

MYTHOLOGY AND THE AIR CAMPAIGN IN THE LIBERATION OF IRAQ

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Myths about the Liberation of Iraq

Despite the unprecedented degree of media scrutiny, the coalition's liberation of Iraq in 2003 strayed into the realm of mythology with regard to the air campaign. Two myths have developed about the air campaign and these are:

- Its simultaneity.
- Its 'strategic' focus, that is the air campaign sought to deal with Iraq's 'capacity to wage war' through attacks on Iraq's strategic command and control systems, its infrastructure and forces out of contact with the coalition's forces.

Such myths are not borne out by the available body of facts and can lead to faulty conclusions about the nature and role of air power in contemporary war. This article will dispel these two myths. The coalition's presence in Iraqi skies between 1991 and 2003 allowed the coalition to prepare and execute operations well in advance of the recognised start of the war (the air attack against a leadership target early on 19 March 2003) let alone land operations. It will also demonstrate that the intended focus of air effort was placed against Iraq's fielded forces as opposed to its war-making capacity, and as such was 'tactical' as opposed to 'strategic'.

Launch of operations

The 1991 Gulf War represented the sequential application of air power and ground forces where an air campaign preceded the commencement of offensive operations on

land. The 1991 plan for the liberation of Kuwait was a combination of several different land and air options. It would see a sequential application of air and land assets in a four-phased operation:

- Phase I: The strategic air and unmanned campaign to destroy Iraq's C³I networks (Days 1-14);
- Phase II: The suppression of enemy air defenses (SEAD) (Days 12-15);
- Phase III: The preparation of the battlefield through air power (Days 15-27); and
- Phase IV: The Air-Land Battle to liberate Kuwait (Days 19-32).¹

In reality, the 1991 air campaign's phases did not last as long as planned due to success, and the Commander-in-Chief U.S. Central Command, General H. Norman Schwarzkopf, U.S. Army, directed a greater focus on Phases III and IV during the later stages of the campaign.²

The 2003 invasion of Iraq was just as sequential as its forerunner, but the myth of its simultaneity developed during the war itself. The American Secretary of Defense, Donald Rumsfeld, tried to differentiate the approaches taken to the 2003 invasion of Iraq from the 1991 Gulf War by stating that the latter: ". . . was a sustained 38-day air campaign, followed by a brief ground attack. Instead, in this case, the ground attack actually started before the air war, with thousands of Special Forces pouring into all regions of the country and a large force rolling across the Kuwaiti border into southern Iraq."³ Rumsfeld argued that the 2003 war was sequential in that ground forces led the assault on Iraq and then the simultaneous application of air power and ground forces

¹ *Conduct of the Persian Gulf War*, Vol. I, (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 1991), pp. 94 and 121, and Col R. Lewis, USAF, 'JFACC Problems Associated with Battlefield Preparation in DESERT STORM', *Airpower Journal*, Vol. VIII, No. 1 (Spring 1994), p. 4. 'Air Land Battle' refers to the American operational-level doctrine for the planning, coordination and conduct of air and land campaigns designed for use against the Warsaw Pact in Europe.

² See: Richard Hallion, *Storm over Iraq: Air Power and the Gulf War*, (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992), pp. 206-209.

³ "DoD News Briefing - Secretary Rumsfeld and Gen. Myers", 1 April 2003, p. 3.
<http://www.globalsecurity.org/wmd/library/news/iraq/2003/iraq-030401-dod01.htm>.

occurred second. The U.S. Army's official history contradicted the Secretary and suggested that: ". . . ground maneuver began simultaneously with air operations to preclude the Iraqi regime from undertaking a scorched earth campaign or turning the oil fields into a WMD . . ." ⁴ Even well known historians were attributing virtue to the simultaneous approach taken to the 2003 war. Victor Davis Hanson argued that:

