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The Persian Gulf TV War

Chapter 5

The Media Propaganda War

In the most relentless bombing campaign since World War II, the U.S.-dominated multinational coalition systematically destroyed Iraq's military and economic infrastructure and inflicted terrible suffering on the Iraqi people. The Pentagon worked to project an image of a clean, precise, and efficient technowar war, in which the U.S. military was controlling events and leading the coalition inexorably to victory. The Pentagon disinformation "leaks" of a quick victory the first night of the war, disseminated by members of the media and political establishment, created a euphoric sense that the coalition forces were scoring a quick knockout victory, or "blowout" as certain media commentators called it. The videotapes of the precise bombing reinforced the image of a new era in high-tech warfare and the claims of a one-hundred percent Patriot intercept rate of Scud missiles were used to extol U.S. technological superiority.

But events began to turn sour. Iraq maintained its Scud missile capacity and almost drove Israel into the war, an event that held unforeseeable results. The Scud attacks on Saudi Arabia and the fear of chemical warheads created panic in Saudi Arabia and Israel. The dramatic coverage of these developments projected TV images of a war out of control. The spectacle of the Scud/Patriot conflicts dominated TV war coverage during the early stages and produced a sense of anxiety in the media commentators and the TV audience. Worst of all from the standpoint of the Pentagon and Bush administration, the Scud attacks made the military look bad. On Sunday, January 20, General Schwarzkopf said in a TV interview that the coalition had destroyed all fixed Scud missile launchers and had destroyed twenty of twenty-four mobile launchers. The same day Iraq fired ten missiles at Saudi Arabia (see 4.4) and would continue almost daily Scud attacks for the duration of the war. The U.S. military's failings in the Vietnam war, the Iran hostage rescue mission, the occupation of Lebanon, the Grenada invasion, the Libyan bombing, and the Panama invasion all spoke to the possibility that they might make a mess of things in the Gulf as well.

To be sure, Grenada, the Libyan bombing, and the Panama invasion had been presented as military victories, but, in fact, key weapons systems failed to work in all three actions. Troops failed to fight in Grenada, and there were serious coordination flaws and many mistakes in all of these attempts to flex military muscle and to use force as an instrument of foreign policy.¹ Indeed, the past military blunders constituted part of the military rationale to control the flow of information during the Gulf war. The credibility, prestige, and budget of the military establishment were at stake and the Pentagon did not want to risk another defeat in the arena of public opinion, and thus tightly managed all news and information.

During the first days of the war, Hussein's "evil" and "madness" were downplayed by the Bush administration, Pentagon, and media in favor of the ideology of the efficient technowar. But it soon became clear that the war could not be sold to the public as an easy victory for the U.S. military, and so a renewed propaganda effort was necessary to mobilize support for the war effort. The military discourse of control and precision was not going to sustain support for the war in the face of its messy collateral damage, Scud attacks, and Iraqi military and propaganda initiatives. Stronger measures were needed and the propaganda

machine of the Pentagon and Bush administration geared up to produce a new strategy that turned out to be highly successful: the demonization of Saddam Hussein and the Iraqi "enemy."

The Bush administration and media had already demonized Hussein and dramatized Iraqi atrocities (see Chapter 2).² Throughout the crisis in the Gulf and the Gulf war, Saddam Hussein and the Iraqis were presented as the foreign "other" to the moral, rational, and civilized coalition forces. This dichotomy between the irrational Iraqis and rational West builds on the "orientalist" discourse dissected by Edward Said.³ "Rational" is equated with "just" and "moral" in this Western discourse, and "irrational" is connected with the "unjust" and "immoral" because justice and morality are grounded in "reason." Further, reason is identified with civilization and modernity, while its "other" is equated with "barbarism." This "orientalist" perspective also legitimated violence against the "barbaric" non-Western foreign other. During the Gulf war, the characterization of the barbaric, irrational, and immoral Iraqis was used to legitimate and conceal the arguably barbaric saturation bombing of Iraq by the United States and its coalition allies, who were driving Iraq back to a preindustrial era through their systematic destruction of its economic base.

During the war, Iraq engaged in more actions that the U.S. propaganda machine could exploit. Totally overpowered militarily, Iraq fought what was largely a propaganda war itself. Its Scud missiles were more instruments of propaganda and terror than of war and the daily Iraqi press campaign used the crudest instruments of propaganda, which were easily ridiculed in the Western press: grotesque exaggerations of allied casualties and Iraqi victories, outright lies, and a bellicose nationalist, pan-Arab, and Islamic fundamentalist rhetoric that sounded quaint and eccentric, to say the least, to Western ears. Indeed, Hussein's propaganda war was not in the least directed toward the West but rather toward the Arab world. His Scud missile attacks on Israel were an attempt to galvanize Arab support in a holy war against Israel and the West; his Scud missile and rhetorical attacks on Saudi Arabia were an attempt to humiliate the Saudis, who had invited Western troops to their soil; and the vintage Khomeini-Islamic rhetoric channeled religious sentiments into support for war against the infidels.

But Iraqi propaganda directed to the Arab world was a dual-edged sword. Although Iraq's Scud attacks on Israel might have thrilled some in the Arab world, they disgusted most of the West; the parading of the captured POWs through Baghdad and their display on television may have excited some people, but the sight appalled others. Likewise, Hussein's propaganda and Islamic/Pan-arabic rhetoric produced a negative resonance in the West. The U.S. propaganda campaign exploited all of these negatives to mobilize public hatred of Hussein and the Iraqis. Heating up the rhetoric of the Iraqi Hitler, however, had both political and military costs. Creating public desires for the elimination of Hussein generated the expectation, and even demands, for his overthrow and the destruction of his regime, thus significantly upping the military and political ante.

Both the U.S. and Iraq thus constructed an enemy that was inflated to represent absolute evil, constituting the other as satan, or the evil infidel. Both propaganda rhetorics were highly simplistic and merged religion, patriotism, and the forms of popular culture. Both propaganda strategies dehumanized the adversary and manipulated people's needs and fears into support of the government's official policies and both channeled aggressive impulses toward the enemy. Such manichean patriotism thus promotes a culture of militarism, which is to say, a culture of death and violence (see 10.5 for further discussion). The propaganda of Bush and Hussein were thus the mirror-image of each other. Both denied their own aggressive actions and projected all belligerence and evil onto the other, blaming their enemy for all the

inevitable horrors of war, while absolving themselves. Both denied their own responsibility for the war and sacrificed their people and nation's resources to advance their own interests, covering over their self-serving and destructive policies with propaganda.

5.1 POWs

The demonization of Hussein as a primary Bush administration focus intensified with Iraq's treatment of U.S. POWs. Iraq's air defense forces began shooting down coalition airplanes and taking prisoners of war (POWs). The January 18 NBC "Today" program announced that an unconfirmed report stated that Iraq had captured two U.S. pilots and that they planned to parade them before the foreign press. Throughout the day of January 19, CNN's Peter Arnett revealed that the Iraqis were holding POWs, which they promised would be made available to the foreign press. Soon after, the Iraqis would make good on that promise. On Sunday morning, January 20, CNN reported an Iranian TV claim that Iraqi TV had shown films of two U.S. soldiers who were blindfolded and paraded through the streets of Baghdad. CBS ran the same story but cautioned that Iranian television was not known for its veracity, so independent confirmation was needed.

Shortly thereafter, however, Peter Arnett reported live on CNN that seven allied POWs had been interviewed that evening on Iraqi TV, dressed in military uniforms and sitting in front of a white wall. "One man had a bandaged hand. And two others had bruised faces." Each submitted to a series of questions and Arnett summarized their answers, quoting several of the POWs. U.S. Warrant Officer Guy Hunter was heard to say: "I think this war is crazy and should never have happened. I condemn this aggression against peaceful Iraq." Navy Lieut. Jeffrey Zaun said, "I think our leaders and our people have wrongly attacked the peaceful people of Iraq." Arnett remarked that the episode reminded him of the scenes from Hanoi during the Vietnam war where pilots and POWs were seen in films criticizing the war.

Immediately thereafter, the notorious Iran-contras felon, Richard Secord, came on CNN, introduced as an "anti-war expert"! Secord had been thrown out of the military for shady business connections and had run Oliver North's secret operation "the Enterprise," which purchased guns for the Nicaraguan contras from money obtained from illegal Iranian arms sales (and illegal drug sales according to many; see Cockburn 1988). Yet Secord seemed eager for a couple of minutes more of international fame and the chance to serve in the propaganda war, commenting that it is "sad to see this [display of POWs], but not surprising. These things are used for propaganda purposes." And so did CNN present to the world one of the great shady characters of modern times as a source of information who would demystify enemy "propaganda." Such "expert" commentary made clear, however, that both sides were waging a propaganda war with the U.S. television networks serving as willing instruments of government indoctrination.

CNN broadcast the audio portion of the Iraqi TV interviews with the POWs around 3:30 p.m. EST, a long tedious transmission with questions in Arabic and then English and answers in English and then translated back to Arabic. A former POW in Vietnam, Daniel Pitzer, came on CNN afterwards and claimed that "these people have been coerced" in some way. Upping the rhetoric, Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.), a former Vietnam POW, observed that "it's patently obvious that these men have been subjected to torture and physical beating.. That's the only thing that would lead them to say anything against their country." The American people "must assume," McCain insisted, that "these people have been tortured."⁴

During the POW-propaganda campaign, McCain served as the Bush administration "point man," slickly conveying the administration line of the day to the media in countless appearances. For the next several days, the media debated whether the POW's injuries, evident in the televised version of the events that the Iraqis released, were a result of torture, or ejection from crashing airplanes. Around 8:30 p.m. on January 20, CNN announced that the United States was formally protesting Iraq's treatment of the POWs, claiming that coercing statements with mistreatment was a war crime. The U.S. appealed to Iraq to adhere to the Geneva Conventions and demanded immediate access to the POWs by the International Red Cross. Shortly thereafter, the Iraqi UN ambassador appeared on CNN's "Larry King Live" and claimed that the coalition POWs had not been abused and were being treated according to the Geneva Conventions. He also made the point that while Iraq held twelve unhappy coalition POWs, eighteen million Iraqis suffered from U.S. "inhumanity."

On January 21, the POW issue was the top story of the news and was widely discussed for days to come. The video portion of the interviews and clips were shown repeatedly throughout the day, focusing on the bruised and scarred faces, especially that of Navy Lt. Jeffrey Zaun, whose puffy and scared features became the symbol of the POWs plight; it was featured hourly on TV news, prominently in newspapers, and even on the cover of a national news magazine (i.e. Newsweek, Feb. 4, 1991). CBS News led off its morning show with pictures of Zaun's face, accompanied by the headline that Iraq was releasing pictures of the POWs and that they will be used as "human shields." Dick Cheney appeared and denounced their treatment as a "war crime" on the morning talk shows and, one after another, former POWs appeared on all the networks to denounce the Iraqi treatment of the POWs. At 9:32 a.m., Deborah Norville of NBC's Today stated that "some American families can't believe their eyes and don't want to believe their ears after Iraq put American POWs on TV with words put in their mouths by the Iraqis," words, she explained, "that sounded like previous Iraqi propaganda."

Radio, TV, and the press presented similar discourses on the POWs and thus contributed to the success of the Bush administration propaganda campaign. The PR model of media management was highly developed by the Reagan administration, which used a "message of the day" that was decided on in early morning strategy sessions. The message was then sent through the White House so that whenever reporters would appear, the various White House sources fed them the line that the administration wanted transmitted to slant the news toward its agendas. The president often appeared in a "photo opportunity" to dramatize the message, providing an image and "sound bite" for the evening's news (see Kellner 1990, Chapter 4).

The Bush administration continued this practice and even faxed its "talking points" every day to political allies, business executives, religious leaders, media figures and other "friendlies" who could be counted on to promote the administration's message. When the administration had a big message to get out, they would trot out their chief spokespeople in a carefully orchestrated campaign. On January 21 they wanted to get out the message that Saddam was torturing POWs and should be tried for war crimes. This message was articulated early in the morning by Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney, who appeared on the morning talk shows. It was the top message of the day in Marlin Fitzwater's briefing and was dramatized in a "photo opportunity" with George Bush, highlighting its importance. The "message" was amplified by British Defense Secretary Tom King and Prime Minister John Major, both of whom provided rousing attacks on the alleged Iraqi violation of the Geneva Conventions and produced excellent sound bites for coalition television.

Returning from a weekend in Camp David, Bush departed from the presidential helicopter, coughed, yawned, and walked up to a microphone stating: "Let me say a quick word about the, uh, brutal parading of these allied pilots... This is a direct violation of the, uh, every convention that protects prisoners. The International Red Cross, understand, certified to that today... This will not make a difference in the prosecution of the, of the, uh, war against Saddam... I would make the strongest appeal that these people be treated, uh, properly.... America is angry about this... Everybody is upset about it." Bush was accompanied at Camp David by the Speaker of the House, Thomas Foley, who had spent the weekend with Bush to produce an image of bipartisan support for the war. Speaker Foley stood by Bush as he spoke and then concurred that the Iraqis were violating the Geneva Conventions concerning treatment of prisoners of war. A reporter shouted to Bush: "Will he [i.e. Saddam] be held accountable?" and the testy Bush replied: "Count on it."

And so Bush and Foley repeated the current propaganda line in the photo opportunity of the day to control prime-time news coverage and news briefs. They arrived just in time for the midday news programs and, of course, Bush's statement dominated the news for the rest of the day. This episode showed how the president can control news frames and the flow of news. We live in an era of news management where the state manages the media to get its line across and usually succeeds, especially in times of crisis. "Instant commentary" tends to be supportive, parroting what official spokespeople say, and this was precisely what happened during the POW event.

