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The Persian Gulf TV War

Chapter 4

Out of Control

The Pentagon and Bush administration were concerned with creating an image of themselves as being totally in control of events, waging a well-planned, coordinated, and effective war. Around 7:00 p.m. EST on January 17, however, with the first reports of Scud missile attacks on Israel, a picture suddenly emerged of a dangerous and chaotic war with unpredictable results that might elude administration and Pentagon control. For the rest of the evening, the relentless allied bombing attack was ignored as the TV focus became the Iraqi missile attack on Israel and whether this would lead Israel to retaliate and broaden the scope of the war. It was feared that Israeli retaliation might engulf the entire Middle East in an Arab-Israeli war, which would shatter the fragile U.S.-dominated coalition and perhaps envelop the Middle East in flames. Consequently, Bush's Gulf war could have exploded into Armageddon at any minute.

The television presentation of these compelling events was extremely dramatic, highlighting again that this was a live "You are There" TV war which was binding together the world as fascinated and often frightened spectators of military spectacle. It was claimed during the evening that Bush, Baker, and other members of the war team first learned of the Iraqi attack on Israel via television and it seemed that television was providing direct access to the suspenseful events unfolding. But more significant events were going on behind the scenes concerning whether Israel would retaliate against the Iraqi Scud missile attacks. As we shall see in this chapter, the media became an actor in the drama of whether Israel would or would not enter the Gulf war, expanding it to a Middle East and perhaps Israeli/Arab war. Bombing Israel was Saddam Hussein's greatest gamble and how it played out would determine the fate of the war.

4.1 Israel

During the first twenty-four hours of the war, the networks presented occasional interviews with Israelis and Middle East "experts" concerning Israel's potential role in a Gulf war. Initial reports indicated that there was tremendous enthusiasm for the war in Israel, which for months had been goading the United States in public and private to commence hostilities against their enemy Iraq. Israel immediately called a state of emergency in the country when the war erupted and urged its citizens to keep their gas masks and chemical weapons antidote kits with them at all times. This kit was given out free to Israeli citizens. After a fierce public debate and Israeli Supreme Court order, the gas masks were given out to Palestinians as well, but they were kept under a tight curfew that was maintained for weeks.

Initial media focus on Israel related to the Israeli response to the reports that the United States had destroyed Scud missile sites. Around 5:35 a.m. on January 17, for instance, CBS broadcast an interview in Israel with author Dore Gold, who stated that Israel was manifesting "guarded relief" because "it is very likely" that the H2 and H3 air bases in Iraq had been destroyed by allied air forces the previous night. Yet, there was concern that Iraq also had a lot of mobile air missile launchers that might be located in protected hangars, concrete bunkers, or other sites hidden from view. Thus Israel was still on a high state of civil

defense alert. Gold explained that near the end of the Iran-Iraq war, the Iraqis took a Soviet-made Scud missile and extended its range from 280 kilometers to over 650 kilometers, which made it possible to hit Tel Aviv from Iraq. There was a debate in Israel, he noted, over whether these missiles could carry chemical weapons, but Israel was prepared for the worst. Much more would be heard about the Scud missiles that night and the following days.

Throughout the afternoon of January 17, it was reported that the Iraqi ambassador to Belgium threatened that Iraq was still planning to attack Israel. In a talk with ABC's Ted Koppel, the Iraqi ambassador to France reiterated that there would be an Iraqi attack against Israel, emphasizing that Iraq indeed had the capacity to strike Israel. ABC pundit Judith Kipper said that this "threat to strike Israel doesn't sound credible" and that "it's very, very doubtful." Around 4:00 p.m. Kipper repeated this position, stating that the threat of an attack on Israel was posturing, that the Iraqis are just "trying to scare us." Kipper couldn't have been more wrong, as it turned out.

Indeed, most of the military experts and media commentators bought the line that the United States had destroyed Iraq's Scud missile capacity during the first night's air strikes. On the CBS morning show, Senator Sam Nunn (D-Ga.), reputedly the Senate's premier defense expert, said that the U.S. war effort had accomplished "main strategic goals" in the initial phases, including the protection of Israel through the knocking out of Iraqi Scud missiles. ABC's Jerusalem correspondent, Dean Reynolds, reported that the destruction of the Scud missile launchers removed the main threat to Israel, according to Israeli military authorities. However, they believed that there might be some hidden weapons, such as missile launchers out in the desert. Tonight would be the litmus test, Reynolds stated; if Israel could get through the evening without going on emergency status, there would be a feeling that Israel would escape "scot free."

Concluding this upbeat report, Reynolds noted that for months there had been discussion of the threat to Israel from the "Iraqi military colossus" and Israelis "are surprised concerning the lame Iraqi response," which they explain as a result of "total incompetence." Some Israelis, Reynolds reported, said that they never considered "this fellow Hussein" a threat to their country. Reynolds also noted that the Israelis were "enjoying the fact that Americans are doing the fighting" and that the Israelis were watching; they were happy to be "on the sidelines of a Middle Eastern war." This pleasure would, however, soon disappear and the Israelis would shortly be subjected to an extremely traumatic set of attacks on their country.

Later in the afternoon, Bob Zelnick, ABC's Pentagon correspondent, pointed out that bomb damage assessment analysis showed that 60 to 80 percent of the Iraqi air force was destroyed. This claim turned out to be totally false, as was Zelnick's claim that stationary Scud missile launchers were largely destroyed. He admitted the possibility that mobile Scud missile sites "could get one or two missiles off at Israel," yet, following his Pentagon masters, he downplayed the threat, claiming that the Scud was not a militarily effective weapon. Obviously, the Pentagon and Bush administration were concerned to put out propaganda about the lack of a serious threat to Israel from Iraq, and its compliant media servants helped by conveying the messages fed to them.

The January 17 "CBS Evening News" reported that Iraq had plans to attack Israel, but reporter Bob Simon stated that it was hard to imagine how Iraqi offensive capability could do anything but decrease. He was skeptical that Iraq could indeed seriously threaten Israel, or anyone else for that matter.

But at 7:04 p.m., Dean Reynolds of ABC News broke in to report that air-raid sirens were going off in Tel Aviv. Shortly thereafter, Tom Fenton on CBS explained that sirens had begun blaring, followed by a huge blast. Israelis were told to go into their chemical weapons protection rooms, which were sealed rooms above ground level. The satellite connection then broke off with Fenton putting on his gas mask, intensifying the drama and suspense. Dan Rather explained that "this is live. We don't know what is happening" and then concluded that an Iraqi missile attack on Israel might be under way.

ABC's Peter Jennings announced that: "The Associated Press is now reporting that three missiles hit in Tel Aviv." Soon after, a video appeared of Reynolds and his crew in Jerusalem, looking rather rattled and without gas masks on. Reynolds and the others were told to put on their gas masks, and all the crew frantically began to do so. As the Israeli crew members rapidly put on their masks, Reynolds was flustered and had trouble getting his on; the camera rather indelicately focused on him as his crew helped him put the mask on. Suddenly, there were explosions in Tel Aviv and Jennings commented: "These are the worst fears realized, of course, of Israelis and Americans. Saddam Hussein had said from the outset that he was going to try to engage the Israelis if the war came and of course now that the war is in its 24th hour, perhaps people were beginning to relax. They expected him to counterattack or attack against the Israelis early on. Very much a worst case scenario for Israel and for the Middle East in general."

Reynolds noted in response: "I would point out that this would...that this is really what we think it is that it will prompt virtually a certain Israeli retaliation and the potential now for a wider conflict, I dare say is there." The TV drama was electrifying; on the ABC live report, the sounds of explosions in the background could be heard and Reynolds reported that Israeli radio confirmed that a missile attack was on. A crackling sound then began erupting every few seconds, giving the impression that bombs and missiles were exploding everywhere. But it was concluded that the sounds were the sharp breathing of Reynolds in his gas mask with an open mike! The TV coverage thus added to the drama and perhaps even created panic.

The air-raid sirens went off again, and a technician noted that this was not an all-clear signal and that Israeli radio was giving instructions on how to put on gas masks and what to do in case of a chemical weapons attack. Peter Jennings commented: "I cannot tell you how in the middle of the night this comes as an enormous shock to people." Jennings then switched to a live phone call from Tel Aviv, where a hysterical voice, barely understandable, told of hearing missiles explode nearby. Soon after, CBS correspondent Tom Fenton from Tel Aviv came on, speaking through a gas mask, and reported that city officials admitted that there had been three hits on Tel Aviv by Iraqi missiles and that there was still no knowledge of whether there had been any casualties or whether the warheads were chemical or conventional). To add to the drama and the sense that the Gulf war was rapidly careening out of control, it was announced that in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia, there were reports of air-raid sirens. ABC cut to Saudi Arabia live at 3:42 a.m., local time, where their correspondent, Forrest Sawyer, reported that the hotel alarm had sounded, but the national air-raid alert had not gone off yet, so that it was uncertain whether or not Saudi Arabia was under attack (the previous night there were two false alarms).

Air-raid sirens wailed again in Tel Aviv, which suggested that another missile attack might be underway. CBS's Tom Fenton in Tel Aviv related that there was just a radio message from an Israeli army representative who said that they did not have information yet regarding the kind of attack it was, so people should stay in their shelters. Fenton thought that Israel was much less likely to respond "after the

astounding performance last night and early this morning by the U.S. Air Force." He then announced that there were casualties in the south of Tel Aviv, in Holon, a working-class suburb that was hit by a missile, and that there were reports that three more missiles struck the north of Israel. Altogether, there had been six missile attacks, he summarized: three in Tel Aviv, two in Haifa, and one in Spak. They still did not know the extent of the damage or whether the missiles held chemical weapons. "But" Dan Rather concluded, "Saddam Hussein has been able to make good on one of his threats: He has hit Israel with some Scud missiles."

A bit later, Rather spoke to CBS correspondents in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, with Fenton reporting that there were a number of Israeli jets seen in the air after the attack. Fenton had heard reports that there were ten casualties in one hospital, but it was still not clear whether there had been a chemical attack. Jim Jensen from Jerusalem broke in to report via telephone that the Israelis were in the process of attacking Iraq; he had heard on Israeli radio that retaliation was under way. On that dramatic note, CBS then moved to Saudi Arabia where Bob Simon added that they had just gotten word from Saudi officials that missiles had been fired at Dhahran, but that the United States had Patriot missiles to protect them against the Scuds. The Israelis, however, Simon explained, did not trust Patriot missiles and did not trust the U.S. to defend them. Dan Rather recalled that the first night there had been reports from Bahrain that Scuds had been fired, but that they missed their targets (the BBC, Agence France Presse, and other news sources had also announced that several Scud missiles had been launched the previous night). This was interesting because U.S. Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney had claimed that morning that the Iraqis had not fired any Scud missiles. As we shall see, U.S., Israeli, and Saudi authorities would continually lie about the number, location, and extent of damage of the Scud missile attacks, in part so as not to give the Iraqis important information, but also to keep the illusion of control and because the Bush administration was concerned to keep Israel out of the war.

CBS's State Department correspondent Bill Plante reported that Israel had turned down U.S. requests that it not retaliate if hit by Scuds; Secretary of State James Baker, however, had been assured that the Arab allies in the coalition would not bolt if Israel retaliated. Plante noted that evidence was building that the Israelis were retaliating though it was believed that they were not flying over Jordanian air space (which would reduce the risk of Jordan becoming involved in the war). Thus, for some time CBS reproduced the story of Israel's retaliation, and it and other networks continued until later in the evening to make these claims.

