Britain and the 1991 Gulf War Witness Seminar

16 March 2011

Cormorant Hall, JSCSC, Shrivenham, Wiltshire

Session 2:
14:00-15:30: Discussion of the Prosecution of the Conflict

Dr Robert Johnson: It is 1400 hours and, with military precision, we shall recommence our proceedings. We will move smartly into a debate about the war aims and some of the war planning that took place. Hopefully, that will lead to a discussion of the knottier issues of targeting, rules of engagement, casualties, strategic communications, adjustments to plans as events unfolded, land campaigns and some views from the different perspectives of the campaign, such as different nodal points within the command structure, including the Brigade Commander's view and so on. Without further ado, let us get going.

What were British war aims, as interpreted by some of the service chiefs? I shall ask, in particular, Air Chief Marshal Sir Patrick Hine to describe his understanding of the position. I shall then call on Captain Chris Craig to talk about the Royal Naval dimension in the Gulf and Sir Peter de la Billière to explain his understanding of the situation as the plans began to shape up and form.

Air Chief Marshal Sir Patrick Hine: Thank you. As a key military member of the coalition, aim number one was help in the liberation of Kuwait. I say 'key' because, although we were small by comparison with the American forces, by the time the conflict started, we had 45,000 people committed to the operation. That was air, land, sea and Special Forces. Secondly, if it came to war, we planned to destroy as much of Iraq's key military capability as possible, because we did not want to have to go back in five or six years' time to do the same thing all over again. Part of that was to get a handle on and destroy at some stage Iraq's chemical, biological and nuclear weapons and research capabilities. Thirdly, we wanted to subscribe to a strategy through inputs to Norman Schwarzkopf's headquarters that, whilst achieving the main aim rapidly, also minimised the risk of significant allied casualties.

Those three broad aims link into the planning process on the military side, which started, I suppose, when I had my first meeting with Norman Schwarzkopf towards the end of August

1990. To remind you, that is when he said to me, 'I want some armoured forces from you', which led to the deployment of the 7th Armoured Brigade, and 'I want Tornados equipped with the airfield denial weapon, JP233', which was a capability that the United States Air Force did not have.[1] We got on to the subject of command and control at one stage during the discussion, and I said to him that, from my perspective, I was quite happy to pass tactical control to the appropriate American commanders – himself and his subordinate commanders – at the right stage when it looked as though we were going to war and on the basis that the tasks that he envisaged for our forces were consistent with the directive that I had been given by CDS.

The command and control arrangements would be MOD down through the Joint Headquarters, where we would retain operational command, out into theatre where General Peter would have OPCON.[2] When he was happy with the task given to our forces, tactical control was given to Schwarzkopf and his appropriate subordinate commanders. I said that I was happy to do that on the basis that he would involve our commander-in-theatre in his daily senior commanders' conferences and that we also had British officers in the key operational planning teams. I think that I am right in saying that, by the time conflict broke out, we had about 100 UK officers in the various planning teams in theatre. Without going on any longer, those were the key objectives that we had in mind when the fighting started and how we were involved in the planning process.

Captain Chris Craig: I was the Commodore in command of the Royal Naval Task Group in the Gulf throughout the war. On my arrival in November 1990, my first impression was that there was a paucity of integrated war planning. Accordingly I consulted largely with the Americans in the person of Vice Admiral Stan Arthur who was USN CTF[3] of the entire region. At the end of December, we had a final constructive meeting in which he asked for Royal Navy detailed contributions on which I had obtained British national approval to support maritime operations on the right flank.

We were not shy about offering aggressive forward commitment. This was in unfortunate contrast to one or two European nations, who were not prepared to put ships into the killing zone at the north of the Gulf. We also had a wealth of Falklands fighting experience in inshore fighting operations. We had a willingness to take our Royal Fleet Auxiliaries into harm's way, so that they could keep the primarily British and American warships topped up with fuel and water throughout. And we had great familiarity with the Gulf region stemming from the British warship Armilla patrol having been deployed since 1980.

Vice Admiral Stan Arthur[4] was delighted with those general contributions. He also welcomed our specialist, guided missile destroyers, Sea Dart[5] armed, in the very forward line of air defence – integrated with American air defence cruisers and destroyers. I was happy to hand off tactical control of these (usually two) British warships provided we had rationalised our rules of engagement (ROE) first. I do hope that that subject comes up at some stage in

the afternoon. It is really vital. He greatly valued our Lynx helicopters, armed with Sea Skua,[6] in the front line to help neutralise the Iraqi Navy. They were to do very well in that task. Best of all, he wanted our Mine Countermeasures Force, which I unashamedly say was one of the best in the world to punch clear lanes through the Iraqi minefields onto the Kuwait coast. Perhaps, above all, he was thrilled to have RFA Argus,[7] which was a primary casualty-receiving ship – converted from our helicopter training ship – with containerised ward and surgery. She would be positioned up just behind the front line to look after casualties, as and when they arose – a brutal lesson that we had learnt in the Falkland campaign. I hope that gives you just a flavour of the war planning for my Task Unit, which eventually increased to 26 ships, 18 helicopters and 6,000 personnel. It was not an insignificant contribution.

General Sir Peter de la Billière: I was the British Forces Commander in the Gulf, working directly to Paddy Hine and alongside Norman Schwarzkopf. I saw the war aims as slightly varied on what Paddy has outlined, in that I went out there and took over from Air Marshal Sandy Wilson[8] when it largely became a military operation – albeit, and most importantly, a tri-service operation backed up by the Navy and the Air Force. Initially, we saw our role as being to hold the line in Saudi Arabia or help the coalition hold the line in Saudi Arabia to get the coalition together and working in the early stages. To that extent, what Paddy had set up for us with Norman Schwarzkopf was of the utmost value and importance in the conduct of the war from then on, in terms of our joint relationships and understanding of the command and control situation.

When it became apparent that Saddam Hussein was not going to pull out under threat and bribery, we started to prepare for war, though still hoping that war would never happen. That required an enormous change and increase in the logistic requirements and in the actual deployment. The maintenance of the sea and air to my mind was of paramount importance throughout the operation. Any of those could have been put at threat in the early stages. Saddam Hussein made several sorties by air against our shipping, in particular. He also threatened us over the border, which Bill Wratten will talk more about later. It was thanks to the Navy and the Air Force that those threats were held at bay and treated with the contempt that they deserved both in technical ability and their aggressive nature before we had even declared hostilities.

It then became more and more clear that we were not making progress, so the planning switched to a possible invasion. It was not an overnight decision. It was a massive build-up of enormous quantities of resources having to be shipped out to the Gulf, landed and then transhipped across the desert for many miles. Such a logistic campaign has probably not been matched in recent days. We were then ready for invasion, if that was to be. As I remember it, right up to the last week before we went in, Paddy Hine was saying, 'It is likely that we are going to invade, but I can't say that we are definitely going to now'. By that time, we had to be deployed in the desert, at sea and particularly in the air, which would have been the initial requirement of any offensive operation.