After Bush's statement, ABC's Peter Jennings brought out Bush administration point man Sen. John McCain, via satellite, for commentary. He and ABC Pentagon spokesperson Bob Zelnick repeated the Pentagon line concerning the violation of the Geneva Conventions and war crimes. John McWethy at the State Department added that the United States had warned Iraq concerning treatment of POWs and may call in the Iraqi chargé d'affaires today. And so, the TV parrots squawked the line of the day. McWethy and Peter Jennings emphasized the president's "strong message" that the allied military war effort would not be deterred by Iraq's threat to make the POWs "human shields" in their prosecution of the war. CNN anchor Reid Collins interpreted Bush's emphasis that Saddam was "dead wrong" if he believed otherwise as an implicit threat on Saddam's life if the POWs were mistreated.

We see here an example of how the White House developed a propaganda line, fed it to the press, and the network correspondents dutifully reproduced the lines fed to them by their official "sources," usually without criticism or qualification. The Bush administration campaign worked brilliantly and the news, discussion shows, and media agenda were dominated by the POW issue for the next several days. Commentator after commentator followed John McCain's line that the appearance and discourse of the POWs proved that they were beaten or tortured, though occasionally an honest voice suggested that the injuries could have been sustained by ejection from the downed planes, but these cautionary voices were overwhelmed by the hysterical demonization of the Iraqis. Radio and television talk shows were dominated by discussion of the topic, with caller after caller insisting that the POWs were indeed beaten, tortured, and brutalized by the Iraqis, views which demonstrated the success of the Bush administration propaganda campaign.

After the war, the POWs appeared healthy, well-fed, and safe, and admitted that they had been well-treated by the Iraqis. Jeffrey Zaun confirmed that most of his injuries were sustained from his

ejection from his plane, adding that he had punched himself in the face a few times so that the Iraqis wouldn't put him on TV.⁵ McCain, Bush, and the many media commentators who claimed that the POWs were beaten and tortured had thus disseminated disinformation, and the public, which passionately bought into the Iraq torture discourse, was duped.

The Bush administration also raised the specter of war crimes trials of Saddam Hussein and the Iraqis at the end of the war. The networks focused on this topic repeatedly and the Bush administration and media continued to threaten Iraq and Hussein with war crimes trials for some time, threats which, in retrospect, appear to have been pure propaganda for, so far at least, there have been no inquiries or public moves in this direction. Perhaps the talk about war crimes stopped when former U.S. Attorney General and peace activist Ramsey Clark began holding international tribunals on U.S. war crimes in the Gulf starting in May 1991, a topic ignored by the mainstream media.⁶ In any case, the rhetoric of Iraqi war crimes circulated by the Bush administration and media during the war now appears as part of a propaganda campaign to mobilize hatred against the Iraqis and to justify the slaughter of their people and the destruction of their civilian infrastructure, both of which became visible by the end of January (see the analysis in Chapters 6-10).

A propaganda war also involves the fabrication of disinformation and "white propaganda," which, like little white lies, are used to negatively portray the enemy or to boost one's own side. In late January, for instance, the networks circulated the story that Saddam Hussein's family had fled to Mauritania, and CNN, in particular, played the story repeatedly. Sen. Bob Dole (R-Kan.) used the story in interviews on CBS and NBC as evidence of the collapse of the Iraqi regime, although Tom Brokaw was forced to tell him that the story wasn't confirmed. CBS's pundit Fouad Ajami used the story to illustrate the evil of dictators, how they plunder and destroy countries and then flee from their crimes when events turn against them. When this story was deflated, the propaganda apparatus claimed that Hussein's family fled to Gambia.

In the next section, I provide some examples of "white propaganda" propagated by General Schwarzkopf and the U.S. military and spread daily through the media. Yet "propaganda" does not merely refer to fictional stories concocted to embarrass one's enemy, but also to constantly repeated codewords and claims, such as the oft-repeated description of "precision" or "surgical bombing." Indeed, the concept of propaganda is not self-evident and obviously the TV audience did not understand how the public was being manipulated by the U.S. government with military propaganda on a daily basis. In the popular mind, propaganda is simply outrageous and transparent deception and blatant falsehoods, such as the Iraqi claims that they were shooting down a large number of allied planes or winning the war. Such discourse was manifestly false and provided the impression that everything the Iraqis said was sheer lies and that their state was a propaganda machine in its very essence.⁷ U.S. propaganda, by contrast, was more subtle and often had some basis in fact, though the United States also told some outrageous lies, which were, however, generally believed by the public (see 5.2, 6.3, 6.4, and 7.3).

For the propagandist, what matters are the effects of the discourse and not its truth. Propaganda is a mode of discourse intended to persuade, to manipulate, and to indoctrinate its audience into accepting policies and personnel that they might not otherwise support. It attempts to squash questioning and criticism by dramatizing evil and concealing facts that might be embarrassing for the forces disseminating the propaganda. It is important to note, however, that propaganda might not be purely false, but is rather a

discourse that legitimates certain interests and policies while providing a one-sided, simplified, and distorted, but not necessarily totally untrue, view of events, people, or institutions. As Ellul (1965) pointed out, propaganda is not mere lies and must appeal to facts, though often selectively. The Iraqi regime was violating the Geneva Conventions by not immediately reporting the POWs capture, by presenting them on TV, and by not allowing immediate access to the International Red Cross. This was rather common practice in the Middle East, however, and, in fact, in most of the world. But later evidence revealed that the POWs were not tortured and were, for the most part (there will always be exceptions), treated according to the Geneva Conventions. The Bush administration POW discourse intended to picture the Iraqi "enemy" (which was, don't forget, itself a symbolic construct of the Bush administration and media) as barbaric and savage and the coalition forces as civilized and humane.

In fact, the United States was also systematically violating Geneva Conventions while it was self-righteously condemning the Iraqis. Sources later revealed that the U.S. had run commando raids into Kuwait and Iraq before the war, using troops disguised in Iraqi uniforms and equipment--a clear violation of the Conventions.⁸ U.S. forces allegedly kidnapped Iraqi ground troops and grilled them for intelligence and showed pictures of the captured troops on U.S. television, also violations of the Conventions. The United States systematically violated Article 56 of the Geneva Protocol 1 of 1977, which states, "Works or installations containing dangerous forces, namely, dams, dikes and nuclear electrical generating stations, shall not be made the object of attack, even where these objects are military objectives, if such attack may cause the release of dangerous forces and consequent severe losses among the civilian population." In addition, during postwar hearings Ramsey Clark and his colleagues presented nineteen charges of war crimes committed by the United States and its allies in violation of the U.N. Charter, Geneva conventions, and international law in hearings after the war (Clark et al. 1992, pp. 11ff).

The Bush administration effectively manipulated the mainstream media on the POW issue, which tended to follow Bush's propaganda line perfectly. Indeed, for the rest of the war the Bush administration continued to play its highly successful trump card of the demonization of Saddam Hussein and the Iraqis, mobilizing people's hatred for the bad guys of their propaganda scenario. Both sides, however, were guilty of heinous crimes, as those who engage in warfare and utilize and depend on propaganda for public support usually are. One of the functions of propaganda is to cover over one's own evil actions and the amount and excessiveness of propaganda that a regime employs is one measure of its own viciousness and mendacity. For propaganda is employed most readily by regimes having unpleasant actions to hide, which they dissemble with lies and disinformation that divert attention from their actions and focus attention on their opponent's evil ways. The utilization of systematic propaganda often suggests that a group is trying to hide something and to deflect attention from its own misdeeds and in the next sections we shall examine some U.S. attempts to cover over the effects of their bombing.

The anti-Hussein propaganda ploy, inaugurated during the first days of the crisis in the Gulf, worked effectively to mobilize a growing number of people to support the Bush administration war policy while splintering its opposition. Who could speak with sympathy of the suffering of Iraqis if they were brutes who were getting what they deserved? The Bush administration had found an excellent PR strategy to manage public opinion and to gain consent to its increasingly destructive war policies, and they carried this propaganda strategy through to the end of the war.

5.2 Disinformation and the Numbers Game

The Bush administration thus began orchestrating a campaign to mobilize hatred against the Iraqis, utilizing the negative image-making of their opponent that had served Bush so well in the 1988 election (see Kellner 1990). The Pentagon, by contrast, at first tended to utilize its technocratic ideology of control and efficiency in managing public opinion and projected a positive image of its endeavors. This effort involved the use of statistics in the daily briefings, reports on the progress of the war, and videos serving as visual evidence that supported their claims. Thus, Gulf war propaganda combined words and images that enhanced the U.S. military while demonizing the Iraqis. Yet the military's discourse on the POWs, for example, was circumspect and cool in contrast to the heated rhetoric of the Bush administration and its media allies.

The military had to overcome its Vietnam legacy in the briefing room as well as the battlefield. During Vietnam, military officials constantly juggled numbers and soon lost all credibility. The military news briefings became known as "The Five O'Clock Follies" and the daily body counts of dead Vietnamese appeared increasingly farcical and absurd (see Herr 1967 and Halberstam 1973). During the Grenada and Panama invasions, the military also lied day after day, but they successfully covered over their mistakes and lies, and the mainstream media did not seriously question the official accounts. The Gulf war was perceived as popular, and the cowardly mainstream media avoided any positions that might lose their audience shares and thus produce a decline in advertising revenues based on the number of viewers.

Technowar measures its successes and its ability to control the situation through numbers by means of quantitative measurement. The numbers game in the Gulf war focused on the number of sorties, planes shot down, and equipment destroyed. During the last days of the war there was a daily count of remaining Iraqi tanks, artillery, and ground vehicles rather than body counts. Although the United States provided running tallies, dutifully reproduced in graphics and charts by the media, of those missing in action (MIA), and occasionally noted that someone was "killed in action" (KIA), they never disclosed a running tally of those U.S. soldiers who died in the Persian Gulf war. There were over 100 casualties before the war even started, but these were rarely mentioned. Moreover, the military didn't list those who died by accident, as when the bunkers of soldiers in the desert collapsed or a helicopter crashed into a sand dune. And, of course, the Special Forces troops who died in covert actions were never mentioned. Consequently, the "killed in action" figures literally referred only to those who were killed in fighting with Iraqis. Thus, the total number of U.S. casualties was never really a part of the discourse of the war.

The U.S. military also renounced the numbers game of citing their estimates of Iraqi civilian and military casualties by claiming that they could not be certain of these figures. Of course, the military had estimates of Iraqi troop casualties, which they utilized to plan the ground war, but to this day these figures have never been released. The U.S. government's reluctance to release Iraqi casualty figures followed from one of the primary propaganda lines from the early days of the war—that the Gulf war was clean, precise, bloodless, and avoided civilian targets and casualties. Over and over, the Pentagon claimed that they were only focusing on military targets and did everything possible to avoid harming civilians. This line was soon refuted by images and facts (see Chapter 6 and 7), but at least for the first week, when consent was being formed, the war appeared to be relatively bloodless.

Of course, the military did everything possible to make sure that this image was transmitted and part of the media management strategy known as the pool system (see 2.2) was intended to keep out of

the public eye all images of the inevitable injuries and death that war produced. The Pentagon, wanting to suppress memories of Vietnam and the human costs of war, forbade images of wounded Americans to appear and even made the U.S. reception center for dead soldiers at Dover, Delaware, off limits to the media.⁹ The Iraqi government helped out by not allowing any images of human casualties of war during the first week. The Iraqis at first seemed intent on avoiding images of damage to their civilians and soldiers, and viewers thus saw very few images of the suffering, mutilation or death caused by the U.S.-led multinational forces' daily bombing runs. The Gulf war therefore at first appeared to be peculiarly antiseptic, a video war consisting of images of smart bombs and spectacular anti-aircraft fireworks displays.

The pool system went way beyond censoring images of blood and death and attempted to assure that nothing in the least bit critical of the military would circulate. For example, early in the war, Frank Bruni of the Detroit Free Press used the adjective "giddy" to describe the returning F-117A fighter pilots after their first night's action; the military censor changed the word to "proud." Pilots aboard the aircraft carrier USS John F. Kennedy told an Associated Press reporter that they watched pornographic movies before their bombing missions, according to Philadelphia Inquirer reporter Carol Morello. She said that the censor deleted the information, claiming that it "would be too embarrassing" and also excised one pilot's use of an obscenity (Browne 1991, p. 44). Military censorship was thus actively involved in image-making and not just preventing information helpful to the Iraqis.

Schwarzkopf's Lies

The U.S. military also provided disinformation during the Gulf war and one of its top propaganda managers was the chief of the operation, Stompin' Norman Schwarzkopf. Although the cowardly media never exposed his constant dissemblance and falsehoods, he continually provided disinformation and outright lies in his many official and unofficial meetings with the press. Propaganda works through the manipulation of misleading numbers and "facts," as well as deceptive generalizations and blatant lies. At the videotape briefing with General Horner on January 18, for instance, Schwarzkopf claimed that the allied bombing missions had a 80 percent success rate, repeating that number on ABC's "David Brinkley Show" on January 20. Schwarzkopf failed, however, to explain--as General Powell did on January 17--that the success rate was measured by the percentage of flights able to deliver their weapons and not by percentage of targets hit. Furthermore, it would be hard to believe that, even in Powell's weaker sense, the figure was still a "success" rate of 80 percent on January 20 because there were reports all weekend that bad weather had caused a large number of planes to return without delivering their weapons. Schwarzkopf, however, was obviously attempting to maintain the myth of a precise and effective war, and thus misled the public by failing to qualify what was meant by "success rate" and by inflating the figures of early coalition "success."

