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The Persian Gulf TV War

Chapter 6

TV Goes to War

The Gulf war was the first war played out on TV with the whole world watching it unfold, often live. Never before had so many people watched so much news. The nation had rarely, if ever, been so involved in a single story. There was discussion of the vicissitudes of the war throughout the TV day and there had probably never been so much concentrated TV coverage of a specific event week after week for the duration of the war. And never had the nation been exposed to and fallen prey to so much disinformation and propaganda. For the rest of the Gulf war, both the Bush Administration and the military vilified Saddam Hussein and the Iraqis whenever possible while presenting their own actions, however brutal, in a positive light so that few negative images appeared of U.S. military actions.

The Big Lie that was repeated daily throughout the war maintained that the U.S.-led multinational coalition bombing campaign was precise and was avoiding civilian casualties. This lie was promoted by both the Bush administration and the U.S. military. General Schwarzkopf, in a January 27 briefing, insisted that the coalition forces "are absolutely doing more than we ever have" to avoid casualties. He claimed that "I think no nation in the history of warfare" has done more to use their technology to minimize civilian casualties and to avoid hitting cultural or religious targets. George Bush echoed this in a February 5 press conference, claiming: "We are doing everything possible and with great success to minimize collateral damage.... I'd like to say that we are going to extraordinary, and I would venture to say, unprecedented length, to avoid damage to civilians and holy places."¹

After the war, the Pentagon admission that seventy percent of the bombs missed their targets put in question the claims of precision bombing (see 4.2), as did the daily visual evidence coming out of Iraq, which depicted a tremendous amount of civilian casualties and destruction of nonmilitary targets in that country. In fact, the destruction of Iraq's economic infrastructure, including its electrical power, water, sanitation, industrial, and communications facilities, was an avowed goal of the allied bombing campaign, and such extensive bombing made it obvious that civilians would suffer greatly during the air war in which Iraq was systematically pounded into a preindustrial condition. And yet day after day the military insisted that they were not bombing civilian targets and concocted ever more specious stories to deny the visual evidence by claiming that the seemingly civilian targets that they had bombed, like the infant formula factory, were really military ones (see 4.2, 6.3 and 7.3).

The fact that the media commentators and the public swallowed these big lies in the face of daily conflicting evidence shows a serious moral and intellectual blindness that I examine in the next two sections. Thus, in this chapter I try, first, to explain why the public so strongly supported the Gulf war and accepted at face value whatever they were told by the Bush administration and Pentagon (6.1 and 6.2). My analysis draws on data from the media and some empirical research already produced, but is largely interpretive and speculative. Although I do not generally subscribe to the "bullet," or hypodermic, theory of mass communications which holds that the media directly influence and manipulate thought and behavior, I believe that in the Gulf war the media helped create an environment that, in conjunction with other social factors, helped mobilize consent to the Bush administration war policies.²

6.1 The War at Home

Part of the reason why people supported the Gulf war has to do with what might be called "territorial herd instincts." When a country is at war and in danger people tend to support their government and pull together.³ It could be argued, however, that during the Gulf war the country was not really in danger, that a diplomatic rather than a military solution could best serve the national interests, and that support of the troops required bringing them home as soon as possible. Moreover, the country was genuinely divided at the start of the war and there was a large antiwar movement in place before Bush began the military hostilities with Iraq. Furthermore, Kolko (1991, p. 25) points out that public opinion since 1969 has been increasingly anti-interventionist and that every Rand Corporation poll had indicated that U.S. military intervention would not receive adequate public support. Yet during the Gulf war, the public was mobilized to support Bush's interventionist policies, in part at least, because of the media support for the war.

To begin, the prowar consensus was mobilized through a variety of ways in which the public identified with the troops. TV presented direct images of the troops to the public through "desert dispatches" which produced very sympathetic images of young American men and women, "in harm's way" and serving their country. TV news segments on families of the troops also provided mechanisms of identification, especially because many of the troops were reservists, forced to leave their jobs and families, making them sympathetic objects of empathy and identification for those able to envisage themselves in a similar situation. There were also frequent TV news stories on how church groups, schools, and others adopted U.S. troops in Saudi Arabia as pen pals, thus more intimately binding those at home to the soldiers abroad. As we shall see in this section, people were also bound to troops through rituals of display of yellow ribbons, chanting and waving flags in prowar demonstrations, and entering into participation in various prowar support groups.

The media also generated support for the war, first, by upbeat appraisals of U.S. successes and then by demonizing the Iraqis that made people feverently want a coalition victory. Initial support was won for the war effort through the media-generated euphoria that the war would be over quickly, with a decisive and easy victory for the U.S.-led coalition (see Chapter 3). Then, the audience got into the drama of the war through experiencing the excitement of the Scud wars and the thrills of technowar war with its laser-guided bombs and missiles and videotapes of its successes (Chapter 4). The POW issue, the oil spills and fires, and intense propaganda campaigns by both sides also involved the audience in the highly emotional experience of a TV war (Chapter 5). The drama of the war was genuinely exciting and the public immersed itself in the sights, sounds, and language of war.

The media images of the high-tech precision bombing, (seeming) victories of Patriot over Scud missiles, bombing of Iraq, and military hardware and troops helped to mobilize positive feelings for the U.S. military effort in much of the audience. Military language helped normalize the war, propaganda and disinformation campaigns mobilized prowar discourse, and the negative images and discourses against the Iraqis helped mobilize hatred against Iraq and Saddam Hussein. Polls during the first weeks of the war revealed growing support for the war effort and wide-spread propensities to believe whatever the media and military were saying. A Times-Mirror survey of January 31, 1991, revealed that 78 percent of the public believed that the military was basically telling the truth, not hiding anything embarrassing about its conduct of the war, and providing all of the information it prudently could. Seventy-two percent called the

press coverage objective and sixty-one percent called it for the most part accurate. Eight out of ten said the press did an excellent job. Fifty percent claimed to be addicted to TV watching and said that they cannot stop watching news of the war. Fifty-eight percent of adults under 30 call themselves "war news addicts" twenty-one percent of these "addicts" say they have trouble concentrating on their jobs or normal activities, while eighteen percent say they are suffering insomnia.

It was, I would argue, the total media and social environment that was responsible for mobilizing support for the U.S. war policies. From morning to evening, the nation was bombarded with images of military experts, vignettes of soldiers at home and abroad, military families, former POWs, and others associated with the military. Military figures, images, and discourse dominated the morning talk shows, the network news, discussion programs, and the twenty-four-hour-a-day CNN war coverage as well as many hours per day on C-Span and other networks. On home satellite dishes, one could sometimes catch live transmissions as the networks prepared or present their reports from the field, and one satellite transponder provided hours per day of live military pool footage from Saudi Arabia for use by the networks--propaganda provided by the military free of charge. TV news preempted regular programs for weeks on end. The result was a militarization of consciousness and an environment dominated by military images and discourses.

CNN was particularly responsible for the militarization of the American psyche during the Gulf war with its around-the-clock bombardment of images of war, including military music, endless repetition of the same headlines, images of soldiers and weapons, and incessant discussion of the war that rarely questioned Bush administration policies. All of the networks cut into regular programming if exciting events took place. Consequently, the nation was in thrall to the television war and, as noted, accepted the TV version. In Danny Schechter's words (1991), "It was a marathon, a news-athon. It hooked us into a state of addictive anxiety where we stayed tuned in to saturation updates without end. It rallied the country behind the war while promoting the illusion that what we were watching in our living rooms was what was happening in the deserts of Arabia" (p. 22).

