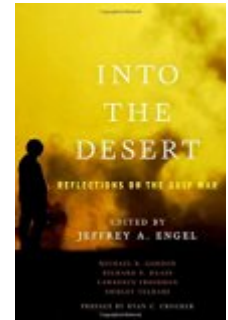


Jeffrey A. Engel, ed.. *Into the Desert: Reflections on the Gulf War*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013. Illustrations. xx + 206 pp. \$29.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-19-979628-1.



Reviewed by Tal Tovv

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Commissioned by Margaret Sankey (Air University)

It has been well over twenty years since the swift and decisive victory of the United States and its allies over Iraq. The overall intent of Operation Desert Storm in the winter of 1991 was to chase Iraqi forces out of Kuwait. This goal was achieved in its entirety, and the fourth largest army in the world was defeated in the “Mother of all battles.”[1] This war may be difficult to study as a historic event, since a study based on archival content is not yet feasible. Yet there is no doubt that the Gulf War is a historically significant event, one with fascinating political and military aspects.

The war can be studied via several frames of reference outside the undeniably important military aspect. *Into the Desert*, an essay collection edited by Jeffrey A. Engel, provides a fresh perspective. The essays share a hypothesis, claiming that the two decades which have passed since the end of the war make up the beginning of a historical perspective. Apart from military lessons and immediate political effects, both regionally and internationally, twenty years provide a reasonable

enough viewpoint for attempting to begin and assay the effects of the Gulf War.

The five essays that make up the book, written by experts in their respective fields, serve as a pioneer attempt to comprehend the war and its legacy. On the one hand, they examine the conflict as a major event in the post-Cold War era and the creation of a new world order; on the other hand, they address the interlude to the second Gulf War (Operation Iraqi Freedom, 2003) and the increased American involvement in the Persian Gulf in the years following Desert Storm. These two elements are what made the Gulf War a conflict well beyond local or regional boundaries. The timing of the war, near the fall of the Soviet Union, and the firm American response proved that the United States was determined to remain a superpower, and furthermore, to instill a new world order based on its ideologies and interests, a result of its own matters of national security.

The first four essays provide the comprehensive global and regional perspective necessary for

discussing the first Gulf War. The first and second essays present a broad historical perspective, while the third is a detailed discussion of the internationality of the war. The fourth piece indicates the importance of studying the war and its battles, in order “to understand its implications for American military strategy and its consequences for the Middle East” (pp. 112-113). It examines how the war in 1991 affected the following years leading up to the second Gulf War. The fifth contribution analyzes Saddam Hussein’s actions, primarily based on Iraqi sources (though not archival ones), granting the reader a fascinating glimpse of the other side of the hill.

The importance of this book lies in its historical aspect, as a book surveying an event that took place twenty years ago. American military and political involvement in Afghanistan and Iraq after September 11th and the subsequent entanglement in these two countries diverted scholarly attention away from the first Gulf War. One is faced with an abundance of studies concerning the two wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, in addition to studies dealing with radical Islam, terror, guerilla and insurgency, and the means of dealing with them, as well as studies that examine the political and social aspects of these countries. In fact, we could claim that the first Gulf War was somewhat cast aside, much like the Korean War in the wake of the Vietnam War trauma. Military involvement and the subsequent evolution into exhausting counterinsurgency campaigns gave birth to an abundance of historical studies concerning past American military experiences in Vietnam, as well as the experience of other countries, Britain first and foremost. These studies attempted to find historical principals to match the reality of Iraq and Afghanistan.

It is therefore advisable, despite the persistent focus on the Global War on Terrorism, to initiate a more in-depth study of the 1991 war. This can provide important lessons on joint operation management, as well as another aspect of the

essence of the operational level of war and the perception of coalition warfare. The Gulf War can serve as a case study of the reforms that the U.S. Army underwent in the wake of the Vietnam War in terms of doctrine, manpower, and new weaponry. Additionally, prewar prep and the campaign itself may demonstrate the role of the theater commander as defined by the Goldwater-Nichols Act (1986).

The focus on the role of the war in history and in the political context allows the reader a glimpse into this important event in the post-Cold War international scheme. As such, the essays form an essential source for future Gulf War studies, specifically dealing with policy and grand strategy but also in studying regional history, as well as an important chapter in American foreign and security policy, specifically its involvement in the Persian Gulf. Students and scholars from such fields as Middle Eastern studies, American foreign policy, and post-Cold War political history can gain much from this book.

As the events of August 1990-February 1991 grow more and more distant, a historic perspective is established. This perspective, in turn, enables critical analysis of the war, the events leading up to it, and its course from views other than American. The essays in this book provide a meaningful contribution to any future study of the Gulf War.

Note

[1]. This phrase was coined by Saddam Hussein at the start of the war, and used to describe the future crushing defeat of the U.S.-led coalition.

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