Chapter Two

Computers at War: Kuwait 1991

Large computers are still running the overall show.
—Business Week Staff (1991c, p. 42)

I couldn't have done it without the computers.
—Attributed to Gen. H. Norman Schwarzkopf on TV

There is no war, then, without representation, no sophisticated weaponry without psychological mystification. Weapons are tools not just of destruction but also of perception.
—Paul Virilio (1990, p. 6)

We give special thanks to Mr. Bush and all the allies: the British, the French, the Egyptians, CNN.
—Kuwaiti man (San Jose Mercury News, February 28, 1991)

TVs over Baghdad

During the Kuwait war\(^1\) the most amazing pictures were on television: bomb's-eye views of trucks, bunkers, bridges, and runways were shown again and again. But other images captured by this same technology—videos of scared men running from machines and dying by machines—were censored. One reporter who managed to see some forbidden gun camera film from Apache helicopter raids said the Iraqi soldiers were

like ghostly sheep flushed from a pen—bewildered and terrified, jarred from sleep and fleeing their bunkers under a hellish fire. One by one, they were cut down by attackers they could not see . . . blown to bits by bursts of 30mm exploding cannon shells.\(^2\) (Balzar, 1991)
The commander of Desert Shield and Desert Storm, H. Norman Schwarzkopf, called it "technology war" (Business Week Staff, 1991a, p. 38). Certainly for the U.S. forces it was often a technology-mediated experience with little danger for most. According to one incredible statistic it was more dangerous to be a young man back in the United States, with its automobile accidents and urban murders, than to be serving in Desert Storm! According to Prof. Charles Lave of the University of California, Berkeley, almost 300 U.S. soldiers had their lives saved by their service in Desert Shield and Storm (Garchik, 1991, p. A8). For Iraqis it was quite a different matter: hundreds of thousands dead and the killing continued as civil war into the spring and summer. It was a war notable for its paradoxes and its intense mediation, and so it makes a fine case study of postmodern war.

**Kuwait as a Postmodern War**

*Politics Is "War by Other Means"*

Michel Foucault argued that today politics is war "continued by other means" in a system that is "the continuation of war" with an "end result [that] can only be . . . war" (1977, p. 244). Both President George Bush and President Saddam Hussein saw politics as war by other means during their conflict. Bush performed prodigious political feats simply to get war approved by the UN and the U.S. Congress and to prevent peace from breaking out. Saddam's foreign policy (toward Iran, Kuwait, and Israel) and much of his domestic policy (especially toward the Kurds and Shiites) is always war or threats of war. Saddam's invasion of Kuwait led to Bush's war, which in turn resulted in Iraqi civil wars. Wars breed wars. The chain goes even further back. The United States built up Iran as a subimperial power, but it became a fearful enemy after the Iranian revolution. So the United States had to build up Iraq and support its attack on Iran to balance the region. Then Iraq became the fearful enemy. Policy breeds wars.

There are other implications to the politics-war symbiosis. Many wars since 1945 have been neocolonial. The Gulf War seems like the colonial wars of the nineteenth century where a few hundred British troops with modern ships and machine guns killed tens of thousands of natives in order to make their land a protectorate or to clear them from valuable real estate. So is it a surprise that President Bush, with a move that could have been made by the British when they played the Great Game to preserve that region's balance of power, prevented the destruction of Saddam's regime, which just days before Bush had been equating to that of Hitler (Gordon and Trainor, 1995)?

No doubt Bush would have preferred it if Saddam had been overthrown and replaced by someone else. But the important considerations were that
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(1) Iraq remain strong as a counterweight to Iran and Syria; (2) the Kurds not be allowed independence because that would threaten Turkey with Kurdish rebellion; and (3) a truly democratic regime not come into power that might focus its energies away from a war policy onto something more threatening to U.S. interests in the long run—a restrictive oil policy for the Middle East, for example. No doubt domestic considerations also played a role in Bush’s decisions, but there the real surprise was that the great victory wasn’t enough to save his presidency, even though many experts have claimed that a good little war guarantees reelection.