In this section, I shall accordingly analyze some of the ways in which TV helped militarize language and consciousness to help produce a prowar constituency in the country. TV went to war and helped manufacture consent to Bush administration war policies via its uncritical war coverage, which sacrificed its democratic imperatives of providing a forum of debate and accurate information so that citizens could participate in key issues in their society. The intensity of the U.S. bombing of Iraq and its destructive effects on the Iraqi people and the environment, the obvious fact that Iraq and much of the world wanted a cessation to military hostilities, and the dangers to the world economy and political ecology of the Middle East from a protracted war should have generated a substantive debate in the political, intellectual, and media establishment. That it did not is partly the responsibility of the mainstream media that silenced critical voices and that privileged the pro-military and pro-Bush administration discourses and images. In addition, the crisis of liberalism and cowardice of opponents of the war in the Congress and intellectual establishment contributed to the prowar consensus, but exploring this theme would require a separate study. Instead, I wish to focus in the following analysis on the role of the media in mobilizing support for the war effort.⁴

Military Language

The Bush administration and Pentagon mobilized support for the war through their discourses and

images of a precision, high-tech bombing that was minimizing civilian casualties while systematically destroying the Iraqi military machine. I analyzed the mobilization of video images of the high-tech war in earlier sections (see 3.3, 4.3, and Chapter 5) and here will analyze the militarization of language. War tends to debase and destroy language as much as humans and their social and natural environment. In the novel 1984, George Orwell developed the term "Doublespeak" to connote language that makes the bad seem good, the negative appear positive, and the unpleasant appear attractive, or at least tolerable.⁵ Orwellian "Newspeak" described the production of neologisms and language to sanitize unpleasant realities. The Gulf war saw a proliferation of Orwellian language that I call "Warspeak." Instead of dropping bombs or firing weapons, planes "dropped ordnance." If the bombs missed their targets, "incontinent ordnance delivery" resulted, which produced "collateral damage," a neologism used to sanitize the destruction of civilian targets and civilian deaths as accidental damage. Targets were referred to as "assets" and warplanes were described as "force packages." Targets were not destroyed, but "visited," "acquired," "taken out," "serviced," or "suppressed." Instead of descriptive terms like "bombing targets," the military and the media therefore spoke of "servicing the target," "neutralizing targets," "suppressing assets," or "visiting enemy."

Euphemisms for killing emerged, such as "eliminate," "degrade," "hurt," and, the favorite of many, "atrit," though General Powell and General Schwarzkopf preferred "kill." Many of the euphemisms used in Vietnam such as "friendly fire" (i.e., bombing your own troops) and "kill boxes" (i.e., areas subject to systematic bombing and destruction) reappeared, while the nastier terminology of Vietnam was redefined or defined away: "body bags" became "human remains pouches" and Schwarzkopf denied that his troops were engaging in "carpet-bombing" Iraq, claiming that the term was inaccurate for the precise coalition bombing, though he did admit that such massive bombing was being used on Iraqi troops in the desert. In fact, the term "carpet-bombing" itself connotes a gentle, laying on of a carpet, a friendly domestic term, rather than destructive killing by a field of viciously lethal bombs.

Media critic Norman Solomon described the routine destruction of common meanings of language as "linguicide." "When the slaughter of civilians is called 'collateral damage,' that's linguicide. When a dictatorship in Saudi Arabia, routinely torturing political dissenters, is called a 'moderate' government, that's linguicide. When a few missiles fired at Tel Aviv are called weapons of terrorism while thousands of missiles fired at Baghdad and Basra are called technological marvels, that's linguicide" (mideast.media, March 11, 1991). The degradation of meaning and language is not harmless for it is language that we use to make sense of the world, communicate with others, and create collective meanings, and if our language is debased or degraded, so is our consciousness, our communication, and our social interactions.

Other terms like "sorties," "Scuds," and "triple-A" became common media fare. The term "sortie" provides a nice neutral and Frenchified sound for bombing missions. The term "Scud" has a rather noxious, scummy quality to it, and its foul sound was exploited by George Bush who invariably uttered the term "Sscudd missile" with an exaggerated sneer. The "Patriot" missile, by contrast, connoted positive virtues, associated with devotion to country. Thus, even ordinary language was absorbed by the propaganda apparatus, which reserved all positive descriptive adjectives for "our" side while the "enemy" was described in negative adjectives. The official military discourse described the "enemy" as "ruthless," "cruel," "wanton," "desperate," "surprising" and "cunning." The U.S. forces were, however, "precise," "careful," "scrupulous," "tough," "decisive," and "effective," combining technological efficacy with traditional (male) virtues. Indeed, language, image, and narratives all celebrated the U.S. military while demonizing the enemy. The media, of course, perpetuated this manichean duality of "us" and "them," with commentators and experts frequently using the terms "we" and "our" to describe U.S. assets and actions

(see 2.1). In these ways, language went to war as well as television, and those who used such language served the interests of the Bush administration and military as they normalized the debased Orwellian and military language.

The Danish paper Politiken examined the English-language press and documented some of the ways in which the English language had gone to war (reproduced in In These Times, Feb. 13, 1991, p. 5):

The Allies have:	The Iraqis have:
Army, Navy, and Air Force	A war machine
Guidelines for journalists	Censorship
Briefings to the press	Propaganda
The Allies:	The Iraqis:
Eliminate	Kill
Neutralize	Kill
Hold on	Bury themselves in holes
Conduct precision bombing	Fire wildly at anything
The Allied soldiers are:	The Iraqi soldiers are:
Professional	Brainwashed
Cautious	Cowardly
Full of courage	Cannon fodder
Loyal	Blindly obeying
Brave	Fanatic
The Allied missiles:	The Iraqi missiles:
Do extensive damage	Cause civilian casualties
George Bush is:	Saddam Hussein is:
Resolute	Intractable
Balanced	Mad

The debasement of language began at the start of the U.S. military intervention with the coining of the term "Operation Desert Shield" to describe Bush's decision to send troops to the desert of Saudi Arabia to engage in war against Iraq. Bush claimed that he was drawing "a line in the sand" and providing a "shield" against Iraq's invading Saudi Arabia. As it now appears (see 1.2), Iraq had no intention of invading Saudi Arabia and Bush had every intention of waging war against Iraq, yet Bush's propaganda line stating the necessity of sending troops to Saudi Arabia to protect neighboring countries against Iraqi aggression prevailed, along with a demonization of Saddam Hussein and the Iraqis. Over and over, the Bush administration repeated the Big Lie that they were attempting to negotiate a diplomatic solution to the crisis, when in fact they did everything possible to block any diplomacy. Thus lying and hypocrisy became a normalized part of political discourse during the Gulf crisis and war.

The code name "Operation Desert Storm" referred to Bush's aggression as an "operation" rather than a war, repeating the trope of the Panama invasion "Operation Just Cause." As Jim Winters suggested (1991), in the era of Reagan/Bush Newspeak, wars "are only waged on poverty and drugs, not people." By contrast, the discourse of "operation" suggests the surgical removal of malignant matter. The medical

discourse pervaded the war with its rhetoric of "surgical strikes," a term that connotes both a precise, clean mode of bombing and the beneficial removal of disease and malignancy. Likewise, Bush's attempt to overcome the "Vietnam syndrome" suggested overcoming the disease of weakness of will and hesitancy in using U.S. military power.

The code for the war itself, Operation Desert Storm, also created the impression that the Gulf war was a natural event, occurring as a force of nature. The war "erupted" with "waves" of attacks the first night. Bombs continued to "rain" on their targets and planes "thundered" through the night. Scuds "showered" their debris below, Baghdad was "awash" in sounds and lights as the bombs exploded, and the "fog of war" made it difficult to ascertain if U.S. troops were killed by "friendly fire." These metaphors coded the event as a natural, inexorable force and lent an air of inevitability to it. Pentagon consultant Bernard Lewis stated: "Once a war is under way the dynamics are difficult to control." The Dallas Morning News headline on January 17 read "War Unfolds in the Gulf" and the Austin American Statesman noted that "the U.S.-led ground campaign opened Saturday" (Feb. 24, 1991). Such events are without agents, without personal responsibility, and unfold with the force of mythic inevitability. No human agency can intervene to stop the war. The "world waits" for first the air war and then the ground war to erupt; the war "is on schedule" throughout; "the end is certain" and "of this, there can be no doubt," George Bush assured us.

Technowar discourse also mythologizes technology and invests it with powerful cultural meanings. Many of the weapons systems played on the mythologies of the American West such as the Apache helicopter, Chieftain, Sidewinder, and Tomahawk missiles. CBS utilized the Western mythology in its nightly logo "Showdown in the Gulf," reducing the war to a struggle between good and evil, like the Western and the fairy tale. Many of the weapons had the implication of powerful nature like Thunderbolt, Tornado, Hawk, Falcon, Hellfire, Hornet, and, of course, Operation Desert Storm itself. Moreover, Mirage and Stealth aircraft magically targeted their "smart bombs," while General Powell and General Schwarzkopf used all their "tools in a toolbox." Honorific qualities like "smart" were thus attributed to weapons, which also absorbed the pragmatic, familiar aura of "tools." In this way, military language occupied the terrain of human intelligence, everyday life, and mythology, which together helped constitute the Gulf war as a heroic project of the mythic destruction of evil.

