

The Gulf Conflict: Diplomacy and War In the New World Order

By Lawrence Freedman and Efraim Karsh. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993.

Writers have compared the media frenzy of the Gulf War to the coverage of a football game. Critics noted the pep rally atmosphere created by journalists (Charles Osgood's description of US bombing as a "marvel"; Dan Rather's "Congratulations on a job wonderfully done."). A *Chicago Tribune* cartoon portrayed Saudi and Kuwaiti emirs in luxury boxes awaiting the war, heckling Bush

to "Throw the bomb!" Perhaps it was that pause in the second week of the bombing, allowing most US soldiers to watch the Super Bowl, but Americans *did* seem to confuse the war with a sporting event. Both features perceived good guys and bad guys, satisfying but guilt-free violence, little sympathy for the casualties . . . and plenty of cheerleaders.

Books about the Gulf War extend this comparison to sports coverage. After the big game, our first wave of analysts report from postgame interviews. These are generally shallow and simplistic, breathless with elation and self-glory. Comparable books on the Gulf War, including biographies of Schwarzkopf, Powell, and Bush, now cram the discount tables at the large booksellers. In sports, the second wave of analysts, back in the studio, offer somewhat meatier explanations and more subtle rationalizations for the events just reported. Their emotions are thinly concealed in a semblance of objectivity.

The "second wave" of Gulf War analysis is now upon us. In both its strengths and weaknesses, *The Gulf Conflict: Diplomacy and War in the New World Order* represents the best effort yet to place the Gulf War into historical perspective. Authors Lawrence Freedman and Efaïm Karsh tap into a rich vein of authoritative sources and sculpt an impressive image of this event. Yet in the end the reader finds only the victor's conclusions, only the explanations of the winning coach. The authors have achieved a higher level of journalism than previous Gulf War accounts, but one can still hear the cheers from the locker room.

Most of this book covers the events preceding the war, with strong narrative and solid documentation. *The Gulf Conflict* discusses coalition building and UN diplomacy in great detail. But where the ice is thinnest, the authors treaded more lightly. April Glaspie's July 25 meeting with Saddam warrants no more than two pages and only the official side of the story. The authors identify Saddam's "threat" to Saudi oil fields as a major factor in President Bush's response, but the reader is offered no proof of any such threat. At the Arab Summit of August 3, King Hussein's eagerness to negotiate an Iraqi withdrawal is preempted by Mubarak's condemnation. The authors endorse Mubarak's hard-line position (as instructed by Washington) and dismiss Hussein's heroic efforts to prevent war.

The Gulf Conflict removes any mask of academic objectivity on the central issues of the crisis and dutifully tows the Allied line. According to the authors, America fought to "oppose aggression." For background comparison, the authors revealingly describe Israel's 1983 invasion of Lebanon as "preventative." Allied generals are unchallenged when quoted as "minimizing civilian casualties and collateral damage." When the Amiriyah bomb shelter was deliberately destroyed, we are told "civilians should not have been there." Horrible memories of butchered Iraqi soldiers in retreat should not trouble us, since "most of the vehicles on the 'highway of death' were empty."

Saddam's crimes are detailed, but America's morality is beyond judgment. Bush is unchallenged as he subverts peace talks, refuses to negotiate, bribes and bullies the UN, targets Iraqi civilians, and crushes a helpless army. Civilian deaths were "remarkably limited," say Freedman and Karsh. This observation, like too much of the book, is short on empathy and wide of the truth. It reflects a cold depersonalization of victims with clinically vague, deceptive, and callous expressions, masquerading as objectivity. Where are the frightening images of human pain? Where are the napalm, fuel-air explosives, the cluster bombs, and the bulldozers that buried hundreds? It was all necessary, we are told. Grimly

the authors explain that "to put pressure on Saddam required imposing real distress on the civilian population."

"This book is neither a celebration nor an indictment," the authors claim. Let the reader decide. *The Gulf Conflict* is informative reading and a well-argued explanation of events, but it cannot aspire to objective history. In the end, it is merely a more academic level of cheerleading.

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The Gulf Conflict

By Robert D. Black and Robert M. Ross
New York: Praeger Publishers, 1991. Pp. 288. \$29.95.

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The Gulf Conflict is a well-written, well-researched book that provides a comprehensive overview of the events leading up to the Gulf War. The authors, Robert D. Black and Robert M. Ross, provide a clear and concise account of the political and military developments in the region. The book is well-organized and easy to read, making it a valuable resource for students and scholars alike. The authors provide a detailed analysis of the conflict, including the role of the United States and the United Nations. The book is a well-argued explanation of events, but it cannot aspire to objective history. In the end, it is merely a more academic level of cheerleading.

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