Meanwhile, CBS cut live to Saudi Arabia about 8:30 p.m. and Bob Simon reported that about five minutes ago air-raid sirens had stopped, but then a couple of minutes ago there had been an explosion and Saudi officials announced that they were in imminent danger. The video images showed people fleeing from an explosion toward bomb shelters, and Simon commented that they were now being told to put gas masks on. Shortly thereafter, Forrest Sawyer reported that he heard something like an explosion in the distance and that a very nervous situation existed in and around Dhahran. ABC's satellite picture went down at this point, accelerating the tension, though anchor Peter Jennings explained that losing the satellite feed "happens from time to time." It appeared that events were careening more out of control by the minute.

ABC's Dean Reynolds indicated from Jerusalem around 8:45 p.m. that there were reports of at least ten missiles hitting Tel Aviv and Haifa. There were some casualties, but it was not yet confirmed

how many and whether the missiles had chemical warheads. The all-clear sirens went off at 3:32 a.m. local time and the Israelis were told that they could take their gas masks off. General Bernard Trainor broke in and said that "if these reports that we're getting from the Israelis, and indeed the United States, of something like 10 Scud missiles hitting missiles, my understanding of Israeli doctrine and my knowledge of the Israeli armed forces, I can't believe for a moment that the Israelis are not in the process of launching not only a strike against possible Scud sites, but a full-scale retaliatory mission against the Iraqis." CBS correspondent Tom Fenton stated that he was not surprised that the Israelis were retaliating since they were "a hard-line government" and have always responded immediately and decisively to attacks on their territory.

On CBS, Dan Rather announced that in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia, air-raid sirens were on again, and a video appeared showing bright lights exploding in the sky as Rather explained that they did not know if they were missiles exploding or flares. CBS Pentagon reporter David Martin claimed that the Pentagon insisted that there were not now, nor had there been, Scud missiles fired at Saudi Arabia and CBS's Bob Simon in Dhahran claimed that a report from Bahrain that a missile hit Dhahran "is absolutely untrue." Instead, they were told that the explosion was a Patriot missile that misfired and exploded. Simon explained that the Patriot is an antimissile defense system that destroys airplanes and short-range missiles. General Dugan added that the Patriot missile was designed to knock airplanes out of the sky and was modified to fire at incoming missiles, but it had not been tested in battle. Its drawback was that it had only a small arc and close range within which it could attack incoming missiles with computer guidance systems. Dugan believed that the Patriot system would not be adequate to defend Israel because of the wide circumference of the defense perimeter. Shortly thereafter, ABC's Bob Zelnick reported that the Pentagon now believed that an Iraqi Scud missile had been intercepted by a Patriot missile in eastern Saudi Arabia. Only one missile was fired, but the Pentagon was worried that perhaps it was fired by the Iraqis to get their range and bearings in order to follow with a volley of missiles. As Zelnick spoke, the video showed an explosion of lights in the sky and the audience was treated to what was reported as the first Patriot hit of a Scud missile.

In Tel Aviv CBS's Tom Fenton broke in and breathlessly announced that they had been told to put gas masks back on, as air-raid sirens blared in the background. Fenton said that they had just heard two more bangs, and Israeli radio reported that there were some casualties, but it was still not clear if it was a chemical or conventional attack. Some new video footage from Tel Aviv came on and CBS played the sounds of air-raid sirens going off on Tel Aviv streets, accompanied by a picture of a middle-class family coping with the attack. The mother was shown with her yawning daughter and a sleeping baby, with gas masks and other equipment next to them; the video then cut to the mother strapping on gas masks to her boy and girl who were then shown having gas masks and plastic wrapped over their faces; next the video moved to a baby in a baby carriage with a plastic protective cover over it. Dan Rather stated "that's the reality in Israel tonight," but it is possible that these were pretaped pictures prepared as a masterpiece of propaganda and ready to broadcast in case of a Scud attack. Rather noted that these pictures "put into perspective" Israel's response, which was that "we are going to strike back at Iraq," and he reported that Israeli jets were heading for retaliation to Iraq.

CBS played the footage of the mother and children with gas masks repeatedly, using it as a paradigm of Israeli suffering. Such footage created instant empathy, for it employed primal scenes of the mother protecting her children and evoked the images of Jews suffering gas attacks. I suspect it was

propaganda because it was so perfectly packaged and framed, and because this was among the first satellite footage from Israel, evoking the possibility that the footage was planned and sent up to the satellite when the attack started to elicit world-wide sympathy for Israel. It was becoming clear that the Persian Gulf war was a media propaganda war, and all interested parties were operating at full throttle to produce words and images to aid their own causes (see Chapter 5).

Yet the television coverage of the Gulf war created the illusion of seeing a real war in real time. In fact, one could only see and hear live what was shown or reported from the places in Saudi Arabia, Israel, and Iraq where the networks had functioning satellite feeds and here too the words and images were subject to government control. Moreover, the various governments censored words and images that did not please them and the networks themselves chose what images to play and what not to play. Hence, although some of the moments of live drama provided a compelling sense of realism, that one was really and directly perceiving the war itself, nonetheless, the Gulf war, as presented by the media, was a symbolic construct produced by the government, media, and military, which presented a highly selective and controlled image of the war. There were, of course, real political struggles and military events going on behind the TV screen, but these were usually invisible in the TV war.

Indeed, the words and images produced were often a cover for a battle of specific political interests, agendas, and policies. The media, for political players, is an instrument to shape public opinion. I argued in the Preface that critical media theory must attempt to discern what positions and agendas lie behind the various official pronouncements or leaks. This requires decoding the political meaning of media words and images: Which policy and interests are being articulated? Who is advancing this position and why? Why are the media disseminating this position and what interests are at play here? Things are rarely what they seem to be in complex events like crises and wars and all players use the media to advance their own interests and agenda. Therefore, critical media analysis must decode the media pronouncements and attempt to discover what is behind the facade of media discourse and images.

The question of chemical weapons use against the Israelis was a highly emotional one that dominated much of the coverage of the Iraqi Scud attacks on Israel and in the following analysis I shall attempt to detect what lay behind the various U.S. and Israeli pronouncements and leaks on the Scud attacks. During the first attack, the networks reported that chemical weapons were used, though these reports ultimately turned out to be false. Dean Reynolds broke in at 9:01 p.m. to report that as many as twenty people had been taken to the hospital suffering from the effects of nerve gas, although Israeli radio reports said that only seven people had been hospitalized. At 9:31 p.m., ABC's Pentagon correspondent Bob Zelnick said that "the Israelis have informed the U.S. that at least some of the missiles that landed in Israel were of the nerve gas variety" and, in response to a query by Peter Jennings, he asserted that his Pentagon sources were "sure of it." Yet this claim could not be confirmed because the Israeli government had not officially authenticated how many attacks there had been, whether the warheads were conventional or chemical, what specific damage had been wrought, and whether they were or were not retaliating. Thus, speculation ran rampant, and figuring out who to believe was difficult.

On CBS, Tom Fenton reported around 9:30 p.m. that one area on a highway north of Tel Aviv had been roped off because there was danger of nerve gas from a missile attack. There were accounts of buildings burning in a small town outside of Tel Aviv. But Fenton now admitted that there was no confirmation whatsoever that Israel was retaliating for the attack, and Rather cautioned that Israeli

retaliation "is not absolutely confirmed yet." ABC's Peter Jennings discussed with correspondent Chris Wallace in Jerusalem whether Israel would use nuclear weapons to retaliate against Iraq! Wallace replied that Saddam Hussein should be very frightened by the possible response if he used chemical weapons against Israel. CBS's Rather reported a bit later that James Baker had discussed the Iraqi missile attack on Israel with the ambassadors of Israel, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Syria, and the U.S. State Department claimed that the Bush administration was "working on the problem," and trying to keep Israel from retaliating

In Dean Reynolds' next report from Israel, he announced that "the Israeli army chief spokesman has come on the air and denied reports that chemical weapons were used against Israel." Concerning the conflicting reports as to whether chemical weapons had or had not been used in the attack, and whether Israel was or was not retaliating ABC's Peter Jennings wondered at one point if there was a disinformation campaign on in Israel, speculating that the Israeli government might not want their public to know what had happened. Dean Reynolds said that his report was from a "reliable source" who was "100 percent certain" that a hospital was treating more than twenty victims of a nerve gas attack. He also commented that military reporters on TV tended to report what the government wanted the public to hear, soon after, Israel instituted military censorship of TV reports and such critical remarks were no longer allowed.

At 9:49 p.m., Reynolds returned on camera, saying that it was now believed that no nerve gas had been involved in the Scud attacks and he apologized for conveying the misinformation earlier; probably someone had fed him the misinformation as part of an internal Israeli struggle over retaliation. Obviously, Israel was getting attacked by Iraqi Scud missiles, and there was a furious debate going on concerning whether the country should immediately retaliate. It was Israeli military orthodoxy that when Israel was attacked, it should respond immediately and violently. Many in Israel shared this perspective, so it was possible that those individuals created reports that chemical weapons were used in order to accelerate and legitimate an Israeli response. Those who, for political reasons, were against immediately retaliating against Iraq had an interest in reporting that casualties were minimal. Consequently, it was possible that different Israeli officials with different agendas and goals were giving the U.S. government and media correspondents information that furthered their own agendas.

All the networks cut live at 10:45 p.m. to a press conference with the Israeli ambassador to the United States, Zalman Shoval, who began by reporting that there was an unprovoked attack on Israel by Iraqi Scud missiles aimed at "purely civilian targets." Shoval detailed some of the consultations between the United States and Israel, and he concluded by stating that the government of Israel, fully supported by the opposition, reserved the right to respond in any way that it deemed fit, without indicating what the decision of the Israeli government would be. He noted that Israel chose not to undertake a preemptive strike at Iraq, on Washington's request, and commented that Israel had now paid a price for its forbearance. In his commentary, Dan Rather underscored that the fact that the Ambassador specifically did not mention any retaliation indicated that, for the moment at least, Israel was not striking back at Iraq. David Martin at the Pentagon then reported that the allied forces in Saudi Arabia had done "some retaliating of their own" against these Scud missile launchers. This news was repeated through the night and became a major motif of General Schwarzkopf's briefing the next day, to reassure Israeli hardliners that the U.S. was carrying out the agenda of destroying Saddam Hussein's military and protecting Israel.

About 12:30 a.m. on January 18, CBS ran some footage of Foreign Minister David Levy of Israel,

who noted that Israel was in contact with the United States but that it was Israel's right and responsibility to retaliate for this attack. Shortly thereafter, CBS reported that Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir would have a cabinet meeting to debate the Israeli response. Israel needed to decide if it was satisfied with assurances from President Bush or should retaliate on its own. Throughout the day—and for the days to follow—there was feverish speculation on the possible Israeli retaliation. If Israel did attack Iraq, would its planes fly over Jordan, risking war with that country? What would Israel hit if it chose to retaliate? How would Arab members of the coalition respond to Israeli retaliation? Would this unravel the coalition or could it withstand such pressures? How would the Palestinians respond if Israel waged war against Iraq? What, if any, Arab countries would join a Jihad against Israel and the West? Every network brought on pundits who discussed every nuance of these questions.