Curiously, military language has always used terms with a strong sexual connotation and thus was evident in the war in the Gulf. U.S. bombs "penetrated" enemy radar or targets, and during the ground war coalition forces quickly "penetrated" Iraqi defenses and "thrust deeply" inside Iraq itself. Weapon systems "engaged" the enemy, and there was constant concern that Saddam Hussein had "married" chemical warheads to his Scud missiles. The enemy was "softened" by saturation bombing, and the discourse of "cutting off" the Iraqi army contained an implied threat of castration; the Iraqi torching of Kuwaiti wells and rounding up of Kuwaiti males also played on sexual fears of castration. Making the castration theme explicit, a British tabloid even featured a story of an English candy firm making Saddam balls, pictured in the smiling mouths of Brit soldiers who were about to tear into them (Evening Chronicle, Febr. 23, 1991 (see Figure 6.1). Such sexual metaphors invest the bombing of Iraq with a positive, libidinal charge, supported by the images of destruction as a thrilling demonstration of precision weapons. They also mobilize sexual fears, like castration, against the "enemy."

Warspeak circulated daily in the media and was absorbed by a public that, in turn, reproduced the debased language. Talk radio and television shows, letters to the editor and opinion pieces, and everyday

discussion exhibited countless examples of individuals parroting the language and propaganda fed them by the military, state, and media. The United States seemed to have been infected by a war psychosis, which made ordinary people raving militarists and fanatic patriots. How did this happen?

Yellow Ribbons and the Culture of Fear

Part of the reason that the public supported the Gulf war was that television coverage of the war helped produce a cumulative mass hysteria and frightened people into submission to military discourse and propaganda. Massive and oft-repeated network TV coverage of chemical weapons threats, terrorism dangers, Scud missile attacks, the torture of POWs, and environmental crimes helped terrorize people into hating and fearing Hussein and the Iraqis. The delirium resulted in broad public support for whatever policies Bush and the Pentagon carried out and whatever disinformation and propaganda they produced. When people are fearful, they support individuals and groups who promise to assuage their fears and to protect them. The Bush administration and Pentagon attempted to project an image of strong, fatherly men in control and competent to deal with the nefarious threats to the people of the United States. The media reinforced this climate of fear and submission by dramatizing and exaggerating Iraqi evil, by masking U.S. lies and crimes, and by producing positive images of Bush and military officials.

The network news featured frequent reports on the tremendous increase in sales of army surplus war merchandise. Segments showed stockbrokers buying gas masks to take to work because they feared a terrorist attack on the New York subways. Stores all over the country sold out their gas masks after the dramatization of the Scud attacks on Israel and an announcement that President Bush's bodyguards were carrying gas masks at all times. One TV news episode featured a saleswoman who told of how a frantic mother came in the store that day to buy a plastic covering for her child's crib "like they have in Israel." On January 29, NBC featured a woman buying a gas mask, telling how her child had been waking up in terror at night, fearing an attack, and that she is buying a gas mask for the child to comfort her. On February 3, CNN broadcast a segment that showed an Atlanta family buying gas masks and constructing "safe rooms" in their house in case of a terrorist attack.

It is difficult to interpret the degree of fear, and, in particular, fear of terrorism, evident in the American public during the Gulf war. In his analysis of the symbolic culture of violence in the United States, George Gerbner and his colleagues in the Annenberg School of Communication argued for years that the culture of TV violence produced a "mean world" syndrome whereby people who watched heavy doses of TV violence were highly fearful and tended to submit to conservative leaders who claimed to alleviate their fear (Gerbner and Gross 1976). During the crisis in the Gulf, Gerbner and his associates (1992) did research that indicated that the amount of violence in film culture was accelerating significantly; the number of episodes of violence in sequels to popular films like Robocop, Die Hard, and Young Guns doubled or tripled in comparison to the original, showing that a culture nurtured on violence needed ever heavier doses to get their fix. Such heavy doses of violence from popular culture, however, created dispositions toward fear that led the public to seek refuge in authoritarian leaders like George Bush or General Schwarzkopf.

Psychohistorian William K. Joseph (1991) suggested that the coming of the war was forecast by Home Alone, one of the most popular movies of 1990. This movie depicted a prosperous, self-indulgent group. The hero of the story was treated quite poorly in early life by his parents and family. Finding himself at the crossroads of collapse or going into battle, he chooses to go to war against the most heinous

of characters, an evil and ugly child tormentor who will stop at nothing to defeat his enemy.

The scenes of battle are vivid and violent and the weapons are used in brilliant strategic fashion. Finally the foe is defeated because the hero was wise enough to create a most unlikely alliance. The jubilation and celebration at the end of the movie was indeed moving and the euphoria of the hero's supporters was unbounded (pp. 32-33).

In addition, two of the most popular movies during the Gulf war were psychological thrillers (Sleeping with the Enemy and Silence of the Lamb), which featured threats to innocent people from psychotic killers. Both mobilized the public to desire the destruction of evil threats and legitimated violence to destroy that evil. Both radiated fear and paranoia, supplementing TV coverage of threats to the public from the evil Iraqis and helping to permeate the culture with fear. In particular, TV promoted a culture of fear by presenting nightly episodes warning about the threats of Iraqi chemical weapons, terrorism, and destruction while popular culture featured a symbolic environment of terror and destruction. The country seemed to go into a war hysteria where they simply accepted whatever lies and propaganda they were fed by the Bush administration and Pentagon, submitting their rationality and humanity to the symbolic fathers who promised to take care of them.

The war hysteria in the United States produced an infantilization of U.S. society, which was especially evident in the fetishism of yellow ribbons and the prowar demonstrations. Yellow ribbons had been broadly displayed during the Iranian hostage crisis in which U.S. hostages were held in the late 1970s by militant Iranians. The yellow ribbons go back to the Civil War and Indian wars in which the families of soldiers displayed yellow ribbons when their loved ones were away at war and held in captivity (recall John Ford's John Wayne vehicle She Wore a Yellow Ribbon and the popular song "Tie a Yellow Ribbon 'Round the Old Oak Tree." The ribbons reappeared when U.S. citizens were held captive by the Iraqis in Iraq and Kuwait during the crisis in the Gulf.

The yellow ribbon symbolism in the Gulf war combined the hostage and soldiers-in-harm's-way connotation, with a popular discourse portraying the U.S. troops as the hostages of "Sad-dam In-sane." Curiously, the symbolism of the ribbons was transferred from hostages to soldiers; initially, the ribbons were displayed to commemorate the situation of the hostages but were soon transferred to the soldiers. This symbolic transference suggested that the U.S. troops in Saudi Arabia were hostages, held against their will in the desert because of the presence of an evil which had to be surgically removed (actually the troops and the entire world were the hostages of the respective Iraqi and U.S. political and military establishments which produced the war). The symbolism implied that innocent Americans abroad were victims of foreign aggression and linked the soldiers with their supporters on the domestic front.

Displaying yellow ribbons provided talismans, good luck charms, and signs of social conformity all at once. It enlisted those who displayed yellow ribbons in the war effort, making them part of the adventure. Drawing on mythological resonances, tying ribbons to trees connected culture with nature, naturalizing the solidarity and community of Gulf war supporters. The ribbons symbolically tied together the community into a unified whole, bound together by its support for the troops.⁶ The ribbons thus signified that one supported the troops, that one was a loyal member of the patriotic community, that one was a team player, and a good American. They also signified, however, that one was ready to give up one's faculties of critical thought and to submit to whatever policies and adventures the Bush administration

might attempt.

Indeed, the sight of yellow ribbons mesmerized the media, scared Congress, and demoralized antiwar protestors. Yellow ribbons appeared everywhere in some neighborhoods and regions of the country and some individuals who refused to put yellow ribbons on their homes were threatened by their neighbors. This mode of forced conformity reveals a quasi-fascist hysteria unleashed by the Gulf war and a disturbing massification of the public.

Dehumanization, Racism, and Violence

The Gulf war involved a massive dehumanization process both on the home front and the battle front. Supporters of the war at home became parts of human flags, crowds mindlessly chanting "U.S.A!, U.S.A!," and uncritical conduits of the lies and propaganda disseminated by the government and media. Many troops in the Gulf dehumanized their Iraqi "enemy" and took pleasure in killing. A-10 pilot Captain Eric Salomonson stated: "I'm proud to have dropped some bombs on these guys. We could hardly wipe the smiles off our faces. We fired off more live ammunition than I ever have. It was great." Pilots flying over groups of Iraqi troops reported that they "ran like ants" when the bombs were dropped on them, while Susan Sachs of Newsday reported that Col. Dick "Snake" White stated: "It's like someone turned on the kitchen light on late at night, and the cockroaches started scurrying. We finally got them out where we can find them and kill them" (Feb. 1, 1991, p. 4). (See the discussion of the "Turkey Shoot" during the ground war in Chapter 9 for more examples of the dehumanization of the Iraqis by the U.S. troops in the Gulf.)