In fact, both sortie and success rate figures were fundamentally misleading. Newsweek reported on February 4, 1991, that by the time that the allies claimed that they had flown 20,000 sorties, only 11,000 or so were combat missions; "the others were flights by tankers, transports, radar planes and other nonfighting aircraft. Most of the 11,000 combat sorties did not attack ground targets. Only about one plane in four carried 'strike munitions.' The others were responsible for missions like air cover, electronic jamming and reconnaissance" (p. 32). Furthermore, of the one-fourth of the planes intending to deliver bombs or missiles, "success" merely meant that the planes dropped their loads. This figure, however, did not indicate how many targets were actually damaged, and Newsweek claimed that "the satellite pictures

suggested an effectiveness rate of 'somewhere between 66 and 75 percent'" (p. 32)—a rate that declined significantly as the war grinded on, since the Pentagon admitted at the end of the war that seventy percent of the bombs missed their targets (see 4.2)

In addition, Schwarzkopf constantly underestimated the number of Scud missile sites remaining, producing figures to meet the needs of his political agenda. On the January 20 NBC's "Meet the Press," Schwarzkopf asserted that: "Our initial estimates were that they had approximately thirty fixed launchers and more than twenty mobile launchers. Today we're very confident that we have managed to neutralize the fixed launchers. Of course, the problem is the mobile launchers and the difficulty in targeting them. We have estimates that say that we may have killed as many as sixteen mobile launchers." Other military officials were, however, more accurate and honest than Schwarzkopf. The same day, in an NBC interview, Dick Cheney reported: "I would put their overall level at this point at perhaps thirty or forty launchers, but that's just a rough guesstimate."

Also on the same day as Schwarzkopf's number-cooking, NBC's Pentagon correspondent Fred Francis announced that the Iraqis had been buying Saab trucks from Sweden and converting them into Scud launchers. He disclosed that they may have as many as seventy of these highly mobile and hard-to-find launchers, deployed throughout the country. According to Wolf Blitzer of CNN, Israeli sources claimed that Iraq still had more than 100 mobile Scud launchers. During the weekend, it was also revealed that Iraq had been deploying decoy Scud launchers, which the multinational forces bombed and then claimed as a hit. Evidently Schwarzkopf didn't get these reports or he chose to disseminate disinformation in order to meet the propaganda need of the moment, which was to keep Israel out of the war by assuring them that the Scud threat was under control. The next day, after a harrowing night of Scud attacks on Saudi Arabia (see 4.4), Maj. Gen. Burton Moore, operations officers of the U.S. command in the Persian Gulf, admitted that the allies were "nowhere near" eliminating either the fixed or the mobile Scud missile launchers (New York Times, Jan. 22, 1991, p. A1). Thus, on this account, Schwarzkopf's "facts" were pure disinformation.

Schwarzkopf also seriously misrepresented the extent to which the allied bombing had incapacitated Iraq's nuclear, chemical, and biological warfare programs during the early days of the war. On January 20 on CNN, Schwarzkopf insisted that there was "absolutely no question about the fact that the campaign to date has done a lot of damage to his chemical, nuclear and biological capacity." Then on NBC's "Meet the Press," Schwarzkopf made known his "high confidence that those nuclear reactors have been thoroughly damaged and won't be effective for many years." Next, on ABC, he claimed: "We've gone after his nuclear capability, his chemical capability, and his biological capability ... I can assure you that it's had a considerable setback, if not a total setback by this point in the game." More honestly and accurately, Britain's Defense Minister Tom King stated to BBC television the same day: "We have made the nuclear, biological, chemical facilities part of the first priorities for the attacks in the air campaign. We think there has been some significant damage done in those capabilities, but it would be very difficult, and we're not yet ready to certainly publish any assessment as to just how significant is 'significant.' ... They've certainly been hit but the overall assessment [is] too early to make." And Britain's Armed Forces Minister, Archie Hamilton, gave a more realistic assessment of the effects of allied bombing on Iraq's chemical and biological weapons program when he told the BBC on their "Breakfast News" program of January 21 that it would be "a complete exaggeration" to say that "we've taken it all out" and he admitted that the allies had only done "some damage to his chemical establishments and so forth."

Throughout the war, the British would be far more honest and forthright than their U.S. counterparts, who constantly exaggerated their successes and minimized their failures and errors (see 7.3). Although the United States asserted early on that they had destroyed Iraq's unconventional weapons capacity, after the war these claims were put into question. General Powell, for instance, declared in a January 23 briefing that the U.S. had destroyed all of Iraq's nuclear reactors and General Schwarzkopf asserted in a January 30 briefing that "we have destroyed all of their nuclear reactor facilities." But by July 1991, there were claims that the bombing had failed to destroy Iraq's nuclear program, and Bush had to threaten bombing Iraq again to force Iraq to allow UN inspectors could examine its nuclear facilities. Sources claimed that Iraq had managed to hide some of its nuclear, chemical, and biological facilities altogether and to take crucial material out of the facilities bombed before the war. In August 1991, there were revelations that Schwarzkopf's bombers had failed to detect the "Big Gun" that Iraq was building to shoot missiles at Israel, and TV showed pictures of the giant gun being built on the side of a mountain.¹⁰

Thus, in retrospect U.S. claims to have destroyed the Iraqi nuclear weapons program in the opening days of the war stand as empty bragging. Likewise, it is questionable whether the United States destroyed Iraq's biological weapons program as Schwarzkopf repeatedly claimed. Lt. Gen. Charles Horner, who was in charge of the coalition bombing campaign, was quoted in *Time* (Aug 5, 1991, p. 31) as saying that "a strike by a conventional bomb could have spread a deadly agent across the countryside, killing millions. As a result, Iraq's biological stocks are largely intact, and a U.S. attack poses the same risks that it did during the war." So either General Schwarzkopf and his associates were lying when they claimed to have eliminated Iraq's biological weapons capability or Horner was telling a story that could legitimate renewed U.S. military action against Iraq.

Horner and Bush's assertions after the war that Iraq's nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons program had survived the bombing may be equally dubious, intended to coerce Iraq into allowing inspection of its facilities, or to legitimate renewed bombing, as Bush threatened. In any case, such claims should be seen as propaganda, intended to achieve certain effects and not as factual discourse. Propagandists adjust their "facts" to the political ends of the moment, totally disregarding truth. Such a daily rewriting of history is reminiscent of Orwell's *1984*, where a Ministry of Truth rewrote history to serve the political exigencies of the moment. "Ministries of Truth" in the so-called Western democracies consist of both the governments and the mass media, which rarely questioned the claims, facts, figures, and disinformation constantly served by the Bush administration and Pentagon.

During the Gulf war, the mainstream media rarely questioned the statements of George Bush and General Schwarzkopf as to their veracity or validity. Yet Schwarzkopf's exaggerated claims and doctoring of figures reveal interesting aspects of the authoritarian mind that he so perfectly exemplifies and the extent to which the U.S. military was continuing its practice of dissembling and lying for political ends. It was intolerable to authoritarians, who like to project an image of knowledgeability and control, not to be able to reveal in public how many Scud missile sites remained, what the extent of damage to Iraqi weapons capacity was, or what percentage of bombs dropped were successful. Technowar involves control over events that presupposes factual knowledge. Knowledge is a form of power for technowar managers and when they do not have accurate knowledge, they become desperate and deceptive. For example, bomb damage assessment was extremely difficult the first weeks of the war because of the bad weather, and the U.S. military obviously did not have complete information, as many of them admitted. Schwarzkopf,

however, projected an image of certainty and control whenever he put his massive ego on line in front of the press and he would respond with anger and even rage when questioned or criticized concerning the obvious disinformation that he dished out regularly.

On the other hand, systematic disinformation and dissembling was typical of the U.S. military and has been the standard practice since Vietnam. The brilliance of the PR campaign of the Gulf war was that military lies, especially those of Schwarzkopf, were believed despite their often palpable contradiction by countervailing information. This was in part because people were so caught up in the war that they simply believed everything that General Schwarzkopf and the military told them and in part because the compliant media never criticized the duplicity and lies. Consequently, the Pentagon continually claimed that during this war they were telling the truth and were praised at the end of the war for being more forthright and honest than the military of the past. Dan Quayle made these points on a CNN "Newsmakers Saturday" on February 2, and General Powell and General Schwarzkopf made these claims repeatedly, as did CNN military "expert" retired General Perry Smith. These military officials and defenders endlessly asserted that the U.S. military was telling the truth and was avoiding disinformation. The excessive repetition of claims of truthfulness, however, is itself a sign that they might be attempting to conceal that they were not really telling the truth.

In addition to giving out false military information, Schwarzkopf and others in the media and military establishments continually circulated and in some cases created a spate of wild rumors concerning the Iraqis and Saddam Hussein: Hussein's wife and family had fled the country; Hussein had executed his top air force and anti-aircraft commanders for their failure to fight; and Hussein was becoming mentally imbalanced and depended on heavy drug dosages to keep him functional.¹¹ Schwarzkopf himself helped circulate these rumors as when he told U.S. News and World Report on February 11, 1991, that: "I would also tell you that we have several reports that Saddam is a very distraught man, that he has three doctors treating him with tranquilizers, which may say something about his mental state" (p. 36). Schwarzkopf also claimed that although some reports had Saddam on tranquilizers, "others have noted he has taken to pulling out his pistol and shooting some of his people--which isn't necessarily calm, by my definition" (Anderson and van Atta 1991, p. 161). Hence, did a U.S. general descend to the level of discourse of the National Enquirer and tabloid newspapers, disgracing the U.S. military and his country with his petty lies and propaganda.¹²

Civilian Casualties, the Infant Formula Factory Bombing, and Pentagon Lies

The biggest lie, repeated over and over by everyone from General Schwarzkopf to the lowliest briefer, was that the U.S. bombing campaign was precise and relatively bloodless, avoiding civilian targets and casualties. Initially, the Iraqis played into this propaganda line by not allowing pictures of the damage of coalition bombing or of civilian casualties. The first blood of the war was visible in the image of a badly injured man in a hospital in Tel Aviv, the victim of the second Scud attack on January 19. The visual images of the POWs were also extremely shocking because these were the first images of combatant injuries. But the first images of injuries and death were evident in the January 22 bombing of Israel, in which the Iraqi Scud missile attacks took their first casualties. A Scud missile hit an Israeli suburb of Tel Aviv and at least seventy people were wounded and three were killed. Ironically, the Scud missile was hit by a Patriot that evidently exploded at its tail, "sending it off the intended trajectory but leaving the warhead intact" (New York Times, Jan. 24, 1991, p. A). The diversion sent it crashing into an apartment,

causing severe casualties and raised serious questions concerning how much protection the Patriot missile actually provides. But again there was little discussion of this key issue in the mainstream media, which had already elevated the Patriot to the status of technological hero. Yet some gruesome footage of heavily wounded Israelis was shown on television and Newsweek published on February 4, 1991, a large color photo of a woman covered with blood. With the sight of blood and death, the media propaganda war heated up.

Detecting a propaganda boon from images of casualties, Iraq began showing pictures of civilian damage on January 22, as they circulated images of a bombed Iraqi mosque, and soon began disseminating images of civilian casualties as well. In one of the most revealing battles of the propaganda war, the Iraqis affirmed that the United States had bombed an infant-formula factory, which the U.S. claimed was a biological weapons factory. The Pentagon had been asserting daily that the coalition forces were not bombing civilian targets, so this seeming refutation of its strategy was highly embarrassing. It reacted with a fierce campaign to discredit the report, which embroiled Peter Arnett and CNN in heated controversy.

This battle in the propaganda war began at 3:38 a.m. EST on January 23 with a report from Peter Arnett in Baghdad via telephone concerning "the bombing of what Iraqis claim is a baby-formula milk factory." Arnett announced that the Iraqis claimed that now, on the seventh day of the bombing, the multinational coalition was targeting not only strategic and military targets but civilian installations. The previous day, the Iraqi information ministry took Arnett to the western outskirts of Baghdad to visit a powdered milk factory that produced milk for infants. The Iraqis said that the plant was destroyed by coalition bombing, and Arnett added that the force of the explosion had torn the aluminum sheets from the side of the factory and scattered them all over the countryside. The steel girders that had supported the building were twisted and blackened and the machinery inside was a molten pile. CNN had visited it in 1990 and the sign in front of the plant read "Baby Milk Plant" in English and Arabic. CNN's 1990 footage accompanied Arnett's 1991 report and showed bottles of milk formula coming down an assembly line, with employees wearing white uniforms that said "Baby Milk Plant" on them in English.¹³ The plant was producing 200,000 tons of powdered milk a day and was the only source of instant formula for infants in Iraq. The plant was valued at \$150 million; the Iraqis said it was destroyed in two airplane missile attacks on January 20 and 21, with four missiles used in each attack.

Within hours of Arnett's report, at the January 23 military briefing in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, Pentagon spokesperson Mike Gallagher claimed that the plant was a "valid military target": "Apparently this facility, by what we've just learned has, uh, military guards around it, barbed wire fence. It has a military garrison outside and numerous sources have indicated that the facility is associated with biological warfare production." Gallagher read the report with a smirk, raising his eyebrow for emphasis as he read. On a live CNN report at 10:25 a.m. from Baghdad, Arnett was asked by anchor Bob Cain to respond to the Pentagon claim that the infant formula factory was heavily guarded and was a biological warfare plant. Arnett replied that there was only one guard at the gate and when he visited it previously he recalled seeing powdered milk from Britain coming in that was to be made into baby formula. "It looked innocent enough from what we could see," Arnett concluded and his report broke off at that point.

Around 2:00 p.m., Frank Sesno of CNN reported on the daily White House briefing and said that "unfortunately CNN's reporting out of Baghdad... came into question with Peter Arnett reporting earlier today that a baby milk plant had been destroyed." President Bush responded angrily to the report and

Marlin Fitzwater subsequently went out of his way to discredit it, claiming that the United States had prior intelligence that the site was a biological weapons facility, ringed with barbed wire and heavily guarded. Fitzwater insisted that everything that Peter Arnett reported was subject to Iraqi censors. When asked if CNN was a propaganda arm of the Iraqis, Fitzwater replied that it was not, that CNN was free to report what it wanted, but any broadcast coming out of Baghdad was coming out of a totally controlled Iraqi government.