With an evolving aim, which we see so often on such occasions, as the politicians have to adjust to events as they unfold, at no time in my mind were we going out there in the early stages to invade Kuwait. We were going out there to prevent war, to protect the Saudi Arabian border and we would do that with the coalition. Perhaps one of the triumphs of the whole campaign was, in fact, the success of the coalition. Arguably, a number of countries were involved. About 31 to 32 nations were working as we heard earlier not under the United Nations mandate, but because they wanted to be there and wanted it to work. It was impressive, and I think that the Americans must take great credit for putting that together, holding differences of opinion at bay as the whole war aim evolved, making adjustments to the deployments within the theatre not only on the best available solution, but on what each nation was prepared to do and how upfront it was prepared to be.

Air Chief Marshal Sir Patrick Hine: Can I just clarify one point? The war aims to which I referred were related to what became DESERT STORM. It changed from DESERT SHIELD to DESERT STORM some time about the beginning of November, when it was clear to the Americans that sanctions were unlikely to work and that political pressure was unlikely to persuade Saddam to withdraw from Kuwait. That was the point at which they went for a major reinforcement of their forces in theatre: from the 230,000 initial build-up to support DESERT SHIELD, to close on half a million to prosecute DESERT STORM. To avoid confusion, the war aims that I gave were the war aims for DESERT STORM.

Dr Robert Johnson: That is probably my fault in respect of chronology. It is very important for us to clarify the difference between the strategic tasking and what is operational, which is what we are agreeing about now. At the risk of labouring the three speakers further, will they clarify whether the transition from the strategic picture to an operational one was smooth and the extent to which that depended on personalities or structures and institutions? Can they make a brief comment on that transition?

Air Chief Marshal Sir Patrick Hine: From my point of view, personal relationships were always going to be very important. I was able to establish an excellent personal relationship with Norman Schwarzkopf, who always welcomed any strategic input that we might have from the Joint Headquarters level, as well as receiving his own inputs from Peter de la Billière in theatre. It seemed that we moved pretty swiftly from a decision that it was almost certain that we would have to mount an operation to liberate Kuwait to the various operational deployments and decisions that had to be taken. Peter touched on one of them without going into any detail.

When we were asked to deploy another armoured brigade out to theatre during the repaid reinforcement that was agreed at the beginning of November, it afforded the opportunity of bringing the British Ground Forces' strength up to divisional level. It made operational sense, bearing in mind that that combat capability came primarily out of the central region of Europe to plug in, if we could, to what we knew by then would be the major assault with a wide left hook to engage the Republican Guard forces.

Our whole training had been in the central region to withstand an armoured penetration from the Warsaw Pact, along with the Americans also in the central region. So for us to become part of the 7 Corps wide-left hook made a lot of strategic sense, and sense from our military capability point of view. General Peter was much involved in engaging Norman Schwarzkopf. After we had persuaded him that we could support the division logistically on a rapid advance, he agreed to the re-subordination away from the US Marine Corps forces on the right wing to be part of 7 Corps on the left wing.

Dr Robert Johnson: Will General Sir Peter comment on that option, as well as the other options that were possibly on the table between him and General Schwarzkopf?

General Sir Peter de la Billière: Before I say anything further, I must say a little about Norman. He is the guy who ran that war and made it the success it was, with his immense strength, as well as his shortcomings. It was quite clear to me that getting on with him in a very personal way was of critical importance to the British presentation and role out there. Norman was extremely straightforward and very strong-minded, but he listened. You could go to Norman with an argument, which at the start he would disagree with, be persuasive, put a little national pressure on – thanks to the rear links with Paddy and up to Prime Minister, if necessary – and he would go along with it with very good grace.

Norman and I had both had experience of heavy casualty wars: myself in Korea, and he in Vietnam. I remember at a fairly early stage in the planning, when it switched, as Paddy has described, from holding our positions to possible invasion, we both had a side chat after daily prayers that neither of us wanted to see heavy casualties. We felt that it was a mission on which our own personal judgment would assess us afterwards through our conscience.

Why were there not heavy casualties? I know that I am moving on a little, but if I may, I want to give you a clear answer to that. There were not heavy casualties, first, for the very reason that command and liaison at all levels were harmonious. We were not squabbling among ourselves – three services, Paddy and I, the Government and the Americans. We had issues, and they had to be sorted out. Our Government from my perspective supported us with – we heard this from Charles Powell, another side view of the position – confidence and a firmness that I can only say was most welcome to commanders in the field.

That meant that, when we put forward for a division that Norman had asked for and to which we were persuaded to agree by Paddy speaking and arguing with him, we got instant support from the UK. That is a memory that I shall take with me for the rest of my life. It made a difference not only to our military contribution, but to our political standing in the war. It made us unequivocally the second most important force out there. The support from the UK was important. I know that military people are in the audience. The importance of getting the relationships right at the top is critical in any operation. If it is not right, we will not see very

much; but, by God, we will feel it down the system, because the ripples will go down, and that is what became right with working with Norman.

The other issue was command and control. We were operating from Saudi. It was their country and naturally they wanted to run things and be in charge. Here again, a major contribution came from Norman. It was an American war, which they could run on their own, without any of us there. It would have been a bloody sight easier actually. There would not have been all the political hassle. However, it was agreed that, Khaled bin Sultan, the Saudi General,[9] was the Commander in Chief while the forces were in Saudi, while once they crossed the border, the Commander in Chief became Norman Schwarzkopf. You can work out in your own mind how that worked – very smooth, as it turned out.

I want to say one more thing on the planning side about the relationships between the Foreign Office and us in theatre. We had Alan Munro, whom you have heard speak this morning, in charge of Foreign Office affairs, and me. I had learnt in the Falklands that, if you want to get things done in Whitehall as a military commander, you do not go prattling back to the Ministry of Defence on your own, which will then discuss it with the Foreign Office, which will then form its own policy, and then put it to the Government, who will then probably decide something quite different. You get together with the Ambassador, make sure you are friends, and agree a policy before it ever goes near Whitehall and then place it in Whitehall's lap from two different angles so that, when the Ministry of Defence goes to the Foreign Office, it finds, hey presto, the Foreign Office is right on-side with the proposal.

Alan and I developed a relationship of that nature through regular conferences and discussions, which I like to think worked effectively. Alan said that he got his hide tanned by the Foreign Office for agreeing with me too much! But there we go.

Dr Robert Johnson: There are lots of points that now need to be picked up on, one of which is the issue of casualties. I want to pick on two people, in particular, to discuss that. Admiral Julian Oswald will make a comment briefly about casualties. Given the present mightiness of history that casualties are such an issue always in considerations on operations and strategy, it might then be worth Sir Alan Munro responding briefly to that, too.