Military socialization and a thoroughly brutal process of military training had obviously produced "a bloody good bunch of killers" (as Gen. George Patton III put it in Vietnam) ready to slaughter Iraqis in the desert sands. In the hangar at one U.S. airfield there was a giant banner of a U.S. "Superman" holding a limp and terrified Arab with a big hooked nose in his arms. As units passed through the U.S. air base in Torrejon, Spain, on their way to the Gulf, they left their calling cards on the wall that read:

Door Gunners from Hell:
If it walks, it crawls, it dies.
QB Company, 2nd Battalion, 502 Infantry

Or:

If you kill for fun, you're a sadist.
If you kill for money, you're a mercenary.
If you kill for both, you're a paratrooper.
Q3rd Battalion, 505 Airborne Regiment.

Marine reservist Erik Larsen, who joined the antiwar movement and was court-martialed for refusing to go to the Gulf, told of chants sung in boot camps:

Rape the town and kill the people.
That's the thing we love to do.
Throw some napalm on the school house

Watch the kiddies scream and shout.
Rape the town and kill the people
That's the only thing to do.⁷

CNN featured a segment from Fort Benning, Georgia, at the beginning of the Gulf crisis where troops chanted "one, two, three, four, Kill Hussein!" in their training exercises. There were also many examples of protofascist behavior among the U.S. population during the Gulf war. An Italian basketball player at Seton Hall University was thrown off the team when he refused to wear a U.S. flag on his uniform and eventually returned to Italy after harassment by "patriots." After Prof. Barbara Scott, at a campus rally at the State University of New York, New Paltz, urged U.S. military personnel not to kill innocent people, she was dubbed "Baghdad Barbara," was accused of treason by a state senator, was subjected to hate mail and a letter campaign aimed at the university president and Governor Mario Cuomo, urging them to fire her. In Kutztown Pennsylvania, a newspaper editor was fired for his editorial titled "How about a little peace?" and an editor was fired from a Round Rock, Texas paper for publishing an interview with a Palestinian-American expressing antiwar views.⁸

Arab-Americans were victims of government harassment and intimidation since the beginning of the crisis. Neal Saad described how Arab-Americans were visited by the FBI in their homes, places of business, and neighborhoods and were questioned concerning attitudes to U.S. policy in the Middle East, the PLO, Arab-American political activities, and terrorism (in Clark et al. 1992, pp. 188ff.). During the war harassment intensified and Pan American Airlines actually decided not to allow Arab passengers on their planes! Identifying ethnic members of a country with "the enemy" itself promotes oppression of minorities who belong to these groups. This identification happened in World War II with Japanese-Americans who were interned in concentration camps and began in the crisis in the Gulf with FBI investigations of Arab-Americans. The result was a resurgence of racism against Arabs and acts of violence against them.

Anti-Arab racism proliferated within U.S. popular culture. For years, Arabs had regularly been villainized in Hollywood films and American television entertainment (see Kellner and Ryan 1988), and during the Gulf war anti-Arab sentiments were mobilized against Iraqis. The words "Bomb Iraq" were superimposed on the lyrics of the Beach Boy song "Barbara Ann." A radio show in Georgia proclaimed, "towelhead weekend," telling callers to phone-in when they heard the traditional Islamic call to prayer; a disk jockey in Toledo, Ohio solicited funds from listeners to buy a ticket to Iraq for an Iraqi-American professor who was critical of the war. Jennie Anderson wrote: "In the United States, anti-Arab propaganda is a hot commercial item. A widely disseminated T-shirt pictures a U.S. Marine pointing a rifle at an Arab on the ground, with the caption, HOW MUCH IS OIL NOW? Another briskly selling T-shirt shows military planes attacking an Arab on a camel, with the caption, I'D FLY 10,000 MILES TO SMOKE A CAMEL," (*The Progressive*, Feb. 1991, pp. 28-29). Another T-Shirt read: "JOIN THE ARMY, SEE INTERESTING PLACES, MEET NEW PEOPLE, AND KILL THEM."

In addition, there was much violence against Arab-Americans in the United States during the Gulf war.⁹ Even before the war began, businesses owned by Arab-Americans were bombed, an Arab-American businessman was beaten by a white supremacist mob in Toledo, a Palestinian family riding in a car was shot at in Kansas City, and an Arab-American who appeared on a Pennsylvania television program received seven death threats. Later, Edward Said and other Arab-American activists received death threats, and during the Gulf war itself violence against Arab-Americans accelerated. The United States had

demonized Arabs for years in the figures of the Ayatollah Khomeini (actually, a Persian and not an Arab), Yasar Arafat, Muammar Qadhafi, and the images of the Arab terrorist. The demonization of Saddam Hussein and the Iraqis heated up racist passions that exploded into violence against Arab-Americans.

Racism and dehumanizing national peoples or ethnic groups promotes violence at home and abroad. Dehumanizing individuals or groups makes them legitimate targets for violence and thus encourages and justifies social violence. One of the pernicious effects of war is that it accelerates racial violence. In order to kill members of another country or race, one must perceive them to be worthy of death and thus there is a tendency to perceive one's opponent as less than human. Schwarzkopf was constantly dehumanizing the Iraqis, indicating in a briefing at the end of the ground war that he would not want to belong to the same race as those Iraqis who had committed atrocities in Kuwait (see 9.3). Yet Schwarzkopf's own troops were at the moment he spoke slaughtering Iraqis in one of the great bloodbaths of history and from this episode one sees that one of the functions of the dehumanization of the "enemy" is to legitimate violent and destructive actions.

Wars also divide countries between those who do and do not support the official war policies and the Gulf war produced incredible division and conflict in the country. It polarized individuals into pro- and antiwar groups, it alienated people from those who did not share their views, it ruptured families, friendships, and the vestiges of communities that have survived the onslaught of television and the consumer society. Although TV portrayed the division clearly in the case of Arcata, California, a town torn between pro and antiwar citizens (i.e., on a CBS news segment on January 24 and an NBC segment on February 3), one rarely saw the genuine divisions in the country over the Gulf war, or the antiwar voices as the war ground on. Most of the people that I spoke to, ranging from my neighbors and colleagues to students, were against the war and we had well-attended teach-ins every day at the University of Texas, so there was certainly an invisible antiwar public in the United States. In the months after the war, I talked to many people who said that in their travels and work in rural Kentucky, south Texas, Michigan, and other parts of the country there was significant opposition to the war—much more than the polls and media let on.¹⁰ Before the war began, polls and media discourse revealed a divided nation and, as we shall see in the next section, one could see the divisions at the beginning of the war, but they became invisible in the media discourse and images as the war proceeded.

6.2 Demonstrations and Propaganda Campaigns

During the Gulf war individuals were not merely passive spectators of the media war, but there were active pro and antiwar demonstrations and organizing. There was a large antiwar movement in place before the war even began and many prowar groups became active as the war went on. In the next two subsections I shall explore how TV presented the antiwar movement and then discuss some of the ways that prowar groups, the media, and Bush administration mobilized support for the war.

The Antiwar Movement and TV Bias

Contrary to the opinion of many in the antiwar movement, during the first ten days of the war, television provided fairly extensive and not completely unsympathetic coverage of the antiwar movement. However, the protest movement soon disappeared from the media spotlight, which instead lavished attention on prowar demonstrations for the duration of the war. During the opening night of the war there were frequent reports on antiwar demonstrations in California, New York, and other parts of the country

ranging from Iowa to Texas. In fact, there had been a large antiwar movement active from the beginning of the crisis in the Gulf that the media suddenly discovered in December as Congress held hearings on the war and a fierce debate broke out concerning whether force or negotiations should be used to get Iraq out of Kuwait. As noted earlier, the country had been genuinely divided, and the networks began to feature stories on the rapidly growing antiwar movement, mainly in vignettes dealing with individuals involved in the movement.

On January 15 and 16, as the deadline for Iraq to leave Kuwait approached and passed, significant coverage of the antiwar movement appeared on television. Both national and local news prominently featured stories on candlelight vigils in which large groups of individuals prayed for peace. During the first days of the war, frequent presentations of antiwar demonstrations throughout the country appeared on television, showing antiwar demonstrators in San Francisco blocking the Golden Gate bridge, high school students in Iowa and California carrying out lively demonstrations, demonstrators in Seattle taking over the state capital building, 4,000 occupying the Texas state capital in Austin, and antiwar demonstrations all over the country.

