

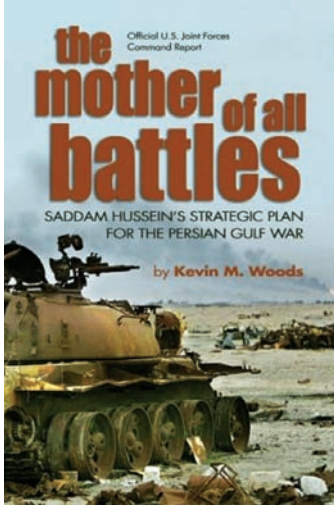
## THE MOTHER OF ALL BATTLES: SADDAM HUSSEIN'S STRATEGIC PLAN FOR THE PERSIAN GULF WAR

WOODS, Kevin M. Annapolis: The Naval Institute Press, 2008, paperback, 352 pages, \$32.95, ISBN 978-1591149422

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*"Adversaries often think differently. The larger the gap between adversaries' cultures, histories, and languages, the more dramatic the differences in how each side views the strategic situation as well as the other side."*

- Kevin M. Woods



Secret materials discovered in several important official archives captured during the 2003 Iraq War offered the Western world its first detailed insight into Saddam Hussein's Iraq. Among the hundreds of thousands of pages of official Ba'ath party strategy and policy records were detailed files explaining many of the strategic and operational decisions taken by Iraqi military forces during nearly three decades of warfare, first against neighbouring Iran (1980-88), and then later against the United States and its allies. Kevin M. Wood's, *The Mother of all Battles: Saddam Hussein's Strategic Plan for the Persian Gulf War*, is the latest contribution to a growing list of publications produced from these sources as part of the United States (US) Joint Center for Operational Analysis (JCOA) Iraqi Perspectives Project (IPP).

The IPP was devised in early 2003 as part of a larger effort by U.S. forces to develop comprehensive analyses of U.S. military strengths and weaknesses observed during Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF). Appreciating that no American analysis would be complete without a contextual analysis from the Iraq point of view, steps were initiated soon after the American occupation to complete a systematic two-year study of the former Iraqi regime and military. In addition to a 350 page classified report, a series of unclassified studies, including this book, were published through the Institute for Defence Analyses (IDA) and the Naval Institute Press (NIP).

This book is, without question, a mandatory reading requirement for anyone with an interest in Middle Eastern warfare and the recent conflicts in the Persian Gulf. Deriving inspiration from earlier works of its kind carried out following the end of the World War II, Wood's analysis makes great effort to be both objective and non-partisan, and most important, revealing of what was happening on 'the other side of the hill' during the 1990-91 Gulf War. At the strategic level, the reader gains much greater appreciation for the psychology of Saddam Hussein's leadership and decision-making, while at the operational and tactical level, there are many surprises regarding the successes and failures of the Iraqi military at war. The study is most helpful in providing context for the seemingly bizarre performance of Iraqi airpower during the war, including its infamous decision to fly the majority of its assets to refuge in Iran. New light is shed on the Iraqi navy as well, including the events surrounding those flotillas attacked by Canadian air forces on the night of 29-30 January 1991. Still the majority of the study deals with Iraq's Army, its command and control, as well as its performance on the battlefield against U.S. and allied forces.

In addition to operations, the book covers the many Iraqi lessons-learned conferences that were held following the war. Contrary to popular perceptions, the Iraqi military was innovative and adaptive, and made great efforts to glean what technical and tactical lessons

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they could from their battlefield experiences and the perceptions of their western adversaries. For example, in addition to circulating several official postwar U.S. congressional reports for review, Saddam Hussein ordered all of his senior military readership to read two books he had given them—the Gulf War memoirs written by U.S. General Schwarzkopf and British General de la Billiere. Still, unfortunately for the army's senior command, nearly all of these proceedings were supervised by Saddam's internal security directorates or heavily overshadowed by his own political perceptions of what 'officially' happened. These 'corrective measures' ensured that except for certain issues, much of what might have benefited the Iraqi military was lost.

If nothing else, *Mother of all Battles* reminds the reader of the importance of including all sides in any analysis of conflict. Too often, ethnocentric approaches adopted by military historians conducting operational analyses do little more than feed the parochialism of their services, which in turn, can have disastrous results for capability development in preparation for the next conflict. Studies such as this are necessary to balance those tendencies and openly challenge them.