Any examination of the actual battle for Kuwait shows that the 1st Cavalry and the 24th Mechanized Division were kept from closing the door on the bulk of the Iraqi Army’s elite Republican Guard, although the 24th did destroy 30% of the Hammurabi Division after the cease-fire. The whole Allied strategy, designed as it was for retaking Kuwait, was for a limited war. Saddam’s policy was also a limited one. He carefully preserved most of his Republican Guard and all of his helicopters and special forces, the best units for domestic control (Eldridge, 1991, pp. 21, 36-37; Friedman, 1991, pp. 250-260).

This war shows that winning the peace may be harder than winning the war. During the war, anti-U.S. sentiment exploded into demonstrations that forced U.S. citizens to flee Pakistan, Bangladesh, and other Moslem countries (Simmons, 1991). Months after the liberation of Kuwait, U.S. troops were ordered to invade northern Iraq to protect Kurdish refugees while other troops were still occupying the south of the country. Five years after the war Saddam was still in power, Kuwait was being ruled as autocratically as ever, and (except for the incredible pollution in the Gulf) things were much the same as they had been before the Iraqi invasion.

Informational War

Information is now the crucial military resource and information processing a central military operation. Computers were a primary weapon of the U.S.—Allied victory:

- Computers to organize and track the movement of the massive armies to the Saudi desert
- Computers to soak up and sort out the thousands of satellite images and the hours of captured electronic transmissions from the fleet of over 50 satellites
- Computers to help fly the planes, drones, and helicopters that, along with all the other weapons, were produced in computerized factories by robots as often as humans
- Computers to guide the bombs and missiles and even the artillery shells
- Computers to jam the radars and fool the targeting computers of the Iraqis
• Computers to send messages and point satellite dishes as much for CNN as for the DoD
• Computers to game the Iraqi responses and predict the region's weather
• Computers to track the weapon platforms and their maintenance.
• Computers to count the weapons expended
• Computers to look up the home addresses of the dead

Humans are still crucial for interpreting information, although there are many plans in the works to use machines in this role as well. There was also a great deal of intelligence gathering by Special Operations troops, but they too were dependent on high-tech equipment ranging from "stealth" parachutes to portable satellite links (Healy, 1991).

These thousands of computers, from ruggedized laptops to airborne mainframes, were organized into at least nine metasystems: (1) The Worldwide Military Command and Control System (WWMCCS); (2) the Modern Age Planning Program (MAPP); (3) the Joint Deployment System; (4) the Stock Control and Distribution Program; (5) the Tactical Army Combat Service Support Computer Systems (TACCS); (6) the Military Airlift Command Information Processing System (MACIPS); (7) the Airborne Battlefield Command Control Center (ABCCCIII); (8) the Joint Surveillance and Target Attack Radar System (JStars); and (9) the Operation Desert Storm Network (ODS NET). A few of these networks were for watching the enemy (JStars) or simulating battle scenarios (MAPP) in Schwarzkopf's Central Command in Riyadh. But most of them were for command, control, and communications.

The ODS NET was the only one of these created especially for Desert Storm. It was managed from Fort Huachuca in Arizona and linked thousands of computers through satellites and lines over almost 50,000 miles of connections. Although it only carried unclassified traffic it was a crucial part of the operation, linking all the services at bases around the world for real-time communication. When the system overloaded on the first night of the land campaign, the system manager, Chief Warrant Officer Robert F Weissert, was called out of bed at 2 A.M. Arizona time. Rubbing the sleep from his eyes, he went into his den and logged on to the system. By rerouting information around some overloaded computers he got the data moving within half an hour. This postmodern warrior–computer operator who battles from his den says of ODS NET: "It far surpasses anything that's ever been done in any war we've fought" (Green and Greve, 1991, p. A19). He may be right—for while topologically smaller than any other military system, it is both more flexible and more powerful then the rest. It represents another stage in the growing importance of computers to the military.

Military theorists declared years ago that for modern war you needed C²: command and control. Early in postmodern war that became C³I:
command, control, communications, and intelligence. In the late 1980s it became C^4I^2: command, control, communications, computers, intelligence, and interoperability. Interoperability means computers talking clearly to other computers and to humans. In this mantra, C^4I^2 computers alone among the categories are artifacts instead of ideals. Or aren't they really both?

The Iraqis responded to the computer-controlled barrage of computer-guided weapons and televised bombings with fiber-optic communication channels, numerous simulated targets, and a few stories on CNN. It was an uneven contest. High technology can be defeated, but it takes organization, loyalty, patience, political acumen, intelligence (in both senses), popular support, and allies. Saddam had few of these.

