A wing-sized task force flies out of Incirlik i the teeth of Iraqi SAMs and AAA.

Northern Watch

By John T. Correll, Editor in Chief

THE first "no-fly zone" was invented in April 1991 to prevent air attacks by Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein on Kurdish tribesmen in the northern part of his country. A similar zone was created in 1992 to protect the Shiite Muslims in southern Iraq.

The concept has since been used elsewhere. In 1993, for example, Operation Deny Flight established a no-fly zone over Bosnia–Herzegovina. However, the classic example is still Iraq, where coalition forces are in their ninth year of an aerial occupation that now covers about 60 percent of Saddam's territory.

Operation Northern Watch, conducted out of Incirlik AB, Turkey, works the area north of the 36th parallel. The Southern Watch zone, south of the 33rd parallel, is patrolled by aircraft from bases in Saudi Arabia and other locations in Southwest Asia and from carriers in the Persian Gulf.

The two no-fly zones still protect the ethnic minorities, but the broader objectives are "to control and contain the Saddam Hussein regime and pressure the regime to comply with applicable UN Security Council resolutions," Brig. Gen. David A. Deptula said in November. Deptula was just back from an 18-month tour as commander of the Northern Watch Combined Task Force.

"The no-fly zones are not unlike a parole officer living in a house with a convicted criminal," Deptula said. "We are going to stay there until we are convinced that he is not going to commit any crimes anymore."

From 1991 until recently, the Iraqis seldom challenged the coalition patrols, and operations were mostly uneventful. A year ago, that changed in a big way.

Brig. Gen. David A. Deptula flies this F-15C during a routine patrol over northern Iraq. He commanded the Operation Northern Watch Combined Task Force from its base at Incirlik AB, Turkey, for 18 months.

Saddam Strikes Back

In December 1998, US and British forces struck some 100 Iraqi targets in a limited 70-hour operation called Desert Fox. It was supposed to punish Iraq for obstructing UN arms inspections and "diminish" Baghdad's ability to threaten its neighbors, but it ended inconclusively. Four days later, Saddam declared the no-fly zones invalid. Iraq sent additional Surface-to-Air Missile batteries into the proscribed areas and announced that allied warplanes would be fired upon.

On Dec. 28, the Iraqis launched three SA-3 missiles at F-15 and F-16 fighters flying a Northern Watch patrol near the city of Mosul, about 220 miles north of Baghdad. It was the first time Iraq had fired on coalition aircraft since September 1996. The US aircraft were not hit and counterattacked with HARM antiradar missiles and GBU-12 precision guided bombs. On Dec. 30, an SA-6 site near Talil fired half a dozen missiles at Southern Watch aircraft. F-16s promptly took out both the missile battery and its radar.

Since then, the Iraqis have challenged coalition aircraft hundreds of times, either by firing on them or by tracking them with the radars that guide the SAMs and the Anti-Aircraft Artillery. On Feb. 1, Saddam offered a $14,000 bounty to any Iraqi who could shoot down an American or British aircraft and a reward of $2,800 for capturing an enemy pilot that he could parade through the streets of Baghdad.

USAF photo by SSgt. Vincent A. Parker

SSgt. Rodney Johns, from Spangdahlem AB, Germany, marshals an F-16CJ returning to Incirlik from a northern no-fly zone patrol. The fighter had launched one of its HARM missiles against an Iraqi SAM site.

Operation Northern Watch had flown more than 7,500 sorties in the past year, and between December 1998 and November 1999, it employed more than 1,000 weapons against more than 240 targets, Deptula said. As of Nov. 15, the task force at Incirlik logged 95 "combat engagement days," which he defined as "a day when the Iraqis actually fired at our forces and we responded with lethal force."

In those 11 months, Northern Watch destroyed more than 140 large caliber anti-aircraft guns, 30 SAM radars, 15 SAM launchers, 10 SAM control vans, and 10 radar relay, communications, and jamming sites, among other air defense facilities, he said.