Many of the leaks and opinions expressed, however, were in support of very specific policies and actions. As noted, those wanting retaliation may have leaked the nerve gas report to legitimate an Israeli military response, or even to create a panic that would drive Israel to retaliate. But such is the complexity of the situation that an Israeli theorist, Oded Balaban, suggested that some of those who were urging retaliation might have been precisely those who wanted the war to end (pers. com., January 13, 1992). On this reading, Israeli retaliation would lead to an immediate demand in the UN for a cease-fire to prevent a Middle East conflagration, consuming the whole area. Thus some of those inciting Israeli retaliation might have been doing so precisely to bring the war to an end. Needless to say, this was also the goal of Saddam Hussein, who was firing missiles regularly at Israel in order to elicit an Israeli response which would either, or so he might imagine, lead to an Arab/Israeli conflict, which would split the coalition against him, or would accelerate calls for a cease-fire and negotiations. Consequently, precisely the Israeli hard-liners who previously would have responded to an Iraqi attack immediately with gusto and maximum force were resisting the call to retaliate on the grounds that the maximum destruction of their Iraqi nemesis would likely be furthered by a prolongation of the war that might be curtailed by Israeli interventions.

This episode raises the question of sources, disinformation, and propaganda. The network correspondents rely in times of crisis on official sources who feed them information. In a crisis situation, there is usually not time to check the validity of the reports and in the highly competitive TV news business the networks tend to go on air with whatever information their correspondents receive. Much of this information, however, may be disinformation in a crisis situation. The night before, CNN's Wolf Blitzer repeatedly reported that he had been told by "highly placed Pentagon officials" that the Iraqi Air Force was destroyed, their Scud missile sites knocked out, and the Republican Guards decimated, all disinformation that someone in the Pentagon had chosen to disseminate. I suggested that this disinformation might have been aimed at creating a euphoria to reassure a nervous public, Congress, and financial markets, or it might have been a desperate attempt to end the war quickly by raising the sense that it was already over.¹

During the Israeli Scud attacks, various sources were also leaking disinformation and trying to manipulate the media. Some sources were leaking disinformation concerning the alleged Iraqi chemical weapons attack on Israel and the next morning the television networks were transmitting various reports that announced that Israel was retaliating against Iraq, just when the Israeli cabinet was meeting to decide their response. CBS News was citing through the early morning of February 18 one "unconfirmed report" that two groups of Israeli warplanes were flying toward Iraq, and another that eight Israeli jets were sighted in Lebanon on the way to Iraq. CBS also quoted an Agence France Presse report that Israel had

decided on a "measured response" to the Scud attacks. All of these reports were disinformation, supporting specific Israeli policy choices which were leaked to the press to encourage or support the policy of retaliation.

Peter Jennings of ABC had raised some questions concerning the "information" being disseminated and alluded to the possibility of disinformation campaigns, but on the whole the mainstream media largely transmitted whatever their sources fed them without much skepticism or critical analysis. Consequently, it was hard to make out what was really going on behind the scenes concerning the debates over the proper Israeli response to the Scud attacks. Moreover, it would prove extremely difficult to ascertain what actually happened during the Scud missile attacks as the countries under attack frequently provided blatantly false accounts of what happened, as did the U.S. government. Ultimately, the seemingly "moderate" Israeli line prevailed (i.e. that Israel not retaliate) and official information was generally tailored to fit this line, playing down the extent of Scud missile damage (though this "moderate" policy might have ultimately expressed hardline interests which sought the maximum destruction of Iraq and Saddam Hussein).

Therefore, one had to be extremely careful in appraising information from "official" sources. Often certain network correspondents are regularly used as disinformation conduits; during the Grenada invasion and Libyan bombing the Pentagon and Reagan Administration used ABC's John McWethy as a reliable source of disinformation.² During the Persian Gulf war, CNN's Wolf Blitzer was a regular source of Pentagon disinformation, with Blitzer eagerly reproducing on the spot whatever he was told, although often his information turned out to be false. The TV networks' military "experts" for the most part put a pro-Pentagon spin on their "analyses," explaining and defending the Pentagon line of the moment. Dan Rather started off critical of official sources, but ended up becoming one of the most blatant defenders of the military, for reasons that will be explained later (Chapter 8). Thus, two of the most deplorable aspects of the media coverage of the Persian Gulf war were the uncritical use of reports from official sources and the narrow range of sources and "experts" and commentators employed in framing and analyzing the complex events of the war.

4.2 A Clean War?

The TV public, quickly addicted to the drama of the war, became entranced with images, spectacle, and fascination with a new type of high-tech video. Images of the bombing of Baghdad taken by night cameras produced an eerie, surreal vision of the war as an aesthetic phenomenon. Images of buildings, bridges, and military targets (but never civilians) being destroyed by laser-guided bombs were photographed by cameras on the planes and on the bombs themselves, which conveyed the images to satellites where they were downloaded and recorded on videocassettes and then shown to a captivated audience. These images literally took the TV viewers into a new high-tech cyberspace, a realm of experience with which many viewers were already familiar through video and computer games, the special effects of Hollywood movies, and cyberpunk fiction. Fascination with video and computer images provided an aura of magic and power for the military that produced such spectacles and enhanced their credibility with a public eager to believe whatever they would claim. Not surprisingly, the media themselves were mesmerized by these images, which they played and replayed repeatedly; Dan Rather spoke with awe when he presented "more remarkable video just released by the Defense Department," and CNN seemed to open each news segment with the videos of the astonishing high-tech bombing. The

images of "clean" bombing seemed to give credence to military claims that they were avoiding civilian casualties and endowed these high-tech wizards with power as well as credibility, providing an aura of veracity to whatever claims they would make, which were seemingly grounded in technological omnipotence and evidence too compelling to doubt.

Around 11:00 p.m. on January 17, ABC, using a British ITN report by Brent Sadler and footage shot by ABC cameraman Fabrice Moussus,³ provided the first footage of the bombing of Baghdad. The film was shot with a special night lens and showed explosions of light over the sky of Baghdad with anti-aircraft fire, tracer bullets, and bombs exploding in the sky, which produced a spectacular sound and light show. The pictures were genuinely dramatic and engaging, with Iraqi anti-aircraft installations on roofs and gunners firing wildly in the air; cars sped through the night and people ran for shelter on the ground; a bomb hit a communications tower in a nuclear-like explosion; and outgoing anti-aircraft fire and explosions lit up the sky.

Reinforcing the Pentagon line that the U.S. military was engaging in a precise and clean technowar, Peter Jennings related, while the footage was on, that Brent Sadler and Gary Shepard of ABC said that there wasn't much damage visible in Baghdad, though Sadler's report included Iraq's claim that there were "barbaric raids on Iraqi towns and villages" that had left 23 dead and 66 injured. Immediately after the broadcast of the video, John McWethy came on the air and described the video as "truly an awesome display of ground fire in Baghdad" at U.S. and allied planes. He explained that "one thing that is a little misleading" was that the camera had a night-scope lens so that everything going up, whether lead, tracers, or missiles, all looked the same. Jennings commented that this was how it appeared to pilots with night-vision goggles who were forced to fly into "a wall of fire."

Jennings was then suddenly reminded of a remark by General William Westmoreland, head of U.S. forces in Vietnam, who told him in 1965 that the camera gets a very narrow view of things. Jennings further noted that the video in question was a narrow view of the war from a camera near the western edge of Baghdad during the first night's air attack. This was a point well-taken and, in fact, about the only images that the Pentagon and networks circulated were high-tech video of aestheticized war, of technowar as a video game spectacle, that produced a narrow range of images within the vast array of weapons and sites of death and destruction.

One might add that these video images covered over that the bombs were being dropped on Baghdad, one of the centers of civilization, a city full of archaeological treasures that were in danger of being destroyed. It was also one of the largest cities in the Middle East with a population of over four million inhabitants. The fact that the bombs were also falling on Iraqi civilians and destroying their homes and social infrastructure was also hidden by the Nintendo-like video images of the pyrotechnics of modern warfare. The media, however, focused on the aesthetics of the images, or the military factors involved, without discussing the human dimension of the bombing.

Shortly thereafter, CBS played the same footage and Dan Rather commented that the "two most dramatic images of the night" were the Israeli mother and her daughter putting on gas masks and the pictures of the bombing of Baghdad, which Rather noted, "shows the kind of courage it takes to fly into this kind of defense." Rather also gushed to Ed Bradley, that the exciting images of Patriots hitting Scuds and the bombing of Baghdad "take my breath away." This disclosure revealed the fascination with images

that permeate the network television mindset and how they bought into the military propaganda, reproducing the discourse of a clean and precise technowar.

The image of technowar was more sharply defined during a January 18 briefing that General Schwarzkopf and General Horner held in Saudi Arabia, which provided the first videotapes of technowar. Schwarzkopf opened with a brief statement on the progress of the war and Horner made some banal opening remarks, but the hit of the day was the videotapes of the actual bombing footage. Articulating the principles of technowar, General Horner described their "very complex and very large campaign plan" and the integration of all the technological and national forces. Waxing metaphorical when asked to describe the coordination of the campaign in more detail, Horner stated:

It is an enormous effort. Of course, now we have a lot of computers, and you can bring together the tens of thousands of minor details, radio frequencies, altitudes, tanker rendezvouses, bomb configurations, who supports who, who's flying escort,... There are thousands and thousands of details and we work them together as one group, put them together in what we call a common air-tasking order, and it provides a sheet of music that everybody sings the same song off.

The song of course, is that of death and destruction, and technowar in its essence is the use of advanced technology to destroy its targets. Indeed, Horner admitted in his opening remarks: "It has been in some respects a technology war, although it is fought by men and women." The highlight of the briefing, however, was technology as Horner turned on his videos to demonstrate precision bombing at work. The world was treated to videos of Air Force F-111 fighter bombers using laser-guided bombs to destroy an Iraqi airfield runway and a suspected storage bunker for Scud missiles. Horner then presented a video of a F-117 Stealth fighter bomber dropping its load down the air shaft of Iraqi air defense headquarters. Finally, Horner showed a Stealth bomber dumping another smart bomb into the Iraqi air force headquarters, destroying the building.

