

Eye on Washington by Leo F. Scanlon

Brookings reviews the war

With stunning cynicism, pundits admit Gulf war "information" was fabricated—and plan the next phase of brutality.

A group of top defense analysts told a Brookings Institution seminar that physical evidence on the battlefields in Kuwait and Iraq had nothing to do with the fairytales circulated before and during the war. The revelations were not motivated by any questioning of the justifications for the slaughter, but as a house-cleaning so as to continue the policy of unparalleled callousness toward the people in the Middle East.

Tony Cordesman, the ABC consultant who regaled TV viewers with computer maps and battle scenarios supporting the U.S. contention that war with Iraq was inevitable, mused over "anomalies" he helped to create: "For example, they put immense effort into coastal defenses, most of which were pretty silly, but if you look at the border defenses along the coast, for that sector of the defenses, they are not there."

Brookings Institution fellow Jane Nolan described widespread fabrications among military officials: "We never seemed to have anyone in the United States government who could define APC or other armored vehicles. General [Peter] Kelley never got it right from day to day, but more importantly, nobody ever got it right in the JIB [Riyadh]. And actually, when we asked the JIB to define what equipment was included as artillery or other armored vehicles, there was nobody who could do it.

"This may sound like it's minor, but if one looks through the detailed history of the equipment counts issued before, during, and after the Gulf war and tries to correlate them to the damage assessment estimates issued by

various sources, it is a statistical nightmare of incoherent information, and a great deal of it simply cannot be true. So in that sense, there is somewhere in this government a very major bureaucratic failure in putting elementary statistics together on the impact of this war."

Joshua Epstein, senior fellow of the Brookings Institution, examined one element of the calculated overkill of the air war. "But the Air Force bombed lots of bridges that were, I think, quite irrelevant to the operation. They wreaked civilian damage in that connection that was probably unnecessary to the achievement of the military goals. The U.N. has called this, 'apocalyptic destruction.' They bombed 39 bridges. My assistant and I looked carefully at targets in Iraq when we did our estimate of the air superiority campaign. We didn't come up with numbers nearly that high. I mean, they were more on the order of a dozen bridges that were really of tactical significance to this war."

Nolan summarized, "I think the problem now, since we have to use sanctions, is how to re-legitimize them, if you will, and to bring back the political ethos that would support a sustained multinational sanctions regime against Iraq."

Continued brutality against Iraqi civilians is no problem for Cordesman, who cautions against "the myth of national innocence." No one "can really believe that Saddam Hussein was personally responsible for the actions of tens of thousands of people who systematically looted the country. *There is a practical limit to the*

amount of regret and sorrow one should feel for the Iraqi people. I have heard the same arguments made about Germany in World War II and I think they are equally inapplicable."

Cordesman extended this view to the entire region, asserting that the PLO and Jordan are the main culprits for the ongoing conflict. He went on, "Once you strip away the statistics, the truth is that the Maghreb consists largely of 'undeveloping' states where in real terms the citizens receive less as a real income each year. That's not inevitable, but it is also not a product of outside action. It is a product of poor governments, of poor economic policies, a refusal to deal with water problems, and a refusal to deal with population control. If those nations are to be helped they will have to help themselves first. . . ."

"The situation in Yemen is very similar and when one looks at the southern edge of the Red Sea it is an almost unmitigated disaster, beyond American influence in many ways, and certainly beyond what we can do to help those states restructure themselves. Once again, they either help themselves or no one helps them. There are two countries which have priority: Egypt and Turkey.

"Now we cannot in this context achieve peace by pressuring Israel . . . the primary goal is not a peace settlement, which we cannot achieve; it is military stability. And that is achieved primarily through Israel's security."

His summary is apocalyptic: "If you look toward the next problem in this region, it is not likely to be an Arab-Israeli war or that one of the civil wars in the region blows up into a major confrontation. It is much more likely that we are going to watch the southern periphery of the Soviet [empire] degenerate into very intensive ethnic conflict."