Admiral Sir Julian Oswald: I do not have much to say, except that at that stage the Chiefs of Staff were engaged for many hours in discussing the likely level of casualties, and what ought to be done. It transpired that all our discussions were based on estimated casualty figures that were wrong by not one, but probably two orders of magnitude. We were looking at horrific casualty figures, and we were too easily persuaded that they were actually likely. In the event, of course, thank God, the casualties were extremely small on the allied side. Whether that was picked up in subsequent staff work to see why we had gone so wrong, I do not know, because I had left the job by then. Someone else might be able to tell us.

Sir Alan Munro: On the whole question of the casualty side, that also came into our handling of a very large, nearly 27,000-strong British community in the area, and my colleagues had their own communities to worry about. That was a major dimension to the diplomatic work in parallel with all the liaison that one was continuously engaged in with Peter, and I think that we had a harmonious and useful relationship. Although there was some vexation at the Ministry of Defence, he did not in the end have his own political advisers. In effect, I served as his political adviser and it seemed to work pretty well.

On the casualty side, mercifully, we did not find that the various chemical weapons, in particular, that had been in the offing were used and there was therefore a certain over-supply. Indeed, all surgery had to cease in southern Scotland, because the territorial hospital based on Paisley suddenly found itself in one of the terminals of Riyadh Airport. I remember going out the first morning they had arrived. The territorials had a scud raid on arrival so that they had a baptism of fire. I found a medical orderly and said to him cheerfully, 'Ah, what do you normally do'? He said, 'I am a driver on the London Underground'. I said, 'Oh, what happened?' to which he said, 'I got to Earl's Court and they told me to report, so I did. I left the train and went'. I reckon that the train was still there a week or two later, because there was no one else to drive it.

It was a splendid show. One of the interesting things was that, towards the end, we asked other countries to help out, thus producing uncommon bedfellows: some eastern European countries produced field hospitals in support of our anticipated casualties. Another of them was the Swedes. They were thrilled to come. They sent surgeons and nurses from Stockholm in uniform. We had a dinner to commemorate with the Swedish Ambassador. King Bernadotte's[10] sword from the Napoleonic Wars was brought out to mark the event as the first occasion when Sweden has taken sides in any conflict since the Battle of Leipzig, which I think was 1713.[11] It was a remarkable turnout.

Another little example of our co-operation, but one of considerable media interest was over the successful and timely visit in the December before the 'off' by the Prince of Wales. The original idea mooted was that he should be accompanied by 'you know who'. Along with Paddy Hine, we agreed for our own reasons that that needed to be blocked. It would have confused, as I stressed, the cultural aspect to have a very senior lady who was of very much interest anyway to much of the media, and it would have been exploited on the religious net, which one always had to bear in mind in advising Peter – it would be exploited by Saddam's very agile propaganda element for bringing in this female participation. Indeed, there were times when we all had to consider what would have been the attitude in 622 – the year of Hijra, when the Prophet Mohammed went from Mecca to Medina – when we tried to decide what line to take over the position of our forces in regard to certain aspects of religious worship in the kingdom. We did need quite an historical reach-back to back up what was a contemporary war.

Dr Robert Johnson: Field Marshal.

Field Marshal Sir John Chapple: I want just to add something to the medical side of things. There were more than 6,000 members of the Army in the medical team, some in the UK, but 5,000 were deployed. Of those, 3,500 men and women were in the medical services, including a large number of reservists and in the TA, and another 1,500 were made up of regimental bandsmen; 27 regimental bands took part in their wartime role as stretcher bearers, etc. It was the biggest medical deployment that we had had – well over 15 per cent of the total force – for a long time.

Lord Hamilton of Epsom: Military casualties were incredibly light, and we were very lucky. The point should be made that a significant number of the casualties were blue on blue, caused by the US Air Force, which had great difficulty in differentiating between an Iraqi tank, a Warrior and a personnel carrier. That should certainly be noted in future. The forecast of casualties were a significant element in the decision to redeploy. We had our armoured brigade supporting the US Marine Corps, and when it became a division, as Peter has said, it was decided that it should be part of the left hook. I did not agree with that.

I would have been more comfortable if we had fought with the US Marine Corps, whose esprit de corps is liable to be rather higher than that of the US Army. Nor did I see the point of extending our supply lines from 80 km to 400 km, when we had a non-inoperable tank. There was a debate over that, but the redeploying of our armoured division into the left hook was not actually a free lunch, because Schwarzkopf needed support for the US Marine Corps and had to find another armoured division from somewhere else in his forces to support the US Marine Corps.

Dr Robert Johnson: Perhaps we should turn swiftly from inaccuracies of targeting by American forces to the targeting decisions that were made by our own Air Force and the selection of targets. That might lead us to a nice discussion about rules of engagement, as Captain Craig rightly reminded us that we must talk about. I call on the former Chief of the Air Staff, Marshal of the Royal Air Force Sir Peter Harding, and Sir Richard Johns to give us a flavour of the RAF position on specific targeting. Perhaps they can consider enemy casualties and even so-called enemy civilian casualties.

Marshal of the Royal Air Force Sir Peter Harding: The part we played back at base (the MOD) was quite small in relation to targeting: that was very much the job of the Air Commander in Theatre. What I thought was almost miraculous was that the Head of the Air Operation planning did a most remarkable job in that several thousand sorties per day (over a 24-hour day) for some weeks non-stop were carried out without any problems of movement into and out of airfields, blue-on-blue clashes or de-confliction. These operations covered the whole range of air operations from targeting Iraqi airfields to ground support.

Taking out Iraqi airfields was our first priority, ie, to neutralise the Iraqi air forces, a task that was quickly done concurrently with radar destruction and that of command and control facilities. In the end, we did not really see much of the Iraqi Air Force getting airborne, except the large number of aircraft who decided to go to Iran rather more permanently!

We were frequently approached by various people in the MOD to widen the targeting base or at least to try to get the Alliance to do so out there. However, in my view, these people were thinking more about total warfare than the sort of activity we needed to carry out the limited aim of retrieving Kuwait and to leave Saddam in a position where he could not easily resurrect his forces. For example, that did not mean taking out all the oil refineries in Iraqi, they would almost certainly be needed when it was all over. We had to be very careful on that score.

The initial concentration on air supremacy was exactly right. Indeed, within a week of the operation starting, we heard from Washington that it had already declared that air superiority had been achieved in the area. That meant, of course, that the Iraqis did not have the opportunity to attack our very vulnerable ground forces. Do remember that they were in a cover-free desert and there were not many places to hide. Moreover, a great deal of equipment, stores and people were all over the desert and would have been easy meat for anyone who had control of the air. Air supremacy was vital and was achieved early on.

Particularly interesting was the fact the General Schwarzkopf, having got the air force general to devise the plan, changed the latter's job from plans to ops and said, 'You devised it, now make it work'!!