"Most of the strategic SAMs, are gone now, either moved or destroyed," Deptula said. "That doesn't mean he [Saddam Hussein] can't move additional SAMs back into the area." Saddam had begun "hiding his weapons and then using them out of locations that are in close proximity to civilians in an attempt to protect those locations from being fired upon."

At the start of Operation Allied Force in the Balkans last March, Deptula said, some of the Northern Watch assets, including tankers, jammers, and air superiority fighters were "borrowed" temporarily with the consequence that "there was a period of several weeks when we didn't fly."

USAF photo by TSgt. John Rohrer

An F-16 from the 138th Fighter Wing of the Oklahoma ANG is readied for a Northern Watch patrol. The Guard and Reserve forces have provided about half of the operation's units since its inception in 1991.

Is it Working?

Enforcement of the no-fly zones in Iraq—even when only the action since December 1998 is taken into account— is already the longest sustained military operation for US forces since Vietnam. Some people have begun to question the no-fly zone operations.

"Firing Blanks: The plot to oust Saddam and the constant pounding from US jets are going nowhere," declared the headline on a *Time* magazine article Nov. 8. "Our Un-

War With Iraq Drags On, No End in Sight," a Newhouse News Service headline said Sept. 23. According to *The New York Times* ("France Voices Dissatisfaction With US–Led Bombing of Iraq") in August, the French Foreign Ministry has three times taken issue with the continuing American and British "bombing raids" on Iraq.

US Secretary of Defense William S. Cohen maintains that the no-fly zone operations are working. "Saddam has been contained since the end of the Gulf War," Cohen said in Doha, Qatar, last March. "He has not been in a position to pose a threat to countries in the region by virtue of the United States, the United Kingdom, and others who have been working to make sure that he doesn't move against Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, or any other country. ... We have helped protect the security of the region."

In testimony to the Senate June 23, Elizabeth Jones, principal deputy assistant secretary of state for near eastern affairs, said that US policy is unchanged and that the objective is still to contain Saddam Hussein while seeking a new regime to govern in Baghdad.

"Operations Northern and Southern Watch deter Saddam from using his air force against the civilian populations north of the 36th parallel and south of the 33rd," Jones said. "We maintain a robust force in the region, which we have made clear we are prepared to use should Saddam cross our well-established redlines. Those redlines include: should he try to rebuild or deploy his weapons of mass destruction; should he strike out at his neighbors; should he challenge allied aircraft in the no-fly zones; or should he move against the people living in the Kurdish–controlled areas of northern Iraq."

USAF photo by SSgt. Vincent A. Parker

SSgt. Mary Blyer, 48th Maintenance Squadron, RAF Lakenheath, UK, checks munitions on an F-15E at Incirlik. During an 11-month span, Northern Watch fighters employed more than 1,000 weapons against some 240 targets.

Some military people have joined in the criticism, perceiving the operations in Iraq as open-ended and lacking a clear objective. Retired Gen. Merrill A. McPeak, former Air Force Chief of Staff, does not share that view. "The bombing isn't hurting us, and it is hurting Saddam," McPeak told *Time*.

USAF photo by SSgt. Vincent A. Parker

SSgt. William Roop, an F-15E crew chief, finishes his pre-flight inspections. The 1,600-strong task force at Incirlik consists of US personnel with some British and Turkish forces.

The Force at Incirlik

The Combined Task Force for Northern Watch at Incirlik consists of about 1,600 people, most of them Americans and the others British and Turkish. The co-commanders are Deptula's successor, Brig. Gen. Bob D. DuLaney of the US Air Force and Brig. Gen. Savas Sanlitürk of the Turkish air force.

The Turkish parliament reviews and renews the Northern Watch mandate semiannually. Last February, the US, British, and Turks agreed on combined rules of engagement for the task force. Northern Watch forces, if engaged, may respond by targeting any element of the integrated air defense system.

The rules, Deptula said, allow "the flexibility to respond, not just against the gun or missile that is firing at us" but also "the whole array of equipment and architecture that goes along with it, which is just as threatening as the missile or the gun."