These videos were replayed for days, producing the image of a precise bombing and coding the destruction as positive. Norm Schwarzkopf's video cassette shows demonstrated that U.S. bombs always hit their targets, do not cause collateral damage, and only take out nasty military targets. This was intended to change the public perception of war itself, that the new technowar was clean, precise, and surgical, that the very nature of war had changed. War was thus something that one could enjoy, admire, and cheer about. War was fun, aesthetic, and fascinating. The videos created a climate of joy in destruction in its audiences, as when reporters clapped and laughed when Horner said: "And this is my counterpart's headquarters in Baghdad," as a video showed a bomb blowing up the Iraqi air force headquarters. Just as video and computer games--or special-effects movies like Star Wars--produce a positive libidinal pleasure in destruction, so too did the videos of high-tech bombing produce pleasure in the destruction of Iraq--at least among the audience that bought into the spectacle of high-tech destruction.⁴

The illusion was projected that only machines and not people are involved in the new high-tech warfare, which was bloodless and antiseptic. The targets of the released footage were always ugly buildings, usually serving military functions. The austere buildings were seemingly always deserted, devoid of humans, so the bombing was coded as a positive surgical operation that was removing methodically the

instruments of Iraqi war—medical discourse and imagery of clean surgery removing evil disease.⁵ This image proved to be quite untrue (see Chapters 6 and 7), yet the constant replaying of these tapes, and their power to produce images of a clean and precise technowar, created the impression that the military desired. Only after the war were figures released showing that most of the bombs dropped were not "smart" computer- and laser-guided bombs. Instead, most of the bombs missed their targets altogether and even the so-called smart bombs often produced a lot of dumb "collateral" destruction (see the documentation at the end of this section). In fact, it was claimed that the best explanation for the accuracy of some of the initial bombing raids, in contrast to the imprecision of the latter ones, is that the ability of the first bombs "to hit their targets would have been enhanced by homing devices at or near their targets, planted by U.S. agents in Iraq before the war started."⁶

Early on, one military analyst attempted to puncture the myth of a clean and precise technowar. Pierre Sprey, a longtime critic of high-tech military systems, claimed: "They're retargeting a lot of the places where they already claimed great success. The bombing just isn't that accurate. In the future, the ineffectiveness is going to become painfully obvious" (*New York Times*, Jan. 21, 1991, p. A6). Indeed, the Pentagon's admitted need to retarget some of their bombing raids indicated that the bombs were not all that precise, and a great debate broke out in defense circles concerning bomb damage assessment and the effectiveness of the U.S.-led coalition bombing campaign. In the days to come, many pictures of the "collateral damage" suffered by Iraqi civilians became evident (see Chapters 6 and 7). Thus, the material reality of the technowar was that the Iraqi civilian and economic infrastructures were being destroyed, along with military targets, and, eventually, it was clear that many innocent victims were maimed and killed as well.

The Pentagon, however, tried to create an image of control, efficacy, and humaneness, and the videos seemed to prove that. Schwarzkopf's opening statement during the briefing with Gen. Horner on January 18 indicated that the U.S.-led coalition was flying "about 2,000 air sorties of all types each day" and "[m]ore than 80 percent of all of those sorties have successfully engaged their targets." Whereas General Powell previously defined the 80 percent success rate in terms of ordinance delivered, independent of whether or not it destroyed its target, Schwarzkopf created the false impression that they actually destroyed their targets ("successfully engaged" them). Horner amplified this impression when he answered a reporter's question concerning whether the planes were hitting fifty percent or eighty percent of their targets: "The combined percentages you see are a function of the number of targets targeted versus the number hit"—as if the eighty percent referred to the hits. Actually, the later figures revealed that only thirty percent of the targets were hit (see below), and the Pentagon later admitted that it was forced to constantly return to retarget earlier "assets" that they had bombed.

In fact, even in terms of Powell's definition of success rate in terms of delivery, Schwarzkopf's figure of "eighty percent" was dubious. Minutes before he began his briefing, Scott Pelley of CBS News reported that a group of planes had just returned to base with bombs intact under their wings because of bad weather. Furthermore, Dunnigan and Bay attest: "Uncharacteristic bad weather in the Gulf caused forty percent of the bombing missions to be canceled during the first two weeks of the war" (1991, p. 161). Thus bad weather was forcing the cancellation of flights, or preventing the crews from dropping their bombs, so that Schwarzkopf's eighty percent "success rate" was pure bluster.

The Schwarzkopf and Horner briefing was a bit odd and might have been the first time that such

videotapes were ever played at military briefings. General Schwarzkopf appeared tired and subdued and not as arrogant and bullying as usual. Warrior Schwarzkopf was basically a ground soldier who was perhaps not comfortable or at home with the high-tech spectacle of video display. For Schwarzkopf, war was serious business and there was something frivolous about playing videos at a military briefing. Horner, by contrast, cool and relaxed, was evidently enjoying playing the videotapes and answering questions, the perfect technomanager for assuring the public that a new type of clean and precise war was being waged.

The media could not resist falling prey to the images and ideology of technowar that became the dominant mode of presentation and discourse for the rest of the campaign.⁷ The high-tech weapons were endlessly praised throughout the war by network commentators. CBS's Charles Osgood acclaimed the high-tech bombing of Iraq as a "marvel," and his colleague Jim Stewart extolled "two days of almost picture-perfect assaults" (both on Jan. 17, 1991). On January 19, NBC's Katherine Couric at the Pentagon described how the videos were taken and praised the high-tech planes, weapons, and strategies deployed. Her descriptions of the specifications and capabilities of the weapons provided excellent PR and free advertisements for the high-tech weapons that her employer GE/RCA (which owned NBC) produced. CBS's Harry Smith watched the videotapes with the CBS military adviser, General Dugan, and described the precision bombing as "stunning." And the CNN military analysts interminably praised the wonders of high-tech warfare.

Reinforcing this image, on the January 19 "ABC World News Tonight," Jim Hickey in Dhahran reported that U.S. pilots claimed that they were "very exacting, very precise" in their bombing and that if they did not see their targets they would return home. On the same program, Bob Zelnick reported that in World War II, weapons missed by half a mile, but in this war Cruise missiles and laser-guided bombs scored direct hits. NBC's Tom Brokaw explained, "So far the U.S. has fought this war at arm's length with long-range missiles, high-tech weapons. This is to keep casualties down." *Newsweek's* February 18 cover read, "The New Science of War," with a subheading, "High-Tech Hardware: How Many Lives Can It Save?" This myth of technowar continued to dominate the media discourse for days and helped fix the public's image of a new era of high-tech warfare.

After the war, it was revealed that U.S. bombing was highly imprecise and overwhelmingly low-tech. In a March 15 press conference after the war, Air Force Chief of Staff General Merrill McPeak (1991) admitted that only 6,520 out of 88,500 tons of bombs dropped by U.S. planes on Iraq and occupied Kuwait were precision bombs, merely seven percent of the total. He claimed ninety percent of these "smart bombs" hit their targets. Former Assistant Secretary of the Navy, John Lehman, however, doubted whether the smart bombs had such a high accuracy rate, citing his own experience of many misfires when the weapons were being tested (Lehman made the point on CNN on Jan. 26 and elaborated the point in an article by Fred Kaplan in the *Boston Globe*, Jan. 29, 1991). Lehman was told by Pentagon officials that only sixty percent of the so-called smart bombs hit their target -- a figure repeated in a later story in the *Philadelphia Inquirer* (Febr. 11, 1991, p. 12A).

More startling, "a senior Pentagon official" told *Washington Post* reporter Barton Gellman that only 25 percent of the conventional bombs hit their targets and that cumulatively U.S. bombs missed their targets at least seventy percent of the time (*Washington Post*, March 16, 1991, p. A1). Shortly thereafter, General McPeak admitted in an interview with *USA Today* that the U.S. made targeting mistakes in their massive bombing campaign against Iraq, "indicating that U.S. pilots hit and destroyed civilian targets"

(March 19, 1991).⁸ Furthermore, the U.S.-led coalition dropped a large variety of "area-impact munitions" that were imprecise and extremely lethal (see Paul Rogers, "The Myth of the Clean War," CovertAction Information Bulletin, No. 37, pp. 26-30). Thus, the discourse concerning precise bombing and the clean war was pure propaganda designed to sell the war to the public and, as noted, the mainstream media were instrumental in promoting this ideology which covered over the brutal reality of the U.S.-led coalition air war.

4.3 Scuds and Patriots

The seeming success of the Patriot missile against the Iraqi Scud missiles was one of the most potent advertisements for the precision and magic of U.S. high-tech weapons. The images of Patriots apparently intercepting Scuds thrilled the TV audience and, as I shall document in this section, led the mainstream media to celebrate the Patriot as the ultimate example of U.S. military superiority. The Scud missile, by contrast, was presented as evidence of Iraqi military inferiority and immoral terrorist bombing of civilian targets.

The Scud missile attacks, however, embarrassed the U.S. military, which wanted to maintain an image of total control of the battlefield, and greatly worried the Bush administration, which wanted to keep Israel out of the war. Schwarzkopf admitted in his January 18 briefing that trying to find a mobile Scud launcher "is like trying to find a needle in a haystack," and later in the day pundit Edward Luttwak noted on CBS that "you can put a Scud launcher in a truck, a barn, a church, anywhere." The problem in war, he claimed, was to see things and then to hit them. Mobile Scud launchers, he explained, were simply hard to see. Thus, although Schwarzkopf bragged about how they were constantly destroying Scud launchers, no one really knew how many Scud missiles and missile launchers Iraq had and where they were deploying them. Nonetheless, the pundits constantly speculated on the number of missiles and launchers that Iraq possessed and what percentage were already destroyed.

Scuds Over Israel

All through the day of January 18, Israeli officials and their media allies put out the line that if Israel was not attacked again, it would probably not retaliate for the first Scud assault, but if they were attacked again and took high casualties and losses, they would retaliate. In mid-morning EST, the TV commentators noted that the Israeli cabinet meeting was over and it appeared that Israel was holding off on retaliation. It was also announced that two people in Israel had died of heart attacks and two others died of suffocation when they frantically put on gas masks and forgot to pull off the seal. Thus, the Scud attacks were taking a lethal toll on the Israeli public.

A bit after 11:00 a.m., George Bush gave a news conference to comment on the progress of the war. Repeating the phrase of the day, which would be reproduced from New York to London to Tel Aviv, Bush called the progress, "so far, so good." He cautioned against euphoria and said that it "will take some time" to destroy Saddam Hussein's military assets. But, he was "outraged" by Iraq's "act of aggression" against Israel and appreciated Israel's "restraint." Consultations were continuing with Israel and other allies, and Bush affirmed that he was determined to "safeguard" Israel, promising that "[w]e are going to be redoubling our efforts in the darndest search-and-destroy effort that's ever been undertaken in that area."

Bush's performance was lackluster and he only summoned emotion when Helen Thomas of UPI asked him why he should be "outraged" when the Iraqis engaged in an "act of retaliation." Otherwise, he failed to understand some of the questions and kept talking about the unity of the nation behind him and the troops, and the unity of the world behind him and the UN resolutions, although both the country and the world were deeply divided over Bush's war against Iraq. Bush's war team rushed him out of the press room and over to the Pentagon for an afternoon briefing and then off to Camp David for the weekend.

The rest of the networks broke off their war coverage midafternoon, returning to their soap operas, and the world turned to CNN to get news of the unfolding events. In a remarkable segment on CNN with Israeli Deputy Foreign Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, an air-raid siren went off in the middle of the interview. Voices in the background indicated that there was an air attack and that the Israeli government had promised them that there would be no air-raid drills or false alarms. "Israel is being bombed again," Netanyahu categorically concluded. Reid Collins asked him from CNN headquarters if "it is an attack or a warning," and Netanyahu answered: "It's an attack." CNN continued to interview Netanyahu until the producer in Jerusalem, Larry Register, broke off the interview, saying that they had to "get protected." The crew started to put on their gas masks and Wolf Blitzer continued trying to question Netanyahu while he and the CNN crew put on their protective gear. Blitzer was trying to make the point that the Israeli government had said that if they were attacked again they would immediately retaliate, while at the same time Register was giving a report through his gas mask on the facts of the supposed air attack; finally CNN cut Blitzer off.