Generally speaking, our part in the operation was fine. We got a lot of flak, particularly from the press, for flying at the very low level over airfields, but it was always HMG's policy right up to the war that what we provided for NATO would be what we used for other operations. So we were stuck with what we had and, of course, to be effective in taking out the runways, and deny the use of the airfields to the enemy, we had to use the JP233, which in any case the Americans thought was a good and effective system, so we were asked to send as many Tornados as we could afford so that it could be used to good effect. It was, of course, a very difficult thing to do and I was told afterwards that the flak was appalling. Very courageously, they had to bear the brunt of that and a few were lost.

Newspapers always overrate such things, and they banged on about the vulnerability of the Tornado. That was sheer nonsense: counter air operations at low level was not without its risks, but it was something we may have had to do against the Warsaw Pact forces, since we all had to delay as long as possible a nuclear decision. Thus, we had to keep a conventional war going as long as possible. So, in the Gulf War, we had what we had and we operated with what we had. Looking back at the number of causalities, although each one was a tragedy for those crews and families, they were really quite small in relation to the number of sorties we carried out and the territory we had to fly over. It was a miracle that not more were lost.

When looking to future scenarios, the lesson we learnt is that we should not look to specific expected threats or provide specifically for those threats. Ten to one, they will not appear, but some other threat will! What we need, and I hope HMG is listening, is a range of capabilities to make sure that we could meet most situations. There are always going to be certain basic requirements like air defence, maritime and strike operations, communications, etc, for all sorts of situations that are essential to have.

Generally speaking, it was a suburb air operation, beautifully carried out by the Allied air forces, of which there were many. Our part was relatively small in relation to overall numbers, but very useful indeed in relation to impact.

Dr Robert Johnson: For another headquarters view, I turn to Sir Richard Johns. I will then turn to the actual theatre view from Sir William Wratten.

Air Chief Marshal Sir Richard Johns: I was not involved in any way in targeting policy. I was the Director of Operations, a two-star officer in the Joint Headquarters. My job basically centred initially on the deployment and sustainment of Armed Forces from all three services out to theatre, and after the war started, it was keeping my Joint Commander, Paddy Hine, briefed twice a day on precisely what was going on, future plans and so on, which were passed to me from in theatre. Air Chief Marshal Bill Wratten, who was the Air Commander out there, is far better placed than I am to talk about direct air operations in accordance with targeting policy. Where are you, Bill?

Air Chief Marshal Sir William Wratten: Down this end! I agree entirely with the points made earlier about the importance of personal relationships. General Charles – Chuck – Horner[12] was General Schwarzkopf's Air Component Commander. He was a three-star general, who was a Vietnam vet. He had suffered the frustrations there and was not about to let them happen again. He, with his immediate staff, obviously with Pentagon support, had devised an air campaign plan, which was split into five separate sections – some of which could run concurrently, the top priority being that of establishing air supremacy and, after that, taking out the various NBC locations, C-squared locations, the Republican Guard, for example, and reducing the land forces in the desert to what was decided to be 50 per cent of their capability.

The ability to judge that later on caused a bit of concern. It is all very well to say it, but far less easy to judge when it happens. All those elements of the air campaign plan were rolled into the air space control plan and the daily air task order, which was produced by one single air planning cell, staffed by front-line operators, who had recently come off squadrons, armed with state of the art computers and planning software. That produced something every 24 hours to run the subsequent 36 hours, so part of it overlapped and that was refreshed as time went along. The planning cell was also manned by our own planners. I particularly had a Tornado-experienced Wing Commander, who saw to it that our resources were employed as we wished them to be employed and which aligned with political directives.

That is where my relationship with General Horner was most important. His philosophy was that you can do and we want you to do what you do best, but you must be a part of the air task order. Nothing flew in theatre that was not in the ATO. It was a huge document. It was the bible of all air operations. In particular, it reflected the very large force packages that are the bread and butter of the flag training operations in the States. The advantage there, of course, was that all of the US forces and many of the coalition Air Forces had been through the flag programmes. We all spoke the same language. We knew the terminology. We were accustomed to force package thinking, and that is why it glued together remarkably well and extremely quickly.

Advantage was also taken of interoperability. You will all be familiar with the size of a US Carrier Task Force. There were six of them in theatre, three in the Red Sea and three in the Gulf, with many F-14[13] resources and other elements as well. The US Navy uses probe and drogue air-to-air refuelling. Our VC10s, Tristars and Victors were in their element, feeding into what the US Navy was providing, particularly in the way of fighter escort to the very large force packages. It all worked rather well. There were several hiccups on the way, and I am sure that we shall discuss the impact of Scud later.

I shall just conclude on my perception of RoE and the essential nature of aligning rules of engagement throughout the coalition before combat begins. Before the actual bullets began to fly, the Royal Air Force was flying Tornado ADVs as fighter escorts on some of the US and coalition high-value assets – for example, the E-3 AWACS and the Rivet Joints. The American identification of a hostile aircraft was one single aircraft coming in towards the HVA at high speed. We had to have two aircraft coming in, so you can immediately see that, although we could fly fighter escort, the HVA itself could well identify a hostile aircraft, which we at the time were not able to engage because we needed to see two of them. That is the sort of urgency that we in theatre tried to transmit back to the UK with varying success.

Dr Robert Johnson: To come back to the issue of Scuds, I want to know the Royal Navy's view of the rules of engagement. Captain Craig, can you comment?

Captain Chris Craig: I should like in just a moment to let Philip Wilcocks (Captain of HMS Gloucester – one of my destroyers in the Gulf), speak, but may I first stress the overall importance of RoE from the Navy's point of view.

If my colleagues and friends in the Royal Air Force are concerned about the possibility of losing a single aircraft with two highly paid airmen through overly prescriptive RoE, just contrast that with the potential difficulties of a multi-hundred million pound warship exposed in the very front line, with a fast incoming air target that may be about to launch anti-ship missiles at you. The price of failure then might be this valuable hull on the bottom and maybe three hundred body bags to parade back home.

Anyone who says that ROE – the correct balance between political constraint and adequate self-defence – is not of pivotal importance in a time of rising tension is completely missing the point. I now hand over to my good friend and colleague, Philip Wilcocks.

Rear Admiral Philip Wilcocks: I am speaking as a unit commander rather than a formation commander. We arrived out in theatre on 27 September and effectively went up threat from then until the beginning of March, with the occasional time off. We have talked about command at the higher level. From a unit command perspective, my challenges were that I was under the full command of Commander-in-Chief Fleet in the UK and under the operational command of the Joint Commander in High Wycombe. I was on the operational control of General Sir Peter in Riyadh. I was under the tactical command of Chris Craig, and for various elements of my capability, I came under tactical control of predominantly American commanders in that Admiral Dan March in Midway was responsible for my positioning within the Gulf. I had an AAW commander in USS *Bunker Hill*, who was responsible for my AAW capability, and for surface warfare capability, I came under an American destroyer commander. My Lynx came under the command of the Forward Air Controller, when I deployed him forward, and the embargo operations were under the command of a completely different American commander. When we moved forward, I had relationships to develop with the MCM commander and when the *Missouri* came into doing naval fire support, I was under his command for my positioning as his 'goalkeeper'.

