

Crisis in Southern Iraq: Operation SOUTHERN WATCH

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DATES: August 2, 1992–To Be Determined

LOCATIONS: Saudi Arabia and southern Iraq

OVERSEAS BASES USED: Riyadh Air Base (AB), Dhahran AB, Al Kharj AB, Saudi Arabia; Shaikh Isa AB, Bahrain

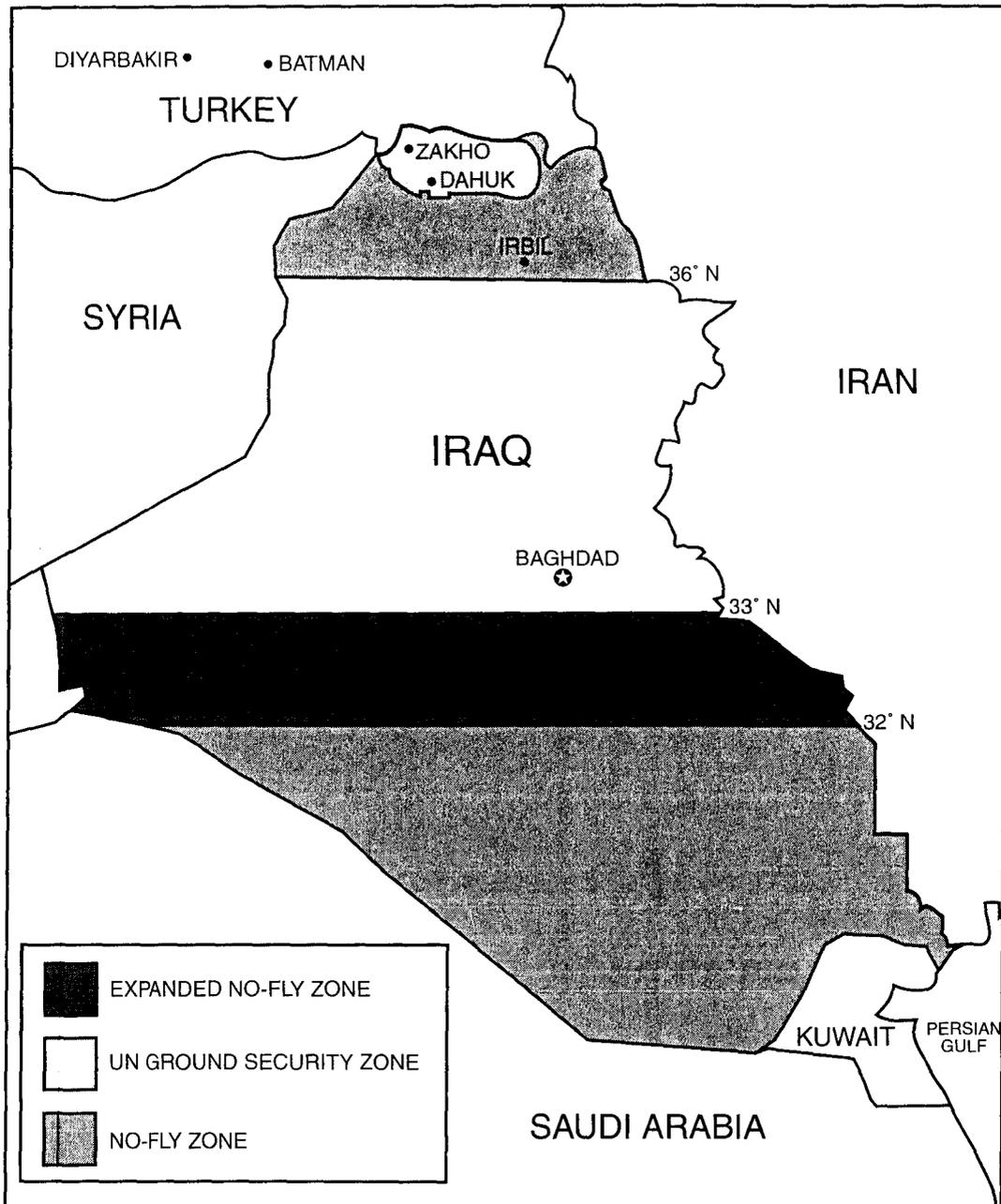
AIR FORCE ORGANIZATIONS:

EXPEDITIONARY FORCES:	GROUPS:
4417th Air	4th Expeditionary Operations
4418th Air	49th Operations
	552d Operations
WINGS:	1681st Airlift
4th Air Expeditionary	1700th Operations
4401st Wing	4401st Operations
4404th Wing	4402d Operations
	4404th Operations
	4409th Operations (later, Air Base)

AIR FORCE AIRCRAFT: C-21, C-130, E-3, EC-135, EF-111, F-4, F-15, F-16, F-117, HC-130, HH-60, KC-10, KC-135, MC-130, MH-53, RC-135, U-2

Operations

On August 26, 1992, U.S. President George H. W. Bush announced a no-fly zone over southern Iraq in support of United Nations Security Council Resolution 688. Thus began Operation SOUTHERN WATCH, one of the longest contingency/deployment operations ever undertaken by the U.S. Air Force. The resolution protected Shiite Muslims under aerial attack from the Iraqi regime of Saddam Hussein in the aftermath of Operation DESERT STORM and enforced other United Nations (UN) sanctions against Iraq. Those sanctions included compliance with nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons inspection, plus dismantling, destruction, and import/export restrictions.



