Air Force Doctrine

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LeMay Center for Doctrine Development & Education



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Teammates – This month, the LeMay Center highlights **Colonel John Warden and Checkmate** as our Doctrine Paragon for **joint air planning**



In August of 1990, Col John Warden was the Deputy Director of Strategy, Doctrine, and Concepts on the Air Staff at the Pentagon. One of the directorates on Col Warden's staff was the Air Force Strategic Studies Group, better known as the "Checkmate" Division. Checkmate was created in 1976 to study the Soviet Union and make recommendations that would assist the Air Staff in preparing the Air Force in the effective application of airpower in a conventional war. Checkmate strategists came from a variety of backgrounds, looked at a variety of plans and contingencies, and provided solutions and recommendations. While Checkmate's original focus was on a conflict with the Soviet Union, Col Warden expanded their focus to include other theaters, including the Middle East.

When Saddam Hussein's Iraqi forces suddenly invaded Kuwait and threatened Saudia Arabia in August of 1990, US Central Command (CENTCOM) planners rushed to develop response options to defend Saudi Arabia and, if necessary, remove Iraqi forces from Kuwait. The *courses of action* presented to the CENTCOM commander, US Army General Norman Schwarzkopf, were generally land centric campaigns that reflected the Army's AirLand Battle doctrine of the 1980s. General Schwarzkopf looked for alternate solutions that reduced the risk to land forces and took a more strategic approach toward resolving the conflict. Meanwhile, Col Warden had assembled a team of Checkmate planners in the basement of the Pentagon and began designing an air campaign that could cripple Saddam Hussein's forces using airpower.

Col Warden led the Checkmate planners through open planning sessions that included other parts of the Pentagon and other intelligence agencies in the National Capital Region. In *mission analysis*, he directed planners to use his "five ring approach" to model the nation of Iraq as a system. Then, the team designed a plan to destroy the enemy system using airpower, which was uniquely capable of targeting Iraqi tactical, operational, and strategic targets simultaneously. The result of Checkmate's efforts was a

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plan called "Instant Thunder." Col Warden briefed *Instant Thunder* to General Schwarzkopf, who liked the plan and began coordinating for its implementation. *Instant Thunder* was the genesis for the plan that would eventually become the Operation DESERT STORM air campaign, which crushed Saddam Hussein's forces over 40 days and contributed to their surrender after only 100 hours of land operations.

Why it matters today: The Checkmate Division continues to provide analysis and strategic options to the Air Staff at the Pentagon. Checkmate's success is due to the diversity of education, experience, and backgrounds of its planners. Checkmate planners are well versed in airpower theory and doctrine, and they also understand operational design and planning methodologies such as the Joint Planning Process (Joint Publication 5-0) and the Joint Planning Process for Air (Joint Publication 3-30). In the future, as Airmen find themselves on planning teams and air staffs for air task forces or theater air components, understanding airpower theory and the methodology behind operational design and planning will enable Airmen to create, refine, and execute plans for successful operations in distributed environments.

To hear more about airpower strategy from Col (ret) John Warden himself, check out the latest Air Force Doctrine Podcast episode: "Deciphering Doctrine - Ep 17 - Col Warden (of 5 Rings' fame) challenges our paradigms: China as a peer, US' survival, strategy, time, and geography in conflict" available at www.doctrine.af.mil and on iTunes, Spotify, Amazon Music, and DVIDS.

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