The command challenges were somewhat challenging at unit level, and in the early stages, that reflected the rules of engagement. The Sea Dart weapon system in the Type 42 has a range of about 40 miles. In addition, the ship carries two fighter controllers that were controlling both American Air Forces, but more particularly American Navy fighters. My rules of engagement said that I could only use my offensive capability in the early stages when I had determined that the unit coming to attack me was hostile at three miles. That was somewhat challenging. It seemed to us at the front line, to both myself and the Captain of *Cardiff*, the other British destroyer, that that was a reflection of the rules of engagement that had been in place during the Armilla patrol and had not really been updated. After a session in my cabin with Sir Peter and Captain Chris, it became clear that I had to use my inherent rules of self-defence to allow me to use my offensive capability to make sure that my ship was not hit.

I wish to touch on the information exchange. It is very easy these days where we are in jointery to think that the first Gulf War had a seamless information exchange. The air tasking order came to me as a wodge of paper via [USS] *Midway*, via *Bunker Hill* and my air team had then to distil them into an understanding of what was going on. To give a feel of what was happening in the Gulf itself, in any one 24-hour period about 600 air contacts would come overhead predominantly as aircraft were egressing from the Kuwait and Southern Iraq area into our own overhead. That was challenged by the fact that we did not have a blue on blue. I remain astounded at the fact that that did not occur. When we shot down the Silkworm missile[14] in the latter stages of the campaign, we were about 22 miles off the Kuwait coast. It took two hours

after we had shot down that target for my AW commander to confirm that all friendly aircraft had got back. I spent that two-hour period wondering whether or not I had made the right decision to shoot.

Air Chief Marshal Sir William Wratten: It was alluded to earlier that the scale of the air operation was enormous. Peter mentioned that more than 2,000 sorties happened per 24 hours. Obviously, nearly half of those were in the dark and a lot of them were under silent RT procedures. There were tanker forces layered with only 1,000 to 2,000 feet between them, six layers on occasions. It was a great credit to everyone involved from the planners through the operators that we did not have a huge number of blue on blues. That was the biggest concern of all in the first 24 to 48 hours.

The air space control plan is just as important as the ATO, of course, for reasons that have just been mentioned. If those with radar returns do not know what to expect, there is inevitably a high risk of blue on blue. The fact that that did not happen – to our knowledge – was a huge credit to the operators, to their professionalism and their ability to use their good sense at the time.

Dr Robert Johnson: Quite right. We should recognise such things. I want now to move to slightly more problematic, knotty areas not just because I am one of those people who like to make your life difficult, but because one of the problems that emerged in the war was the issues of Scuds. It could have completely wrong-footed the campaign from the strategic point of view and damaged the leaky coalition to which Sir Alan referred. General Sir Peter de la Billière, how critical were the attacks? Can you explain the decision-making process that led to the deployment of Special Forces as a hunting force for those scuds?

General Sir Peter de la Billière: Let me first get my position in this right. I served about 20 years with the SAS during its evolution from a small-time jungle patrol to the Gulf War. We need to understand that, in that period, it was an integral part of the Army, just as the Armoured Corps or the Artillery were, and it has a special role for which it was specially trained and for which people were specially selected. However, there is a tendency to think that there is something magical about it – there isn't.

Norman Schwarzkopf had had a bad experience with Special Forces in the Caribbean, was it not, Paddy?

Air Chief Marshal Sir Patrick Hine: Grenada.

General Sir Peter de la Billière: He did not want Special Forces deployed at all. The Americans were forbidden and kept back in America. They were not allowed anywhere near the theatre. As it so happened, we had Special Forces training in the UAE at the time of the war and they were positioned there just on the doorstep. So if there was a role for them, it would have been

a minimal effort to deploy them. Norman's arguments against Special Forces were that: 'If I put them, Peter, behind the enemy lines into Iraq and things go wrong, you'll expect me to rescue them. That will mean deploying my forces from the main attack at a most critical moment, and I do not want to be faced with that position'. I gave him an assurance that that would not happen – it didn't.

It is indicative of Norman's character and personality that, when we put on pressure to use our Special Forces, he eventually agreed – turning 180 degrees. Why use Special Forces? I do not think that that has ever really come out. I will tell you why. The Scuds were mobile. The Scuds were hidden, many of them in secure shelters under railways, road arches and so on. They could not be identified in time for the Air Force to take them on before they were back under cover again, so they had a facility, particularly at night, for fairly rapid deployment.

Israel was wishing to become involved. I cannot speak in detail about that, so perhaps politicians or Paddy would be able to do. A lot of work was going in, I understand, to stop them becoming involved militarily for obvious reasons. The Iraqis were threatening to move Scuds towards Israel. In fact, they did launch several on Israel, but only a few, in order to stir the political pot. The one way in which we could stop that happening was to get at them on the ground. The one resource that we had to do that efficiently and precisely, inexpensively and not at the threat of the main operation was to use the Special Forces to deny the Scuds mobility in their own country. That is what they did, and it worked. That is why the Special Forces were deployed.

Dr Robert Johnson: Will Sir William Wratten comment on the special contribution that Tornados made and say whether there were adjustments to the air plan caused by the Scuds issue or whether it was part of the overall shift of plan?

Air Chief Marshal Sir William Wratten: They had an unexpected and noticeable impact on Tornado operations in that, when we were first deploying and preparing for Desert Storm, we had LGBs[15] in theatre. We were about to bring the Buccaneer into theatre, but at that stage the Saudi Arabian air bases were deemed to be full. They were not anything like full, but they were deemed to be full, so we had to observe what the Royal Saudi Air Force was saying. The only place we could put them was into Bahrain, which was already like a sardine can, within range of Scud – a target-rich environment.

Horner was most reluctant to see any more aircraft brought into theatre, particularly to that airfield and especially of a different type with all the support tail. So he gave not an assurance, but agreed that, when the time came, he would provide laser designation for Tornado LGB operations. Come the time, of course, what we had not expected was the impact of Scud on the F15 resources, so we did not have the laser designation that we anticipated and there was a hiatus, during which we operated with radar bombing from Tornado from medium level, with the predictable results, while plans were regenerated to bring the Buccaneer into theatre.

With the Buccaneer [and its Pave Spike designator pod] also came the Thermal Imaging And Laser Designating [TIALD] pod, which was strapped on to the Tornado, although it was still in its trial status, with considerable success. From my perch – a quite different perch from that of the Special Forces – the Scud was an essentially political nuisance. It was not a military threat to any degree. It had quite an impact on the perception of Tornado operations. However, all that was too difficult to explain to the press, so for a while we came under criticism.

Dr Robert Johnson: I shall artificially break up the air-land battle, although one of the characteristics of the campaign was the fact that such things were done together. I wish to turn to the conceptions of the land operations, in particular, and ask General Sir Rupert Smith to say something about his take on manoeuvrist doctrine, evolutionary implementation of that way of thinking and your plans as they evolved. Can you dwell, in particular, on the importance of that period of training that you managed to get in before crossing the start line?