No-Fly Zones in Iraq during Operation SOUTHERN WATCH

Later UN resolutions included war reparations and Iraqi acceptance of the sovereignty of Kuwait.

The original no-fly zone (called "The Box" by SOUTHERN WATCH participants) encompassed all of southern Iraq south of 32° N. The Box excluded all Iraqi fixed- and rotary-winged aircraft. In the aftermath of an Iraqi massing of troops at the Kuwaiti border in October 1994, the United States declared it

a no-fly, no-drive zone. Under the direction of U.S. Central Command, Air Force, Navy, and Army, as well as coalition (Saudi Arabia, Great Britain, France, and later, Kuwait) forces, combined to enforce the UN sanctions. The remaining U.S. forces in the Persian Gulf after DESERT STORM provided the forces for the newly organized Joint Task Force-Southwest Asia, which provided tactical command and operational planning for Operation SOUTHERN WATCH forces. On August 27, 1992, less than twenty-four hours after President Bush's announcement, these forces flew the first operational sortie.

Flying activities included fighter sweeps and patrols conducted against would-be targets in southern Iraq, reconnaissance, suppression of enemy air defense, air-to-air refueling, airborne warning and control system support, and other special missions. By February 1997, Operation SOUTHERN WATCH aircrews had flown more than 133,000 operational sorties, with over 86,000 being in The Box over southern Iraq.

The U.S. Air Force normally deployed personnel to Operation SOUTHERN WATCH on a ninety-day rotational basis. Operational flying squadrons deployed the necessary aircraft, personnel, and equipment needed to meet force-structure requirements, while support squadrons filled their ranks through individual tasking per occupational-specialty requirements. Once deployed, personnel were assigned to provisional units. From August 1992 to January 1997, Tactical Air Command, later replaced by Air Combat Command, activated eighty-one provisional flying squadrons, groups, and wings at various times to meet the manpower and force structure requirements of Operation SOUTHERN WATCH. Also, these commands activated an additional seventy-two provisional support units to support flying operations and meet changing requirements. At any given time, they deployed over 5,000 USAF members to support the operation. At times, such as the reinforcement of SOUTHERN WATCH during Operation VIGILANT WARRIOR, the ranks could swell to nearly 15,000 USAF people, plus additional Army, Navy, and Marine Corps personnel.

The Iraqi regime complied with the restrictions of the no-fly zone until December 27, 1992. Then the Iraqi air force sent two aircraft south of 32° N, threatening USAF patrol aircraft. A flight of F-16s attacked the intruders with missiles, shooting



This F-16 is still active at Eglin AFB, Fla., as a test aircraft. F-16s were used against MiG-25 intruders of the no-fly zone.

down a MiG-25 "Foxbat" aircraft. The American delegate to the UN delivered a demarché to the Iraqi delegate on January 6, 1993 over the violation of the southern no-fly zone and the threatening deployment of Iraqi surface-to-air missile systems to southern Iraq. Operation SOUTHERN WATCH forces subsequently met Iraq's refusal to remove the threatening missile systems by attacking both missile sites and the Zaafaraniyah Nuclear Fabrication Facility near Baghdad. On January 13-18, USAF aircraft struck missile sites in southern Iraq. Later, four USN warships launched forty-five Tomahawk land-attack missiles against the nuclear facility, followed by more USAF and coalition attacks against several missile and command and control sites in southern Iraq.

Again, on April 18, 1993, a USAF F-4G "Wild Weasel" aircraft fired on an Iraqi radar site that had threatened the aircraft. Later, on June 27, Operation SOUTHERN WATCH forces launched an attack on the Iraq Intelligence Service Headquarters in Baghdad in response to the April 1993 planned assassination attempt on former President Bush during his visit to Kuwait. Two days later, a Wild Weasel struck another hostile Iraqi radar site. On July 24, another Wild Weasel on a routine patrol over southern Iraq fired an antiradiation missile at an

Iraqi radar. As members of the Operation SOUTHERN WATCH team, two USN EA-6B "Prowler" aircraft fired missiles at another Iraqi radar site on July 29.