CNN then turned to its correspondent Richard Blystone in Tel Aviv, who said that the sirens had ceased, and next the screen showed Netanyahu making a call from the CNN studio, no doubt to get information. Blystone reported that the Israeli radio announced a missile attack, yet he had not heard any sound of it in Tel Aviv. The radio, he claimed, ordered people to put on their protective gear and to go into a sealed room, as there was fear of a chemical attack. CBS broke into its soap operas and Tom Fenton reported that Israeli radio announced that an attack was underway; Fenton thought that he had heard a bomb drop, but wasn't sure. CBS reported that they believed that a Scud alert was on in Saudi Arabia and broke to correspondent Scott Pelley, but his satellite link was abruptly cut off just as he started to report, intensifying the drama.

CBS's Pentagon correspondent Jim Stewart relayed the Pentagon's statement that they were fairly confident that there were no Scud attacks, but in Israel there was suddenly another warning siren, so it was hard to know exactly what was going on. Meanwhile, CNN's Linda Sherzer and Netanyahu were conducting an interview in their gas masks before the all-clear signal sounded. Then, in a fascinating exchange with Larry Register, Netanyahu explained why Israel had to retaliate against such "terrorism." When a map of the area was brought out, he put his hands one after another on the Arab world and his thumb on Israel, to demonstrate how vastly outnumbered Israel was by its Arab enemies. Register told Netanyahu how people had told him that Israel shouldn't respond, that "Israel should let America respond for us." In response, Netanyahu launched into his usual demonization of Saddam Hussein, Arafat and the PLO, and the other Arabs who he claimed wished to destroy Israel, repeating his hawkish line that national survival dictates that they must destroy these enemies first. Netanyahu warned of the danger to Israel if a Palestinian state were formed right on its border, making it able to fire even more accurate short-range missiles at them. Never before had the Israeli hard-line right wing gotten a more sympathetic hearing on U.S. television.

The prime-time news programs centered on the false alarms of Scud attacks on Israel and Saudi Arabia, and through the evening a now-dominant technowar discourse settled in, focusing on the high-tech wonders of the U.S. military and speculating on when a ground war would be necessary, thus providing an aura of control and normality. However, late in the evening, events careened out of control once again. ABC's "Nightline" was having a report on the antiwar movement when suddenly, around midnight, the show was interrupted by correspondent Chris Wallace in Israel, saying that there had been a series of explosions in downtown Tel Aviv. Wallace reckoned that there were between three and five explosions close to the ABC bureau. The crew was in a sealed room, and radio confirmation had been given that there was a missile attack in Tel Aviv that, Wallace claimed, hit in the center of the city in a highly populated area.

On CBS, Tom Fenton reported through a gas mask to Susan Spencer that a series of missiles fired together hit Tel Aviv at dawn. He also reported that a CBS cameraman in Jerusalem claimed that there were seven hits in Jerusalem and four in Tel Aviv! A bit later, Tom Brokaw broke in on NBC to move live to correspondent Larry Weidman in Tel Aviv, who, also talking through his gas mask, claimed that he heard three explosions on the northern side of the city and had heard reports of one explosion in the south side of Tel Aviv. The sound volume of the explosion was about the same as last night, he claimed, though this time the missile hit at dawn. A bit later, Weidman said that there may have been as many as six or seven explosions in the Tel Aviv area. It appeared that a major missile attack was happening which could determine the fate of the war. Once again, the drama of the Persian Gulf TV war was gripping.

The attack raised speculation regarding whether chemical weapons had been used and how many casualties the attack had produced. Well before these facts were ascertained, NBC's Tom Brokaw stated almost immediately that this attack "will remove every doubt whatsoever whether Israel will respond... No government, no matter how liberal or understanding, can allow its society to come under an attack of this kind without doing something about it. And Israel has always operated under the principle of an eye for an eye. The Israelis will feel compelled to strike back despite the overtures to hold back of President Bush." Brokaw then speculated that Bush, too, may step aside and accept the now inevitable Israeli retaliation. Thus, Tom Brokaw stepped back from his function as reporter to become public policy maker, legitimating what he believed would be an Israeli retaliation and advising President Bush to accept the inevitable!

At least four times in the next hour, Brokaw repeated his assurance that Israel would now retaliate and throughout the evening would push the retaliation line; Tom Brokaw was obviously out of control. At one point, NBC's White House correspondent John Cochran produced an argument against retaliation, suggesting that it did not seem that this attack was big enough to trigger a response. Later, when it was announced that there were only slight casualties, Cochran indicated that Washington would have a hard time accepting such an insignificant attack as justification for retaliation. Nonetheless, Brokaw continued to push the retaliation line, arguing against Cochran, Middle East expert Gary Sick, and others who thought that Israel would not and probably should not retaliate. Instead, Brokaw agreed with U.S. and Israeli interviewees that Israel should retaliate immediately. One cannot be certain why Brokaw took such a strong and emotional position in favor of retaliation, but it was clear that he overstepped his function as journalist and became a public policy advocate, pushing what, in retrospect, was a particularly stupid policy. During several Israeli Scud attacks, in fact, he became extremely emotional about the viciousness of

the Iraqis, though he never seemed to summon any sympathy for dead Iraqis, bombed by the U.S-led coalition.

By contrast, NBC White House correspondent John Cochran was pushing the White House line that Israel should not retaliate, doing the bidding of the Bush administration upon whom he depended for his "information". On the whole, however, the other network commentators followed Brokaw, citing the inevitability and rightness of Israeli retaliation. Dan Rather noted on CBS that "there are going to be an awful lot of people ... who [will] say: 'Look, there is no way to keep the Israelis out of the war now. They're going to retaliate. It's only a question of time.'" CBS military adviser Gen. Crist stated categorically: "I don't see how they can allow this to happen. I think the only option...is for Israel to try to handle the missile problem themselves." CBS White House correspondent Leslie Stahl, however, had some reservations: "If Israel does react, they hand Saddam Hussein the very victory that he is looking for.... Now we will wait and see if Israel will continue to show the restraint they have shown so far." ABC's Ted Koppel, however, predicted that: "It seems almost inevitable that the Israelis will respond."

Thus, while the network anchors generally took the line that Israel would and should retaliate, the White House correspondents took the position of the Bush administration that Israel should show restraint. This example indicates once again the extent to which the White House correspondents just parrot the line of the moment of the administration that they are covering, while the TV anchors respond to a variety of influences and thus might support policies at odds with the government. In any case, it was revealing to see the major White House correspondents arguing for the policy that the Bush administration was pushing--that Israel not retaliate--whereas the anchors were urging, justifying, or predicting Israeli retaliation.

In one of the most interesting exchanges on the Iraqi Scud attack, Joshua Epstein, a defense analyst for the Brookings Institution, said on ABC that Israel would clearly respond and that he was afraid that it would spread the war and break up the multinational coalition. Israeli retaliation, he feared, could roll out of control and cause the coalition to accelerate the combat and perhaps begin the ground war prematurely. Moreover, it was not clear what the endgame would be: There were still many Iraqi divisions north of Baghdad, so the total destruction of the Iraqi military and overthrow of the regime of Saddam Hussein could involve quite a bloodbath. Epstein did not see that the Bush administration had projected any clear end to the war, and it appeared to him in retrospect that starting a war in the Middle East was "a rather rash act." The possibility of bringing in Jordan could also intensify and complicate the war and cause a serious split in the coalition. Moreover, Epstein warned, the status of the Iraqi air force was still unknown; it is conceivable that they could assemble a large armada, perhaps loaded with chemical weapons, and some might get through to Israel. In any case, it appeared that events were spinning out of control, he warned. Epstein's was one of the few critical voices to emerge in the mainstream media that questioned the rationality of the war itself, pointing out that it was not clear where the war was going, how it would evolve, what the terminus might be, and how it might be widened, causing a further escalation into the unknown and uncontrollable.

Around 2:15 a.m., CBS correspondent Tom Fenton reported that the Israeli Red Cross told him that there had been casualties, but the all-clear signal had just gone off, and he was told that the weapons were conventional warheads and that poison gas was not used in this attack. In Fenton's next report, he stated that by monitoring police radios in Jerusalem, his team had concluded that there were no missile hits

in Jerusalem and that the noises reported there might have been reverberations or echoes. Fenton noted that there were hits in Tel Aviv and that they had pictures of a crater five feet across. Illustrating Fenton's report was video footage of an Israeli civil defense team with chemical suits checking out sites for damage and for evidence of chemical weapons while spraying water on the crater.

Throughout the night, the networks aired footage from the missile attack as soon as it appeared on their satellite feed, much of it of very poor quality and obviously unedited. It appears that in a crisis the networks would show any picture that came down the satellite feed, as quickly as they could get it on the air. Their aesthetic in these situations might be described as a "neorealist minimalism" in which they throw out all aesthetic and technical standards and show whatever video images they are fed. Hungry for pictures, they are potential dupes for governments who want to feed them certain words or images that serve the interests of the government in question, thus rendering the networks propaganda agents for foreign governments.

Around 3:15 a.m., NBC broadcast a statement live from an Israeli embassy spokesperson who reported that all the warheads in the Scud missiles that hit Israel were conventional and that there were about ten light injuries and heavy property damage. The most interesting point of the briefing, however, was that the Israeli government stated that it would no longer comment on the number, accuracy, or location of the missile strikes. This briefing thus signaled a new Israeli policy that would make it increasingly difficult to chart the trajectory of the Scud wars. The decision was made for military and political reasons. Militarily, Israel obviously did not want the Iraqis to know which missiles hit and caused damage and which did not. Politically, the Israeli government wanted to manipulate the information concerning the damage of the Scuds for its political purposes: to exaggerate damage if it decided to retaliate or to cover up damage if it chose not to retaliate.

In fact, it was not certain how many Scuds hit in this attack and what damage they caused. CBS claimed during the morning of the attack that their crew confirmed that there were four Scud hits with heavy property damage, but light casualties (the latter point was also asserted by the Israeli embassy in the United States). The following morning the New York Times reported: "Four Iraqi missiles slammed into heavily populated areas along Israel's coastal heartland early this morning.. and slightly injured 15 civilians." The U.S. military, however, claimed at their briefing in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, the next morning that only three Scuds hit Israel. One wonders, however, if there were really more serious Scud hits and if the Israeli and U.S. governments were covering over the extent of the damage, thus enabling Israel to avoid retaliation. Baghdad radio claimed that it fired eleven missiles and an Israeli, David Halevey, also reported that Iraq might have fired as many as eleven missiles at Israel. There were reports by both CBS and NBC that there were multiple missile hits in Jerusalem,⁹ and although these reports were later denied, one might be suspicious of these denials. In fact, CBS's correspondent Doug Tunnell in Jordan said that they received an unconfirmed report that at least one of the missiles fired at Israel landed in Jordan! Jordanian officials were not commenting on the report, he said, yet they did not deny it either.