For its part, while the peace movement around the world could mobilize more antiwar protesters than could prowar advocates, it could not garner the same level of coverage that either of the warring sides could. Still, it was close. Peace seemed always about to break out. The careful deployment of images, arguments, and weapons by both Saddam and Bush kept the war alive.

So, obviously, the centrality of information to postmodern war is not limited to the battle space. Controlling information at home is just as important, and it has been Pentagon policy since Vietnam to do just that.

**The Expansion of War**

War has spread not just to every corner of the globe but to the very heavens as well. Gen. Merrill A. McPeak, the U.S. Air Force Chief of Staff, called it "the first war of the space age." Outer space was a crucial resource, especially for collecting information (Trux, 1991, p. 30). The war also extended across the surface of the globe. The United States showed itself quite capable of fighting a major war in the desert, which included bombing runs flown from snowy England, balmy Louisiana, and tropical Diego Garcia. The battlefield doctrine used in Kuwait was AirLand Battle, originally prepared for the European Theater. This doctrine holds that the air (including space) and the ground are equally important. Battle is three dimensional now and as it spreads into physical space it compresses in real (i.e., lived, human) time. AirLand Battle goes 24 hours a day, thanks to caffeine, amphetamines, computers, radar, and infrared. Rapid attacks, slashing and thrusting, shatter the enemy fronts and armies in a matter of hours instead of the days that blitzkriegs took, or the weeks and months of most modern-war offensives. As Virilio and Lotringer have emphasized in their work, speed becomes crucial: "There is a struggle . . . between metabolic speed, the speed of the living, and technological speed, the speed of death" (1983, p. 140). The milliseconds a laser takes to target a bunker or a jammer to confuse a radar are the margins of victory. In the war of mechanical speed against human reactions, bodies are the only real losers.
The home front is more important than ever before. The media must be guided to keep support high. Col. Darryl Henderson (USMC Ret.) notes how Gulf War bad news was managed: "restricting access to it," "presenting it as an isolated incident," and allowing it to "dribble out in a controlled seepage over a number of days or weeks." Good news is "heavily marketed," or even manufactured, to minimize bad news (1991). Along with direct news management other issues have to be dealt with, especially protests and economic strains caused by the war. Protests are managed through the media and with repression, calibrated to keep resistance low. Finally, the economy must be buffeted from the worst shocks (Reuters Staff, 1991).

**The Limitations of War**

Despite much bluster to the contrary, this was a very limited war. The targets open to air attacks were severely constrained for various reasons, including the fear of damaging holy sites, the fear of killing civilians openly, and a general regard for public opinion. This is not to say the bombing wasn't ferocious as hell, it was. But it could have been generally unrestrained, instead of just specifically. As free-fire zones were set up in Vietnam, "killing boxes" were established in the Desert Theater of Operations where unlimited air attacks were allowed. "Each 'killing box' is several miles long and wide and it is identified by letters and numbers, U.S. Air Force officials said" (Fulghum, 1991, p. 62). This is Cartesian war in its purest form yet.

Certain weapons, CBN (biological, chemical, nuclear), for example, were not invoked, although several U.S. generals did call for the use of nuclear bombs (Gellman, 1994). An important limiting factor was President Bush's claim that this was a "just war." Since just war doctrine calls for minimizing civilian deaths and restraint in the use of force, the open bombing of cities, as practiced in World War II, was precluded. The point wasn't so much to keep the number of dead Iraqis to a minimum. The long blockade, followed by the destruction of the country's infrastructure, including water, power, and sanitation, led to tens of thousands of civilian deaths, as did the civil war Bush encouraged. The strategy was to make it seem as if civilians were being spared. It has been at least a moderate success (Green and Greve, 1991). Even without considering that most of the Iraqi troops slaughtered by air were untrained conscripts, it is very likely that many more civilians died in this war than military personnel, continuing a trend that started in World War II.

**Simulations and Games**

Before it invaded Iran, the Iraqi military bought a game about such an invasion for several hundred thousand dollars from the BDM Corp., one of
the top computer consultants for the Pentagon. Before the Kuwait war it brought another such game. U.S. interventions in the Middle East have been gamed and simulated for years. A specific plan for liberating Kuwait was practiced in Schwarzkopf’s Central Command two years before the Iraqi invasion (Der Derian, 1991).