General Sir Rupert Smith: I am not sure that I knew what the word 'manoeuvrist' meant then! It has grown in use. I had been a Divisional Commander for four days, when I was told to take my Headquarters out to Saudi Arabia. I was told that other forces – I would be told who they would be – would be sent out to join Patrick and his brigade who were already there. That was formally announced at the end of November, if I recall correctly. I was told that I was to do it right at the end of October, and that we would not get everyone out there until sometime in the early bit of January. What I had as a Division was not recognisable as such in any staff college wiring diagram or manual. It was what was available. Its primary equipment, armoured fighting vehicles – particularly the tank and the FV432, although we also had worries with the Warrior – were unreliable. They were both unreliable in their automotive systems and in the case of the tank, in its turret systems.

We were also having problems with the helicopter engines, because they did not have sand filters and the smaller Army helicopters, being low to the ground, were sucking in large quantities of sand and we were only getting about 20 hours an engine, which posed another set of problems.

The Division was heavy on artillery, not least by my request, and I do not think that this is ever properly understood, even at the time. By comparison to the Second World War 1944 armoured division which, by the way, only had two armoured brigades, I had 30 times the weight of high explosive under my own hands than my Second World War 1944 contemporary. It went a lot further, too. But just by adding up the throw weight of the shells, I had 30 times. If you want to compare that with the Second World War, you are much closer to being a corps reinforced by the Army Group Royal Artillery in terms of fire power. The other characteristic was that I was very light on infantry.

There was a logistic issue, where I had a fundamentally different view. That might explain one of the points about casualty estimations. Because I had all the equipment, there were no

other tanks to replace the ones I had. There were no other medium artillery pieces to replace the ones I had and so on. I had everything. The assumptions on which logistic planning is conducted is based on the fact that there is a Division, and it has so many tanks, and when it has a tank knocked out, it is replaced. You are always trying to supply the complete order of battle. But that assumption was not satisfied. I had them all, so every time I lost a vehicle my supply problem improved. I had less to supply! That applied to casualties. I found a lot of what was told to me about the casualty expectations incredible. I was going to run out of kit before men!

That coloured the way and how I thought that I would fight it, which will perhaps answer your question about doctrine. I was not going to fight for ground; I would only fight the enemy. I would fight for very small objectives – bite-sized bits – very quickly because the quicker you win, the less you use in resource and time. I would fight brigade by brigade. If I got the whole Division into a fight at one go, I had nothing left. I had to fight each brigade in turn, and I described it like a hammer drill going through a concrete wall. I had to do it very fast, at a high tempo. To do that and because of those logistic points, I organised the Division into autonomous groups: the artillery was autonomous; the brigades were autonomous and, within the brigades, the logistics were forward-loaded, so the battle groups were autonomous. That paid off a bit, as I shall describe.

All our understandings about movement and the preparation of the operation and our thinking were predicated on the single assumption that we would have air superiority. We could therefore get into huge pile ups of vehicles, which of course speeds up our going through breaches, starting the next attack, resupplying people and so forth. We could ignore the air threat, if we had air supremacy. If we did not have air supremacy, I would have to start dispersing and that would inevitably slow down the speed we moved at and supplied ourselves. Thanks to the Air Forces, we had that air superiority.

The other assumption that I was prepared to see fail was that the elastic band of my logistics could be maintained. My problem, unlike my fellow American divisional commander, was that I did not have corps headquarters attending to my logistics and the corps headquarters did not have the United States Army Headquarters attending to their corps logistics. My logistics were my problem and they always went back to the Port of Jubail and, even if I got to the Euphrates, they would still be my problem. I needed to hold all of that in mind. If that elastic band broke, I depended utterly on the Royal Navy, the hospital ship ARGUS and four LSLs[16] loaded with ammunition, food and water for the Division in Chris Craig's train.

We were grouped, as you have heard, with the 7th US Corps, which had come from Germany and we had extremely good relationships with it, as had Patrick, as no doubt he will tell you, with the US Marine Corps before me. As for the preparation for the battle, we had to do three things all superimposed at the same time. We had to receive all the stuff being deployed out to us. That was being deployed in the main in shipping, but not exclusively. The shipping was

loaded on an administrative or commercial basis, not on an 'I, Rupert Smith, need it next' basis. But, of course, the deployment from Jubail into the desert would have to be done on the basis of how we thought we would fight the battle. So we had a difficult translation problem from administrative loading of gear to battlefield loading of gear to manage in the port. That, to the greatest credit of the logisticians, was managed.

We then had to deploy it all up into theatre where we were to conduct the fight. We had to prepare with 7th Corps for how we would fight and plan, and we had to train. We had to train for three primary reasons: most of the Division had not trained together at all; 7 Brigade had, but the rest of it had not. People needed to be acclimatised to the desert conditions and the various battle drills that we had developed. Finally, from memory, four or it could have been five of the units – three gunner regiments and one engineer regiment – were meeting equipment new to them off the ships. The MLRS Regiment had trained on its pieces as a crew, but the regiment had not trained as batteries or a regiment. The same was true with the fact that one regiment was converted, as it moved through the air to the theatre, from the Abbot to medium artillery, picked up its pieces as it got off the ship and started to train on the new equipment. It certainly applied to an engineering regiment as well. That had to be done, and unfortunately their equipment was late in the deployment process.

In the execution, the logistic arrangements paid off. It is not generally known, but the plan was changed as we were passing through the breach, doing a passage of lines which is difficult enough as it was through the United States 1st Infantry Division. As both Divisions were in the 18 lanes of the minefield crossing, the two Division Commanders were invited to change the plan, so that the Big Red One which was to remain in the breach and guarding it could come out of the breach and be included in the attack into the Republican Guard. The solution to the problem was arrived at by the two Generals without any of their staff present. The decision was that I would cut myself off from my divisional logistics and the empty lanes would all go to the Big Red One. You should have seen the face of my Chief of Staff when I told him!

It worked because I was in autonomous groupings and we were able, just, to not have divisional logistics until about 2 o'clock in the afternoon of the next day, when we linked up again. The intelligence support was poor to virtually non-existent and, because of the plan and the deception plan, I was hardly allowed to collect information on my own account. I depended upon other people providing me with the information for the attack. When we did attack, I ran out of my ability for collection. I did not have enough collection capability to move people ahead of me at the speed we were winning our fights and advancing.

Somewhere around 36 hours after we had started to attack, I could not see further forward than my leading battle group. But it was okay at that stage. I had caught up with all my reconnaissance. It was bad weather, I could not get my helicopters forward, but at that stage we were entering the pursuit and it did not matter. However, it was a lesson that I took away. If you want to attack, which I had not properly thought through, and if you succeed at a great

speed, you can outpace your ability to collect the information ahead of you. You actually need to be developing and have the capacity to develop your collection operation well ahead of you, much further than you first thought.