And so it was not really clear how much damage the Iraqi Scud attack produced or what the Israeli response would be. I indicated earlier how the network commentators for the most part believed that retaliation was inevitable. Some of those who took this position were pundits, who simply thought that Israel would immediately retaliate, while a large number were Israelis or their ideological champions, who wanted Israel to retaliate. Others took the Bush administration position and urged Israel not to retaliate,

claiming that this action would simply play into the hands of Saddam Hussein. In any case, throughout the next several weeks, this issue was endlessly debated. As it turned out, Israel did not retaliate during the Gulf war itself, at least as far as is known, nor has it yet retaliated despite constant bluster that it would definitely retaliate, but at a time of its own choosing.¹⁰

Scud Wars in Saudi Arabia

Part of the reason that Israel did not retaliate against Iraq was that the U.S. sent Patriot missile batteries to the Jewish state to protect it against Scud attacks. During the weekend of January 19 and 20, there was much media attention focused on the bringing of Patriot missile batteries to Israel which were supposed to protect the country from Scud attacks. After the relatively calm weekend of January 19 and 20, the U.S. military began to assert that they had the Scud situation under control. A Saudi military official told the BBC that the Iraqis no longer had the capacity to hit Saudi Arabia with Scud missiles, and the media reported repeatedly that U.S. Patriot missiles, sent to Israel over the weekend, would protect Israel against future Scud attacks. At the U.S. military briefing in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, Captain Robert Johnson observed that the Scud attack trend was obviously down, declining from eight hits the previous night to three that night (figures in themselves contestable), and other U.S. officials and their allies in the media continuously repeated this inane argument, one that was soon literally shot down by new rounds of Scud attacks.

Throughout that weekend the Patriot missile system, which so far had only performed once, was praised to the skies--despite the fact that the media also reported that two Patriot missile systems had misfired and the missiles had to be exploded in the area, costing taxpayers more than one million dollars for each misfire.¹¹ This rather dubious track record did not, however, interfere with fulsome Patriot propaganda. On the "CBS Evening News," for instance, Pentagon correspondent David Martin reported that the first of the Patriots were operational in Israel and described the Patriots as "[t]he single most important weapon in the American arsenal," which was obviously total nonsense. Martin did note the accidental firing of two Patriots that day and that it was still not certain why they misfired: "But finding out is essential because these missiles are capable of shooting down American planes flying back from Iraq or Kuwait."

Around 1:56 p.m. EST on January 20, CNN correspondent Charles Jaco reported from Dhahran, Saudi Arabia, that there were claims of five Scud missiles in the air coming toward Saudi Arabia. A frantic Jaco breathlessly informed the world that Patriot missiles were just fired at the Scuds, and everyone had been told to scramble off the platform. Jaco and his crew remained, however, and described the confusion live for some time. A CNN crew member saw Patriots going up and then saw streaks of light and sparks in the sky. There was no warning of this raid at all, Jaco remarked; it came as a complete surprise and "the first warning we might get is the explosion of the missiles going off." Air sirens screamed in the background and a very nervous Jaco looked from side to side and calculated whether he should stay on the scene or seek shelter as advised.

At the same time, the Big Three' networks broadcasting of sports events was interrupted by announcements of Iraqi Scud attacks on Saudi Arabia. During the broadcast of a playoff for next week's Super Bowl, NBC's Saudi Arabia correspondent, "Scud stud" Arthur Kent, reported that Iraqi Scud missiles had been fired at Saudi Arabia and subsequently attacked by Patriot missiles; footage was shown

of Kent ducking and saying: "There goes a Patriot. Let's go!" Shortly thereafter, reporting live on NBC, Kent nervously dashed his head from side to side, looking for the next Scud, as he gave his report, obviously rattled by the large number of Scuds aimed at Saudi Arabia. Remaining cool in New York, Tom Brokaw reported: "It now looks like the worst was over" and "the American investment in that anti-missile missile is certainly paying off.... This is the second time that it intercepted Scuds."

But on CNN, Charles Jaco kept repeating: "We still don't know anything at all." The CNN crew had seen three to five Patriots going up, and one crew member had seen a definite explosion of a Patriot hitting a Scud. But Jaco and his crew got no information from the military, who were "hunkering down in the sealed room of the hotel bomb shelter." He said that military officials had told the CNN crew that it was "in or out" before they sealed off the shelter and it was evidently "out" for Jaco and his CNN crew. Jaco noted that there was no official confirmation of missile hits or information concerning the dangers of a chemical attack because there were no officials in Saudi Arabia accessible to the media. Consequently, rumors ran rife. From Riyadh, around 2:14 p.m. EST, CNN correspondent Greg LaMotte reported that the all clear signal had been given and that the military had just reported that two missiles heading for Riyadh were shot out of the sky—a "fact" that never appeared later in official reports, or perhaps it was a mere "rumor" spread by the media, eager for any bit of "information."

During half-time of the football game, NBC broke in for a live report by Arthur Kent, who announced that four Scuds had been fired at Dhahran and that Patriots had intercepted them. On CBS, Connie Chung related that U.S. pool technicians saw two Patriots destroying the Scuds, though Scott Pelley in Saudi Arabia stated that "it is hard to get precise information about what's going on." Meanwhile, Jaco was becoming increasingly angry that he could get no official information from the military. Indeed, one wondered why the military was not giving out any information, as people in Saudi Arabia and those closely following the war throughout the world probably became increasingly anxious as the uncertainty grew and the rumors flew, perhaps leading many to fear the worst.

Around 2:35 p.m., Jaco was describing the quiet in Dhahran when the CNN newsreader broke in to say that they had just been handed a report of a missile firing and an explosion in Bahrain. Moments later it was claimed by the Saudis that two Scuds had been fired at their territory and intercepted by Patriots. Shortly thereafter, CNN's Greg LaMotte reported that Patriots shot down the Scuds and that allied airplanes hit the launchers. At 3:00 p.m., Pete Williams of the Pentagon said that the "best information" from preliminary reports was that there were launches of two Scud missiles toward Saudi Arabia from southern Iraq and in response the U.S. fired five Patriot missiles from batteries near Dhahran, which destroyed all the Scuds. The Pentagon did not know yet what sort of warhead it was; there were no reports of injuries nor were there reports of any missiles aimed at Riyadh--despite the media reports just given. Williams praised the Patriot missile system and answered some questions. As usual, CNN Pentagon correspondent Wolf Blitzer summarized the report as if we were finally getting accurate information concerning the Scud attack.

This practice of immediately summarizing official briefings or press conferences creates what might be called a "redoubling effect" in which the message (often propaganda) is doubled by the correspondent who summarizes the event, lending an extra dimension of credibility and objectivity to what is usually highly self-interested discourse of the parties putting it out. Then, the military experts reproduce once more the same "information" as facts, usually putting as pro-military a spin as possible on

whatever information was produced. But in this case, CNN quickly undercut the Pentagon propaganda line on the Scud battle of the day by switching to Charles Jaco in Saudi Arabia, who said that they had information that "contradicts everything that Pete Williams of the Pentagon just said." According to Jaco, a U.S. government official stated that there were four Scuds fired and two were hit and two got through, "landing with ground explosions." Furthermore, a civilian saw two Patriots launched with no explosion, although Saudi sources claimed that there were five Scuds launched and that all of them were destroyed.

CNN's military adviser James Blackwell noted that it would be important to resolve the contradictory information because a lot was riding on the accuracy of the Patriots. Indeed, precisely because the defense of Israel and Saudi Arabia seemed to depend on the Patriots, it was highly probable that U.S. and Saudi officials chose to cover over failures of the Patriot missile system, as they continued to do throughout the war. At 4:02 p.m., Wolf Blitzer broke in with some "new information," reporting that Pete Williams had claimed that there were three and not two Scuds that were fired and that five Patriots were fired, resulting in the destruction of all three Scuds; the Pentagon stuck with this story in the days to come, despite reports to the contrary.

Around 4:45 p.m., CNN cut to Dhahran, Saudi Arabia where a siren was audible, along with hysterical background talking, but no one on camera. Finally, technician Chris Turner appeared on camera wearing a gas mask, reporting that they had just seen two Patriot launchings and heard two explosions, with one Patriot going up and crashing straight down. CBS's Scott Pelley, also in gas mask, said that the air base in Dhahran was under attack and that Saudi authorities told everyone to put their gas mask and suits on because "there was reason to believe that there has been a chemical attack." ABC broke in with a live report from Morton Dean, without gas mask, who nervously explained that he had to leave to seek protective gear. NBC's Arthur Kent, also without protective gear, reported, with head bobbing from side to side nervously, that they had heard two thumps and rumbles, which sounded like the impact of a missile on the ground, but the explosion seemed to be in the direction of a neighboring city.

Shortly thereafter, CNN correspondent John Sweeney broadcast live from the capital city of Riyadh that it was under attack by Iraqi missiles. He claimed that they had seen a dozen or more Patriot missiles fired at the Scuds and observed how some Patriots appeared to hit Scuds in the sky, exploding in a fireworks display of sparks and lights, while another missile seemed to come down unimpeded and exploded. Greg LaMotte then called CNN from his hotel room in Riyadh, saying that his heart was pumping like it had never pumped before. LaMotte said that a bit after 1:00 a.m. local time, he felt a heavy explosion that shook the hotel and then heard many other explosions one after another. During the following minutes the CNN crew in Riyadh continued to claim that they had seen a dozen of what appeared to be Patriot missiles shooting into the sky and saw one that they believed had landed.

The confusion continued during the rest of the afternoon. There had obviously been two rounds of Scud attacks, the first hitting at least Dhahran and the second hitting Dhahran and Riyadh, but it wasn't certain what damage had been done, if the Patriots either missed Scuds or even went up and crashed into the city, as would later be reported. A media pool video of the second Dhahran attack appeared showing panic in the streets with people running for shelter and yelling. Something that looked like a missile came down and crashed on the horizon as people put on gas masks and ran into a shelter. CNN transformed the earlier CBS report that there may have been chemical weapons in the second Dhahran attack into a report that there were chemical weapons involved, and then retracted this, saying that CBS had reported that

chemical weapons may have been used and not necessarily were used. Later in the evening, pool video of a large crater in Riyadh appeared. This video also showed destroyed adjacent buildings, though the Pentagon and Saudis continued to insist that the Patriots intercepted all Scuds. False alarms continued to go off, rumors continued to fly, and all the while commentators kept praising the Patriot system though it really wasn't clear if it had worked or not.

Henceforth, there were frequent contradictions between the Scud war figures concerning the number of Scud launches, Patriot intercepts, and the extent of damage. At a press conference broadcast at 9:15 p.m. EST by CNN, U.S. military spokesperson Mike Gallagher claimed that during the first attack on Dhahran three Scud missiles had been fired into eastern Saudi Arabia (i.e., Dhahran) at about 9:50 p.m. local time and were blown up by five Patriots. Most television reports, by contrast, announced that four Scud missiles had been fired at Dhahran and also reported that an explosion had been heard in Bahrain that had sounded an air alarm. Gallagher also claimed: "In the second attack, about 12:45 a.m. this morning, January 21, Saudi time, Iraq fired seven Scud missiles: four at Riyadh, two at Dhahran, and one in the waters off Dhahran. Six of these Scuds were shot down by Patriot missiles and one crashed harmlessly in the water." When asked, Gallagher denied that the military had any information concerning an errant Patriot or a Scud hit in Riyadh, or any information concerning a crater caused by a missile hit (CNN, in an effective use of montage, cut to pictures of the crater while Gallagher spoke, putting in question his denials). Gregg LaMotte of CNN then imparted that he just returned from a scene where a Scud "blew out the back side of a building and left a hole in the ground about ten feet deep and thirteen feet wide. There were pieces of a missile all over the place around a mile and a half down the road."