Colin Powell also commented on the baby formula plant (see below), clearly showing that a full-scale propaganda war was on between Iraq and the United States over the extent of damage to civilian targets from the U.S.-led coalition bombing. The campaign unfolded, first, when U.S. military spokespeople in Saudi Arabia attacked what they claimed to be Iraqi propaganda. Then the attack was repeated by the White House and the Pentagon (interestingly, Fitzwater alluded to Bush's anger, without bringing the president directly into the fray). As the New York Times reported the next day, "Mr. Fitzwater said that the plant was heavily guarded and surrounded by barbed wire, but refused to say what other evidence there was that the facility was used for germ warfare, or how it was obtained" (Jan. 24, 1991, p. 4).

As it turned out, this was a disinformation campaign: The U.S. command in Saudi Arabia, the White House, and the Pentagon were lying. The Washington Post later reported that the French firm that had built the factory insisted that it was a milk factory and that the equipment there could not produce biological weapons (Feb. 8, 1991, p. A1); the French contractor, Pierre Guerin, who built the plant insisted that it solely produced infant formula. New Zealand technicians who visited the plant repeatedly said that they saw powdered milk being produced there and questioned the U.S. military account, denying that there was a military garrison or special security around the plant (Feb. 8, 1991). In addition, a representative from the Nestlé corporation claimed: "'We know this was a state-built infant-formula plant.' Company officials said they had regularly observed its construction in the last few years, 'because we like to be aware of the competition'" (cited in The Village Voice, Feb. 5, 1991). Yet the media went along with the White House version, with the exception of CNN, which broadcast reports of the return of Peter Arnett and other reporters to the milk factory; they showed that there was no evidence whatsoever that biological weapons were produced there, reports that intensified White House attacks on Arnett and CNN.¹⁴

After the war, however, on a BBC documentary on Operation Desert Storm that was shown on the A&E cable channel, the former director of defense intelligence, Lt. Gen. Leonard Perroots, admitted that "we made a mistake" and that the United States had faulty defense intelligence.¹⁵ In a USA Today interview after the war, Gen. Merrill McPeak, head of the Air Force responded to a question concerning whether the bombing of the infant formula factory was a mistake by stating: "Time will tell what kind of factory that factory was. There is no doubt that we made some mistakes about what we bombed" (March 20, p. 12). During the war, however, the U.S. military never admitted making and mistakes and lied consistently to hide the fact that they were regularly hitting civilian targets. On February 8, Iraq asked the United Nations to send a fact-finding mission to determine if the infant formula factory was a biological weapons facility and the UN reported "that no biological capabilities or facilities existed" (Arkin, Durrant, and Chemi 1991, p. 104).

Obviously, reports of civilian damage represented a legitimization crisis for the Bush administration

and Pentagon, who were claiming that the bombing campaign was precise, aimed only at military targets, and avoided all civilian damage. Almost every day for the rest of the war, the Iraqis asserted civilian damage from U.S. bombing and often confirmed it with graphic pictures of the destruction of nonmilitary sites and the mutilation and murder of innocent civilians. The Bush administration and Pentagon constantly dismissed these reports and often presented lies and disinformation as counterpositions. Military lies were sometimes accompanied by brutal admissions of the true intentions and philosophy of the U.S. military. In a January 23 Pentagon briefing, Colin Powell stated that, "Our strategy to go after this army is very, very simple. First, we're going to cut it off, and then we're going to kill it."

Technowar is clean and precise, but it is also brutal and deadly. At another point, Powell admitted that so far they had "killed" only 41 Iraqi aircraft out of 809, deflating earlier excessive claims (recall that the first night, when Wolf Blitzer reported continually that the allied military had totally destroyed the Iraqi air force, and network Pentagon correspondents debated the next two days whether fifty percent or seventy percent of the Iraqi Air Force was destroyed). Yet Powell revealed technocratic faith in the ability of coalition forces to destroy all Iraqi military material, asserting that, "[t]hese numbers will rise over time as we continue the campaign to go after shelters, go after bunkers, and essentially rip up the air force in its entirety." As it turned out, much of the Iraqi Air Force escaped to Iran and most of the rest of it hid throughout Iraq, thus reducing Powell's predictions to empty boasting.

Later that day a pool interview was released in which General Schwarzkopf also boasted: "Eventually we will destroy his air force." The war planners stressed over and over that they had concocted a comprehensive plan to totally destroy the Iraqi military, an aim made manifestly clear in Powell's briefing. In another revealing and oft-quoted phrase Powell stated that, "we have a tool box that's full of lots of tools, and I brought them all to the party, General Schwarzkopf has them all at the party." So war is a "party" for the techno-managers, who systematically will use their "tools" to annihilate the Iraqis and to "rip up" their military assets. In fact, the Persian Gulf war was a proving ground for these tools, many of which were untested in battle. It was also a project in which the overpowering superiority of the U.S. military would demonstrate that it could cut off and kill any army in the world--or at least a Third World army in the desert.

The total destruction of the Iraqi military was thus revealed as the goal of the technowar managers. Their vision entailed the methodical and systematic destruction of the Iraqi weapons facilities, tanks, artillery, armored vehicles, air force, and as many soldiers as necessary to humiliate Saddam Hussein and to defang Iraq as a military power. Over and over, the technomanagers used the words, "kill," "destroy," and "annihilate," or the more sanitary "attrit," an abbreviation of "attrition" that became one of the favorites of the Pentagon briefers (see 6.1), though Powell and Schwarzkopf preferred the harsh "kill." Their vision of a technowar that would totally destroy the Iraqis replicates the insane Nazi plan to systematically annihilate the Jews, and indeed the U.S.-led coalition would "kill" as much of the Iraqi military as they were able to get away with (although after the war General Schwarzkopf bemoaned the fact that he wasn't able to "annihilate" more of it). These technokillers became national heroes, to the shame of the nation.

One of the major points of Powell's briefing was that although the Iraqis had a lot of troops, so far all they had used were their inaccurate Scud missiles, which were weapons of terror, in contrast to the totally precise U.S. weapons, which were allegedly avoiding civilian casualties. Justifying the claim of precision bombing and avoiding civilian targets led Powell into denying the Arnett report, stating

categorically: "There was a story earlier today about the infant formula factory. It is not an infant formula factory, no more than the Rabta chemical plant in Libya made aspirin. It was a biological weapons facility, of that we are sure, and we have taken it out." Note the combination of arrogance and certainty in Powell's mode of discourse: He was sure that the plant produced biological weapons and that it had been totally destroyed. Powell also claimed that the Iraqi nuclear facilities were destroyed: "I think I can confirm for you that the two operating reactors they had are both gone, they're down, they're finished, and the one that the Israelis took care of some years ago remains down."

This claim, too, was highly questionable, and the British press pointed out that the two reactors at Tuwaitha, near Baghdad, had nothing to do with Iraq's nuclear weapons program, as Powell implied. "'The reactors have no military significance at all; they are of no significance for Iraq's nuclear programme,' said Dr Frank Barnaby, a nuclear physicist and defence analyst. 'They produce radioactive isotopes for medical purposes'" (Observer, Jan. 27, 1991, p. A11). Later, the International Atomic Energy Authority indicated that the reactors were only research establishments, "but if the reactors have been fractured there is a possibility of radioactive spillage and release into the atmosphere" (Vidal 1991, p. 136). The mainstream media in the U.S., however, seemed to be unaware that the Pentagon was handing them one piece of disinformation after another, articulated as categorical assertions, affirming certainty for claims that later turned out to be bogus. At one point, as General Powell showed a series of complicated graphs, doctored to confuse the Iraqis, he said "Trust me, trust me." The press laughed, but this was exactly what most of them did and reports the next day indicated how Powell had "the press eating out of his hand" (New York Times, Jan. 24, 1991, p. A5).¹⁶

Yet it was certain that by carrying out enough daily bombing sorties, sooner or later the Iraqi army would collapse. Even if the Pentagon missed most of its targets (which it did), the daily carpet-bombing, cluster bombs, daisy cutters, and fuel-air explosives would sooner or later "attrit" the Iraqi army and force it to surrender or flee Kuwait (this matter is discussed further in Chapters 7-10). Powell's briefing, coupled with the unfolding of the bombing campaign itself, the most savage in history, should have made clear the brutality of the U.S. technowar. As it turned out, not only were the Iraqi people and their economic and military infrastructure the target and victim of U.S. bombing, but so was the delicate environment of the Persian Gulf, which would experience one of the greatest ecological catastrophes in history.

5.3 Environmental Terrorism

In a New York Times Op-Ed piece at the beginning of the war (Jan. 17, 1991, p. A15), Leonard Spector begged the Bush administration not to bomb Iraq's nuclear plants because of the dangers of lethal environmental contamination. A conference in London the first week in January, almost totally ignored by the U.S. mainstream media, warned against environmental holocausts either through the burning of oil wells or oil spills in the Gulf. John Vidal notes: "for all the justification given for combat, the possible environmental consequences were wilfully ignored by the United Nations, the European Community, all participating governments and the oil industry, before and during the conflict. Even though Saddam Hussein had warned the West in October 1990 that he would set fire to the wells and create and light 'a sea of oil', and the industry knew that he had mined the wellheads, the forces of government chose not to listen" (1991, p. 134).

The media also ignored the possible devastating threats to the environment from a Gulf war. The

destruction of nature seemed neither to matter to the war managers, nor to the media. When the devastation eventually became public it was processed as an event in the propaganda war with the U.S.-led coalition and their compliant media boosters blaming the environmental holocaust solely on Saddam Hussein and the Iraqis. Yet, as we shall see in this section, both Iraq and the coalition forces share blame for the wanton destruction of the environment that took place during the Gulf war.

The War on the Environment

The environmental effects of the Gulf war were largely suppressed by both the military and the media during the opening days of the fighting. In his January 18 military briefing in Saudi Arabia, General Schwarzkopf was asked if oil refineries were a target and he blandly noted that: "We have made it a point to not hit targets that are not of a military nature." This was a typical Schwarzkopfian evasion and soon after, the military briefers openly admitted that they were bombing oil refineries, claiming that these targets were of military significance. During the Pentagon briefing in Washington the same day, a reporter asked if damage had been done to the chemical, biological, and nuclear sites that the military had claimed were high priority targets. Again the briefers ducked the question.

ABC's "World News Tonight" on January 18 had the first comprehensive report on the war and environment, and Ted Koppel developed the theme further on "Nightline" that evening. The ABC News report noted that because the Kuwaiti oil fields were right on the Gulf, their destruction could be disastrous. Imagine, the report suggested, that after the war, the Iraqis could blow up 1,000 oil wells, which would produce a mind-numbing environmental threat--a horror show illustrated by pictures of black, sooty smoke erupting from just one Kuwaiti oil well ablaze from U.S. bombing. ABC explained that Saddam Hussein had booby-trapped the wells and their torching could create a terrible smoke cloud affecting the climate and environment all over the world. Dr. Paul Crutzen from the Max Planck Institute in Germany claimed that temperatures could drop 10 to 15 degrees Celsius and cause an environmental disaster. A British scientist countered that it would be nothing more than a local event. Another scientist feared radioactive contamination after attacks on Iraq's nuclear facilities and toxic fumes from the wreckage of their chemical weapons facilities. Taking up the prophetic mode again, the ABC report also noted that Iraq may use oil as a weapon, as it did in the Iran/Iraq war, causing spills in the Gulf.

In a chilling NBC report on January 20, Pentagon correspondent Fred Francis made known U.S. military belief that they had taken out most of the Iraqi chemical sites, but concluded that they had not totally destroyed the nuclear development or research facilities because their sensors had not picked up any radiation! The Pentagon thus admitted that it was prepared for nuclear contamination and was indeed seeking it as positive confirmation that they had destroyed Iraq's nuclear program! When, after the horrific environmental destruction of Vietnam after years of U.S. bombing, the Pentagon was forced to follow an environmental code, the Bush administration signed an order exempting the Pentagon from all environmental restrictions (see New York Times, Jan. 30, 1991, p. A14). When environmental issues came to the fore in the Gulf war, the Bush administration passed along an order on January 25 that no government agency could release any environmental information to the press or public.¹⁷

Oil fires and environmental destruction were evident, however, early in the war. One of the first skirmishes of the war involved a fight over eleven oil platforms near Kuwait that the Iraqis were using to mount anti-aircraft attacks against allied planes. In a fight with U.S. troops, twenty-three Iraqis were taken

prisoner and five were killed. In a pool report on the incident, broadcast by CNN on January 20, Lt. Cdr. Mark Jensen recounted that the ship accompanying the operation, the USS Nicolaus, was close to Kuwait and he could see a fire burning in an oil refinery. He described "burst oil tanks," presumably from allied bombing as this had occurred before there were claims that Iraq had torched oil wells and refineries. The results were "a big fire," Jensen said with a giggle, which made the "Louisiana oil fire [i.e. which had broken out in the Gulf of Mexico the previous year] look small." Furthermore, in a British military briefing telecast by BBC television on January 23, it was claimed by Major General Alex Harley that Iraq's oil-refining capacity had been reduced by 50 percent as a result of allied bombing. Pictures of flames coming from Iraqi refineries outside of Baghdad were some of the first images to emerge from Iraq during the early days of the war, so there was no doubt that bombing Iraqi oil facilities was an important priority of the U.S.-led coalition war plan.