For much of 1994, the Iraqis seemed to accept daily patrolling by Operation SOUTHERN WATCH forces, since little Iraqi activity warranted retaliation or defensive protection by coalition aircraft. However, by October, Iraq had moved elements of its elite Republican Guard and regular army through southern Iraq to the border with Kuwait. This aggressive move led to the rapid reinforcement of Operation SOUTHERN WATCH forces during Operation VIGILANT WARRIOR. Troop strength in the theater swelled to over 25,000 U.S. personnel from all services. The number of available USAF aircraft grew temporarily to over 270 to meet the crisis.

In late 1995, Operation VIGILANT SENTINEL was launched to deter any Iraqi adventurism after several high-level Iraqis defected with their families to Jordan. Although a smaller reinforcement than Operation VIGILANT WARRIOR, this operation proved to the Iraqi leader the resolve of the United States and its coalition partners to keep Iraq out of Kuwait and Saudi Arabia.

Operation SOUTHERN WATCH became the USAF test for the Air Expeditionary Force (AEF) concept in October 1995, when a composite unit, designed to temporarily replace a USN Carrier Air Wing leaving the gulf area, arrived to support flying operations. The AEF provided forces with the same or greater capability than the units that they replaced. The first, AEF I, deployed with eighteen F-16 aircraft to Shaikh Isa AB, Bahrain, from October 28 to December 18. The AEF arrived fully armed and began flying within twelve hours of landing. The AEF concept proved sound, and since the first AEF deployment, several additional AEFs have deployed to support Operation SOUTHERN WATCH.

Following a terrorist attack against Saudi Arabian and U.S. forces in Riyadh in November 1995, Headquarters Joint Task Force-Southwest Asia implemented antiterrorism measures to deter further attacks against U.S. forces in the region. However, on June 25, 1996, a terrorist bombing killed nineteen USAF members at Dhahran AB, Saudi Arabia. The blast

wounded another 547 people, including 250 Operation SOUTHERN WATCH personnel.

On September 3–4, USAF and USN aircraft hit targets in southern Iraq, a response to Iraqi military moves against Kurds in northern Iraq. In Operation DESERT STRIKE, B-52s and Navy ships launched forty-four cruise missiles against air defense batteries in southern Iraq. Then, in response to Iraqi aggression against Kurdish rebels in northern Iraq, U.S. President William J. Clinton expanded the no-fly zone to 33° N, just south of Baghdad. The expanded zone, combined with Operation PROVIDE COMFORT in northern Iraq, covered most of the airspace over Iraq.

In February 1998, President Clinton ordered U.S. forces to the Persian Gulf to deter Iraqi President Saddam Hussein from taking military action in the face of continued UN sanctions. Hussein refused to allow UN inspectors (specifically American inspectors) access to possible nuclear, biological, and chemical production sites located in or near his presidential palaces. The U.S. Air Force deployed additional F-117 stealth fighters, F-15s, and other aircraft and over 2,000 members. Although Hussein quickly relented and allowed the inspections, the U.S. forces did not redeploy until June 1998.

Since the beginning of Operation SOUTHERN WATCH in 1992, routine and emergency deployments have created several personnel and operational problems for the U.S. Air Force. Because of SOUTHERN WATCH and other deployments like Operations NORTHERN WATCH and DENY FLIGHT in Bosnia, USAF members faced multiple temporary-duty assignments within a given year. In the case of crews flying E-3 AWACS or EC-135 aircraft, the number of days deployed each year reached as high as 200 or more. While Operation SOUTHERN WATCH tested USAF pilots, aircrews, and support personnel in a near-combat situation, high deployment rates for some squadrons and individual mission-essential specialists created proficiency training, quality of life, and pilot retention problems. Because of the high deployment rates, the Air Force assessed its overall "Ops-Tempo" and took several measures that enhanced training and the quality of life for their members. These included limiting the number of days members deployed from their home base and cutting back the

number of higher headquarters inspection visits, peacetime training exercises, and competitions.

Perhaps one of the most important improvements in both flying operations and the quality of life for USAF members resulted directly from the 1996 bombing at Khobar Towers, Dhahran AB. In the aftermath, the Air Force reviewed its entire security police, law enforcement, and force protection programs. The review resulted in a new security forces concept that proved to be more than just a change in specialty name. In 1998, the Air Force reorganized existing security police units into new security forces groups and squadrons that trained and specialized in all aspects of force protection, including terrorist activity and deployed force security.

By mid-1998, the Air Force continued routine deployments of personnel and aircraft to the desert, fulfilling its mission of patrolling the skies over southern Iraq and enforcing UN sanctions. General Ronald R. Fogleman, Air Force Chief of Staff, pointed out the significance of Operation SOUTHERN WATCH in July 1995. He stated, "What we have effectively done since 1992 is conduct an air occupation of a country. . . ."