By forgoing a long bombing campaign but starting the land invasion in tandem with precision strikes on the regime's grandees, we caught the Ba'athists off guard . . . There were also political considerations behind the decision not to soften up Iraq by air for weeks on end . . . we felt we could not ruin the heavy infrastructure of the country, suffer through weeks of televised images of collateral damage caused by us, allow Saddam to devour the resources of his own people or endure endless criticism of our alleged timidity about putting 'boots on the ground'. ⁵

It is remarkable that politicians, official histories and even some renowned historians have drawn conclusions about the March 2003 war based on the date actual hostilities began (19 March 2003) as opposed to the longer-term effort to deal with Iraq between April 1991 and March 2003. The application of this artificial date would cause one to draw the erroneous conclusion that air power was applied simultaneously or after land operations began. Yet in both the long and short term, it was applied sequentially and preceded land operations.

In the long term, coalition aircraft had been enforcing two separate no-fly zones (NFZ) over Iraq through Operation NORTHERN WATCH (originally known as Operation PROVIDE COMFORT II) and Operation SOUTHERN WATCH for over ten years. During this time, only a relatively narrow band of central Iraqi airspace remained untouched by the coalition. Operation NORTHERN WATCH saw the coalition deny the

⁴ COL Greg Fontenot, Retired, U.S. Army, LTC E.J. Degen, U.S. Army and LTC David Tomm, U.S. Army, *On Point: The U.S. Army in Operation IRAQI FREEDOM*, (Washington, DC: Office of the Chief of Staff of the Army, 2004), p. xxvi.

⁵ Victor Davis Hanson, "Lessons of the War", *Commentary* (June 2003), p. 18.

Iraqi government the ability to fly in Iraqi airspace north of the 36th parallel as of 11 April 1991. Operation SOUTHERN WATCH saw the same south of the 32nd parallel in support of United Nations Security Council Resolution 688 as of 26 August 1992. It should be noted, however, that the southern no-fly zone only extended to the 32nd parallel until 3 September 1996, when the coalition expanded it to the 33rd parallel in response to the Iraqi recapture of the city of Irbil from the Kurds. The extended range meant that the coalition could strike at most of Iraq's southeastern air defence network and targets in Baghdad with little to no notice.⁶ This allowed the coalition to prepare the proverbial battlefield in the portions of Iraq covered by NFZs in advance. Lieutenant General Michael Moseley, USAF, the Coalition Forces Air Component Commander (CFACC), admitted this in a briefing during the 2003 war by noting that:

. . . we've been involved in Operation Northern Watch for well over 4,000 days. We've been in Operation Southern Watch for well over 3,800 days. So we've done some preparation in that time relative to north of 36 and south of 33. And from June of last year up until the initiation of hostilities we increased our presence in the no-fly zones to enforce the Security Council resolutions, and by doing that he shot at us more and in doing that we were able to respond more on items that threatened us.⁷

It should also be noted that a NFZ favours the enforcing party in a war, as they would start from a position of local air superiority in the NFZ. This meant that the coalition did not have to expend additional effort in reconnaissance and suppression of enemy air defences (SEAD) in the two NFZs.

⁶ E. Schmitt, 'Air Zone Enforced', *New York Times*, 5 September 1996, B. Starr, 'Clinton's line in the sand puts pressure on DoD', *Jane's Defence Weekly*, 11 September 1996, and 'Continuing Challenges . . . Evolving Threats . . . Improving Posture', *1997 CENTCOM Posture Statement*, (Tampa: CENTCOM Headquarters, 1997), p. 16.

⁷ Lieutenant General Michael Moseley, USAF, "Coalition Forces Air Component Command Briefing", 5 April 2003, p. 8. See: www.globalsecurity.org/wmd/library/news/2003/iraq-030405-dod01.htm.