Thus, early on, there was confirmation that coalition bombing was producing oil fires in both Iraq and Kuwait. The stated coalition aim of destroying Iraqi nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons facilities also raised the issue of the environmental effects of the Gulf war. This concern, however, did not surface in the mainstream media until the United States claimed that Iraq was torching oil wells and refineries. When reporters and scientists began questioning the military and government in regard to the environmental effects of the multinational forces bombing, they usually got evasive answers. For instance, in the January 21 military briefing in Riyadh, Gen. Burton Moore took the Schwarzkopf line, claiming that Iraqi nuclear and chemical facilities had been largely destroyed, but there was no response to the inquiry concerning the potential environmental effects of this destruction.

Yet accounts began to emerge in the foreign and alternative press concerning potential environmental damage. In a January 24 British Channel 4 report, Dr. Tom Wilkie claimed that the area of Iraq around these bombed chemical and biological weapons facilities "must be rather unpleasant and contaminated with, presumably, with mustard gas and other noxious chemicals.... I certainly wouldn't like to be in the neighborhood of the chemical plants that have been attacked." Journalist Randy Thomas reported on January 26 to the Environment News Service that a Gulf Peace Camp volunteer, who just arrived in Jordan from Baghdad, "told of fleeing a 'chemical cloud' in one section of the city. 'You could see and smell it,' he said. We ran for our lives." Dr. Abdullah Toucan, science adviser to King Hussein, told Thomas that he was concerned by the release of Seranian, mustard gas, and other chemical warfare agents following the destruction of an Iraqi chemical warfare factory. Toucan feared even more nuclear contamination from the bombing of a five-megawatt nuclear plant near Baghdad.

In a January 30, 1991, briefing Gen. Schwarzkopf claimed that the coalition forces were using precision weapons to bomb Iraqi weapons facilities and were being "very, very careful in the method of attack and the munitions used, to ensure that we didn't have any contamination." Arkin, Durrant, and Chermi noted, however, that Aviation Week & Space Technology reported on April 22, 1991 that a "massive (and seemingly disorderly and unsuccessful) attack by some 32 F-16 fighters carrying unguided general purpose bombs preceded a later attack by F-117 stealth aircraft carrying laser-guided weapons" on the heavily guarded nuclear research facility on the outskirts of Baghdad" (1991, p. 97). A later Aviation Week report noted that, "[s]mokepots around the facility obscured the target, and anti-aircraft fire was too intense to linger in the area" (1991, p. 97) Lt. Col. Robert Maher, commander of the 417th Tactical Fighter Training Squadron of F-16s, claimed that, "[t]hey lofted bombs from a fairly great distance and did little damage with a large number of aircraft." This refutes Schwarzkopf's specious claims concerning the

precision used in bombing nuclear, chemical, and biological warfare facilities and raises the question concerning the degree of environmental contamination from coalition bombing.

Schwarzkopf claimed during the January 30 briefing that coalition forces had "destroyed over eleven chemical and biological storage areas" and had "destroyed or heavily damaged three chemical and biological production facilities." He also noted that, "we're going to continue a relentless attack on this very, very heinous weapon system," and by February 11, Lt. Gen. Kelly stated that "very, very little NBC [nuclear, biological, and chemical] production was going on in Iraq." Concerning chemical contamination, Arkin, Durrant, and Chemi report:

On 18 January, the chief of Soviet Chemical Troops warned that an attack on Iraqi chemical facilities would release dangerous concentrations of sarin and tabun, spreading to several dozen kilometers. On 22 January, the Washington Times reported that a Czech chemical reconnaissance unit in Saudi Arabia detected trace quantities of chemical weapons in the air. On 3 February, French military officials stated that the allies had detected traces of nerve gas fall-out as a result of allied bombing. 'We have found trace,' Gen. Maurice Schmitt said on Channel 4 TV in the UK on 4 February. 'We think that they could only come from chemical weapons and what we've picked up was along the border as well as in the sea (1991, p. 100).

I would add that on January 26, ABC and CNN reported that coalition forces had detected chemical contamination in Saudi Arabia (see Chapter 6, note 13). Later, the Environment News Service reported on February 11, 1991, the spread of an unknown and rapidly progressing disease, after a biological weapons production plant near Baghdad was bombed. Fifty Iraqi soldiers mysteriously died from exposure to biological agents around these bombed-out plants. The U.S. military came close to admitting responsibility for nuclear or chemical contamination when Gen. Thomas Kelly replied in a January 29 briefing: "The initial assessment I saw was that, if there was any [nuclear or chemical contamination], it would be very localized. Precisely what it is, I don't know the extent of it." Other U.S. military briefers also admitted the possibility of environmental contamination, raising the issue that the Geneva Convention prohibits attacks on installations containing "dangerous forces" (see Arkin, Durrant, and 1991 and Clark et al. 1992). But despite the significance of the issue, the mainstream media almost completely ignored the issue of environmental contamination from coalition bombing.

On January 22, however, the corporate media focused on the environmental damage to the Gulf when the Iraqis were reported to have deliberately set Kuwaiti oil wells and refineries on fire. CNN reported during the early morning hours of January 22 that allied military authorities claimed that Iraq had deliberately torched oil wells and storage tanks at the al-Wafra oil field in the south of Kuwait and that there were also reports of oil fires at two refineries as well. A bit later, during the early morning CNN "Business Day," it was announced that Iraqi forces had blown up Kuwaiti oil facilities and that the Iraqis might have been trying to keep the United States from starting a ground war by fouling the battlefield with dark smoke that would hamper U.S. high-tech military activity. Earlier in the day, Dr. Abdullah Toucan appeared on a CNN segment claiming that such oil fires could influence target detection, hamper air support, and thus could be a military tactical weapon. Without going into the environmental threats that he

had earlier described in the CBS and ABC segments, Toucan darkly hinted that the tremendous amount of carbon monoxide in the fires might be a more effective weapon than the chemical weapons that had been the focus of so much media attention.

According to CNN, Iraq was making good on a threat to make the Middle East an inferno, and pundit Lawrence Korb of the Brookings Institute speculated that Saddam Hussein knew that he would eventually lose the war and wanted Kuwait to be left with nothing and make it more difficult to bomb his troops as they departed. This alleged "scorched earth" policy was interpreted as evidence of how badly things were going for Iraq, and how malicious Hussein and the Iraqis were. Nothing was said, of course, concerning all the oil fires that allied bombing had produced. The other morning TV news programs also interpreted the oil fires as expressions of Iraqi evil, without mentioning the equally pernicious effects on the environment of the U.S. bombing, which had caused an oil fire in Kuwait two days before as well as producing oil fires in Iraq, and the potential chemical, biological, and nuclear contamination caused by coalition bombing. There was no real discussion the entire day of the new environmental threats from the oil fires, which resulted from the actions of both sides. Instead, Bush administration and media attention still focused on the POW issue, which was reaping such a fabulous bonanza in demonizing the enemy.

Another ominous environmental event was revealed on January 24 when ABC's Forrest Sawyer reported from Saudi Arabia that Baghdad radio claimed that two Iraqi oil tankers were hit and were leaking a huge amount of oil into the Persian Gulf. Later that morning, at the U.S. military briefing at Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, Col. Greg Pepin reported that two Iraqi oil tankers doing intelligence work had been attacked and disabled by U.S. naval air operations, setting off secondary explosions. There were fires on the deck, he noted, and during the questioning Pepin admitted an oil spill of one-half mile of refined rather than crude oil, which he claimed burns faster. The story was given little exposure and probably would have been forgotten were it not for a massive oil spill that appeared the next day and that produced one of the more significant battles of the propaganda war.¹⁸

At the U.S. military briefing in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, on January 25, Major Gen. Robert Johnston responded to a question from a reporter who asked if fires reported around Kuwait City were caused by U.S. bombings by stating "my answer to that is no." Discussion then turned to questions concerning what caused the massive oil slick that had just appeared. When asked if this was caused by coalition combat operations, Johnston replied that "I can't respond to that." Nobody brought up Pepin's briefing of the previous day, when he admitted that the United States had caused an oil spill by bombing two Iraq oil tankers, which they claimed were sending out intelligence communications. Johnston speculated that "it's a lot of oil to pump in there accidentally" and suggested that it was possible that the Iraqis blew up the oil storage station, but he seemed edgy and evasive.

During the Saudi military briefing, National Public Radio reporter Deborah Wong asked about the oil spill and the Saudi military briefer, Col. Ahmed al-Robayan, said that Saudi Gen. Khalid had been at a meeting with scientists from the Ministry of Petroleum and Mineral Resources to study the problem and to find solutions. The Saudis believed that the Iraqis had deliberately caused the oil spill and that they expected this based on their knowledge of the Iran/Iraq war, where there had been "oil spilling." The oil was moving from the north to south, al-Robayan explained, and the spill was about fifteen kilometers long and was following the water movement and weather. It had begun three days earlier, he claimed, and had moved fifteen kilometers south from its origin at the Sea Island Terminal, the main Kuwaiti offshore

loading station. When asked if the oil spill threatened the desalination plant in Khafji, the Saudi military briefer answered that the "oil is going out away from Khafji." This point of information would be extremely interesting as we shall soon see.

At 11:24 a.m., CBS's regular programming was interrupted by a live report from Pentagon correspondent David Martin, who said that the Pentagon claimed that it has reports of a massive oil slick, though there were different claims concerning its origin. The spill was comparable to the Exxon Valdez disaster and was estimated to be two miles wide and twenty miles long. Martin speculated that the oil spill could be a major Iraqi military operation intended to impede an allied amphibious operation and foul up a Saudi desalination plant, an action that could threaten the water supply. Martin's report was illustrated with pictures of oil splashing on the shore and birds dripping with oil, conveniently provided to dramatize the report, which would eventually turn out to come from another oil spill altogether.

Around 1:40 p.m. CNN's Frank Sesno announced from the White House that Marvin Fitzwater had indications that Iraq was dumping large amounts of crude oil from a Kuwaiti oil storage tanker into the Persian Gulf. Fitzwater said that he had "no particular read" on Saddam Hussein's motivations for doing this: They may be military or just meanness. Bush was briefed on this spill which had been developing for three days. Moreover, the Department of Defense was assuming primary responsibility to control the oil flow. In addition, experts from the Environmental Protection Agency and other government agencies and environmental groups were being assembled to discuss how to deal with the problem.

Technowar requires control of all contingencies, of being totally in control of the situation, so the Bush administration and Pentagon constantly stressed their plans to control the disaster. They repeated that the spill had no military significance and would not interfere with their war plan. Such a blatantly specious claim, repeated over and over, raised the suspicion that this was a propaganda line and honest military commentators pointed out that obviously the oil spill would be of military significance in days to come, despite what the Pentagon and Bush administration claimed.

Throughout the day, CNN played a British ITN report narrated by Peter Sharp that covered the oil spill. Interestingly, the ITN team got the footage outside of the pool system. It was later revealed that there was a pool team present in the Khafji area when the spill was discovered, but they were not told about it by their military escorts and thus were not able to photograph the spill or inquire into its origins. In any case, the ITN tape turned out to be of great propaganda value to the Bush administration and Pentagon; it provided pictures to mobilize disgust against Saddam Hussein, who had allegedly caused the spill that was polluting the beaches and killing the wildlife. However, as we shall see, there were claims that the oil spill and devastation that was shown throughout the day was the result of U.S. bombing.

Sharp's extremely powerful ITN report documented in words and images the environmental holocaust that the Gulf war produced. "Looking across enemy lines into occupied Kuwait this morning, smoke from the al-Wafra oil field set alight by the Iraqis clouds the horizon. Oil analysts and scientists believe that setting fire to the Kuwaiti fields and storage facilities could bring environmental catastrophe to the region," Sharp narrated as the images showed burning oil wells. "It was the cormorants stumbling across the highway near the beach that signalled something was wrong." Images of oil-soaked birds were followed by images of thick oil washing onto the shores. "Neither side is admitting responsibility for this disaster, but these scenes will be repeated in the days and weeks ahead... No one should be surprised at

this. It's exactly what environmentalists said would happen if war broke out." The cleanup will be very difficult, he stated, because it is in the war zone, and thus pollution threatens the entire Persian Gulf which was now "a major casualty of this war."

At 3:00 p.m., George Bush held an unscheduled press conference and the questions centered on the oil spill. When the president himself intervened there was obviously a major propaganda campaign on. Indeed, both the White House and the Pentagon mobilized their top spokespeople and propaganda apparatus throughout the day to blame the oil spill on the Iraqis. When asked by UPI reporter Helen Thomas to comment on the oil spill, Bush replied:

Well, there's a lot of activity going on right now, trying to figure out what the best course of action is to clean this mess up, to stop this spill. Saddam Hussein continues to amaze the world. First, he uses the Scud missiles that have no military value whatsoever. Then he uses the lives of prisoners of war, parading them and threatening to use them as shields. Obviously, they have been brutalized. And now he resorts to enormous environmental damage in terms of turning loose a lot of oil. No military advantage to him whatsoever. It's not going to help him at all. Absolutely not. It has nothing to do with that.

Note that Bush's rambling response was pure propaganda, mobilizing, first, the technocratic ideology of control and then quickly shifting to the propaganda lines of the previous days that cumulatively demonized Hussein and the Iraqis: the indiscriminate use of Scud missiles, the parading of POWs, and now the destruction of the environment. In retrospect, Bush's blaming of the oil spill solely on Hussein and the labeling of him as an "environmental terrorist" were among the most daring and hypocritical moves in the propaganda war. The hyperbolic nature of Bush's propaganda rhetoric emerged in further answers to questions in which he characterized Hussein's alleged act as a "sick" act of desperation that had outraged the entire world and that his acts were "totally irrational."

