

Bruce Cordell

SEI Planners Can Learn from Desert Storm

Operation Desert Storm is the most recent example of how the United States can focus its assets very successfully to achieve a large-scale national objective. Lessons from that conflict could have profound impact upon the future of a more peaceful endeavor. The war's most positive elements can be used as lessons for structuring and planning the proposed Space Exploration Initiative (SEI), a similarly vast effort to explore the moon and Mars.

It is possible to identify a number of characteristics of the Persian Gulf war that are relevant to planners of a mammoth projects such as SEI:

- There was excellent leadership by U.S. President George Bush and the military; this was buttressed by formal Congressional support.

- Goals, objectives, threats, and rationales associated with the Gulf war were narrowly defined by decision makers and effectively communicated to the public. Concerns about costs were recognized and dealt with early in the crisis.

- Media coverage was extensive and effective; TV exposure was essentially continuous and detailed on Cable News Network.

- High-technology systems performed extremely well.

- As the operation progressed, there was a palpable, growing sense of national patriotism, support and teamwork, even among the general population, in support of the Gulf war.

- Once hostilities broke out, the Gulf action was brief and intense.

- Genuine heroes were produced.

- Success in the Gulf was the result of an innovative action plan. Gen. H. Norman Schwarzkopf's coalition forces strategy was daring, challenging, and got the job done.

- The U.S.-led Gulf operation featured sig-

nificant international cooperation, and indeed, it was fully sanctioned by the United Nations. Also, it is significant that arrangements were made to share costs among the international allies.

- The Gulf war was portrayed as important to the global future and ultimately as a key supportive element in the President's vision of a new world order.

For a program with characteristics like those above, financial considerations do not limit planning and execution of the program. Many lessons for SEI can be gleaned from the Gulf war experience:

As a high-technology program, a properly structured and presented SEI should benefit from the positive feelings generated by the public toward hi-tech systems during the Gulf war.

Many in Congress did not anticipate the extent of public support for the war. It is possible there may be current political parallels with public support for SEI.

Money is not the real challenge for SEI. The challenge is to establish SEI as a high national priority and make it a national commitment. An SEI that is intense and focuses more on the short-term is likely to succeed.

In addition to presidential leadership and congressional support, SEI might benefit from the public relations advantages of a leader like Gen. Schwarzkopf or Gen. Colin Powell, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Perhaps the key hurdle facing SEI is identifying a motivation analogous to the Iraqi threat.

Former National Science Foundation director Erich Bloch recently said, "basic scientific research and technology development have become crucial to economic competitiveness." Columnist Jack Anderson has highlighted the current crisis in American

education by pointing out that 90 percent of America's high school graduates may not be capable of accomplishing even the most routine high-technology tasks.

Like the Apollo project in the 1960s, SEI would stimulate technology development in several key areas and provide motivation and funds for education. SEI often is touted as a key solution to the challenges of educational reform or competitive success, or as a way to provide potentially important answers to Earth's environmental and energy problems.

There is little doubt that SEI would benefit science and international relations, and it would certainly elevate the human spirit. The question remains: can these worthy SEI rationales be formulated and communicated so that they become motivations as powerful as was the Iraqi threat?

Although the Gulf war was a tragedy in many ways for Kuwait and Iraq, the war had several positive effects for the coalition nations. U.S. prestige and the image of the U.S. military improved significantly around the world. There is a sense of increased patriotism and a "can do" feeling. Also, the war confirmed, in the minds of the politicians and the public, the benefits and reliability of high-tech systems in general.

Somewhat unexpectedly, the Gulf war has reinvigorated American self-esteem and opened an enticing window of opportunity for progress in SEI. Despite the initial lukewarm response of some to SEI, it is time now for those who support its key, inevitable goals — the human exploration and settlement of the solar system — to join forces and encourage the president and Congress to actively pursue the Space Exploration Initiative.

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