Lastly, the enemy was a poor lot really. Their morale had been broken by the air attacks. We should be careful what lessons we learnt about the particular fighting because, in my view, we were stressed more by our own boldness and our successes than we were by the actions of our enemy.

Dr Robert Johnson: Major General Sir Patrick Cordingley, will you give the Brigade Commander's view and even a reference to the issue of tempo?

Major General Patrick Cordingley: Just to go back a little in time because I think that it is relevant. When we first arrived, it seemed that there were three problems. The Americans, the media and how on earth do we set about training to become an effective part of a huge coalition army? I am not being rude about the Americans; I am being rude about ourselves. We had told the world that we had unreliable tanks and that we had withdrawn from the NATO tank-firing competition, and that had to be put right. In effect, I was forced out into the desert before my 12,000-strong brigade had all arrived. This was important; we could give confidence to the American Marines that we would be in the right place at the right time and we could show them that we were well trained. We could also give stories to the media that were worth reporting rather than the trivia that they were reporting when we were in the dockside, and we could get on with the training – training units that had been prepared to fight the Warsaw Pact to now do something totally different in the desert, and it was a significant difference.

During that time, we worked with the I Marine Expeditionary Force[17] and became very much part of its organisation. I was indeed part of their O Group. So, by the middle of November, we were ready to go. We had all the extra tanks the American Marines wanted and the armoured engineers. But then we doubled in size and General Rupert joined us and we were moved to the US 7th Corps. To us in the 7th Brigade, that was something of a sadness. To this day, it is still a sadness. To us, from a strategic point of view, it seemed to attack straight into Kuwait and end up in Kuwait City was probably more interesting and beneficial to UK interests than going the long way round with the US 7th Corps and ending up in the desert. However, that is very much a personal opinion.

We then had to rejoin the British 1st Division and work up a different plan for how we would operate; there was a mental change going on. But we were very well trained. Also we were breaking a lot of equipment, as you have heard. Each time we broke a tank engine, we could not mend it in Saudi Arabia. It had to be flown back to Germany. Huge problems about training were building up, and I was hugely relieved to hand over all such problems to General Rupert [Smith] when he arrived.

I have only one other comment to make. We felt, as we went into the attack with the 1st Division, that we were well trained. We had had time to get together, and as the two brigades operated, we felt that it would work. What struck me, and I take the point about the Iraqis not being a very forceful enemy, was that, after 24 hours, they nearly stopped fighting altogether. But we were still using an incredible amount of force. After two days, I called in my commanders together and said, 'How are we to stop killing people'? It was very clear that we were killing a lot of people unnecessarily, but what is really difficult in the middle of an operation is to change the way you react when coming across an enemy position. So I am afraid that we went on using considerable force. My overall feeling at the end of it all is that we used unnecessary force against a weak enemy, but we did not know that when we started off. I am worried that this mindset continued in 2003, but that is another story.

Dr Robert Johnson: Thank you. That was very candid and very direct, which is exactly what we are after. I shall now ask a couple of panellists to reflect on their main concerns as the ground operations got under way.

Air Chief Marshal Sir Patrick Hine: After five weeks of air operations and particularly the last two of those weeks when a great deal of effort went into suppressing the Iraqi ground forces and cutting their lines of communication, I was confident that we were going to be successful and that it would not take all that long, but I was surprised, along with others, exactly how quickly Iraqi resistance melted away – or crumbled. He had prepared very well, dug-in positions along the Kuwaiti-Saudi border and we were not sure how much difficulty we would have in breaking through those positions.

General Schwarzkopf saw those operations as designed to be a holding operation to draw in the Iraqi tactical reserves and second strategic forces, while the real effort went through the wide, left hook with the purpose of engaging the Republican Guards Division, the key assets in the Iraqi Army to the west and north of Kuwait. I thought that we would be successful, but that we were so successful so quickly, particularly in breaking through those well-prepared forward defences, took me by surprise. My concerns before the operation started were, 'Will he use chemical weapons against our forces, particularly during the breakthrough phase?' We knew that he had chemical-tipped artillery rounds. That was the major threat, but we were prepared for it. But what would the impact be if he did use chemical weapons?

I was also unsure how hard the Republican Guard would fight against the wide, left hook and so forth. The answer, as you have heard, was not as hard as we had expected. But there was always the chance that they would and that we would be drawn into a bit of a battle of attrition with mounting casualties. The impact of having been there in the desert for several months by that time and having been pounded from the air over up to five weeks had certainly had its effect, as General Sir Rupert said, on morale. So fortunately, the ground campaign – masterly conducted, if I may say so – was all over in 100 hours. However, we should not forget

the impact on overall Iraqi capability and morale that five weeks of air operations had had in the run-up to that war.

Dr Robert Johnson: Sir William Wratten, did you have any particular worries?

Air Chief Marshal Sir William Wratten: Just one, and Sir Patrick has just alluded to it. It was an unforeseen and unanticipated move to chemical or biological operations by what was left of the Iraqi Air Force. I felt that we had almost seduced ourselves into believing that the Iraqi Air Force was no longer an issue and, as it turned out, that was correct. My personal concern – and I aired this to General Horner a few times – was that, if we did see a low-level penetrator armed with chemical or biological weapons making it to, for example, Riyadh, that would change the picture hugely.

On the coalition side and the Royal Air Force side, in particular, we would have to move back down to low-level operations very swiftly. Having educated air crew who had spent their lives at low level into the medium-level environment, we would have to reverse that and put them back down into the only real threat that Iraq had against low-level operations – and that was huge Triple-A, which was the cause of our losses, we think, in the early days. We are not sure about that, but it must have been very good odds against those losses falling to Triple-A.

Field Marshal Sir John Chapple: Another relatively small point brought up by speakers earlier this morning was the tank engines. That worried us a bit because their reliability had certainly worried Mrs Thatcher when she was Prime Minister. We had given her reassurances, put our head on the line and, as a result, we had taken the engines out of most of the tanks in Germany. That was only one year after the end of the Cold War. We had completely paralysed our NATO effort. Nothing could go to war there at all, should the Russians do anything. We had taken all the reconditioned engines off the shelf. We got Vickers to build some new ones, and we sent them all out there. Virtually every tank had about four engines spare somewhere along the line.

The only reason I have raised this is because it is the sort of thing we were worried about all the time, in case something went wrong. I went out there at the end, and talked to Rupert, Patrick and the guys on the ground and breathed a sigh of relief that they had managed to keep going so fast over the days of the land campaign. I spoke to Patrick's tank driver, 'Everything all right with the tank'? 'Oh yes', he said. 'Did you ever change your engine'? He said, 'Well, as a matter of fact, I did change it four times'. I thought, 'Oh my god, what have I done? Committed the Army to four changes of engine in five days'. Then I realised we might have forgotten the calibre and initiative of the soldiers under our command. He said, 'I knew there were new engines out there, sir, and I wanted to get one for my tank before I took it back to Germany, because I knew that I would never get one there'!