The requirement for preparation had been reduced as a result of the rules of engagement (RoEs) used for Operation SOUTHERN WATCH. The RoEs stated clearly that:

No threat to coalition operations over southern Iraq will be tolerated. The Iraqi Government should know that coalition aircraft will use appropriate force in response to any indication of hostile intent as defined in previous diplomatic demarches. Inter alia, illumination and/or tracking of aircraft with fire control radars and any other actions deemed threatening to coalition aircraft, such as the intrusion of Iraqi aircraft in the no-fly zone, would be an indication of hostile intent.⁸

This stemmed from the right to self-defence enshrined in Article 51 of the UN Charter. As the forces conducting Operation SOUTHERN WATCH were monitoring compliance with SCR 688, they needed to use the right to self-defence to justify or permit the use of force. Due to the nature of Iraqi air defence weapons, the target needs to be 'illuminated' by radar prior to launching the missile.⁹ This led to the 'illumination' of targets being perceived as a threat, and therefore, sufficient justification to attack air defence radar and weapons systems as a means of self-defence.

The seemingly permissive RoEs permitted the preparations to extend into the realm of SEAD. This is a crucial precursor to any form of offensive air campaign, and was precisely what occurred in the short term prior to the recognised commencement of hostilities. The Joint Task Force - South West Asia, the force enforcing the southern no-fly zone, conducted Operation SOUTHERN FOCUS in order to prepare for the war in advance of the actual invasion of Iraq from the 1st to the 20th of March 2003. This would mean that the route to Baghdad would be cleared of opposition, allowing for initial

⁸ 'Statement issued by the Members', in M. Weller, Ed., *Iraq and Kuwait: The Hostilities and their Aftermath*, (Cambridge: Grotius Publications, 1993), p. 725.

efforts to be focused on the establishment of air supremacy over all of Iraq and the application of air power against strategic targets. One report, contained in an unclassified U.S. Air Force magazine, described Operation SOUTHERN FOCUS:

Between March 1 and the start of the war on March 20 [Baghdad time], pilots flew 4,000 strike and support sorties in the no-fly zones, 'shaping the battlefield' by knocking out radars and air defense guns and cutting fiber optic links . . . Jets were able to fly with virtual impunity in support of the troops in southern Iraq, and combat sorties turned quickly to strategic targets in Baghdad and elsewhere . . .¹⁰

For 20 days, the coalition engaged in the equivalent of Phase II (SEAD) of the 1991 Gulf War in the southern NFZ. Moreover, this preparation occurred during a flurry of international diplomacy intended to avert the coalition from waging war on Iraq.

Conducting SEAD in the southern NFZ in advance of the war freed aircraft for other tasks, be it offensive air support to ground forces or to a strategic air campaign. The official CENTAF report noted that during the liberation of Iraq (defined as 0300 (GMT) 19 March to 0259 (GMT) 18 April 2003) only 14.1% of the effort was planned for target associated with the establishment of Air Supremacy, but only 7% of the overall effort was actually executed against such targets.¹¹

It was the nature of the RoEs from Operation SOUTHERN WATCH that allowed the coalition to prepare to attack Iraq in advance of 19 March 2003 (the date of the first recognised strikes of the war). This, however, artificially separates what was a preparatory campaign (that could have only existed due to the NFZ enforcement efforts) from the 2003 air campaign. The air campaign began with the launching of Operation

⁹ This included the SA-2, SA-3, and Roland systems. The remainder of Iraqi air defence weapons are passive infrared guided. See: T. Cullen and C. Foss, *Jane's Land-Based Air Defence 1996-1997*, (Coulson: Jane's, 1996), pp. 8-10, 98, 100, 102, 113, 115, 140, 247 and 250 for technical details.

¹⁰ Richard Newman, "The Iraqi File", *Air Force*, Vol. 86, No. 7 (July 2003), p.7. See also: Williamson Murray and Robert H. Scales, Jr., *The Iraq War*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003, pp. 162-163.

¹¹ *Operation IRAQI FREEDOM - By The Numbers* (Shaw AFB: USCENTAF, 2003), pp. 4-5.

SOUTHERN FOCUS (1-20 March 2003) and therefore the overall campaign to liberate Iraq saw a sequential application of air power and then ground forces. Any reference to complete simultaneity or that land operations preceded air operations is mythology.