During the war, gaming and simulations continued. They ranged from giant mock fortifications built by the Marines in California to practice assaulting, through flight simulators used by all the pilots, to the computers at Desert Storm headquarters that ran complicated scenarios.

**Humans and Machines**

The U.S. military has been striving for years to replace soldiers in battle with machines so as to make foreign wars more palatable to the American people, who still refuse to admit to themselves that they are citizens of the history's most powerful imperial state. In this particular war, thanks to overwhelming air superiority and incredible Iraqi inferiority, a remarkably low casualty count was achieved, making the American public very happy. Reagan got more troops blown up in one hour in Lebanon than Bush lost in the whole Gulf War, although hundreds of thousands of Iraqi and Kuwaiti soldiers and civilians were killed. The second benefit of the machines-for-men policy is that machines help soldiers kill more enemies, not just physically but psychologically as well. It is hard to kill people hand to hand, one to one, face to face. With machines you can kill many and at a distance. This somehow seems more moral as well. The confirmed killing of thousands of civilians in Iraq would constitute a terrible war crime if they had been killed by soldiers with knives or hand guns. The real morality of the incredible air attacks can be inferred from this pilot's account of his experience: “It's almost like you flipped on the light in the kitchen at night and the cockroaches start scurrying, and we’re killing them” (Morse, 1991, p. A3).

Iraqi casualties, military and civilian, were high to keep U.S. casualties low. Similar decisions have been made, albeit shamefully, during modern wars. But to bomb civilians so as to lose fewer soldiers would have been considered quite unmanly by earlier standards.

**War Is No Longer So “Manly”**

The foregoing makes the point that war is no longer just for men. Not that this war was less sexist than others, but it was more complicated in gender terms as the media went out of its way to show. Children were left at home with fathers when their mothers went off to war. Children were left at home parentless when their parents went off to war. Soldiers got pregnant and were sent home; others cried on TV while showing pictures of their kids to the world. But all was not gentle sweetness and light. The inevitable women
prisoners and women casualties were still shocking. And on the front lines, where the living meet the dead, war's old gender rules still applied, at least symbolically.

Clearly, in war's coding, the inferior and hated enemy is feminine. Consider what one U.S. pilot said when he shot down an Iraqi: “Cold, cold smoked the bitch.” The pilot didn't say “bastard,” he said “bitch.” In a related dynamic, covered Saudi woman were dehumanized by the U.S. troops who called them “BMOs” (black moving objects) and “Ninja women” (Newsweek Staff, 1991a, p. 12). And, as with most wars, while the enemy is labeled female, our weapons can be considered male. The owner of the New England Patriots football team made this clear when he compared Patriot missiles to the male genitalia his players used to harass a woman reporter: “What do the Iraqis have in common with Lisa Olson? They've both seen Patriot missiles up close” (Newsweek Staff, 1991b, p. 23).

Cynthia Enloe (1983, 1993) has shown that while women have always been important in war, and war has always severely impacted their lives, seldom have they participated directly in combat. Lately, however, women have been allowed, physically and rhetorically, closer and closer to the very heart of war, the killing and dying. This also bleeds over into the militarization of the home front. During the Gulf War Tina Kerbrat, a Los Angeles policewoman, was killed by an illegal Salvadoran immigrant. Said Police Chief Darryl Gates in a “profanity-laced news conference” after the shooting:

There's been a lot of talk about women in combat these days... The Los Angeles Police Department's women are in combat all the time. There's a war right here and it's been fierce... If you think the war is just in the Persian Gulf, you are wrong. Our casualties are greater in proportion to the casualties in the Persian Gulf. (Associated Press Service, 1991b, p. A6)

Judging by Chief Gates's rhetoric, by the large numbers of women in the U.S. military, and by how well they have performed, it seems clear that women are at war now to stay.

