

## [Operation Southern Focus](#)

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Did Air Power achieve the objectives?

The 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) approaches, however the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its predecessor, Operation Southern Focus has passed (or rather is ongoing). Southern Focus was the enhanced air campaign that took place covertly prior to Operation Iraqi Freedom and was conducted to provide the necessary precursors to commit ground forces in Iraq. It is not well known, even though air force historian Ben Lambeth has written about it open source. In Lambeth's telling in *The Unseen War* (Naval Institute Press 2013), the air campaign was initiated due to a variety of complex factors, one of which was to avoid the perception by the American public that the Army needed an Air Campaign (as in 1991) to soften up the Iraqi Army before going in to divest Saddam of his weapons of mass destruction (WMD), among other things.

The so-called compromise involved the Army still wanting key targets, as well as assured air superiority, serviced and in place when the "generated start" of the ground war finally began once the go ahead for OIF was given. Southern Focus was thus conceived to "service" these targets prior to the invasion. The result, and Lambeth alludes to this in his book, was that many of the goals of the Iraq War regarding the threat of Saddam Hussein (other than his removal from power) had been accomplished by Southern Focus before the ground invasion began. Of particular concern to General Tommy Franks was the ability of the Iraqi military to hit the invasion force with chemical weapons. Southern Focus reported that all known or suspected sites for WMD storage and weaponization had been neutralized. If this was what military leaders truly believed, why did they not then recommend cancelling the operations since its main goal had been achieved?

Post facto, we now know that most of these sites were inactive or defunct, and most lower grade chemical munitions such as mustard gas buried far away from delivery systems—but this changes nothing. The Air Force reported the truth as they knew it and it reflected reality as it actually existed. So why invade Iraq???

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