'Strategic' Focus

The second myth that emanated from the air campaign was that it represented the failure of strategic air power. Robert Pape argued that the 2003 air campaign represented an example of air power's inability to deliver 'strategic' results and that the coalition changed the way it employed air power to focus against Iraq's armed forces in response to this failure.¹² This myth reinforces Pape's earlier arguments about that the use of air power in a 'denial' strategy is the best approach to employing air power.¹³

The facts from the 2003 war do not appear to support the myth propagated by Pape.

The air campaign opened with a series of attacks on targets in and around Baghdad in an attempt to induce 'Shock and Awe'. This buzzword became associated with the recognised (and rather telegenic) first phase of the war (20 to 24 March 2003) and it was frequently shown against a backdrop of mesmerising explosions delivered by coalition air power that lit up the Baghdad skyline. This brought what was a catch phrase for a particular plan into the limelight. As the war continued past 24 March 2003, the 'Shock and Awe' efforts waned.

Pape's myth attributes the failure of 'Shock and Awe' with being the cause of the air campaign's later shift to a 'tactical' focus. Therefore, Pape's myth can be dispelled if

¹² Robert Pape, "The True Worth of Air Power", *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 83, No. 2 (March - April 2004), pp. 116-130. See also: Merrill McPeak, "Hit or Miss", *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 83, No. 5 (September - October 2004), pp. 160-164. Max Boot raised a similar point in "The New American Way of War", *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 82, No. 4 (July-August 2003), pp. 41-59.

¹³ For details, see: Robert Pape, *Bombing to Win: Air Power and Coercion in War*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), pp. 10, and 324-325.

the later change in focus can be attributed to other factors, such as campaign design, weather or changes in the situation.

It is necessary to distinguish between 'tactical' and 'strategic' foci. A 'tactical' focus would be defined by an intentionally disproportionate degree of effort against 'tactical' as opposed to 'strategic' targets.¹⁴ The U.S. Department of Defense's definition of strategic air warfare provides one means of distinguishing the two types:

Air combat and supporting operations designed to effect, through the systematic application of force to a selected series of vital targets, the progressive destruction and disintegration of the enemy's war-making capacity to a point where the enemy no longer retains the ability or the will to wage war. Vital targets may include key manufacturing systems, sources of raw material, critical material, stockpiles, power systems, transportation systems, communication facilities, concentration of uncommitted elements of enemy armed forces, key agricultural areas, and other such target systems.¹⁵

'Tactical' air operations are defined by the criteria of being employed in conjunction with other services or are operating within a specific objective area.¹⁶ There are two means to differentiate the two: one, strategic air warfare is conducted against 'vital' targets where the effect on the target would have a disproportionate effect on the enemy war effort, and two: efforts on vital targets are conducted timed and geographically situated independently from other operations.

The overall context of the coalition's war planning suggests that the emphasis was on the 'tactical' application of air power. In short, air power was intended to serve as a force multiplier to offset a less robust land force structure. This was similar, at least theoretically, to the 1991 Gulf War's phasing of the operation where in later phases, air

¹⁴ The DoD On-line Dictionary defines a target as: "An area, complex, installation, force, equipment, capability, function, or behavior identified for possible action to support the commander's objectives, guidance, and intent." See: <http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/jel/doddict/data/t/05264.html> for details.

¹⁵ See: <http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/jel/doddict/data/s/05069.html>.

power would supplement the land forces in the application of 'AirLand Battle', but there was a subtle difference. The Bush Administration's requirement for a quick victory with a minimal force presence meant that more effort needed to be devoted to close air support of land forces. The land forces had to fight with fewer organic artillery assets and use air assets to offset the lack of artillery. The shift in the air campaign's focus was deliberately planned as opposed to a reaction to the 'Shock and Awe' campaign.¹⁷ In fact, the term 'Shock and Awe' was only a catch phrase used in CENTCOM plans and orders to convey the intended effect of this part of the air campaign to subordinate commanders.¹⁸ The 'strategic' element of the campaign was intended to set the conditions for an easier invasion by land forces.