**War against Nature**

The Persian Gulf War was one of the most disastrous ever for the environment, especially considering the war's limited scope and duration. T. M. Hawley concludes his study of its environmental destructiveness by calculating that at one point 15% of the world's oil consumption was burning in Kuwait, producing a petroleum fog that spread over 1.3 million square miles. The oil spill was two to three times bigger than any other in history (Hawley, 1992, p. 183). It wasn't just the direct air, water, and land pollution from the combat or other hostile actions. The indirect ecological costs of supplying
and maintaining the two armies, from manufacture to deployment, was at least as great as the direct battle destruction, and probably equaled whatever conscious ecological destruction Saddam ordered. Humans can totally destroy nature but the military isn’t really aware of it. Bureaucratic/logistical and technoscientific power can now overwhelm the biosphere even by “accident” or “mistake” as the case may be.

War has always been polluting, and this one was no exception. In August 1990 the White House waived for the military the provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act for environmental studies because of the Persian Gulf mobilization. In January 1991 the Pentagon said that that waiver might “be the first in a wider program seeking suspension of other federal environmental statutes” (Siegel, 1991, p. B11). Ironically, just as the war was starting the DoD was committing itself to becoming ecologically responsible. But war itself is not ecologically responsible. As a Colonel Norris of the U.S. Army said in responding to a question about military pollution in Virginia, “Ma’am, we’re in the business of guarding this country, not protecting the environment” (personal communication from an observer).

**War as Spectacle**

War was once as much a ritual as a pragmatic activity. Hunting, manslaying, and human sacrifice, the parents of war, were originally profoundly religious activities. As the child of these practices, war had as part of its very rationale a focus that linked effective and holy display with material and metaphysical efficacy. As war became civilized the show was less for fate, for the gods and goddesses, and more for the morale of the warriors on both sides. Still, Paul Virilio is right when he says, “War can never break free from the magical spectacle because its very purpose is to produce that spectacle” (Virilio, 1990, p. 5; emphasis in original). Without the spectacle it would not be bearable. With the Gulf War, however, a mass media war, it was not just the United States and Allied troops who were ennobled by the great display of Western weapons, it was all of the West. It wasn’t just the Iraqi troops who were bedazzled by these weapons’ glamorous and destructive power, although they felt it most truly, in their bodies. But it was everyone in the TV-watching world that witnessed the raids on Baghdad, that rode smart bombs into shelters and bunkers, that saw Patriots meet Scuds in cloudy night skies. We were dazzled as well, with horror, or awe, or even pleasure, or all of these at once.

And it was to us, the viewing public represented by the camera crews of the infotainment industry, that many of the Iraqi troops surrendered, sometimes even chanting “George Bush, George Bush.” The line between spectacle and battle can become quite indistinct. The Pentagon contracted with National Football League films to make the DoD’s official version of the war. Said NFL Films president Steve Sabol,
I don’t want to say that war is the same as football, [but the military] likes the way we have presented and mythologized pro football. The same spirit and ideology that football glorifies and inspires—discipline, devotion, commitment to a cause, unselfishness, leadership—is also the spirit necessary for a successful military endeavor. (Santa Rosa Press Democrat, 1991, p. A1)

Meanwhile, the motion picture industry launched an offensive of Gulf War films. They included: Desert Shield starring Jan-Michael Vincent as a commando in the war, for 21st Century Productions; Human Shield, about “the kidnapping of an American colonel’s brother by a vengeful Iraqi officer,” for Cannon Pictures; Shield of Honor, an Iraqi plot to destroy Israel, starring David Carradine, and Omar Sharif as Saddam Hussein; and Target U.S.A., an attempt by Iraqi terrorists to take over an American town (Arar, 1991).

J. Glenn Gray points out in his remarkable book The Warriors: Reflections on Men in Battle (1959) that the beauty of explosions and the eroticism of the speed and the sounds of war are very attractive to many soldiers. Now, from our living rooms, we can watch these lethal pyrotechnics in real time and with no danger, perhaps mistaking them for NFL highlights or the latest war thriller. Robert E. Lee said, “It is good that war is so horrible; lest we grow too fond of it.” Postmodern war isn’t horrible at all . . . for most of us.

**The New Emotions of War**

War has always been emotional: fearful, awful, inspiring, dreadful. Great currents of love (for comrades and distant families), pity (for enemy soldiers or civilian casualties), and hate (for the rear echelons, the brass, and civilians at home in general) have been felt by most combatants in modern war. Now, however, these emotions traditionally centered around other humans are being supplemented by emotions about machines, especially love for them (technophilia), fear of them (technophobia), and the belief that they can save us (technism). The technoeuphoria of the Gulf War makes it seem as if the high-tech weapons won the war, even though all they did was keep Allied casualties low.