It remains for future historians to judge how rational and healthy Bush's actions in the Gulf war were, though it was immediately obvious that the labeling of Saddam Hussein as an "environmental terrorist" was another example of Bush's hypocrisy. The United States had been bragging daily in the military briefings about destroying Iraq's nuclear, biological, and chemical facilities, destruction that undoubtedly had produced environmental contamination. Moreover, the U.S. admitted destroying oil installations in Iraq and a British military briefing even stated that the allies had destroyed more than 50 percent of Iraq's oil-refining capacity. Obviously, such destruction of oil installations was going to cause oil fires, spills, and pollution, therefore it was clear that both sides were engaging in environmental terrorism, that war itself is a mode of environmental terrorism. Thus it was sheer hypocrisy for Bush to attack Hussein for what the United States did regularly in this and other wars.¹⁹

The media, however, did not pursue the issue of the extent of environmental destruction caused by the United States and its allies in the war and privileged the U.S. version, which became more detailed and aggressive as the day proceeded. At the 3:30 p.m. military briefing at the Pentagon, the propaganda war over the oil spill intensified. Pentagon spokesperson Pete Williams claimed in his opening remarks that Iraq had been spilling oil pumped from the Mina al-Ahmadi storage facilities in Kuwait to the Sea Island

Terminal, ten miles from shore, where the oil was released into the sea. This was, Williams insisted, an act of "environmental terrorism," which was causing an oil spill likely to be twelve times bigger than the Exxon Valdez spill, as several million barrels of oil had already been spilled and millions more were expected. As Williams spoke, the CNN viewer was treated to images from the ITN report of black oil splashing onto the beach with birds covered with oil. This was, he added, an environmental concern and not a military concern, repeating the Pentagon propaganda line that the oil spill was not of military significance.

Williams was not clear on exactly where the oil was coming from, when the spill started, or what its nature and direction was. He admitted that while at least "one-half" of the oil was dumped into the Gulf from the Sea Island Terminal, some of the oil might have come from five Iraqi oil tankers, located in the vicinity of the al-Ahmadi storage facility. Nobody asked Williams if these were among the oil tankers that the United States had admitted bombing and that the Iraqis claimed were the source of the oil spill. Although the Saudis asserted that the oil spill had started three days earlier, and the ITN report indicated that it had been underway for thirty-six hours, Williams claimed that the Pentagon had only become aware of the oil spill in the last twenty-four hours (though Marvin Fitzwater had earlier told reporters that the White House had known of the spill for several days). Either the White House was not talking to the Pentagon or a cover-up was underway. Although Williams declared that there were already several million barrels of oil dumped in the Persian Gulf, the military briefer that morning in Riyadh had stated that the Sea Island terminal was only capable of discharging 100,000 barrels a day. The facts and figures were not adding up.

The official Pentagon briefer of the day, General Tom Kelly, continued to deny that the oil had any military significance and when skeptical reporters continued to ask why Iraq might have dumped the oil, he replied: "It makes as much sense militarily as shooting Scud missiles into population centers," and he called it "another act of an international terrorist." Thus, the Pentagon and Bush administration strategy was to equate the oil spill with Hussein's other allegedly irrational and terroristic acts and to present it as another instance of his "evil."

Some of the initial media reports exhibited a cautious skepticism toward the Bush administration/Pentagon version of the oil spill. At 6:30 p.m., the "CBS Evening News" opened by describing "a new ecological disaster beyond anything the world has seen." The CBS report indicated that "the facts are unclear" and it was not certain whether the oil spill was a deliberate act of environmental terrorism, as the Saudis and United States stated, or a result of coalition bombing. Dan Rather reported that George Bush and Dick Cheney were saying that the oil slick was from a deliberate oil dumping by Saddam Hussein, while others asserted that it may have been leaking from oil facilities damaged by allied bombing. The CBS report depicted Dan Rather asking Dick Cheney in a filmed interview: "What proof do we have that the Iraqis did it?" Cheney answered: "As best as we can tell, it is a conscious release of oil from one of the offshore loading terminals off the coast of Kuwait. The size of it, the fact that it continues, gives every indication that it is a deliberate release by the Iraqis of Kuwaiti oil... All of the evidence that we've seen to date, it looks to me like a conscious release of oil by the Iraqis." Note the slight equivocation in Cheney's report ("As best as we can tell," "it appears to be"), compared to George Bush and Pete Williams's categorical allegations. Returning quickly to his usual propaganda mode, however, Cheney stated how he was continually amazed at Saddam Hussein's willingness to operate as an "international outlaw" with chemical weapons, hostages, Scud attacks, and the environmental terrorism of "his massive oil spill." Cheney implied--following Bush's propaganda line almost verbatim--that if Saddam Hussein had

done all of these other horrible things, then he must have caused the oil spill as well.

Although CBS news claimed that there were two different explanations concerning who and what caused the oil spill, ABC bought into the official Bush administration/Pentagon line that the Iraqis were the sole culprits, not even questioning the official reports. ABC's "Nightline", for example, in their January 25 program dutifully reported the dual propaganda line that the oil spill was caused by the Iraqis, who had allegedly consciously dumped oil into the Gulf and that it had no military significance. During the evening of January 25 and the following days, there was no debate over the cause of the oil spill on any of the talk programs, and almost every person asked about the spill on discussion shows or who mentioned the spill in news reports blamed it on the Iraqis, or merely assumed that the Iraqis did it and speculated on the reasons.

Over the next few days, Iraq continued to deny responsibility for the huge oil slick and said that allied bombing had produced it, hurling back at the Americans the charge of "environmental terrorism." The Iraqis claimed, according to Baghdad Radio: "The alliance planes bombed oil installations in the province of Kuwait and targeted oil pipes which ignited a fire and led to the flow of quantities of oil" into the Gulf (New York Times, Jan. 29, 1991, p. A6). The Iraqi UN ambassador categorically denied that the Iraqis caused the oil spill and Iraqi Foreign Minister Tariq Aziz called for a UN team to investigate the oil spill. So far, there has been no official investigation, and it is still difficult to know who to believe, concerning who caused the oil spills.

The mainstream media, of course, privileged the U.S. version, blaming the spill on the Iraqis. Yet some media reports in the coalition countries over the next days would be more balanced in their official news summaries. CNN would frequently open a progress report on the oil spill by stating that the United States blamed the spill on the Iraqis while the Iraqis blamed it on allied bombing. Some newspapers hinted that there were two versions, but also usually privileged the U.S. account, as did the mainstream weekly news magazines.²⁰ On January 26, the New York Times reported: "Iraq filed a complaint with the United Nations saying that the United States caused the slick by bombing two tankers in the gulf, a charge the White House denied" (p. A5). The rest of the report documented the U.S. version, with no elaboration of the Iraqi claim. There was an interesting chart, however, which stated: "Millions of gallons of oil floated southeast yesterday from tankers at the port of Mina al-Ahmadi and [italics mine] from a nearby offshore oil loading dock" (p. A4). The "and," not discussed or analyzed in any articles in the paper, suggests that there may have been at least two sources for the Gulf oil spill.

Indeed, the U.S. military briefer on January 23 had already admitted the sinking of Iraqi oil tankers, and evidence existed that from the beginning of the war, the U.S.-led coalition had bombed oil facilities in Iraq and Kuwait, causing fires and other damage. During the morning of January 26, the TV version of the war oscillated between categorically assuming that the Iraqis were responsible for the spill and journalistic "balance" that contrasted the Iraqi claims with the U.S. ones. The U.S. position was, of course, privileged because most reports accompanied their version with clips of Bush administration or Pentagon officials blaming the spill on Iraq and their "environmental terrorism," and the audience had been positioned to believe that anything which the Iraqis claimed was mere propaganda while the U.S. was telling the truth.

The most significant media discussion of the oil spill occurred during the morning military briefing in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. Lt. Col. Mike Scott indicated in his opening statement that "Iraq continues to

dump oil into the Northern Arabian Gulf... The resulting oil slick has now grown to approximately 30 miles by 8 miles wide. Overall, from a military standpoint, the oil slick is minimal. However, from the environmental standpoint, you can see that it's going to have a major impact." In response to a question concerning the origin of the oil spill, Scott went to a map and, pointing to the Sea Island Terminal, stated that the oil spill started ten miles off shore, and was moving south. When asked if it was moving toward the shore, Scott said it did not yet pose a threat to the shorelines. When the reporter then asked what caused the on-shore oil spill that the television images were showing, Scott knitted his brow and said that he didn't know, suggesting that the oil near the shore "might be, er, part of it, or it may be something else that's out there."

This concession suggested that there might well have been more than one source of the oil spill. The possibility of several oil spills supports parts of both the Iraqi and the U.S. versions, implying that both sides were responsible for the environmental damage and that both countries were engaging in environmental terrorism--that the Persian Gulf war itself was an act of environmental terrorism. If the oil polluting the shoreline, which had so appalled world TV audiences who viewed the ITN report, was a result of U.S. bombing of Iraqi oil tankers, this would be embarrassing for the Bush propaganda team, which had made such aggressive attacks on Iraq's "environmental terrorism" and the psychological sickness of Saddam Hussein.

Some sources were actually claiming that the United States was responsible for the oil seen pouring onto the Saudi beaches, which was killing the birds and befouling the coastline. Britain's Channel 4 News, claimed on January 28 that although it seemed clear that the major oil slick in the northeastern Gulf was the result of the opening of valves on two major oil tanks in Kuwait by the Iraqis, the oil pollution on the beaches of north-east Saudi Arabia was the result of damage caused by U.S. military action. Channel Four News said that the U.S. authorities admitted this on Friday, and it had been confirmed by Saudi oil officials. This means that all the TV pictures of dead and dying cormorants and oil washing the beaches of Saudi Arabia, which were being used as illustration for stories about Iraqi environmental terrorism, were actually the result of collateral damage to--or deliberate attacks on--oil facilities by U.S. forces.

It was thus becoming clear that there had been two oil spills. In the January 26 Pentagon military briefing in Washington, Pete Williams disclosed the Pentagon's belief that the oil was coming from both the oil storage tanks in the Sea Island Terminal and five Iraqi tankers in the port at Mina al-Ahmadi, thus admitting that there were two oil spills, but blaming both of them on the Iraqis. This would be the official U.S. line for the next several days, though it vacillated in interesting and revealing ways, and concealed the admission by the U.S. briefer on January 24 that the United States had bombed two tankers, which were spilling oil into the Gulf.

Schwarzkopf's Fable

On January 27, the Saudis were blaming both oil spills on the Iraqis, claiming that the second spill came from an oil tanker at Khafji, which the Iraqis had shelled some days before, and that this spill was befouling the beach and killing the birds, as seen on TV. Shortly thereafter, the world was treated to a somewhat different version in a briefing by General H. Norman Schwarzkopf. The general began his briefing by reading, with glasses on, an "operational update" consisting of the day's statistics, just the sort of "factual data" that the military technocrat enjoys before his formal briefing. Then, Schwarzkopf took off

his glasses and spun a yarn about the origins of the oil spill and his recent military action to try to stem it. Schwarzkopf began his narrative with the assurance that his story comes "from hard evidence, schematic in nature, but pretty accurate" ("pretty accurate"?). According to Schwarzkopf's Fable: Once upon a time on the coastline of Kuwait near the port Mina Al-Ahmadi, there were five Iraqi ships. On January 16, they were riding low in the water because they were full of oil; on January 24, they were suddenly riding high because they were empty of oil. Ergo, the evil Iraqis dumped the oil from these tankers into the sea. Ten miles out from the port there was a Sea Island Terminal that had an oil buoy next to it that fed hungry oil tankers. There was now a flood of oil coming out of the oil buoy because the Iraqis opened its spigots and pumped oil into the Persian Gulf. The general checked his records and found that "we see absolutely no indications at all, no indications at all, that any U.S. military action caused this to happen."

The general and his staff began consulting with experts concerning the damage to the environment and military action that could be taken to solve the problem. Experts advised that the oil spill should be set on fire and that the flow of oil to the buoy that was pouring the oil into the Gulf should be cut off, perhaps by bombing. Because General Schwarzkopf was "not in the business of destroying Kuwait to liberate Kuwait," this was very tricky. But lo and behold, the fable continued, in the course of normal military actions one of Schwarzkopf's boats encountered a small Iraqi boat near the Sea Island Terminal. "This was a small boat of the type that is suspected of supporting mine-laying craft," the General explained, "also a small boat that has anti-aircraft [guns] on it, and this is the type of small boat that they've been going [after]--out in the area because those boats have been shooting at them." And so, "They engaged that boat, that boat happened to be next to the Sea Island Terminal and as a result of that engagement, the Sea Island Terminal caught fire."

The general was happy because experts had recommended that the oil be set on fire and it was on fire. The next thing to do was to bomb the source of the leaking oil in the on-shore terminal, in which there were two oil storage units about five miles from the shore. Schwarzkopf accordingly had the manifolds bombed (these were the pipes that carried the oil from inland to the storage tankers and from the tankers to the off-shore oil terminal). This precision bombing cut off the flow to the Sea Island Terminal. To be sure, Schwarzkopf admitted, there were about thirteen miles of oil pipes full of oil from the storage area on-shore to the off-shore terminal, so there could be leakage for a while. Schwarzkopf did not know the answer to a question concerning what happened to the oil flowing from the bombed manifold pipes as it poured onto the land, and there have been almost no mainstream media reports that followed up, or critically analyzed, Schwarzkopf's "surgical" operation.²¹

Schwarzkopf's fable was extremely interesting because he admitted that his aircraft were routinely firing at vessels in the vicinity of oil installations. In fact, there had been several well-confirmed stories of U.S. bombing setting fire to oil installations and rupturing oil tankers. Given that coalition forces routinely patrolled the area and fired on Iraqi boats, perhaps the coalition troops bombed some of the tankers, the Sea Island terminal, or its oil buoy, and began some of the fires and spills before the fire that Schwarzkopf admitted starting.