On the first weekend of the war, January 19-20, the big demonstrations in Washington, D.C., and San Francisco, in which around 100,000 people marched in opposition to Bush's war, were covered on TV.¹¹ On Sunday, January 20, CBS's "Sunday Morning" program featured a sympathetic segment on opposition to the war in Durham, N.C. and the local stations in Austin, Texas, presented detailed coverage of the weekend's antiwar activity. There was coverage by the networks of a sit-in at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) and civil disobedience in Boston. For the next week as well, there was coverage of antiwar demonstrations, with the major TV networks also providing coverage of the antiwar movement which was national in scope.

On CNN, Ann McDermott narrated a segment on January 23 that showed that antiwar protests were more organized and diverse than in past wars. Pointing out the differences between the protests in the Vietnam era, the CNN reporter noted that protests in the earlier era were motivated by a feeling of deep alienation from the system, but the current demonstrations were often organized by people strongly integrated into the system. Many protesters had been involved in other issues and a diverse range of groups and types of activities were visible, ranging from high school and college students organizing demonstrations, to lobbying efforts, involvement in peace campaigns, education efforts like teach-ins, and prayer vigils. The segment indicated that there was much rational criticism of Bush administration policies in the movement, a worry about violence on both sides, an insistence that antiwar activity was patriotic and supportive of the troops. Indeed, antiwar demonstrators claimed that if one really supported the troops, one should work to bring them home safely.

The message of the antiwar movement was thus, McDermott concluded, the same as during Vietnam: Stop the war. Many TV reports stressed similarities with the earlier 1960s' antiwar movement such as a CBS segment featuring signs reminiscent of Vietnam: "Bring the troops home," "Peace Now," "U.S. Out of Iraq," and "Hell no, we won't go, we won't kill for Texaco!," though one demonstrator carried a sign more appropriate to the TV war currently underway: "Violence begins at breakfast." On January 25, "CBS This Morning" had an excellent segment on organized local and national efforts to stop the war. Roger Newell, representing the National Committee for Peace in the Middle East, stated that, "the American people want an end to the conflict," and he stressed that the goal of the movement was to bring the troops home safely. The organization sought to end the military conflict in the Middle East, to reshape

national priorities, and to rectify the devastation caused "by the militarization of the economy" by the Reagan and Bush administrations. Actress Margot Kidder called for a ceasefire now "before the boys in the desert will be getting killed." She was working with the Friendship for Reconciliation, a religious pacifist group, and stressed that the victims in Iraq are children, innocent civilians, and refugees. A physician who was called up with the military reserves, Yolanda Huet-Vaughn, refused to go to Saudi Arabia, went AWOL, and joined the antiwar movement. She claimed that the coalition forces were dropping the "equivalent of a Hiroshima a day on Iraq." Citing German sources who estimated that there would be from 100,000 to 300,000 civilian Iraqi casualties, she warned that an environmental catastrophe in the region could take thousands more lives. Huet-Vaughn declared that she had trained as a physician to save lives and would not now serve in an effort that was so wantonly destroying lives.

CBS also featured a segment on military recruiters in high schools who got a mixed response to efforts at recruitment; high school antiwar activists told that they resented the presence of military recruiters on their campus. The report indicated that several big cities had rules against giving out addresses of high school students and had banned military recruiters from high school. Earlier, NBC covered the banning of military recruiters from high schools in Oakland and a debate over whether this violated free speech of the military.

On January 26, CNN had a segment on the image problem of the antiwar movement, which was often perceived as unshaven, countercultural, and violent. Roger Newell argued against this perception by claiming that the mainstream was directly involved in the current peace movement, which included the National Council of Bishops, the National Council of Churches, and many religious organizations. The movement also had very diverse demographics, he claimed, drawing supporters from groups ranging from students, blacks, gays, pacifists, unions, women, and so on. The movement rejected the idea that public protest is unpatriotic, though, as author Jim Miller noted, its participants had gone beyond unquestioning acceptance of what the government said was a rationale for a war. A black woman pointed out the irony that although there seemed to be billions of dollars to fight a war, there was no money for child care, health care, shelter for the homeless, or job training for the unemployed.

Yet a FAIR "Gulf War Sources Survey" of television coverage of the war from January 17-January 30, 1991, found that only 1.5 percent of the network TV sources were identified as U.S. antiwar protesters—about the same percentage of people asked to comment on how the war had affected their travel plans; only one leader of a peace organization was quoted in the broadcasts surveyed, while, by contrast, seven Super Bowl players were asked their opinions on the war; about half of the sources were connected to either U.S. or allied governments; and few intellectuals and professionals associated with the antiwar movement appeared while retired military personnel were most frequently used by the networks as "experts" (FAIR Press Release, Feb. 26, 1991).

There was a tremendous amount of coverage, invariably prowar, of the military families coping with war. These segments bonded the country to the troops and their families, serving as propaganda devices for military views because often the families appearing on television were coached by the military, told what to say—and what they were not to say. In addition, "person in the street" interviews and segments on communities dealing with the war became increasingly prowar. CNN had several units traveling around the country, sampling public opinion, and the reports were overwhelmingly prowar. With the exception of some examples discussed above, there were few segments dealing with people organizing and struggling against the war, and TV reinforced the prowar public-opinion consensus by making it

appearing unpatriotic to be against the war as they increasingly promoted the new patriotism.

Furthermore, the mainstream media ignored completely the theme of resistance against the war within the military. Yolanda Heut-Vaughn was able to surface on some TV programs when she went AWOL for refusing to accept her military reserve orders, and a clip of her being arrested and taken to prison for her resistance was briefly shown. During the crisis in the Gulf, there were some reports on Marine reservist Erik Larsen, who refused his orders and was an active participant in the antiwar movement, but there was little or nothing on the many other cases of troops who refused orders to fight in the Gulf. In both the United States and Germany many soldiers went AWOL when they got their Gulf orders.¹² Nor has there been TV coverage of their later trials and, in some cases, prison sentences for their resistance to the war. Yet, in retrospect, it was precisely these resisters who were the true heroes of the Gulf war, many of whom are now languishing in prison.

Nonetheless, throughout the country, antiwar demonstrations continued to unfold, despite the media attacks and the more positive coverage of prowar demonstrations. Divisions in the country became less and less visible, however, for network television gave less and less coverage to opposition to the war, and one heard almost no antiwar voices in the mainstream media as the war went on. What little one saw of the antiwar demonstrations was reduced to quick images of crowds without any discourse and there was hardly anything on the growing European or Third World antiwar movements and demonstrations. One got a quick glance at 200,000 German antiwar demonstrators in Bonn; brief images of large demonstrations in Britain, Italy, and Spain; and snippets of images of hundreds of thousands of Arabs demonstrating in Algeria, Libya, Morocco, Jordan, and other Arab, Moslem, and Third World countries as well.

TV's increasingly prowar stance and its exclusion of legitimate antiwar discourses was primarily, I believe, because commercial television is fundamentally a money machine. At the start of the war, the television machines envisaged that their audience was split and tried to portray both sides of the issue, in part to avoid alienating segments of their audiences and thus suffer declining ratings and advertising rates. As the public opinion polls showed increasing support for Bush and his war policies, and as conservative prowar fanatics began attacking the antiwar demonstrators and the media that broadcast their message, the amount of coverage given to the antiwar movement steadily declined while prowar demonstrations, however small, repetitive, and mindless, got good coverage. This is not, I would submit, because the television networks were intrinsically prowar, but because their lust for ratings and profits dictated that they follow popular opinion, which increasingly supported the war. Thus, the occasional antiwar voice heard during the first two weeks of the war was excluded from the mainstream media which turned to publicize the new patriotism, love of the flag and prowar demonstrations.

Patriotism, the Flag and Football

Eventually, U.S. Vice-President Dan Quayle assumed former Vice-President Spiro Agnew's role during the Vietnam era and attacked protesters and the media. Speaking to a military crowd in Texas on January 25, Quayle began attacking the antiwar demonstrations where: "some American flags were burned." En masse, the crowd booed as the demagogic Quayle continued: "And, unfortunately, the media seemed compelled to devote much more time to these protests than they've deserved." At this lie, the crowd broke into applause and Quayle, who was reportedly able to get out of active duty during Vietnam through his father's political connections, nodded his head. And thus Quayle and the Bush administration

followed the Nazi leader Hermann Göring's advice that "all you have to do is tell people they are being attacked, and denounce the pacifists for lack of patriotism and exposing the country to danger. It works the same in every country."