Low-tech weapons worked just as well as high, and many high-tech systems had very poor performance rates or failed to work at all. The Tomahawk missiles, not used in the last half of the war, and the Patriots were particularly ineffective, although the press was told the opposite (Friedrich, 1991, pp. 169, 175). Gregg Easterbrook (1991, p. 49) concludes:

- “The low tech stuff is working as well as the high tech.”
- “Obvious is doing just as well as stealth.”
- “The same trends making weapons more accurate also make targets more elusive.”
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- "Wonder weapons kill things better than people."
- "The high tech arsenal might not be as effective against a more formidable foe."

The Patriot-Scud confrontation is a good case in point. Israeli defense officials have testified that while Patriots hit 41 of 42 Scuds that were fired at over Israel, they only destroyed the warhead 44% of the time and "may have caused more actual damage than [they] prevented" (San Francisco Chronicle Staff, 1991, p. A24). The 29 U.S. soldiers killed in the Saudi barracks at Riyadh may have been killed because a Patriot hit a Scud and brought the warhead down prematurely. It was headed out into the desert (Bowman, 1991, p. 8).

Finally, the very technology that brings so much speed to war also causes some surprising delays. General Schwarzkopf admitted to reporters that he couldn't change his battle plan easily because it was so computerized (Glass, 1991). In this war that didn't matter; in another war it well might.

The Special Discourse of Postmodern War

War is a discourse system, but each type of war has different rules of discourse. In postmodern war, the central role of human bodies in war is being eclipsed rhetorically by the growing importance of machines in general and weapons in particular. The number of Iraqi tanks and planes destroyed was always available; the count of dead Iraqi bodies was not. It was considered a "distasteful" or "pornographic" interest by one British briefing officer. General Schwarzkopf could even go so far as to say, "we are not in the business of killing." In his essay on bodies in the Gulf War, Hugh Gusterson (1991) explains how the general could make such a claim:

Schwarzkopf was able to make the extraordinary and, on the face of it, absurd contention that he was fighting a war without being in the business of killing largely because of the power of a system of representations which marginalizes the presence of the body in war, fetishizes machines, and personalizes international conflicts while depersonalizing the people who die in them. (p. 51)

That war is a discourse has been remarked upon by many. The historian Susan Mansfield argued that "Traditional cultures clearly understood war as a form of discourse between the human and 'the other' " (1982, p. 236). The meticulous Quincy Wright concluded, "modern war tends to be about words more than about things, about potentialities, hopes, and aspirations more than about facts, grievances, and conditions" (1964, pp. 356–357). So it shouldn't surprise us that Schwarzkopf remarked in his famous postwar
briefing, "It's hard to read an army," or that George Bush, in defending the war in his televised announcement of the hostilities, characterized it as an act of definition: "We're called upon to define who we are and what we believe."

But in postmodern war discourse the best arguments are weapons, and they trump bodies, even words, again and again. While in earlier wars the discourse was limited to those who were there, now it is a conversation for the whole electronic culture. In that conversation, images and simulations are sometimes just as important as actual events because they become events in and of themselves.

Lessons of Desert Shield/Sword/Storm

The elements of postmodern war are contradictory; so it is with the lessons of the Gulf War. War is limited in some ways, expanding in others. It is more lethal for some, less lethal for many. It remains real war in most ways, but it has become unreal in some important respects. What this war clearly showed is that contemporary war is very confusing. But three of the clearest lessons were in what the United States/UN versus Iraq war did not prove:

1. It didn't show that high technology and smart weapons are crucial to winning wars. The Allies would have won this war with dumb weapons. Almost all the weapons, from the dumbest to the smartest, worked with the limited efficiency of everything in war. The Iraqis had some of the newest equipment in the world. It didn't help them. This war shows how human will, accurate judgments, and political alliances are more important than ever in war today.