At any given time, Northern Watch has about a wing's worth of aircraft, a fourth as many as Southern Watch operates. Southern Watch also has more territory to cover, but the percentage of area covered by AAA and SAMs is considerably greater in the North, Deptula said.

Because of the geographical boundaries of the unified commands, the US contingent of Northern Watch reports

The Aircraft of Northern Watch

Mission	US	Turkey	Britain
Combat	1 F-16CJ. Suppression of enemy air defenses.	F-16 F-4	
	2 F-15C. Air superiority.		
	3 F-16CG. Emergency defense suppression.		
	4 F-15E. Emergency defense suppression.		
Combat Support	5 EA-6B. Electronic jamming.		10 Jaguar. Reconnaissance.
	6 KC-135. Air refueling.		11 VC-10K. Air refueling for Jaguars and EA-6Bs.
	7 HH-60G helicopter. Combat search and rescue.		
	8 M/K/HC-130. Tankers to refuel the helicopters.		
	9 EP-3 or RC-135. Signals intelligence.		
Command, control, and communications	12 E-3B/C Airborne Warning and Control System.		
Combat service support	13 C-12. Theater transport.		

14 Also shown is a Patriot missile unit from the US Army, which became part of Northern Watch for a short time when Iraq threatened to attack neighboring coalition countries.

to US European Command while its Southern Watch counterpart reports to US Central Command.

The task forces have sensibly straightened out that wrinkle by means of a hotline that connects them. "It's important that we treat Iraq as an entire system and capitalize on the advantage we have in applying pressure on the Saddam regime from both north and south simultaneously," Deptula said. "Accordingly, we coordinate some operations between north and south and use the hotline to exchange information of an immediate nature."

The task force at Incirlik ran on an expeditionary model, even before the US Air Force formally implemented its Expeditionary Aerospace Force concept Oct. 1.

"Northern Watch is a TDY [Temporary Duty] organization," Deptula said. "With the exception of the

commander, the combined force air force component commander, and the chief of staff, everybody who comes to this operation comes on a temporary basis. ... Forces that fly actually rotate from as short as 14 days for the Air Reserve Component all the way up to 180 days for the Navy and the Marines."

Regular Air Force crews rotate into and out of Incirlik every 45 days. Rotation times for others are as short as 14 days for the Air Guard and Reserve, 60 days for the Royal Air Force, 90 to 120 days for the Combined Task Force staff, to 180 days for the US Navy and Marine Corps. Only the three top officers have the option of long tours.

The operation has yet again shown the flexibility of the reserve components. "Forty-nine percent of all the Northern Watch units since the inception of Northern Watch have been either Guard or Reserve air forces," Deptula said. "I gotta tell you, they roll into this operation seamlessly because they've done the preparation."

About 2,000 Americans are assigned as permanent party to the 39th Aerospace Expeditionary Wing, an element of US Air Forces in Europe whose mission is to support Northern Watch. The commander, Col. Dutch Remkes, also serves as the Air Force component commander in the Northern Watch Task Force.

Deptula said that although Northern Watch "is an aircentric operation, it is a joint task force with components from each of the services participating. When Iraq threatened to attack neighboring coalition countries last year, a Patriot missile unit from the Army became a part of Northern Watch for a period of time for ballistic missile defense."

USAF photo by 1st Lt. Dave Westover

A Kansas ANG KC-135 fuels an RAF Lakenheath F-15E. Fighter, tanker, and electronic support aircraft fly as a composite force from Incirlik 400 miles east to Iraq's border, where the fighters top off fuel then head south for a patrol.

The Composite Force Package

For a patrol of the no-fly zone, the coalition fighters, tankers, and electronic support aircraft fly out of Incirlik as a large composite force package and proceed to the Iraqi border, 400 miles to the east. The intelligence aircraft and the tankers hold an orbit over eastern Turkey. The fighters top off their fuel tanks and turn south toward Iraq.

If Iraqi aircraft violate the no-fly zone restrictions or rise up to meet the coalition force, they will be met by the F-15 air superiority fighters. Navy EA-6Bs provide electronic jamming.