A reporter asked General Schwarzkopf if the U.S. sinking of an Iraqi oil tanker, which was admitted earlier, caused any major spill. Schwarzkopf answered that the Navy claimed that the oil from this military action was a "refined product" (and thus not crude oil) and that it had burned off, thus "there is no concern in regard to that." Hence, Schwarzkopf was claiming that there was no major spill from the

allied bombing, which he indicated "took place somewhere in the northern part," but he wasn't sure where. He said that he'd get back to the reporters on that, but he never publicly returned to the incident, which some believed was the source of the oil spill that TV showed splashing on the beach in Saudi Arabia and killing wildlife.²²

When a reporter told Schwarzkopf that the Saudis had said that the second oil spill, lapping up on the Saudi shore, came from Khafji, but the slick began north of Khafji, General Schwarzkopf admitted that he did not know where that specific spill was coming from. He said, incoherently, it "might have been an outlet," but broke off and said, "I just don't know." Thus, there were now conflicting stories by the Saudis and the U.S. concerning the origin of second slick and, interestingly, the U.S. would soon turn to the Saudi version which claimed that the second slick (i.e., the one seen on TV with oil spashing on the Saudi shore) came from Khafji, where Iraqis had fired on oil facilities (while the Pentagon had earlier claimed that it came from tankers near Mina Al Ahmadi opened by the Iraqis; this episode consequently disappeared from the U.S. version of the spill). However, the Iraqis, British television, British and French reporters, oil company personnel, and even some coalition military officials claimed that the on-shore spill was coming from Iraqi tankers bombed by the U.S. As we shall see in the next section, however, it is still not clear who produced the oil spill seen on TV or where it came from.

Cover Up

The mainstream media focused attention in the following days on the oil spill and its clean-up rather than on who actually started the spill. For example, in a front-page New York Times article of January 28, R. W. Apple relied solely on coalition sources and failed to even consider the Iraqi version, which many other reporters were at least raising and investigating. Apple quoted Saudi officials and a "ranking American officer based here [who] spoke bitterly of 'Saddam's scorched-ocean policy'" (p. A1). Apple described the devastation of the oil spill, cited Schwarzkopf's admission that "the origin of the oil coming ashore here was not clear" and then concluded, "it hardly seemed to matter" (p. A4). It is disturbing that a top writer for the New York Times thinks that it doesn't matter if his own government is involved in environmental terrorism, covers it over with disinformation, and uses that writer and his once-distinguished newspaper as part of the disinformation campaign. Indeed, neither U.S. television, newspapers, nor the mainstream weekly newsmagazines that appeared on January 28 (see Note 19), went back to the Wednesday U.S. military briefing where the U.S. admitted that it had bombed two Iraqi oil tankers and caused an oil spill; none investigated the extent to which allied bombing created the spill; none noted that the Saturday, January 26, U.S. military briefing made it clear that there were two spills, and none attempted to draw out the Iraqi, Saudi, and other sources which were blaming at least some of the spills on coalition bombing.

Yet, conflicting accounts continued to emerge and eventually some critical questions arose concerning the origins of the oil spill. At the Pentagon military briefing on January 28, Col. Dave Herrington reported that the major oil spill was now approximately thirty-five miles in length and ten miles in width and had not reached the shoreline in Kuwait or Saudi Arabia. He claimed that the oil seen coming on shore originated from Iraqi attacks on the Saudi refinery in Khafji, thus repeating the Saudi story that had earlier been questioned by reporters, who had seen oil splashing on the shores north of the Khafji oil refinery, while the currents were moving the oil to the south. Thus the five Iraqi tankers which the Pentagon had claimed were sources of the oil spill now disappeared from the Pentagon fable.

On January 28, CBS News raised the key question of who caused the massive oil slick in the Gulf. Alan Pizzey reported that "it still isn't clear if the oil came from a loading buoy that the U.S. said that Saddam Hussein opened on purpose, or if the Sea Island Terminal was accidentally hit by naval vessels in an engagement with Iraqi gunboats." Pizzey also indicated that the cause of the spill onto the beaches south of Khafji was still unclear. This explosive questioning of the U.S. propaganda line was done quickly and without fanfare and seemed to have passed over the heads of most of the audience. The television networks and the mainstream press did not pursue the issue and there was almost no discussion of the origin of the oil spills in the mainstream media, although reporters kept asking questions in the U.S. and Saudi military briefings in Saudi Arabia over the next few days concerning who really caused the oil spills.

On January 31, 1991, the New York Times published a story headlined "Another Oil Spill Imperils the Gulf" (p. A5). The story read:

Even as salvage experts and environmentalists went to the Persian Gulf today to try to limit damage from the largest oil spill ever recorded, Western military officials reported that oil had begun cascading into the gulf from a new source, an Iraqi offshore oil terminal near Kuwait.

The officials said it was not clear if the Iraqis had deliberately created the new slick by opening valves at the Mina al-Bakr oil terminal...or if the spill resulted from an allied bombing attack....

American military officials today described other, previously unreported oil spills that are adding to what is already an environmental catastrophe in the gulf. Some of the spills, they said, may have been created intentionally by the Iraqis, while others are apparently the result of allied bombing raids on oil installations in Iraq or Kuwait, or attacks on Iraqi shipping.

It had thus become increasingly clear that there were multiple oil spills and that the U.S.-led coalition was causing at least some of them. On January 31, CBS had a brief segment which noted that a London news source provided partial confirmation that U.S. bombers on January 22 had attacked two Iraqi oil tankers and caused an oil spill. Apparently, a British submarine was hiding under the tankers for a British commando raid that night and the British were not amused by the resulting damage to their submarine from the U.S. attack on the oil tankers. It is also interesting to note that just before General Schwarzkopf's briefing on January 30, Dan Rather dramatically announced that "Iraq has started pouring more crude oil into the waters of the Persian Gulf." During Schwarzkopf's briefing, a reporter mentioned a Reuters news agency report that the Iraqis were pouring more oil into the Gulf in the region of the Iraqi offshore ship loading terminal at Mina al-Bakr. Schwarzkopf admitted that Iraqi oil tankers there had been attacked "for several reasons in the past." He acknowledged that his staff had been watching that oil spill for several days and was prepared to attack the terminal again to stop the flow of oil into the Gulf.

The United Nations announced that they were undertaking an investigation of the oil spills, but so far no authoritative report has been published. Different sources attribute different levels of responsibility

to the respective forces with the U.S. and Iraqis blaming each other for the spills. The environmental journalist for the British Guardian, John Vidal, later wrote:

On Tuesday 21 January 1991 the Allies attacked Iraqi tankers in the Gulf. Five supertankers, each capable of holding 100,000 tonnes of crude--no one will say how laden they were--were moored at offshore terminals. Two-mile-wide slicks were reported off Khafji, and sometime between then and 25 January the oil terminal at Mina Al Ahmadi was destroyed. Then--the timing is uncertain--the Iraqis opened the pumps and millions of gallons of crude poured into the Gulf from the Al Hamaji terminal.

Whether the Allies caused more oil to be spilt into the Gulf than the Iraqis may never be known, but for a few days it became politically expedient to condemn Saddam Hussein's ecological aggression and take the sting out of any accusations that the Allies were using similar tactics in their 100,000 sorties into Iraq. The media, starved of images of death, turned to filming cormorants, albeit dying in oil spilt in Allied raids (1991, p. 137).

On February 3, the French Journal de Dimanche reported that "four out of five [oil spills] are the responsibility of allied forces." According to a summary of Claude-Marie Vadrot's study by Andre Gunder Frank (1991), "The first one was from the January 19 allied bombardment of three oil tankers. The second one from the January 20 bombing by French and British planes. The third one can be attributed to Iraqi bombardment. The fourth is due to allied bombardment of Al-Ahmadi, and the fifth oil spill is from the bombing of Boubyane Island by British planes" (p. 19). U.S. sources, however, concluded that seventy percent of the oil spilled resulted from Iraqi actions (see Aviation Week and Space Technology, March 4, 1991, p. 24; National Journal, March 2, 1991, p. 536; and Macleans, March 4, 1991).

In any case, it is clear that coalition bombing had caused at least some of the oil spills and fires in the Gulf and the issue of Iraqi "environmental terrorism" was dropped by the Pentagon, although occasionally those in the Bush administration would invoke the theme because the issue had never really been discussed in the mainstream media and most of the public continued to think that the environmental damage in the Persian Gulf was solely the result of Iraqi action. Yet after the war, John Horgan argued in an article in Scientific American (May 1991) that the United States had ordered government officials not to disclose any information concerning the environmental damage in the Gulf war because such information might raise embarrassing questions concerning the impact of the U.S.-led coalition bombing on the ecology of the region. Horgan cited John Cox, an environmental engineer and member of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament in Britain, who believed that satellite images would reveal that coalition bombing of Iraqi refineries and oil reserves had "created an appalling smoke cloud" comparable to the one generated by the Iraqi sabotage of Kuwait's oil fields.²³

But the compliant corporate media never really investigated who caused the oil fires and spills and because the spills did not ultimately harm the Saudi desalination plants and thus the water supply, the story was more or less dropped for the rest of the war. The Saudis constantly revised down their estimate of the extent of the damage from eight million barrels spilled, to five, to 3.5, and finally to one million barrels by the end of the war, about one-twelfth of earlier claims.²⁴ In most media reports during the following weeks, however, it was assumed that the Iraqis had caused the oil spills, thus the media helped cover over possible U.S. complicity in one of the greatest environmental crimes in history. Consequently,

the Gulf oil spill was probably the greatest propaganda victory of the war for the coalition forces, as the public generally believed that Saddam Hussein and the Iraqis caused the oil spills and many who had been sympathetic to the plight of the Iraqis were now angry with the images of dead birds and oil pouring onto the Saudi beaches. The powerful images of environmental damage intensified hatred of Saddam Hussein and demoralized the peace movement, many of whose members were strong environmentalists. The Bush administration and Pentagon propaganda campaign thus succeeded to mobilize a large majority of the public behind their war effort.

Notes

1. Two PBS documentaries on Grenada "Frontline," "Operation Urgent Fury," narrated by Seymour Hersh) and on Panama ("Frontline," 1990, narrated by Bill Moyers) demonstrated the military blunders that were left out of mainstream media reports in these two interventions. On the Grenada foul-ups, Greg Easterbrook wrote: "Invading the smallest nation in the world, the forces of the United States committed blunder after blunder. Space-age helicopters were shot down by Cuban construction workers using World War II surplus guns; a SEAL commando team drowned without being fired on; paratroopers were dropped into 'secure' areas that were in fact defended; civilian targets were bombed; interservice rivalries were highlighted by the discovery that Army and Air Force units could not communicate with each other because their radios used different frequencies. Most important, the medical students, whose rescue supposedly justified the attack, were not located until some thirty-six hours after the invasion began. Had there been a real danger that local forces would execute the students, Grenada would now stand as one of the greatest embarrassments in the history of statecraft" (The New Republic, Sept. 30, 1991, p. 36).

In Libya, high-tech bombs missed their targets, killing many innocent civilians, and it was not widely reported that the terrorist disco bombing of West Berlin, which was the ostensible reason for the Libya bombing, was not a Libyan operation, as the Reagan administration speciously claimed, but was, according to the West German intelligence forces who investigated it, caused by terrorist groups who had ties to the Syrian government (see Chapter 1, note 16).

2. Popular culture had firmly established Saddam as "the man you love to hate" and once the war started the media had vilified him in terms more extreme than any previous target of propaganda campaigns since World War II, employing the rhetoric of "another Hitler" to mobilize hatred of the Iraqi leader. Moreover, a cottage industry emerged of anti-Saddam artifacts, including golf balls with Saddam's head painted on them, Saddam dart boards, T-shirts and bumper stickers with anti-Saddam messages, cartoons in newspapers and magazines vilifying him, and parodies of popular songs with anti-Saddam or anti-Iraq lyrics (see Figure 5.1). The tabloids published wild stories about his bizarre and vicious sexual practices with the February 12, 1991, National Enquirer "reporting":

His own bodyguard's terrifying story.

* Saddam executes his young lovers

* His evil sex life

* His passion for "Little House on the Prairie"

The "body guard" later appeared on "60 Minutes" with stories more suitable for this audience. It was later revealed by French intelligence, however, that there was no evidence that the "body guard" had ever worked for Hussein and they labeled him a "mythomaniac" who had frequent contacts in Paris with Saudi military and intelligence officers (see Doug Ireland, The Village Voice, Feb. 12, 1991). A National Examiner story the same week headlined a "Shocker": "Saddam's Love Child Lives in U.S. He's Joining Army to Kill His Father" (Feb. 12, 1991). Cartoonist David Levine drew a sketch on the Op-Ed page of the New York Times on February 1, 1991, labeled the "Descent of Man" starting with a humanoid Caucasian image of Clark Gable and passing through apes and various animals to a diminutive Saddam Hussein with flies buzzing around his head.

3. Said (1978) compiled copious documentation of Western texts that affirm the radical otherness of non-Western races by asserting that "accuracy is abhorrent to the Oriental mind," that Orientals cannot reason and are fundamentally irrational, and that they are barbaric and uncivilized (see pp. 38ff, 54ff, passim). Said claimed that Arabs were often the target of these discourses and pointed out that such doctrines legitimate domination and are thus instruments of power over subjected races. Aksoy and Robins (1991) provide some examples of Western commentary producing the Iraqis as an irrational foreign Other: "'Their twentieth century is not our's,' wrote Alain Finkielkraut, 'They have allowed honour to prevail over democracy, and force and machismo over freedom.' According to Martin Woollacott, it was 'the problem of irrationality and fantasy in Arab life'; there is an 'Arab sickness' centred on the failure of rational thought'" (p. 329).

