



Gulf War Air Power Survey: Summary Report (Volume 6 of 6)

Office of Air Force History, U.S. Air Force

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From 16 January through 28 February 1991, the United States and its allies conducted one of the most operationally successful wars in history, a conflict in which air operations played a preeminent role. The Gulf War Air Power Survey was commissioned on 22 August 1991 to review all aspects of air warfare in the Persian Gulf for use by the United States Air Force, but it was not to confine itself to discussion of that institution. The Survey has produced reports on planning, the conduct of operations, the effects of the air campaign, command and control, logistics, air base support, space, weapons and tactics, as well as a chronology and a compendium of statistics on the war. It has prepared as well a summary report and some shorter papers and assembled an archive composed of paper, microfilm, and electronic records, all of which have been deposited at the Air Force Historical Research Agency at Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama. The Survey was just that, an attempt to provide a comprehensive and documented account of the war. It is not a definitive history: that will await the passage of time and the opening of sources (Iraqi records, for example) that were not available to Survey researchers. Nor is it a summary of lessons learned: other organizations, including many within the Air Force, have already done that. Rather, the Survey provides an analytical and evidentiary point of departure for future studies of the air campaign. It concentrates on an analysis of the operational level of war in the belief that this level of warfare is at once one of the most difficult to characterize and one of the most important to understand. The Survey was directed by Dr. Eliot Cohen of Johns Hopkins University's School of Advanced International Studies and was staffed by a mixture of civilian and military analysts, including retired officers from the Army, Navy, and Marine Corps. It was divided into task forces, most of which were run by civilians working temporarily for the Air Force. The work produced by the Survey was examined by a distinguished review committee, which included scholars, retired general officers from the Air Force, Navy, and Army, as well as former and current senior government officials. Throughout, the Survey strived to conduct its research in a spirit of impartiality and scholarly rigor. Its members had as their standard the observation of Mr. Franklin D'Olier, chairman of the United States Strategic Bombing Survey during and after the second World War: "We wanted to bum into everybody's souls that fact that the survey's responsibility... was to ascertain facts and to seek truth, eliminating completely any preconceived theories or dogmas." The Survey attempted to create a body of data common to all of the reports. Because one group of researchers compiled this core material while other task forces were researching and drafting other, more narrowly focused studies, it is possible that discrepancies exist among the reports with regard to points of detail. More importantly, authors were given discretion, within the bounds of evidence and plausibility, to interpret events as they saw them. In some cases, task forces came to differing conclusions about particular aspects of this war. Such divergences of view were expected and even desired: the Survey was intended to serve as a point of departure for those who read its reports, and not their analytical terminus.

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