Indeed, the Bush administration promoted the line that one was either prowar and a good citizen, or antiwar and thus not a good citizen, not a patriotic American. Call-in radio and television shows featured rabid and aggressive attacks on the antiwar demonstrators, and more and more prowar demonstrations and violent opposition to the antiwar demonstrators appeared on television. On January 17 at a basketball game in Missoula, Montana, as antiwar protesters were being dragged off the courts by police, the crowd pelted the protestors with potatoes and began chanting "U.S.A! U.S.A!" In fact, one began seeing prowar demonstrations almost every day on television, with crowds waving the flag and chanting "U.S.A! U.S.A!" Media critic Dan Quayle to the contrary, these usually small demonstrations got increasingly more coverage than the larger antiwar demonstrations. The networks quickly shifted, on cue from the Bush administration, to segments covering the "new patriotism" and love of the flag. News reports featured yellow ribbons and flags with many stories on flag factories where the managers indicated that they could barely keep up with the demand.

Carl Boggs (1991) argued that the intense nationalism, racism, glorification of violence, and militarism evident during the Gulf war was a response to growing powerlessness and insecurity, and was similar to the situation in Nazi Germany analyzed by Erich Fromm in Escape From Freedom (1941). The prowar demonstrations seemed to offer mechanisms through which individuals could escape their powerlessness and overcome (temporarily) their insecurities. The flagwaving and chanting pointed to individuals immersing themselves in masses and exhibiting collectivist, conformist behavior. It appeared that powerless individuals felt themselves part of something greater than themselves when they chanted and waved flags. Human flag phenomena began to appear: in San Diego, 30,000 people appeared in red, white, and blue T-shirts on January 25 to form the world's largest human flag photographed from a blimp and dutifully broadcast by the television networks. On February 2, an even larger human flag was formed in Virginia Beach, Virginia, with 40,000 people chanting "U.S.A!, U.S.A!" as they became one with their country and flag. On February 15, CNN featured a story on the new patriotism in which flags were shown flying en masse throughout the country and TV images linked the flags to portraits of George Bush, accompanied by the 1988 Republican campaign song as background music.

All over the country, whenever there was a prowar demonstration, crowds chanted "U.S.A! U.S.A!" The lack of specific content in the chant in favor of empty patriotism contrasted with the antiwar chants and slogans that always had a specific content--attacking the war, calling for the troops to come home now, or affirming specific values like peace. Yet the masses of prowar demonstrators who chanted "U.S.A!" every time they were given the occasion were not articulating any particular values or reasons for their prowar and pro-America stance. Rather, they were simply immersing themselves in a crowd and expressing primal patriotism, national narcissism, and aggressive threats against anyone who was different. The "USA!" chant expressed thus expressed loyalty to the home team in the Super Bowl championship of contemporary war and bound together the prowar constituency into a national community of those identifying with the U.S. war policy, becoming part of something bigger than themselves through participation.

In addition, the prowar demonstrations seemed to make people feel good through providing experiences of community and empowerment denied them in everyday life. Those who were usually

powerless were able to feel powerful, identifying themselves as part of the nation proudly asserting itself in the war. Losers in everyday life the prowar demonstrators could experience themselves as part of the winning team in the Gulf war. Participating in the prowar rituals thus gave individuals new and attractive identities that gave them a renewed sense of participation in a great national adventure. Like sports events and rock concerts, the prowar demonstrations thus provided the participants with at least a fleeting sense of community, denied them in the privatized temples of consumption, serialized media watching, and isolated "life styles." For almost 100 years, sociologists have studied crowd behavior and analyzed the mechanisms through which individuals dissolve themselves in mass behavior. During the Gulf war the phenomenon of individuals immersing themselves in mass behavior was a daily feature of the TV war. Usually, American community in the Age of the Media is a simulated TV community, whereby one becomes one with the others by watching the same images and participating in the same ritualized experience of events like the Super Bowl or Gulf war. Yet one could participate in the ritual of the Gulf war more fully by leaving one's home and joining into prowar demonstrations, in which one could become more vitally integrated into the patriotic community.

The flag-waving and chanting also provided a new form of participatory experience that enabled individuals to be part of an aesthetic spectacle. The prowar flag wavers and chanters had been immersed for years in the aesthetic of consumer culture: viewing seductive commodities in advertisements; fascinated by images of luxury, eroticism, and power in the images of popular entertainment; tempted by the dazzling display of the commodity world in malls and stores; and gratified by whatever items they could afford to buy in their everyday lives (i.e., cars, clothes, electronics, etc.). The Gulf war was packaged as an aesthetic spectacle, with CNN utilizing powerful drum music to introduce their news segments, superimposing images of the U.S. flag over American troops, and employing up-beat martial music between breaks. The audience was thus invited to participate in a dazzling war spectacle by its media presentation.

But prowar demonstrators were able to overcome the usual privatization and passivity of TV culture by more actively participating in the public celebrations of the war. Many individuals of the TV war audience were normally isolated, disempowered, and able to feel that they belonged in the consumer society only if they could afford to buy the icons and totems of social prestige. A prowar demonstration and flag waving, however, is a cheap thrill, offering anyone the opportunity to become part of an aesthetic spectacle of flag waving, rousing music, and enthusiastic chanting. Although individuals at home watching television are passive and isolated, in prowar demonstrations the participants were active and socially bonded.

Indeed, the prowar constituency rooted for the U.S. team as if it were a sports event and from the beginning there was a close relation between war and football. During a break in a nationally televised football bowl game from El Paso shown on New Years eve, an announcer greeted U.S. soldiers in the stands who were there courtesy of The John Hancock insurance company. Then, as Haynes Johnson put it, "while the cameras panned rows of cheering, waving soldiers, the sportscaster pointed to a mural painted across the stadium wall. Depicted was an eagle swooping down on prey. Helpful as ever, while the cameras slowly played across the mural, the sportscaster read aloud the message spelled out there: 'Go Desert Shield, Beat Iraq'" (Washington Post, Jan. 4, 1991, p. A2).

During the Super Bowl weekend of January 25-26 patriotism, flag waving, and support for the war were encouraged by Bush and the media. Bush insisted that the Super Bowl game not be postponed and

urged the nation at his Friday, January 24, news briefing to enjoy the game during the weekend. The ubiquitous television reports documented the unprecedented security at the Super Bowl, with almost 2,000 security personnel checking each spectator with metal detectors. Radios, TV sets, purses, and other items were not allowed, and spectators had to wait in line for hours to submit to the searches and gain entrance to the game. Television also reported on the brisk selling of Operation Desert Storm T-shirts, pins, hats, and other memorabilia, and especially flags, which were the best sellers of the day. The "Star Spangled Banner" was dedicated to the "half million fans in the Gulf," identifying troops with fans, war with football. Footage shown that evening confirmed the identification, showing troops in the desert staying up all night to watch the football game (it was amazing that Iraq failed to fire any Scuds that day or even to begin the ground war, which would have caught the sleepy fans in the Gulf off guard).

The football fans at home, in turn, were rooting for the troops while watching the game. One sign said: "Slime Saddam" and a barely verbal fan told the TV cameras that "he's messin' with the wrong people," while fan after fan affirmed his or her support for the troops. One of the teams wore yellow ribbons on their uniforms and the football stars went out of their way to affirm support for the troops and/or the war. Halftime featured mindless patriotic gore, with a young, blonde Aryan boy singing to the troops "you're my heroes," while fans waved flags, formed a human flag and chanted "U.S.A! U.S.A!", reminding one of the fascist spectacles programmed by the Nazis to bind the nation into a patriotic community.

Also during the halftime, a videotaped speech by George Bush was broadcast dedicated to the men and women in the Gulf, with Barbara Bush standing next to him, beaming at her husband, and helping project a strong family image--the ultimate photo opportunity for a politician. Bush's message was that the families of the troops were the true heroes, aiming a lowest common-denominator-discourse at the narcissism of the families suffering from the loss of those currently serving in the Gulf. Yet it was simply demagogic to claim that the families at home were the heroes rather than those troops in the Gulf inhaling chemicals from the bombing of chemical plants,¹³ sleeping with scorpions and deadly insects in the cold desert, ploughing through mud without the possibility of a shower for weeks on end, eating cold packaged food, and suffering god knows what fears as they were getting ready for the bloody ground war.