The Iraqis will also draw a response if they begin tracking the coalition aircraft by radar, a step presumed to be preparatory to missile launch or anti-aircraft fire. The strike may be conducted by the fighters being painted by the radar beam, or it may be by some other element of the force, perhaps some time later. But there will be a response.

The F-16CJs will use HARM missiles to take out the radar, and the F-15Es and F-16CGs will lay half a dozen or so precision guided bombs on the offending gun, SAM site, or other piece of the integrated air defense system.

Everything that happens is closely monitored, not only by the electronic control and intelligence aircraft orbiting near the border but also by the combined air operations center back at Incirlik, which receives a continuous live feed via satellite from the Airborne Warning and Control System and other platforms.

"Sometimes folks question the training obtained in deployments like Southern Watch and Northern Watch," Deptula said. "We are a small

USAF photo by SrA. Jeromy K. Cross

The tent city at Incirlik houses airmen taking part in Operation Northern Watch. With the exception of the senior leaders, the operation is a TDY endeavor—Air Force crews rotate in and out about every 45 days.

enough operation that we have the opportunity to all brief together, fly together, and come back home and debrief together and build upon the lessons we learn that particular day. ... We fly and execute as a composite force package. Every ONW mission that is flown is a large force employment exercise, which normally folks in training units back in the States would only get at a Red Flag. ... Here, any time we fly a mission, we do all of this."

In addition, he said, about a third of the sorties that are flown every month are training missions on the ranges in Turkey and in the airspace there.

USAF photo by SrA. Adam Stump

Deptula checks a missile on his F-15C prior to heading to the northern Iraq patrol zone. "We are going to stay there until we are convinced that [Saddam Hussein] is not going to commit any crimes anymore," he said.

Future of the Zones

Despite the duration of the ongoing operation in Iraq, the armed forces have tended to regard no-fly zones as a temporary phenomenon. Recently, however, some strategists have begun to theorize that no-fly zones in fact represent a new option for power projection in support of foreign policy, and that the concept may be more lasting than previously believed.

At the same time, there are suggestions that the same results might be achieved in different ways.

On the PBS "NewsHour" Aug. 17, Gen. Richard E. Hawley, former commander of Air Combat Command, raised the possibility of operations "to contain Iraq without the requirement to expose our forces daily to those threats from Iraqi defenses and still achieve the objective of containing Iraqi aggression."

Hawley said that "as we have advanced our capabilities to respond quickly to aggression in any part of the world, one alternative might be to rely more heavily on our ability to project power rapidly from long distances."

For example, B-2 bombers might fly from bases in the United States, as they did daily during Operation Allied Force, to strike targets in Iraq whenever that is necessary.

Asked about it after his presentation, Deptula said that "there are a variety of ways that you could execute air exclusion zone operations, and I think we need to explore some of those. Perhaps that is something the Joint Forces Command could experiment with.

"I am open to exploring some of those," but "it depends to a degree on the demonstration that you could apply force rapidly and quickly, when needed to do so, from far away. I think we could do that, personally."

Also looming in the near future is the problem of advanced Surface-to-Air Missiles. So far, Saddam has had only earlier-generation missiles of Soviet design. According to press reports, though, he has been trying to purchase SA-10s from Russia, with shipment and delivery handled by some third country. If he obtains these weapons, to which most US fighters are vulnerable, how would the no-fly zone be enforced?

"It would be more difficult than it is today. You would need to take out the [SAM] site. This is one of the unappreciated stories about how and why it's so important to continue to acquire stealthy aircraft like the F-22. With F-22s operating in a dual role, we could significantly reduce the total number of aircraft required to conduct no-fly zone operations, reduce the number of people deployed, and reduce the dollar cost of operations while increasing the effectiveness of the operation against a wider and more capable spectrum of threats." ▪

USAF photo by SSgt. Vincent A. Parker

An F-15E from the 494th Expeditionary Fighter Squadron touches down following its patrol in northern Iraq, where it had been part of a defensive strike against an Iraqi SAM site.