2. It didn't prove an end to the Vietnam syndrome. The euphoria that declared the Vietnam syndrome over with the crushing of Saddam seemed hollow less than a hundred days after headlines screamed Bush's claim that "This War Is Behind Us!" More sober analysts, including General Schwarzkopf himself, have always refused to equate the Iraqis with the Vietnamese, or the Vietnam War with shorter conflicts. To quote Schwarzkopf:

I certainly don't give the Iraqis much credit. Ho Chi Minh and [Gen. Vo Nguyen] didn't live in luxury, didn't have seven different palaces, didn't drive white Mercedeses like Saddam Hussein. Hanoi had an entirely different class of leadership. (quoted in Lamb, 1991, p. A14)

James Webb, the marine combat veteran and former Secretary of the Navy, also refuses to claim that the easy victory in Kuwait erases the lessons
of Vietnam. He points out that we didn’t lose in Vietnam because of our technology but because of our opponent:

We had one of the best-trained and best-equipped armies in American history in Vietnam. Our technology was just as good as it was in the Persian Gulf war. Not to denigrate what we accomplished against Hussein, but Hussein was no military strategist.

If Ho Chi Minh had put 60 percent of his army in one spot where there were not any trees, we would have blown them away in 40 days too. (quoted in Capuzzo, 1991, p. E12)

That the Gulf War erases the Vietnam syndrome is just wishful and dangerous thinking. The Vietnamese won the first postmodern war because they had the proper strategy, motivation, and organization (including important allies) to match their enemies. The Soviets were driven from Afghanistan for similar reasons. Fundamentally, both were because the people of the West and North aren’t willing to support long bloody wars for the sake of empire; while many people of the East and South are willing to fight and die for the hope of something better than what they have now, or at least to drive foreign armies out of their countries.

The syndrome isn’t cured at home, either. There was a truly significant level of resistance to the war with Iraq, despite the brilliant political mobilization orchestrated by the war movement. Antiwar forces didn’t stop the war, but they came close. The war movement did triumph in the end, but it has a problem: they may not get an enemy like Saddam again for quite some time.

3. Many analysts have been struck by the power of this war’s images. These are important, especially in justifying war and seducing many to its glamour. But simulations are not as important as the real, Baudrillard (1991) to the contrary. For those who were there, or anyone who reflects seriously on what being there meant, this was war like war has been for thousands of years—death, fear, relief, and many more emotions, and real bodies really dead at another’s hand, no matter how remote. This is the real horror, and it holds the true glamour in its old twisted rituals.

The New World Disorder

This is black versus white, good versus evil.

—President George Bush, to a group of college students in January 1991

Two distinct, through interrelated, forces have shaped modern Western culture and identity. The first . . . has been the centrality of reason as the constitutive principle of modernity itself. . . . The second . . . has been the intensive
and intense encounter with other cultures brought about by imperialism expansion. . . . Saddam is not an alien monster, a monster against modernity, but rather a monster born of modernity, a monster within modernity.

—Kevin Robins (1991, p. 42)

The New World Order—Peace in the West, war for the rest.
—John Brown Childs (1991, p. 83)

Horrible as the Persian Gulf war was, it didn’t mark the beginning of any new era or new type of war. The New World Order is the Old World Order. The United States had made a commitment to the continuation of the Cold War militarization of domestic and foreign policy even as the Soviet empire began its collapse. As Marine Col. Lawrence Karch put it in “The Corps in 2001”:

Increasing nationalism, religious and racial strife, bitter sectarian enmities, competition for materials and energy, and endemic poverty will ensure a slow burn into the 21st century. . . . The United States for its part must be a steadfast “Arsenal of Democracy” in low-intensity warfare, and a combatant only when U.S. national interests cannot otherwise be protected. (1988, p. 41)

He went on to predict numerous LICs and at least one midintensity war involving the United States, most likely in Korea, Southwest Asia, or the Mediterranean. Sociologist John Brown Childs quotes an article by Gen. George Crist (also of the Marines although retired) in the winter 1990 issue of Strategic Review. General Crist makes it clear that as the Soviet threat decreases “operations in the third world move up in priority” (Childs, 1991, p. 6). It is called by some the “Rogue State Doctrine,” and it has justified a U.S. military in the mid-1990s of roughly 1.5 million soldiers and a yearly war budget under President Clinton of $260–270 billion, which is equivalent to what the United States spent yearly during the Cold War, except during the Korean and Vietnam Wars (Klare, 1995, p. 625).