During the Super Bowl week, there were frequent discussions of the connections between war and football, patriotism and sports in the American imagination. Both activities involve team work, coordination, and game plans, and both activities are highly competitive and violent. In both, squadrons of helmeted men seek to gain territory and try to drive their enemy back, while throwing balls, bombs, or bullets downfield. Both stress the values of discipline, training, team work, hitting the opposition hard, and, above all, winning. On December 19, Lt. Gen. Calvin Waller told the press, "I'm like a football coach. I want everything I can possibly get and have at my side of the field when I get ready to go into the Super Bowl" (United Press International (UPI), Dec. 20, 1990). On a news segment on the CBS morning show on January 25, a sports fan stated that he liked Buffalo in the bowl because "it's an impressive unit with powerful weapons." A U.S. soldier in a January 23 report on CNN said that "Saddam Hussein doesn't have much of a team; in comparison with football he'd be the Cleveland Browns." Army Chief Warrant Officer Ron Moring stated on the eve of the war: "It's time to quit the pregame show. We're a lot more serious about what we're doing. There's a lot more excitement in the air."¹⁴

Football metaphors were also employed in war rhetoric when Bush said that Tariq Aziz gave them a "stiff arm" after the unsuccessful Geneva meeting at the eve of the war. A U.S. pilot returning from the

first night's bombing raid said that "it was just like a football game where the other team didn't show up." Helen Thomas asked Bush in a January 18 press briefing if the Gorbachev peace initiative was perceived as an "end run" [around Bush's desire to start the war]. A Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) Radio headline indicated that the Canadian armed forces in the Gulf were given "the green light to tackle the Iraqis." ABC's "Nightline" (Jan. 17, 1991), quoted fliers just back from the first missions of the war, enthusing: "It's just like a football game once you get airborne and you get the jet under you and you start feeling good, then you just start working- working your game plan." Another pilot exclaimed: "It's like being a professional athlete and never playing a game. Today was the first game and the enemy didn't show up, the opponent didn't show up. We went out there and ran our first play and it worked great, scored a touchdown, there was nobody home."

In addition, the military planners talked of making an "end run" around the Iraqi troops massed on the Kuwaiti border. Scud missiles were "intercepted" by Patriots and Col. Ray Davies described the U.S. air team as "like the Dallas Cowboys football team. They weren't a real emotional team. That's exactly what it's like with these pilots out here. They know exactly what they've got to do" (Washington Post, Jan. 19, p. C1). Furthermore, the audience processed the Gulf war as a football game. A Jesuit professor wrote in the National Catholic Reporter that, "A resident adviser in one of our college dorms tells me his students watched the CNN live war and cheered and took bets as if they were watching a football game. Small wonder. A sports mind-set has revved us up for the war. Some weeks ago, TV's most disconcerting image was of Defense Secretary Dick Cheney whipping the cheering troops into a fighting frenzy as if he were a coach at halftime in a locker room" (Feb. 1, 1991, p. 1). And so did the Gulf war become a game in which the U.S. emerged victorious in the Super Bowl of wars.

Bush's Propaganda Offensive

During the week beginning on Monday, January 28, the Bush administration mobilized the theme of patriotism as its major propaganda line in the war effort. It was a carefully orchestrated effort in which every day Bush carried out a propaganda offensive to generate patriotism and solidify support for the war. Analysis of this campaign reveals how Bush used patriotism, religion, and moral rhetoric to mobilize support for his war policies.

On Monday, Bush addressed a convention of religious broadcasters and presented his "just war" speech. In his State of the Union address on Tuesday, Bush mobilized patriotic rhetoric in support of Operation Desert Storm and insisted that the United States is the beacon of freedom and democracy, that U.S. leadership in the world is indispensable, that "the hopes of humanity turn to us.... We are Americans." Continuing the moral rhetoric of the week, Bush concluded: "Our cause is just. Our cause is moral. Our cause is right." On Wednesday, Bush spoke briefly at a congressional ceremony honoring Franklin Roosevelt and said that Roosevelt's "four freedoms" (of expression, of worship, from want, and from fear) were the moral beacons and guideposts of U.S. policy to this day and that the Gulf war was an exercise in "the work of freedom." Bush was camouflaging the fact that the Gulf war limited the freedom of expression of the press and military families more than any event in recent U.S. history, that the troops in Saudi Arabia could not practice freedom of religion because of the feudal customs of the Saudis, and that his war was producing want and fear throughout the Middle East.

On Thursday, Bush addressed another convention of religious broadcasters and uttered some banalities about war, God, and prayer.¹⁵ On Friday, Bush took trips to three military bases in the South to

generate images of flag-waving gung-ho, prowar support. Bush got carried away, however, at Fort Stewart, Georgia, and blurted out: "The U.S. has a new credibility. What we say now—goes!" The crowd went wild in response to Bush's chauvinistic imperialism, pointing again to disturbing tendencies afoot in the land of the free and the home of the brave. At all three of his stops that day, all televised live, military wives and relatives of POWs were present to serve as part of the propaganda offensive. The morning talk shows cut live to Bush's speeches at the bases, inundating the nation with images of flag-waving supporters of Bush and the war. On his Saturday radio broadcast, Bush declared that Sunday would be a day of prayer. During news segments on both Saturday and Sunday, there were clips of Bush's speeches, trips, radio broadcast, and pronouncements throughout the week. Thus the Bush war team could legitimately conclude that they had conducted a successful propaganda campaign for a country at war.

To complement Bush's patriotic offensive, during the weekend of February 2-3, prowar demonstrations throughout the country featured the usual flag waving, chanting of "U.S.A!, U.S.A!," burning of effigies of Saddam Hussein, and unleashing aggression against the "evil" Iraqi "enemies." Television featured images of "the largest flag ever made," in which a Virginia Beach crowd formed a human flag the size of a football field, enabling those participating to become part of something bigger than themselves, part of the flag itself. The flag seemed to be becoming a totemic security blanket that gave the waver a sense of magical power, and waving the flag empowered individuals, signifying their belonging to a community. Perhaps the flag also served as a phallic fetish that gave the holder a sense of phallic power and libidinal gratification, as well as aesthetic gratification, enabling flag wavers to become part of a dazzling mass spectacle. Or perhaps flag waving and exhibition was simply a duty that good patriotic citizens performed because they were told to do so.

In any case, during the weekend of February 2-3, television broadcast clips from demonstration after demonstration of support for the troops in the Persian Gulf, providing images of a massive mobilization of civilian support, embodied in outbursts of patriotic fervor throughout the country. The antiwar movement seemed to have disappeared and the country seemed to be experiencing a simultaneous wargasm of patriotic ecstasy. CNN, for instance, had a camera crew in Fayetteville, Georgia, where most of the people in the town turned out for a demonstration in which people waved flags and cheered and chanted. In this bucolic invocation of small-town America, blacks and whites came together in patriotic enthusiasm and a chubby young boy told the crowd and the television camera why the United States was in the Persian Gulf, ending his canned speech by exclaiming, with genuine passion, "and we're going to kick some butt!" The crowd roared.

Obviously, war is the most time-honored mode of organized aggression yet devised for the channeling of aggressive energies. The spectacle of a small child wanting his country to "kick butt" raises some interesting questions about the mode of socialization and culture in the United States and the ways that war brutalizes individuals. The young boy had perhaps been raised on Rambo movies and other action adventure spectacles, on football and other sports, and had been socialized into a male culture of aggressivity in which being tough and "kicking butt" are part of the social construction of masculinity, of "being a man." We have observed the role of football metaphors in the Gulf war, and one often hears admonitions to "kick butt" from school gym teachers and athletic coaches. Kicking butt is part of military socialization as well, and the media popularized and naturalized the phrase during the Gulf war.

In regard to the Persian Gulf war, none other than the war leader himself, George Bush, bragged that the U.S. was going to "kick ass" and this noble sentiment was also enshrined in a piece of video in

which General Schwarzkopf bragged how his troops were going to "kick Iraqi butt."¹⁶ TV showed image after image of soldiers on the front bragging about how they were going to kick butt, while frenzied and aggressive individuals at prowar demonstrations told the TV people over and over how the U.S. was going to kick Iraqi butt. So the little Georgia butt kicker is just emulating his president, the commander of the multinational coalition, his coaches, TV, and his peer group in wanting to unleash aggressive energies against a foreign "enemy." He was not alone. Throughout the week, television portrayed young children carrying signs at Bush's visits to military bases that celebrated the victory of Patriot over Scud missiles and that threatened Hussein and the Iraqis. One could envisage little warriors sitting in front of the TV cheering every time a Patriot hits a Scud and every time the daily kill rate was announced for Iraqi planes, tanks, and artillery.

