

National Command Authority Options

— for projection of military power

by Mike Sheheane

In view of recent events in the Persian Gulf, the ability of the United States to project military power in support of its vital interests is extremely relevant and ripe for discussion. I would like to discuss the options that were available to the National Command Authority (NCA) in light of those options that were actually implemented.

The organization of the Department of Defense provides the political and military leadership of the United States with considerable flexibility in the manner in which military power is applied in support of the nation's vital interests.

The organization of warfighting capabilities into unified commands establishes joint service commands dedicated to planning for contingencies in specific geographical areas of the world. The principal task of these unified theater commanders (CINCs) is to plan and execute campaigns and major operations to achieve strategic and policy aim.

In the Persian Gulf Theater, this task fell upon the United States Central Command (CENTCOM). With responsibility for southwest Asia, CENTCOM had developed plans for various military options solely for this geographical region of the

world. In contrast, the NCA and Joint Chiefs of Staff have to consider military options in light of their global impact on the national objectives. After the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, the NCA was required to give CENTCOM specific guidance regarding national objectives and the extent of military force the NCA was willing to allow to achieve those objectives. As a CINC, General H. Norman Schwarzkopf had various military options available as well as the ability to move from one option to more aggressive options.

The first option, presence, is an integral part of the unified command structure itself. The United States openly demonstrates its willingness to protect national objectives through the mere presence of unified commands within the defense force structure. The geographically based organization of these commands serves to demonstrate to potential adversaries that United States national interests in specific regions of the world are being closely monitored. The CENTCOM-sponsored exercise, BRIGHT STAR, repeatedly served to project a U.S. presence in the CENTCOM theater. In the case of the invasion of Kuwait by Iraq, mere U.S.

presence was insufficient to deter the aggression.

The second option available to the U.S. could have been a show of force. This option equates to the commonly used term, muscle flexing, or the archaic but descriptive military term, saber rattling. An excellent example of this option occurred during the later part of the Iran-Iraq War when the U.S. Navy began escorting oil tankers in the Persian Gulf after Iran threatened to attack any ships in the area. This show of force worked since no ships were attacked. Due to the somewhat surprise invasion of Kuwait and the rapid escalation of events, this option was not used as a U.S. response to the Iraqi action.

The deployment of the U.S. Rapid Deployment Force into Saudi Arabia represented the execution of the military option known as a demonstration. This deployment, Desert Shield, coupled with the arrival of such follow-on forces as the VII Corps was designed to warn Iraq that the U.S. and its coalition partners had the resolve and the capability to prevent further aggression while still seeking diplomatic solutions to the invasion of Kuwait. Any prudent and responsible leader should have realized from this

diplomatic solutions to the invasion of Kuwait. Any prudent and responsible leader should have realized from this demonstration that the U.S. would do whatever had to be done to satisfy national objectives.

Subsequent to the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, the United Nations adopted a series of resolutions placing stringent economic sanctions on Iraq in an effort to convince that country's leadership that they should withdraw. To enforce these resolutions, the U.S. and other coalition forces imposed the military option known as a blockade. History is full of examples of blockades being used during times of conflict. As with most of these previous blockades, the purpose of this option was to cut off all commerce into and out of the blockaded country, Iraq. The blockade was somewhat less than what might be considered a total blockade since lines of communication were left open and the movement of personnel into and out of Iraq was permitted, as well as allowing some medical and humanitarian supplies into the country. All commerce appears to have been effectively stopped with the exception of the clandestine transport of some ammunition from Jordan into Iraq.

All other options failing to bring about the desired results, the NCA authorized the CINC to escalate U.S. efforts to an actual "forced entry," known as DESERT STORM, to expell Iraqi forces from Kuwait. Extensive planning resulted in the conduct of a very successful air campaign which devastated deployed Iraqi forces as well as destroyed that country's war materials production capability within the country. The failure of Iraq to withdraw after weeks of pounding

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from the air resulted in the initiation of an extremely successful ground attack. This air and ground attack may serve as the standard by which all future forced entry options are judged: total success in achieving the NCA's stated objectives while sustaining minimal casualties to friendly troops and non-combatants.

An option that only fully came to light after the successful forced entry was the use of "special operations." There was some information during the initial phase of DESERT STORM regarding the United States' use of psychological operations in an effort to get Iraqi front-line troops to surrender rather than to continue to be subjected to the extensive air attacks. What was not known was the extent to which unconventional warfare forces were being used to provide intelligence and target information. The full extent of these special operations may never be fully known due to security restrictions, but it has become apparent from what information has been released that this option was extensively implemented and had a significant impact on the overall success of the forced entry.

In years to come, the Persian Gulf

conflict may become the textbook example of the use of various military options to project military power to secure national objectives. As discussed here, the U.S. utilized virtually all of the recognized military options in bringing about the expulsion of Iraqi forces from Kuwait. From establishing a presence in the theater (BRIGHT STAR), to the demonstration of resolve (DESERT SHIELD), to the culminating forced entry (DESERT STORM), the U.S. effectively used its military options to resolve a problem of national and global interest.

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