Noam Chomsky (1989) quotes Dimitri Simes, a well-connected academic, regarding one version of this new “American Peace” that many governmental voices have called for. It doesn’t seem that peaceful at all:

First, the U.S. can shift NATO costs to its European competitors. . . . Second, it can end the manipulation of America by Third World nations. . . . Third . . . the apparent decline of the Soviet threat . . . makes military power more useful as a United States foreign policy instrument. (p. 7)

To justify this new aggressiveness, the military has to claim that today’s world is even more dangerous than the superpower standoff. By 1991 this had
become the U.S. Army's official "Posture Statement." "The United States faces as a complex and varied a security environment as it enters the 1990s as in any time in its history" (Klare, 1990).

Along with the continuation of cold (or low-intensity) war in its new diffuse North–South format, there are a number of aspects of the world situation that are important for understanding postmodern war. Across the spectrum, enumerated below, a number of the usual signs of postmodernism are present, including the centrality of computation and information, the increases in speed, the proliferation of contradictory trends, strange marriages and alliances, machine mediations of culture, and so on.

* * *

There are those who have nothing but praise for how the United States methodically destroyed Iraq and its armies with technoscience. They see this as a cool, reasonable way to wage war. But it is actually a kind of technological fanaticism, as a brief reflection on the fate of the Iraqi conscripts shows. Michael Sherry, in his comments on the United States's strategic bombing of Japan, describes the technological fanaticism of U.S. military policy in Iraq perfectly:

The lack of a proclaimed intent to destroy, the sense of being driven by the twin demands of bureaucracy and technology, distinguished America's technological fanaticism from its enemies' ideological fanaticism. That both were fanatical was not easily recognizable at the time because the forms were so different. The enemy . . . had little choice but to be profligate in the expenditure of manpower and therefore in the fervid exhortation of men to hatred and sacrifice—they were not, and knew they were not, a match in economic and technological terms for the Allies. The United States had different resources with which to be fanatical: resources allowing it to take the lives of others more than its own, ones whose accompanying rhetoric of technique disguised the will to destroy. As lavish with machines as the enemy was with men, Americans appeared to themselves to practice restraint, to be immune from the passion to destroy that characterized their enemies and from the urge to self-destruction as well. (1987, pp. 253–254)

How this technological fanaticism has come to dominate U.S. military policy is a long story, some of which is recounted in this book. But before we look at its history in detail we should first get a better measure of its scope. The 1990–1991 Mideast War is a good case study, but it is not unique. Technoscience is central to the rest of U.S. military policy as well. It turns out Desert Storm was just an expression, albeit the first really effective one, of a philosophy of war that is in place throughout the U.S. Department of Defense, in all branches, for almost all missions, as the next chapter shows.
Chapter Three

Military Computerdom

Our leaders and scholars . . . have given up on peace on earth and now seek peace of mind through the worship of new techno-dieties. They look up to the surveillance satellite, deep into the entrails of electronic micro-circuitry, and from behind Stealth protection to find the omniscient machines and incontrovertible signs that can help us see and, if state reason necessitates, evade or destroy the other.

—James Der Derian (1990, p. 298)

The Proliferation of Military Computing

Before the cyberwar mania, described in Chapter 1, and the computerized Gulf War, of Chapter 2, most of what the public heard about military high computing was about the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI)\(^1\) and its proposed artificial intelligence (AI) control system. There was also discussion among computer scientists about the related Strategic Computing Program (SCP).\(^2\) Both these projects will be described in detail below, but first it must be stressed that they are only part of a massive commitment since the 1980s to AI and other advanced computing technologies by the U.S. military. Expectations that this commitment will eventually pay off are what underlay the theories of info- and cyberwar.

Projects using AI and related techniques include "brilliant" or "autonomous" missiles (they choose their own targets), a "robotic obstacle-breaching assault tank" (a mine remover), an autonomous vehicle for laying mines underwater, all sorts of automated construction and manufacturing equipment, a wide range of robotic research, numerous programs for automating the maintenance of high-tech weapons, and an ever-expanding army of data control and manipulation programs.

The U.S. military has a large AI research capability of its own. The Air Force has AI institutes at Wright Aeronautical Laboratories, the Human Resources Center in San Antonio, Logistics Command, the Institute of