

The Second Gulf War*

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The book deals with the Second Gulf War (GW 2) from the point of view of strategy, politics, diplomacy, and its impact on the USA and the world; rather than the purely military concepts of war. The author is a noted strategist of considerable experience. Even then, nearly 25 per cent of the book comprises 'notes and bibliography' and the high level of research becomes obvious as the arguments unfold.

In a mere 155 pages, the author argues that the 'war was unnecessary and damaging to the US security interests'. The subject is topical and likely to remain so for some time to come. Even though the period covered ends before the capture of Saddam Hussein; and well before the US made serious overtures for UN intervention, and global support for the rebuilding of Iraq; the book is well argued, interesting, and will remain relevant for many years. The book is sometimes somewhat academic and theoretical but the reader's interest is maintained. Also, the writer's attempts at what the future holds have not been totally accurate, but then that is the price one has to pay for crystal ball gazing.

One of the causes of GW 2 was that Saddam Hussein continued in power in spite of the ignominious defeat in the First Gulf War (GW 1), the subsequent sanctions imposed, the Kurdish and Shiite rebellion that followed etc. It is interesting to note that GW 1 was not about regime change but was a UN sanctioned operation to restore the status quo ante in the area. On attaining the war objectives, an invasion of Iraq to unseat Saddam Hussein was contemplated by the US. The suggestion was overruled, inter alia, on the hope that the Iraqis themselves would topple him; that the exercise could be termed as military occupation; that urban warfare could well result whilst the US would have the responsibility for law and order, and restoration of a new government. It was also said that such an act could lead to a weakening of the coalition, and could create political difficulties at home. The arguments are unexceptionable but, obviously, were ignored by those responsible for GW 2.

A very large number of neo conservatives (neocons) were admitted into responsible positions when President George W Bush assumed office in January 2001. The more recent neocon movement is based on the

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paper titled 'Project for New American Century'. The essential argument is that use of force is legitimate in attaining and maintaining the goal of world domination. Not only is absolute military superiority viewed as essential, but no other country should be permitted to gain capability that could threaten the US or the US designs. It was also postulated that 'democracies do not fight each other', and, therefore, as the world leader, it is incumbent on the US to foster or impose democracy all over the world. As a result, the core principles of the US policy became: stop WMD proliferation and preemption with regime change if necessary. GW 2 was clearly on the cards.

If the incomplete military or political victory in GW 1 was the main cause of GW 2, the catalyst certainly was the 11 September 2001 Al Qaeda attacks on the US mainland. From then onwards, the 'use of force' strategy gained momentum. The National Strategic Security Review of September 2002 clearly stipulated that the US must have a strong military, and that the main threats were WMD proliferation and religious and political extremism. The Bush doctrine also spoke of "an imminent, multifaceted, undeterrable, and potentially calamitous threat to the US. .." The case for pre-emption was made. It is indeed interesting to note that pre-emptive war, as stated by the US Secretary of State Daniel Webster in 1837, was acceptable only when the threat is instant and overwhelming, leaving no other choice or means, and there is no time for further deliberations. The author opines that GW2 was not pre-emptive war but more like 'preventive' war where the threat is neither certain nor imminent. GW 2 was the result of outright aggression.

To buttress the case for a war on Iraq, linking of Iraq, Al Qaeda and the 11 September 2001 attacks was attempted. Just like the presence and possible use of WMD by Iraq was later proved to be an illusion, the US Commission that recently reported on the September 2001 attacks has clearly stated that they have found nothing that links Saddam Hussein with Al Qaeda or the attacks. The war was, therefore, unleashed on inaccurate information. At best, it was a case of a series of gross intelligence failures; at worst excuses were trumped up in an attempt to provide a fig leaf for the invasion. Be that as it may, the planning for and the attack on Iraq was a serious distraction from the fight against Al Qaeda in particular and terrorism in general.

The author lists the declared and undeclared objectives of the war. Amongst the latter were preservation of the balance of power in the region, to demonstrate that the US will use force unilaterally if necessary, regime change towards a democratic Iraq and the start of an exercise to

ensure control of oil assets in the Middle East thereby ensuring the US global primacy. The declared objectives were regime change, destruction of Iraqi WMD capability, to drive out terrorists, to gain needed intelligence on terrorist networks and illicit WMD activity, end sanctions, secure oil fields, and institute democracy in Iraq. It is a moot point if, apart from regime change, the US position is now any better on the defined objectives than it was in early 2003 before the war.

The chapter on the war proper covers the well trod ground including the overpowering US capability pitted against a very weak Iraq, civilian-military relationship that was not always smooth and seamless, major intelligence failures, and the very serious state of near anarchy at the declared end of the war. Iraq had been turned into a 'terrorist state'.

Undoubtedly, a serious flaw in the planning for war was that enough attention was not placed on the 'planning for peace'. The widespread looting should have been expected and steps taken to forestall such occurrences. In the event, the 'instant cure' selected was to shoot even more Iraqis thereby fuelling greater hatred. Also, the troops available were ill equipped and untrained for the task of peace enforcement. The continued presence of US made it an occupying power in the eyes of the Iraqis and the US support to Iraqis of doubtful credentials made it worse. It did not help when General Jay Garner had to be replaced in a mere 16 days of his arrival in Iraq. The war also weakened the power of moderate Arabs, and spawned terrorists.

The author undoubtedly has done a commendable job in proving his case that the war was both unnecessary and inimical to the US interests. Much has transpired after the period covered in the book and it will be a long time before the last word is written on the war and its aftermath. Hopefully, the author will continue to write more books to cover later events. All those who read *Dark Victory* will probably eagerly await his next book on the subject.