4. Some nights later, on January 23, George Bush gave a speech to the retired officers association. He quoted an Air Force general to the effect that the pilots must have been tortured--otherwise they wouldn't say such things "because they are Americans." The crowd roared with approval.

5. See the New York Times, June 11, 1991, where Zaun also stated: "I don't ever want to kill anybody again." Referring to victory celebrations in Washington and New York, Zaun remarked, "This country didn't get to see the cost of war. I did." He added, "They didn't see Iraqi mothers get killed." Immediately after making these statements, Zaun was reassigned aboard a ship in the Indian Ocean and could not be reached for further comment. LOOT (July-August 1991, p. 9) reported that the June 11 AP dispatch was captioned, "U.S. Pilot Shot Down in Iraq Regrets Human Cost of War." The Times headline on June 11, however, read, "American Flier Shot Down in Iraq Recounts Horrors After Capture" . The first caption, however, more accurately sums up the substance of the Zaun interview, while the other is pure propaganda.

6. Ramsey Clark and a group of international lawyers and researchers amassed a tremendous amount of evidence of war crimes by the U.S.-led coalition forces (Clark et. al 1992). The mainstream media, however, ignored these efforts, just as they ignored Clark's trip to Iraq during the war and the graphic video and reports he made of the barbaric damage to civilians and systematic hitting of civilian targets.

7. One of the more amusing examples of alleged Iraqi propaganda concerned a widespread report that "Baghdad Betty" broadcast on an Iraqi propaganda radio frequency to U.S. troops, warning: "G.I. You should be home... While you're away, movies stars are taking your women. Robert Redford is dating your girlfriend. Tom Selleck is kissing your lady... Bart Simpson is making love to your wife." This example was reported as evidence of the crudity of Iraqi propaganda in The New York Times, Washington Post, CNN, NBC, and Time magazine. The joke, however, was on the mainstream media because the story was originally told as a gag on the Johnny Carson show on August 22, 1990, and was taken up by a cycle of mainstream media corporations as a true story! See Extra!, May 1991, p. 17.

8. This and the following example come from articles in the Covert Action Information Bulletin, Number 37 (Summer 1991). The claims concerning the violation of the Geneva conventions come from Clark et al. 1992.

9. The military received some mainstream media criticism for this restriction, as when NBC's commentator John Chancellor groused about the restriction on January 20, though anchor Tom Brokaw stated two days later that it was not "in the best interest of the U.S. to cover the return of dead U.S. soldiers" (note how the GE military-industrial complex booster Brokaw equates his role as "journalist" with promoting the U.S. national interest, as if he were competent to define it). A more grisly tale of dead U.S. soldiers emerged when reporter Jonathan Franklin infiltrated the Dover mortuary and provided graphic accounts of mutilated bodies, claiming that he believed there were more U.S. casualties than officially reported from his comparison of the number of dead and mutilated bodies with the official U.S. casualty figures of the time (San Francisco Bay Guardian, March 6, 1991).

10. For the case that the U.S. had not really destroyed Iraq's unconventional weapons programs, see Washington Post, National Weekly Edition, October 21-27, 1991, pp. 9-11. U.S.-Canadian arms merchant Gerald Bull had been building the Big Gun and was found murdered, probably by Israeli agents; see Darwish and Alexander 1991 and Henderson 1991.

11. It was later revealed that George Bush regularly took tranquilizers and sleeping pills when a heart flutter some months after the war led his doctors to analyze his ailment.

12. "Professional" propaganda analysts distinguish between "white propaganda," consisting of overt lies attributed to official sources to defame or confuse one's enemies; "gray" propaganda, in which the source is not clear and its truth or falsity is not known; and "black" propaganda, in which the source is completely hidden and the disinformation is manifestly untrue. Such distinctions are racist (equating "white" with harmless "little white lies" and "black" with mysterious and deadly lies) and do not hold up in analyzing Gulf war propaganda, which was carefully orchestrated and coordinated, mixing "white," "gray" and "black" propaganda in the same discourses.

13. It was claimed later by apologists for the U.S. government that the sign in English in front of the plant proved that the whole episode was an Iraqi propaganda ploy. To this argument, I would counter that the uniforms shown in the 1990 video footage of the plant also had English writing on

them and it was later ascertained that the uniforms had been made in England. Furthermore, one learned from careful TV viewing that signs on buildings and streets in Baghdad were frequently written in both English and Arabic, so that ideologues who claimed that the sign in English was evidence of Iraqi propaganda were themselves dupes or agents of propaganda.

14. On February 1 on a live CNN report from Baghdad, Arnett indicated that journalists had returned to the baby-milk formula plant to inspect its ruins and that it continued to appear that the plant was solely civilian and did not produce any biological weapons. In a later ITN report, Brent Sadler, who was one of the pool of foreign correspondents with Arnett at the plant, reported that the site "looked, felt, and smelt like an innocent building where milk was made," as video images showed what certainly looked like the ruins of a milk factory. Sadler indicated that he and the other reporters were able not only to look through the wreckage of the building, but also to inspect the company's books and records, and one image showed Sadler examining what looked like company records. Sadler's segment was strongly narrated and supported by convincing visual images.

When Arnett, in an interview with Newsweek (Feb. 11, 1991, p. 37), was asked to comment on his controversial report of the allied bombing of a baby-food factory, he stated: "I think that was a mistaken bombing.. It seems to me that it was an unlikely location for a chemical plant. It was beside a main highway with no security fences around it. [We were able to] walk around it and through it. We took extensive video. I think the U.S. just miscalculated it.... I see a lot of other installations around here that are probably less important than a facility of that nature, and the security is incredible. I just cannot conceive {of their having} the limited kind of security that they had if it was such a secret installation. I mean, it's Iraq,... They can build it underground, they can put it anywhere."

The weekly newsmagazines, however, privileged the U.S. account. Time claimed: "In the first days of the war, bombers concentrated on blasting Iraqi nuclear facilities, chemical- and biological weapons plants (including one factory in Baghdad that the Iraqis said manufactured baby formula but that the White House insisted was devoted to preparations for germ warfare)" (Feb. 4, 1991, p. 24). Although this statement appears to be even-handed, giving both versions, it was included in a story on the bombing of nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons facilities and ultimately identified the milk factory with these targets; the Time version also posited the antithesis between Iraq and the White House, leaving out Arnett, who was to stand by his report, noting in several interviews after the war that he believed that the plant was not a military facility. Newsweek chimed in the same week (Feb. 4, 1991) with two references that accepted the White House version attacking "the ham-handed attempt to depict a bombed-out biological-weapons plant near Baghdad as a baby-formula factory" (p. 26) and claiming: "U.S. officials identified that facility as the country's main biological-weapons factory. According to one source, the evidence included 'human source material'" (p. 32). Propaganda works with hyperbole, so in this account the factory was elevated to "the main biological-weapons factory" and an unnamed source claimed that the evidence includes "human-source material." When propaganda is being disseminated, beware of unnamed sources, especially unnamed sources citing other unnamed sources.

15. Perroots was described by the London Times (March 25, 1991) as "director of the American Defense Intelligence Agency until 1989 {who} was used as a special consultant to the agency throughout the Gulf war." On an edition of the BBC show Panorama, Perroots admitted that, "the American intelligence community had got it wrong when bombers attacked the baby milk factory." He also questioned the official U.S. claim that the bombed sleeping shelter in which hundreds of Iraqi civilians were killed was a bunker (see 7.3).

16. After the war Powell continued to insist that the U.S. had made no mistake in targeting the infant formula factory, claiming: "Even after it was destroyed, some of the so-called baby powder that was around could not have been made there. We saw the packages and read the labels. It was made by a company that was not, to the best of our knowledge, doing business in Iraq. There was a body of evidence to suggest that we knew what we were doing." In fact, the packages and labels revealed the product to be a powdered milk product called Millac, which was produced by the Northern Ireland firm Pritchitt Foods that sold it to the Iraqis, who then produced the infant formula; see the Irish papers Today, Jan. 25, 1991, p. 8, and the Daily Mirror, Jan. 25, 1991; the latter paper stupidly assumed that the fact that the product was powdered milk proved that the Iraqis were lying, when obviously the powder was just part of the infant formula. In any case, Powell was misinformed.

17. See Tom Wicker's op-ed column in the New York Times on April 3, 1991, and the discussion in an article by John Horgan, in Scientific American (May 1991) which I shall discuss below.

18. The lead story in the Jan. 25 New York Times, for instance, mentioned the bombing of an Iraqi tanker as part of their description of naval activity but did not mention the oil spill (p. A4). Buried in another story on Iraq, however, the Times noted, "Baghdad radio also accused American airmen of causing a huge oil slick in the Persian Gulf by attacking two Iraqi oil tankers. The United States Navy reported Wednesday that American carrier-borne aircraft had badly damaged an Iraqi tanker and destroyed three armed Hovercraft in the gulf." Oddly, the Times does not mention the briefing where Pepin admitted that the United States caused the oil spill, attributing the story to the Iraqis, so it could easily be dismissed as mere Iraqi propaganda.

19. Recall the massive U.S. environmental destruction in Vietnam where the United States dropped thirteen million tons of bombs, defoliated between one-fourth and one-half of the country with deadly herbicides, "pockmarked the land with 25 million craters, displacing 3 billion cubic meters of soil and leading to disease and water shortages.... Vietnam's environment remains devastated from the war...and 'much of the damage can probably never be repaired.'" Political Ecology Group, War in the Gulf: An Environmental Perspective (San Francisco, Calif.: The Tides Foundation, Jan. 1991). In this context, Brian Tokar's remarks are worth citing: "The environmental consequences of war may be easy for some people to overlook... But the consequences for the earth are invariably the most lasting, and they continue to plague people and their land long after hostilities have ended. Hospitals in Vietnam still report several new victims of left-over land mines from the ecocidal war every week. Much of the country's land remains unable to sustain life, as the effects of chemical defoliants dropped by United States forces continue to linger." "War Is

Ecocide," Z Magazine, April 1991, p. 37.

20. Time magazine opened its February 4 story "A War Against the Earth" by suggesting the concept of "eco-war": "The environment itself has become both a weapon and a victim" (p. 32). The main body of the story, however, utilized the hypothetical mode or passive voice ("U.S. and Saudi officials claimed that...", "Iraq is believed to have opened...", "The Iraqis may have released..."). Caution was thrown to the wind, however, in the concluding paragraph where Time evoked "the sense of horror and demoralization caused by Saddam's callous acts of environmental terrorism," concluding: "in his quixotic madness, the Iraqi strongman seems intent on waging what he calls 'the mother of all battles' against the mother of us all—the earth itself" (p. 33). This is a telling example of how propaganda and ideological rhetoric overcame journalism in the Gulf war. Newsweek in their February 4 story blamed the spill solely on Saddam Hussein who "ordered a massive attack against the Persian Gulf itself. The Iraqis opened the pumps... They also pulled the plugs on five Kuwaiti tankers loaded with 3 million gallons of petroleum." Note here the use of the active tense and the assumption that Iraq and Saddam Hussein are the sole culprits. The story, as we shall see, is more complex.

21. Randy Thomas reported in the Earth Island Journal (Summer 1991) that months after the end of the war "large quantities of oil were also seen spilling from bomb-ruptured pipes at the Ahmadi oil terminal" [which Schwarzkopf had bombed] (p. 42). John Vidal (1991, p. 137) claimed that, "Two months later more than 5,000 gallons of oil a day were still reported to be leaking out." On August 16, 1991, Australian oil expert Joe Vitalls reported on PeaceNet (mideast.gulf) that the formation of oil lakes was making it hard to put out some of the oil fires (see 10.3 for more details on the aftermath of the environmental terrorism in the Gulf).

22. It is still not clear to me who caused the oil spill that produced the images of oil flowing onto the beaches around Khafji and killing birds. The Saudis claim that this spill resulted from Iraqi shelling of Khafji early in the war, but the question arises as to why it took so long for the oil to be visible and how the spill had entered beaches north of the city when the tides were said to have been flowing to the south and east. British and French reporters, as I note in this section, claim, based on interviews with Saudi and U.S. military officials, that the oil on the Saudi beach was caused by the U.S. bombing of Iraqi tankers, as did the Iraqis who called for a UN investigation. Although the U.S. admitted bombing an Iraqi oil tanker on January 23, they claimed that the oil spilled from this was a refined product that burned quickly and that the spill was only approximately one-half mile (U.S. military briefing in Riyadh, January 24, a claim repeated by Schwarzkopf in his January 27 briefing).

23. Tokar (1991) points out that weeks before the retreating Iraqi troops set ablaze the Kuwaiti oil wells, "unusually high levels of soot in the air were being measured as far away as the observatory at Mauna Loa in Hawaii and unprecedented acid rain was observed in the mountains of Turkey and Iran. Considerable scientific evidence suggests that widespread atmospheric pollution and spillage of oil into the Gulf began with the onset of U.S.-led bombing" (p. 57).

24. There were, however, other spills and other estimates, so that the Saudis might have been downplaying the extent of the damage. Tokar (1991), for example, claimed that, "Estimates of the

amount of oil spilled directly into the Persian Gulf are reaching 7.5 million barrels, and rising. This is twice the amount of oil that spilled into the Gulf of Mexico in 1979 after an accidental well blowout -- until now, the largest oil spill in history -- and almost thirty times as much oil as was spilled by the Exxon Valdez. A dozen different sources of leaking oil have been identified, challenging claims that most of the oil in the Gulf originated with the Iraqis opening valves at the Sea Island oil terminal at the end of January" (p. 58). A Greenpeace, Jan. 10, 1992 Press Release claimed that an estimated four to eight million barrels of oil was split into the sea. There will be further discussion of the environmental aftermath of the war in 10.3.