General Sir Rupert Smith: I might add that that was an advantage of the autonomous units. Most of those pack changes took place on the run, as did replacing the cards in the turret systems, and they did not have to go back to the workshops.

You had to repair the unserviceable pack as a workshop programme on a divisional basis as a second stage.

Dr Robert Johnson: We should reassert some civilian primacy here, I think. Lord Hamilton.

Lord Hamilton of Epsom: I did go to the Rhine Army[18] during that time, and I have never met a more demoralised armoured corps. Of course, there was a war going on, and they were not part of it. When you visited their tanks, many of them were actually just blocks of steel sitting on piles of bricks. Even the tracks and the bogeys had been taken off them, as well as the engines and gearboxes.

As for intelligence, I saw the Ministry of Defence during the build-up and a rather interesting development happened. There seemed to be new Iraqi Divisions appearing, so I said to the intelligence people, 'How many men does that represent'? There was a terrible pause. They could not really make up their mind. There were no new Iraqi Divisions. What Saddam Hussein was actually doing was pretending. He knew that his communications were being intercepted, so he pretended there was another division there. It never existed at all. That might be useful for the future.

Lord Powell of Bayswater: This has obviously been a military session, and very brilliantly it has been handled. But we should perhaps reflect on what was going on at the political level and the ultimate direction of the war. The first thing to remember is that, quite apart from the war in Kuwait, a war was going on within the Conservative Party, which resulted in Margaret Thatcher stepping down and John Major taking over.

On the whole, it is not recommendable to change the national leader two months ahead of a war, but that is politics for you. There were some genuine reasons for concern at the time. Let's face it, the choice of John Major was a surprise to the nation. It was probably a surprise to the Tory Party. I am absolutely sure that it was a surprise to him! He had no defence experience, no experience of war. He had served for three months at the Foreign Office and intensely disliked it. He had never met President Bush, our main ally in the war. Let us say, physiologically, he was very different from Margaret Thatcher, who could last months if not years at a time on three hours' sleep a night. John Major needs eight hours' sleep as a minimum to get by.

Most of those misgivings were actually completely unwarranted. First, John Major made no attempt to change the strategy or the objectives. He was absolutely firm that Saddam Hussein had to meet all the requirements of the United Nations resolutions in all respects. There was no letting him off the hook. There was a lot of pressure, particularly from the Labour Party

and Parliament to say, 'Well, if he pulls back halfway, perhaps we should abandon the whole enterprise'. He refused to get involved in some of the diplomatic tricks that were being tried, whether it was President Mitterrand[19] suddenly coming up with an initiative to solve the whole crisis. John Major had spent the morning with him in Paris. I had been there. Mitterrand made no mention of the initiative; it was announced later that afternoon, which showed how easy it was to do business with the French.

John Major maintained pretty much the same process. Margaret Thatcher had insisted on a very small War Cabinet, going back to her experience of the Falklands. In particular, she insisted on excluding the Chancellor of the Exchequer on the grounds that all he would do would moan about money. She was absolutely right about that. John Major slightly extended the War Cabinet, and brought in the Cabinet Secretariat, which Margaret Thatcher had banned from participation. Above all – this is the most important part – he was an excellent communicator for the circumstances. His ability to explain to the British public, the Churches and many others, why we would have to go to war was really remarkable and very successful, including his final television broadcast ending with the words, 'God bless', which I had opposed two minutes before on the grounds that it was naff. He was absolutely right. It struck completely the right note.

One last point: John Major went to Washington on 21 December for his first ever meeting with George Bush to discuss the war aims. There was immediately complete understanding between them. The plan had been to go to Camp David by helicopter to discuss it all. The weather intervened. We could not helicopter to Camp David. We travelled up in the President's limo with President Bush and John Major sitting on the back seat, and General Scowcroft and myself on the jump seats facing them. Virtually all the final decisions relating to the war were taken on that ride – in particular, the date on which the military operation would start.

The scale of the political problems that George Bush still faced was very clear. In particular, he had to be able to show that he had made one last effort with the Iraqis directly to get Saddam Hussein to change his mind. That was actually the last thing that he wanted to do, but it had to be done. That, of course, led to the meeting between James Baker and Tariq Aziz in Geneva. We all sat at home and I am sure that the President sat at the White House hoping that it would fail because it would never have been a clear-cut solution, and it did fail.

On the starting date, President Bush and the Prime Minister said that no one should be told. Well, that is a bit of a problem. We have always had difficulty with information, which we are not allowed to tell anyone, and it was held at the political level certainly as a complete secret until the last moment. I told Douglas Hurd, who was Foreign Secretary at the time, with about 45 minutes to go before the bombing started. It was intended to be two hours before, but the bombing started early.

My overall point is that John Major turned out to be a very good leader in the political sense in the Gulf War. Indeed, probably his first six months of his Prime Ministership were the best of the whole period, certainly in the eyes of most people.

Dr Robert Johnson: I notice that we are one minute over the hour for afternoon tea. We are left with a moment of poise. We have armour racing across the desert and have joint fires streaming on the remains of the Iraqi positions. We have oil wells raging ablaze and, on that note, we shall ponder on that moment. After we come back, we will be looking at the closing stages of the war and some of the aftermath.

Notes

[1] http://www.raf.mod.uk/history/AirPowerintheGulfWar.cfm.
[2] Operational control.
[3] United States Navy Commander, Task Force.
[4] Admiral Stanley R. Arthur, US Naval Forces Central Command during Operation Desert Storm, 1990-1.
[5] British surface to air guided missile system used by the Royal Navy, 1973-2012.
[6] Sea Skua: lightweight short-range air-to-surface missile designed for use from helicopters against ships.
[7] http://www.royalnavy.mod.uk/our-organisation/the-fighting-arms/royal-fleet-auxiliary/casualty-ship/rfa-argus.
[8] Sir Andrew 'Sandy' Wilson, Commander British Forces Arabian Peninsula (In-theatre commander for Operation GRANBY), 1990.
[9] Khalid bin Sultan, Saudi Arabian Assistant Minister of Defence and Aviation.
[10] Charles XIV John (Jean-Baptiste Bernadotte, 1763-1844), King of Sweden and King of Norway, 1818-44.
[11] The Battle of Leipzig or Battle of the Nations, 1813, between Napoleonic France and the coalition of Russia, Prussia, Austria and Sweden.
[12] General Charles 'Chuck' Horner, US Commander, Ninth Air Force, 1987-92. Joint Force Air Component Commander.
[13] Grumman F-14 Tomcat; US Naval fighter aircraft, in service 1974-2006.
[14] NATO reporting name for Chinese Hai Ying (HY-series) anti-ship missiles.
[15] Laser Guided Bombs; the RAF employed a single type of LGB, namely the 1,000lb Paveway II weapon during Operation GRANBY.
[16] Landing Ship Logistic.
[17] I Marine Expeditionary Force, the 1st Marine Division.
[18] British Army of the Rhine.
[19] François Mitterrand (1916-96), President of France, 1981–95.

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