.