Targets are normally grouped into 'sets' of similar natures based on the effect that would be generated from attacking them. In the case of the 2003 war, vital targets that supported Iraq's national capacity or will to wage war included weapons of mass destruction (WMD) delivery systems, Iraqi industries supporting the war effort or national military communications systems.¹⁹ The target sets, as defined by the Coalition air campaign plan, are described in Table 1.²⁰

The primary 'strategic' target sets were the WMD (target sets WD and WI in Table 1) and the command and control systems (target set SR in Table 1). WD was intended to cause the suppression of WMD delivery systems, and WI was intended to have the effect of neutralising or controlling Iraq's WMD infrastructure. In short, the strategic air campaign dubbed as 'Shock and Awe' was intended to deliver particular messages to

¹⁶ See <http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/jel/doddict/data/t/05230.html> for details.

¹⁷ Thomas Donnelly, *Operation IRAQI FREEDOM: A Strategic Assessment*, (Washington, DC: AEI, 2004), pp. 36-44 and 53.

¹⁸ Confidential Interview.

the Iraqi population, prevent the use of WMD by Saddam Hussein's regime, and eliminate key leaders or deny them the ability to communicate.

Table 1: Target Sets and Classification

Target Code	Set	Description of Effect	Classification
CA		Maintain Air and Space Supremacy in the Iraqi Theatre of Operations	Tactical
CL2		Support Coalition Forces Land Component Commander to achieve defeat of the Republican Guards Forces Command & Regular Army and conduct Security and Stabilisation Operations	Tactical
CL4		Be prepared to support the prevention of non-combatant forces from impeding Coalition Forces Commander operations	Strategic
CM		Support Coalition Forces Maritime Component Commander to Maintain Maritime Supremacy	Tactical
HA		Support Coalition Forces Commander to secure regional and international support	Strategic
JR		Conduct Joint Reception, Staging, and Onward Integration of Follow-on/Combat Replacement forces and maintain air posture	Tactical

¹⁹ The range of target sets could have been larger had the coalition not chosen to limit them to particular effects. See Page Four below.

²⁰ *Operation IRAQI FREEDOM - By The Numbers*, p. 4. The author classified the target sets as either tactical or strategic.

SR	Continue suppression of Iraqi regime's ability to command Iraqi forces & govern state	Strategic
SS	Be prepared to establish and operate secured airfields in Iraq in order to establish alternate Aerial Points of Disembarkation in support of Coalition Forces Commander operations	Tactical
UW	Support Coalition Forces Special Operations Component Command Operations	Tactical
WD	Suppress Iraqi Tactical Missile Delivery / Weapons of Mass Destruction delivery systems	Strategic
WI	Be prepared to Support Coalition Forces Land Component Commander in neutralising/controlling Weapons of Mass Destruction infrastructure and sensitive site exploitation	Strategic

One of the major concerns for the coalition was that a functional Iraqi command and control system might allow the Iraqi military to use WMD against coalition forces. This was the impetus behind efforts against attacks on command and control systems. The CENTCOM Operations Officer, BG Vincent Brooks, U.S. Army stated that:

. . . the red zone or the red lines that we describe is simply a term that characterises that there may be a trigger line where the regime deems sufficient threat to use weapons of mass destruction, weapons that we know are available to them, weapons that we've seen the regime use on their own people in the past, weapons we believe are in the possession of some of their forces now.

That's the red zone. So it's a conceptual line across which there may be a decision made by regime leaders. That's why we attacked the regime. That's why we attacked the regime's methods of communicating orders. That's why we attack those who would make decisions.²¹

In effect, this was desirable as a force protection measure once coalition ground forces threatened Baghdad. This indicates that the WMD satisfied a strategic goal by directly fulfilling one of the war's aims as well as a tactical requirement to shape the battlefield for the land forces.