The U.S. military thus asserted that the Iraqis had fired a total of ten Scud missiles in the January 20-21 assault on Saudi Arabia and that the Patriots had intercepted nine of the missiles, with one Iraqi missile falling into the sea, not having been engaged by the Patriots. But the French army headquarters said that eighteen Scuds were fired at Saudi Arabia. TV reports constantly mentioned that witnesses saw missiles crashing to earth in both Dhahran and Riyadh, and television had clearly shown images of a large crater from one missile hit. Jeffrey Lenorovitz, an editor of Aviation Week and Space Technology, said that he witnessed the launching of a Patriot missile and then saw the missile crash after traveling horizontally less than two miles (New York Times, Jan. 21, 1991, p. A1). To the reports that a crater was visible in Riyadh, the U.S. military first claimed not to know of it, and then, after it was telecast repeatedly, claimed that it was the result of debris from an exploded Scud hit by a Patriot. The next day, however, CNN played what they described as "an amateur video," which showed a Patriot going up and then crashing. Furthermore, the same day at the daily Pentagon military briefing, Pete Williams admitted that one Scud got through the Patriots. Despite this information, the Big Three networks continued circulating the official Pentagon version that all Scuds were successfully intercepted by the mighty Patriots. Moreover, Bush, Schwarzkopf, and other military briefers would continue to claim a 100 percent success rate for the Patriots for some time to come, in spite of evidence to the contrary.

Indeed, the contradictions in the account of the big Saudi Arabian Scud/Patriot exchange were smoothed out when the major networks processed the story and magically transformed a very negative event for Saudi Arabia into a triumph of U.S. technology. CBS, which gave no extended report the day before on the Scud attacks, opened their "CBS This Morning" program on January 21 with the headline: "Patriot missiles protect Saudi Arabia from Scud attacks." Then Scott Pelley reported from Saudi Arabia that the previous night Iraq launched its largest missile barrage ever in Dhahran and Riyadh. U.S. Patriot

missiles were launched, and the Pentagon said that nine Scuds were knocked down, with the tenth crashing into the water. The Pentagon claimed that damage from falling debris was relatively minor. Pelley indicated that a crater was found in Riyadh where there were reports of damage from debris, but it was not certain if the crater and damage were from a Scud missile or an errant Patriot. CBS did not show the footage of the crater and evidently did not have anyone on the scene the previous day. Moreover, in a report that closely followed Pelley's (which raised some question concerning the level of protection provided by the Patriots), CBS supported the Pentagon version by assuring its audiences of the Patriot's efficacy.

The segment in question featured Jeffrey Lenorovitz, who previously said that he saw a Patriot shoot straight up in the air and then suddenly swerve horizontally to crash in the distance. This was earlier perceived as the errant Patriot that might have caused the crater, but now he said that after examining the site he believed that the Patriot carried out a low intercept of the Scud as pieces of both missiles were found in the site. Thus, the contradiction between the media reports and the military reports was smoothed out, allowing the military to triumphantly claim that its Patriots had successively intercepted all Scuds, in a show of U.S. technological superiority and even omnipotence. For the rest of the day the major networks repeated the Pentagon version as the gospel truth, although occasionally CNN reports questioned whether a Patriot had misfired or a Scud had actually gotten through the Patriot defenses.

Patriot Propaganda

Later, it was revealed that many of the missiles that the military said had been intercepted by Scuds were only partially hit, with the warhead crashing to earth. Many Patriots hit the fuel storage part of the Scud, causing spectacular explosions, while the warhead continued toward earth unimpeded. In other cases, clearly seen on video but denied by the military, the Patriot fired and then crashed to earth. In some cases, the combined debris from Patriot and Scud explosions fell to earth, causing serious damage. The crater in Riyadh, for example, seemed to have been caused by a low-level Patriot intercept that had arguably compounded the explosive damage of the Scud by scattering more debris over a larger area than a Scud hit alone would have caused. The Patriot was thus something of a fraud, celebrated by the Bush administration and its media boosters but often causing more damage than a Scud hit alone.

But for weeks during the war, one "expert" and commentator after another praised the Patriots' 100 percent intercept record, creating the deceptive impression that they Patriots constituted a shield of total security. For example, on the January 21, "NBC Nightly News" correspondent Katherine Couric commented: "Every war supplies a hero above all others and this one has produced the Patriot missile." In an episode titled "The Protector," she argued that the Patriot is "ten for ten" and that "every Scud missile that threatened Saudi Arabia... has been smashed to bits by the Patriot," which she eulogized as "the king of air defense systems." The segment concluded by noting that "star wars technology is expected to be revitalized, thanks to the Patriot's success."

In assessing these claims, note that Couric simply accepted at face value the U.S. military claim that all Scuds were intercepted by Patriots (Schwarzkopf and other military briefers were making similar claims). Later analysis, however, showed that many Scuds got through despite military claims that they had intercepted the Iraqi missile. Furthermore, serious questions had already been raised concerning whether the Patriot was "ten for ten." But the networks almost always followed whatever the Pentagon reported, privileging its sources above all others, even when contradicted by their fellow reporters' eye-

witness accounts and media footage that seemed to corroborate these contrary accounts. In addition, Couric's claim that the Patriots had "smashed to bits" all the Scuds was obviously false in the light of the picture of the crater and the shattered Saudi insurance company building, which was shown periodically through the day by CNN. Moreover, as noted, the Patriot often hit some of the Scud, while the rest proceeded on its destructive way, so Couric's "smashed to pieces" claim was also false.

Furthermore, not only did Couric mythologize the Patriot's technological omnipotence, but it connected it to "star wars" (SDI) technology, a connection that experts later called highly misleading.¹² It may be relevant to point out that GE and RCA, NBC's parent companies, have billions invested in military space technology, so NBC's constant promotion of the Patriot was boosting its own defense industry interests, providing advertising for a strategic antimissile defense system that GE/RCA was strongly interested in, showing once again the acute problems inherent in corporations owning TV networks and using them to promote their own economic and ideological interests. But it is unlikely that the Raytheon corporation, which produces the Patriot, would criticize such coverage, as its stocks soared as a result of the free advertising for its wares (perhaps the Federal Communications Commission should undertake a study of the TV networks' Patriot PR to see if deceptive advertising practices were violated!).

In retrospect, the Patriot was more of a propaganda weapon than a military one. In his January 21 briefing, General Schwartzkopf claimed that the Patriot had intercepted ten out of ten Scuds fired at Saudi Arabia. During a February 15 visit to the Raytheon Patriot missile factory, Bush claimed that the Patriots had destroyed 32 of 33 Scuds fired (see 6.2 for further details of Bush's visit). "Official" U.S. figures after the war asserted that Patriots succeeded in knocking out forty-five out of the forty-seven Scuds they went after (Dunnigan and Bay 1991, p. 186). And throughout the war, the Patriot was praised as the ultimate high-tech weapons system without a word of dissent from this standard view--which greatly aided Patriot missile sales around the world.

Yet some weeks later, it was admitted that only 49 of the 60 Scud missiles launched by Iraq had been destroyed by Patriot missiles and that 160 Patriots, at a cost of \$1.3 million each, were fired and that most of them destroyed themselves after unsuccessful attempts to find the Scuds (*Der Spiegel*, March 25, 1991 and *Science*, Vol. 252, May 3, 1991, pp. 640-641). Furthermore, at an April 16, 1991, House Armed Service Committee Defense Policy Panel hearing, MIT defense analyst and former Pentagon consultant Theodore Postol contended that reliance on the Patriot in Israel and Saudi Arabia may have resulted in more damage from debris than if the system had never been deployed. Drawing on an Israeli study, Postol (1991) claimed that before the Patriots were used in Israel thirteen Scuds fell unopposed near Tel Aviv; they wounded 115 people and damaged 2,698 apartments. After the Patriots were deployed in Israel, another eleven Scud attacks occurred, killing one person, injuring 168, and damaging 7,778 apartments. So although the number of attacks dropped fifteen percent, the figures show that Israeli casualties per Scud fired increased by fifty percent after the Patriots started "defending" Israel. The number of apartments damaged per Scud tripled. Consequently, Postol concluded that Israel might have been better off if it had never fired any Patriots at all.

Postol argued that there were several serious problems with the Patriot's performance in Israel: the Patriot's "homing device" seems to have been confused by pieces that broke away from the Scuds as they reentered the atmosphere and thus failed to target consistently the warheads. Furthermore, the Patriot system was designed to fire more than one interceptor missile against each incoming Scud, thus

multiplying the number of missiles fired at fragmenting Scuds. In addition, Patriots would occasionally explode in the air, scattering their debris, and sometimes even crashed to earth. For example, Postol noted a video recording by an ABC News crew of four Patriots launched against incoming Scuds over Tel Aviv on January 25 which showed that one Patriot self-destructed in midair while two others crashed into residential areas and the fourth climbed and then dived into a warehouse district.

Furthermore, even successful hits sprayed potentially destructive Scud debris over a wide area, wider than would have been affected by an unopposed warhead. Moreover, because Patriots operate at a relatively low altitude, they sometimes followed targets to the ground, adding their own debris to the damage done by the Scuds. Postol cited an instance in Riyadh where a large piece of an intercepted Scud hit an office building, killing one man and injuring scores of others. House Armed Service Committee Les Aspin thus concluded that the Patriot "was not as effective as we originally thought," after hearing the testimony about the missile and reviewing secret information about its performance. Aspin concluded that the interceptors' greatest contribution "was in fact psychological," rather than military (Washington Post, April 17, 1991).

During the Fall of 1991, further Israeli studies raised questions about the Patriot's performance. The New York Times reported: "Senior Israeli scientists and military officers have disclosed new information indicating that the American Patriot missiles used in Israel in the Persian Gulf war destroyed far fewer Scud missile warheads than previously believed, Israeli and Defense Department officials said today" (October 31, 1991). The Israelis claimed that the Patriots destroyed far fewer than the 44 percent of the Iraqi Scud missile warheads claimed by the U.S. government and that estimates now ranged between zero and twenty percent Scud warheads destroyed. Reuven Pedatzur, a research fellow at the Tel Aviv University-based Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, claimed in a preliminary report published in an October 24, 1991 issue of the Israeli daily Ha'aretz that the Israeli team of missile scientists demonstrated "beyond a shadow of a doubt that the Patriot missiles failed totally in the mission of intercepting the Scuds" (Defense News, November 18, 1991). Israeli sources were now claiming that the Patriot missile failed to destroy even one Scud warhead during 39 missile attacks, despite damage to parts of the Scud missiles which produced spectacular explosions.

In a later paper on his and Israeli research, Postol (1991-1992) argued that the visual pyrotechnics of dramatic explosions in the air only produced an illusion of antimissile success. The Scuds, he explained, were so poorly designed that they broke into pieces before landing and the Patriots were often merely hitting pieces of the missile, or exploding in the air without significantly impacting on the Scud, creating a fireball often mistaken as a successful interception. Postol claimed that close inspection of publicly available videotapes showed Scud warheads hitting the earth unscathed by Patriots. In an analysis of videotapes of fourteen missiles fired in Saudi Arabia, for instance, Postol counted thirteen misses and one probable hit. In addition, Postol continued to argue that ground damage was greater than would have probably occurred if the Patriots had not been fired. Finally, he noted reports of a widespread lack of data-recording equipment at Patriot sites, suggesting that the Government has poor records of what actually occurred. Postol thus concluded that: "Our first wartime experience" with antimissile defense resulted in what seems to be "an almost total failure to intercept quite primitive attacking missiles."