Command and control targets, and especially leadership targets, were 'strategic' for two reasons. The coalition attempted to convey to the Iraqi people that the Ba'athist regime was the enemy as opposed to Iraq as a whole; the coalition also appeared to believe that without centralised control, Iraqi forces would lose both the capability and the will to fight coherently. BG Brooks stated that: ". . . we focus our actions directly against the regime leadership, against the regime command and control systems, against the things that protect the regime, whether it's air defense systems or whether it's forces, in an effort to eliminate the influence of the regime and its abilities to continue to conduct command and control."²² This appeared to be reminiscent of the 1991 Gulf War's attempt to 'decapitate' the regime through attacks against leadership targets and telecommunications infrastructure. However, coalition briefings appeared to avoid the term 'decapitation' as it might create false expectations of instantaneous results or an underestimation of Iraqi capabilities. The paucity of attacks against infrastructure appears to have been a lesson drawn from the 1991 Gulf War where the targeting of electrical grids and other industries had a significant effect on the humanitarian situation

²¹ "Transcript of 4/2 CENTCOM Brief", 2 April 2003, p. 10. See: www.globalsecurity.org/wmd/library/news/iraq/2003/iraq-030402-centcom10.htm

after the 1991 Gulf War. The coalition maintained a list of those types of targets in reserve should Saddam Hussein's regime not collapse immediately and require more encouragement.²³ Such self-restraint was also attributable to a desire to minimise collateral damage.

The political risk associated with collateral damage, which was likely given the location of many strategic targets, forced the coalition to deliberately reduce the degree of effort against strategic targets during the planning and execution of the war. The British Chief of Defence Staff, Admiral Sir Michael Joyce, Royal Navy, stated that the coalition wanted to:

“ . . . make sure that the economic infrastructure of Iraq is left as intact as possible to benefit the Iraqi people after the campaign. And all of our military approach has been very conscious of this need to restructure and rebuild the country after the fall of the regime, and from the military point we have been tailoring all our plans accordingly . . . ”²⁴

The CFACC also stated that: “The sensitivity that the CINC and all of us have as component commanders is to absolutely totally minimize the collateral damage and absolutely totally minimize the effect on the civilian population so that as much of this infrastructure can be returned back to the Iraqi people after the liberation so that they can get themselves as fast as possible back to a functioning society.”²⁵ Collateral damage was a force that would only work against the coalition in terms of domestic and international political backlash. This meant there were fewer targets that could be used to generate a strategic effect (i.e. direct attack against Iraq's war making capacity) thus

²² “Transcript of 4/8 CENTCOM Brief”, 2 April 2003, p. 10. See: www.globalsecurity.org/wmd/library/news/iraq/2003/iraq-030408-centcom05.htm

²³ Murray and Scales, pp. 167-168.

²⁴ Admiral Sir Michael Boyce, RN, “Defence Secretary and Chief of the Defence Staff: Press Conference at the Ministry of Defence, London - 21 March 2003”, p. 3. See: <http://www.globalsecurity.org/wmd/library/news/iraq/2003/iraq-030321-ukmod01.htm>.

significantly limiting the scope of targeting to the regime's C³I and WMD means of delivery.

This degree of effort can be measured through two means: the planned allocation of effort (what was intended) and the record of executed missions (what actually occurred). One can then compare what volume of effort was intended for the tactical target sets with the strategic target sets. This would indicate what was planned. The same process could be applied to the actual execution of missions. The reasons for discrepancies between the planned and actual could then be examined. The data is contained in Table 2 below. However, it should be noted that the volume of effort has been weighted to account for variances between different aircraft (i.e. one B-52 sortie provides a different volume of effort than one F-16 sortie), and such a methodology tends to favour larger aircraft conducting strategic missions as opposed to smaller aircraft conducting tactical missions.²⁶

Table 2: Percentages Planned and Executed against Target Set Types²⁷

Strategic Target Sets			Tactical Target Sets		
Code	Percent Planned	Percent Executed	Code	Percent Planned	Percent Executed
SR	9.8 %	9 %	CL2	50.7 %	79 %
WD	10.2 %	4 %	CM	1.0 %	Included in CL 2

²⁵ Moseley, p. 3. See: www.globalsecurity.org/wmd/library/news/2003/iraq-030405-dod01.htm.