On the January 16, 1992 ABC News, the TV networks finally exposed the Patriot fraud. Defense expert Pierre Sprey noted: "No doubt if they released the complete data you would see, in fact, what a

failure the Patriot has been." ABC Correspondent Morton Dean explained that: "The complaints have reached Congress. John Conyers of Michigan has directed his government operations subcommittee to investigate the Patriot's performance." Conyers (D-Mich.) admitted: "What I'm beginning to feel is that this wonderful system wasn't so wonderful after all." Dean concluded: "The Patriot's apparent success helped win a billion dollars for the Star Wars program and Raytheon expects five billion dollars in foreign sales. So appraising the Patriot's performance is not just an historical exercise." And on a January 30, 1992, MacNeil-Lehrer NewsHour, it was reported that the Pentagon itself was now admitting that fifty percent of the Patriots missed their targets.

Furthermore, in the postwar assessment of high-tech weapons performance, serious questions were raised concerning some of the others stars of the Gulf war. At an April 22, 1991, hearing of the House Armed Services Committee, Pierre Sprey, a weapons expert and former Pentagon official, accused the Defense Department of "shamelessly doctoring statistics" on the performance of U.S. arms in the gulf war. He sharply criticized the use of videos which only portrayed hits, claiming that these images of picture-perfect precision bombing provided a totally misleading image of the accuracy of high-tech weapons systems. Using official U.S. government statistics, Sprey argued that it had taken an average of 24 laser-guided "smart bombs" to hit each Iraqi bridge in the first two weeks of the air war. He attributed the success of the F-117A Stealth fighter to its ability to fly above the range of Iraqi air defenses, claiming that the F-117A was "probably not so stealthy" and had been tracked during the war on British-, French- and Chinese-made radars (Sprey and Perry 1991).

Sprey also claimed that the old-fashioned low-tech "Warthog" A-10 jet was responsible for destroying far more Iraqi vehicles than the highly praised and expensive "tank-killing" Apache helicopter.¹³ Questions were also raised about the highly-praised Cruise missile system. At the same April 22 hearing, Bill Perry claimed that the missile did not make a significant difference in the war (Sprey and Perry 1991). Although the Navy fired around 200 Cruise missiles at Iraqi targets, Perry claimed that bombs dropped by jet airplanes could have done just as well--at much less cost. Cruise missiles cost about two million dollars a piece, Perry explained, while a one thousand pound bomb costs about ten thousand dollars. Experts also questioned the accuracy claims for the Cruise missile, doubting Navy claims of an "over 90% combined mission success rate" (Marc S. Miller, "Patriotic blindness and anti-truth weapons," Index on Censorship, Nr. 10, 1991, p. 32).¹⁴ In addition, Sprey repeated the claims that the Patriots had caused more damage in Israel than before their deployment and concluded: "The country has been poorly served by...hand-selected video clips of isolated successes that were pumped out to the media during the war in order to influence postwar budget decisions." Former Defense Department official Bill Perry agreed that the Patriot was not a very effective antimissile weapon system (Sprey and Perry 1991).

For the rest of the Gulf war, there were contradictions between official reports concerning the Patriot/Scud conflicts, and frequent contradictions between what the audience saw on television the night before and what was heard the next day in the briefing room. Ultimately the Patriot was a propaganda weapon more effective in creating the illusion of U.S. technological brilliance than in protecting people from missile attacks, in spite of praise from George Bush and Dan Quayle. Consequently, by the end of the first weekend of the war it was clear that the Persian Gulf war was rapidly becoming a media propaganda war as much as a military adventure.

Notes

1. In terms of reassuring the markets, the opening night euphoria was a smashing success. It was reported on January 17 that sweet crude oil prices dropped a record ten dollars per barrel and the stock market went up 114 points, the biggest one-day jump in more than three years.

2. See the discussion in Kellner 1990, pp. 171 and 236. Once again, McWethy proved himself to be a loyal servant of power. When asked to respond to the State Department response to the war, McWethy obsequiously replied on the first night of the war: "Secretary [of State James] Baker is here in the State Department tonight. He is watching the reports as things unroll, the man who is very much responsible for putting the coalition together and making it work in these final days, so that when this finally happened the different countries would come together without a problem." When anchor Peter Jennings noted that the outbreak of war represented a failure of diplomacy, McWethy responded in defense of Baker: "I'm sure that Secretary Baker would argue that diplomacy was successful in bringing about a coalition to try and reverse what Saddam Hussein had done, first peacefully, if he could, Baker would argue, or by force, which is of course happening tonight."

3. On January 18, Moussus and ABC reporter Gary Shepard appeared in Amman, Jordan, with the story of how they shot the footage during the first night of the war. Apparently the cameraman and his soundman hid in the closet of the Al-Raschid Hotel in Baghdad. When the bombing started, they went to the window of the hotel to tape the footage, using a special night lens that produced an odd phosphorescent quality to the images. They were among the media personnel who left Iraq the next day, traveling on the road from Baghdad to Amman, where they experienced several bombing raids, saw Scud missiles being loaded and moved down the highway, and hid under a bridge when flak from U.S. bombing was dangerously close. The footage was initially broadcast under the rubric of a British ITN report by Brent Sadler and it turned out that Moussus had given a copy of his footage to Sadler to help assure that it could be gotten out of the country and telecast; it was broadcast and every network used it, robbing ABC of an "exclusive" ("Nightline," Jan. 18, 1991).

4. Through the first weeks of the war, the TV pool footage showed hand-written inscriptions on the bombs that included such literary wit as: "To Saddam With Love," "Saddam, You're Going to Die Soon," "Bend Over Saddam" (a masterpiece of homoerotic sadism), "Saddam, this one's for you" and "To Saddam. A 2,000 pound kiss from Flaherty." Another hand-scrawled dedication read: "When I've been over here for five and a half months it's personal," thus revealing the resentment building up in the troops and their desire for revenge for the disruption of their lives.

5. On the use of medical metaphors in war and military metaphors in medicine, see Montgomery 1991. I shall discuss the use of language and metaphor in the Gulf war in more detail in 6.1.

6. From Anti-War Briefing Week Four, cited in the Covert Action Information Bulletin, No. 37 (Summer 1991), p. 11. For further documentation of how the Special Forces placed locator devices by targets, see the article by James Adams, "Secret War" in MacArthur 1991, pp. 250ff. There were several reports of a U.S. commando team hitting Baghdad to perform secret operations just as the

war was starting; for example, the episode of ABC's "Primetime Live," Feb. 28, 1991; Michael Gordon, "Desert Missions by Commandos Aided in Victory," New York Times, March 1, 1991, p. A1; and two Newsweek cover stories on "The Secret History of the War" (March 18, 1991) and "Secret Warriors" (June 17, 1991).

7. By "ideology," I mean a mode of discourse that legitimates certain forms of domination and destruction. Ideologies utilize language, images, narratives, and other cultural forms to cover over domination, inequality, and oppression, or attempt to render it natural and just. In this case, the ideology of technowar legitimates a high-tech military and its right to control a tremendous amount of the country's resources and to utilize military assets as an instrument of foreign policy. The ideology of technowar thus legitimates domination of the polity by the military and the exercise of a certain form of modern warfare as rational and beneficial to the public. Ideologies of technowar present it as rational, good, just, and beyond critical questioning (For more on the concept of ideology that I am employing, see Kellner 1978, 1979, 1989a, and 1990.) The Gulf war was thus an attempt to sell the military as a whole and its new high-tech weapons systems, as well as to legitimate specific practices and policies in the war.

8. I return to the McPeak interview in 7.3 in further discussion of U.S. claims concerning their precision bombing and will debunk the U.S. military denials of significant damage to civilian targets throughout the book.

9. CBS claimed for some time that there were missile hits in Jerusalem before denying the report. NBC's Larry Weidman also stated that "there was a report that there were a series of missiles shot into the occupied territories in Jerusalem." CBS asserted initially that it was their monitoring of Jerusalem police radio reports that led them to conclude that there were no missile hits in Jerusalem, but NBC disclosed that its monitoring of police radio reports led it to conclude that there were missile hits in the city! The New York Times wrote on January 21, 1991: "There were reports that another fell near Jerusalem at the same time, but they were never confirmed" (p. A1). Of course, the reports claiming Scud hits in Jerusalem could have been disinformation by those who wanted to rush Israel into immediate retaliation--or perhaps Jerusalem was hit and those Israelis favoring nonretaliation covered this over.

10. Iraq claimed that Israel sent planes and troops to join the coalition that attacked Iraq, but I have encountered no independent evidence for this claim.

11. Misfires were common and expensive. In addition, Dunnigan and Bay (1991, p. 186) estimate that at least two patriots were fired at each Scud and after the war, as I indicate below, there were many that argued that the Patriot missile did not really provide protection and was a colossal waste of money.

12. Vice-President Dan Quayle claimed that those who did not believe Star Wars would work should look at the Patriot, disregarding the fact that the technologies were fundamentally different and that a patriot hitting a nuclear warhead close to its target would hardly provide protection. Quayle and his PR team stressed throughout the war that he was responsible for saving the Patriot

from cancellation in the Senate, and neither Bush nor Quayle missed an opportunity to praise the Patriot. Ideologue George Will argued (ABC, Jan. 20, 1991) that the Patriot proved the virtues of Ronald Reagan, SDI, and the military-industrial complex, and most of the network military "experts" never missed a chance to praise the Patriot's wonders. After the war, however, it was revealed that the Patriot's record was less than sterling, though by then it was already mythologized in the popular consciousness as the symbol of U.S. technological brilliance. For exposés of the Patriot fraud, see Science, Vol. 252, May 3, 1991, pp. 640-641; Aviation Week & Space Technology, April 22, 1991, pp. 90-91; The New York Times, May 26, 1991, p. E10; Scientific American, June 1991, pp. 26-27; and other sources that I shall draw upon in the following discussion. Indeed, even military apologist Perry Smith questioned the efficacy of the Patriots (1991, pp. 20-21), as did a January 16, 1992 episode of "ABC World News Tonight" and a January 30, 1992 episode of "The MacNeil/Lehrer News Hour."

13. A report by the Government Accounting Office (GAO) supported Sprey's allegations, stating that "the average Apache had been able to spend less than 37 hours in the air during the six weeks of allied offensive operations in the Gulf. In contrast, the study noted that the average Air Force A-10 Thunderbolt attack plane had been able to spend about 130 hours in the air during the war. (The Army and Air Force credited the aging A-10s, nicknamed 'Warthogs,' with destroying more than 1,000 Iraqi tanks). The report contended that the Army had been forced to make extensive use of civilian technicians to keep the Apaches flying, and had been forced to cannibalize spare parts from Apaches based outside of the gulf region" (Facts on File World News Digest, May 30, 1991).

14. Recall that "success rate" was defined by General Powell simply as delivering ordinance and "combined mission success rate" refers to the fact that two Cruise missiles were fired at each Iraqi target which were followed up by attacks by piloted aircraft. MIT's Postol finds it "surprising the Pentagon didn't have anything more to say if the Tomahawk [Cruise missile] did well" (Miller 1991, p. 32).