²⁶ *Operation IRAQI FREEDOM - By The Numbers*, pp. 7-8. There were between the USAF, USMC, USN, RAF and RAAF, 735 fighters with 20228 sorties and 51 bombers with 505 sorties. While not all fighter sorties were 'tactical', this data seems to favour the argument that the campaign was primarily 'tactical' in nature.

²⁷ *Operation IRAQI FREEDOM - By The Numbers*, p. 4.

WI	0.5 %	0.0 %	SS	0.0 %	0.0%
HA	0.0 %	0.0 %	UW	12.5 %	Included in CL 2
CL4	1.2 %	1 %	CA	14.1 %	7 %
			JR	0.0 %	0.0 %
Totals	21.7 %	14 %	Totals	78.3 %	86%

Well over half of the Coalition's air component's efforts were planned and executed as offensive air support. The other target sets did not receive a statistically relevant apportionment.²⁸ Over half of the CFACC approved apportionment were planned for the target set CL2 (Offensive Air Support of the Land Component). CENTAF noted that the majority of these missions were KILLBOX INTERDICTION [KI] / CAS [CLOSE AIR SUPPORT] missions.²⁹ KI missions are devoted to attacks against fielded forces out of contact with friendly ground forces as defined by the control measure of a 'Kill Box', which is a free fire area for air assets. The contents of Table 2 demonstrates that the plans called for almost 80 % of the air effort against tactical target sets, and during the execution, almost 90% of the effort was tactical.³⁰ By comparison, the 'strategic' target sets only accounted for approximately one fifth of the planned air effort and even fewer were executed. Pape was correct in identifying the existence of a change in the nature of the air campaign.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 5. This included Target Sets HA (Regional and International Support), JR (Joint Reception, Staging and Onward Integration) and SS (Aerial Points of Disembarkation).

²⁹ Ibid, pp. 4-5.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 5.

The shift in the air campaign's focus from 'Shock and Awe' to a joint application of air power and land forces occurred during the *Shamal* of 25-27 March 2003. This sandstorm accounted for 65% of all weather cancelled sorties during the campaign, but only 4% of the total number of sorties were cancelled or considered ineffective due to weather.³¹ The *Shamal* coincided with the U.S. Army 3rd Infantry Division's push to Najaf from Kuwait by 25 March 2003. The air campaign's post-*Shamal* focus was based on air attacks against the Republican Guard units south of Baghdad.³² It was not the case that 'strategic' air operations had failed, but rather that as the land forces approached the 'red zone', the threat came from Iraq's conventional forces as opposed to its WMDs.

In short, the air campaign included a 'denial' strategy in a joint context just as Pape had prescribed, but the alleged failure of the 'Shock and Awe' campaign did not provide a pretext for an unintended adoption of a 'denial' strategy. During the war, 'Shock and Awe' appeared to achieve what was intended. It seemed to convey the message that the government of Iraq was the target, assist in reducing the Iraqi government's ability to communicate and prevent the Iraqi use of WMD. At the time, the WMD threat was not known to be non-existent. As the campaign progressed, the focus of air effort shifted to where it was deemed as most required by the coalition's military commanders. It appeared that based on the force structures, the campaign progressed as was intended by its architects.

³¹ *Operation IRAQI FREEDOM - By the Numbers*, p. 9.

³² Timothy Garden, "Iraq: the military campaign", *International Affairs*, Vol. 9, No. 4 (2003), p. 709.

Conclusion

The available body of facts does not support the two myths in question. The application of air power remains a necessary precursor to a joint campaign, in which air efforts can be focused on tactical targets in concert with land forces. Had the coalition not been present for at least a decade prior to the war, the outcome and the debate would be vastly different. The 2003 air campaign was focused on achieving the coalition commander's objectives alongside land forces as opposed to largely 'strategic' operations. This war seemed to mirror its 1991 predecessor with one exception – the nature and degree of the shift had been planned from the outset.