The Persian Gulf TV war thus militarized U.S. culture and throughout the United States, the media, schools, churches, circuses, athletic events, and businesses sold patriotism and mobilized support for an aggressive war. The patriotic propaganda war channeled positive sentiments into flag country, and the military, while mobilizing negative emotions against the enemy and, especially, Saddam Hussein. This highly dangerous propaganda strategy raised emotions to a fever pitch and helped promote violence against Arab-Americans while legitimating U.S. violence against the Iraqis.

This analysis of Bush's patriotic propaganda campaign helps explain why his rationales for U.S. involvement in the gulf were so weak and vacillating concerning the reasons that the U.S. was fighting a brutal war far from home with an enemy that was, for the most part, totally unknown to the American people (see Figure 6.2). Bush really had no politically justifiable reasons why the U.S. should fight a Persian Gulf war, so he fell back on blind patriotism and flag-waving. In his State of the Union address, the key rhetorical point was: "We are Americans and this is what we do." By extension, if one supports the war one is patriotic and a good American, while if one does not support the war one is not a good American. It was as simple as this and this simplistic binary logic of either/or was the crux of Bush's propaganda campaign. However, the test of all propaganda is purely pragmatic--does it work?, and it appeared that Bush's propaganda, however primitive, was working in mobilizing support for his war policies.

6.3 Iraq Under Bombardment

For the first week of the Gulf war, the war itself was invisible, with the exception of the Scud wars that were a nightly drama for some time before they became routine fare. The daily bombing and skirmishes between ground and naval forces were reduced to bland statistics at the daily military hearings or headlines in news briefs. The video footage of the bombing provided excellent photo opportunities for the military to demonstrate the wonders of technowar, and the U.S. pool footage, properly seen as military propaganda footage, provided banal images of planes taking off, ground crews engaged in daily labor, ground troops moving to the front preparing for land war, and interview footage with the troops usually saying something patriotic or bellicose.

Only into the second week of the war did the audience begin to see the reality behind the statistics of the coalition bombing campaign in the form of video footage of victims of the air war. During the morning of January 25, "NBC Today" opened its news segments with the headlines that it had been a busy night for the allied forces in the Gulf, which had taken advantage of the clear weather to fly 3,000 sorties, the most of the war. NBC also reported that Iraq was claiming that the allies were bombing civilian

areas, "a charge that U.S. military authorities firmly deny." Orchestrating a new propaganda theme, the Iraqis began to document daily U.S. bombing of innocent civilians and the destruction of homes, neighborhoods, religious, cultural, and other nonmilitary sites. Iraq intensified its dramatization of the horrors of war by releasing videotapes of civilian destruction by U.S. bombing. This theme became the emphasis of Peter Arnett's CNN reports out of Baghdad.

Arnett, a New Zealander who had won a Pulitzer prize for his Vietnam reporting and who was generally respected as one of the world's greatest war correspondents, was the only major Western broadcast journalist left in Iraq after it expelled the press during the first week of the war. For some time thereafter, until Iraq began allowing foreign journalists to reenter, Arnett was the only Western voice in Baghdad. His descriptive and evocative reporting, subject to Iraqi censorship, became the center of a firestorm of controversy, drawing attack from the prowar coterie in the United States and elsewhere.

On January 25, at 10:01 a.m. Arnett reported on CNN that on his first trip outside of Baghdad, he had been taken one hundred miles to a residential area in al-Dour, a small town in northwest Iraq where heavy damage was caused by extensive bombing by the multinational forces. A technical institute five miles from the town had been bombed previously, Arnett was told. The southwest part of the town was hit hardest; homes there "were flattened as though shaken by a mighty earthquake." Arnett counted twenty-three homes destroyed and twenty-three bomb craters; Iraqi authorities claimed that twenty-four civilians were killed and one hundred injured in the bombing. A whole family was killed; they had a son who was a student in the local university and Arnett found a tattered copy of Thackeray's Vanity Fair in the house in English, inscribed by his teacher. There was no bomb shelter because the townspeople didn't believe that they were in danger of being attacked. A weeping woman said that her three brothers and many other members of her family had died. She said that there were no reasons to bomb the city because there were no military targets in the area. Arnett saw twenty-four recent graves in the cemetery.

When asked to respond to criticisms that his reports were aiding the Iraqis, Arnett answered that "viewers will have to get used to reports of this nature.... You can't unload this many tons of bombs on a country and not expect to get casualties." Arnett then recalled that during the Vietnam war, New York Times correspondent Harrison Salisbury was taken to Hanoi in 1966 when the U.S. military was claiming pinpoint precision bombing, and he reported on civilian casualties. Salisbury was taken to places bombed, reported what he saw, and was widely criticized. Arnett explained that with such a massive bombing assault, there is bound to be "fallout on civilians."

Arnett concluded that "[t]here has been heavy bombing of this little community," documented by video that was shown later in the day by CNN and which portrayed Arnett and other reporters observing the damaged buildings and talking to townspeople. In addition, a framed photograph of a child hung from a tree in front of one rubble-strewn lot. When asked if this could have been staged, Arnett replied: "There is no way that this could have been staged; I have seen bomb damage in seventeen wars over thirty-three years... The Pentagon may say that they had a reason to bomb this community, but I didn't see any." CNN anchor John Holliman, Arnett's companion during the first night of bombing, told him that people were criticizing the CNN coverage, claiming that CNN was being used by the Iraqis to transmit their propaganda. Arnett responded that he did not feel that he was being used: "Obviously, the Iraqis are going to take us to selected sites, but if all of this bombing is taking place, people should expect that there is going to be this sort of damage."

Around 12:30 p.m. CNN's Mary Ann Loughlin broke in to read a report attacking Peter Arnett's earlier claims of civilian injuries from the multinational forces bombing of al-Dour. CNN replayed fragments of Arnett's report and then Loughlin stated: "We have some additional information from our CNN research files here." Beginning with a rather irrelevant point, Loughlin read: "What the Iraqis described to Peter Arnett as a technical school is as far as we have been able to determine, this al-Dour site, is uh, is described as, uh, a main electronics communications center." Reading from a piece of paper in front of her, rather than the usual CNN text on monitors, Loughlin continued to stumble, noting that the center was opened in 1985 and military communications and radar were being built there. "Peter Arnett," she continued, "described this as being near, uh, Sammara, which is located, ah, according to the research that, uh, we've been able to come up with, uh, producing uh, mustard and, uh, nerve gas and agents with the annual capacity to produce 200, uh, 700 hundred tons of mustard and 200 tons of nerve agent. This building described by Iraqi authorities to Peter Arnett as a technical school is, as we have been able to determine, a chemical weapons facility."

This report is highly interesting because what is being presented as "CNN research" is obviously disinformation fed to CNN by the Pentagon. Obviously, the newsreader was handed a report that she had never seen before and read the Pentagon propaganda sheet, falsely claiming that it was from "CNN research files." A CNN report later in the afternoon indicated that it was actually Pentagon sources who claimed that there were chemical and biological weapons facilities in the area, a point repeated the same afternoon by the Pentagon briefer in Washington. The Pentagon was obviously disturbed by reports that its bombing was creating civilian casualties and was desperately attempting to discredit such reports. Yet it was becoming evident that the massive U.S.-led coalition bombing was destroying the economic infrastructure of Iraq and that there were a large number of civilian targets hit and civilian casualties from all over the country. The Pentagon continued to insist, however, that they were not hitting civilian sites and that their bombing was pinpoint and precise, a lie refuted daily by the video pictures coming out of Iraq.

On January 26, for instance, Arnett reported that he was taken to cities in southern Iraq, five hours from Baghdad, where, for the fourth day in a row, he had been taken to civilian sites that had been bombed by the coalition. This time he was taken to the Shiite religious city Najaf, one of the holiest sites for the Islamic religion. In the town, he saw the destruction of a civilian area, with five blocks of residential houses flattened. An engineer working for a Korean firm in Baghdad told Arnett that he took his family to the town because he thought it was one of the holiest places in Islam and therefore would be safe. But his house was bombed and many of his family were killed. Arnett then told of others he interviewed who told him of the bombing and destruction of their property as well as of injuries and deaths suffered by their relatives. At another site he was taken to in the town, about seven houses were flattened, seven civilians were reported killed, and about fifty were wounded. Relatives were seen going through the rubble and they were particularly angry because they thought that the holy spirit of the city had been violated and because there were no military targets in the area.

The same day CNN showed pictures from Mosul, in the north of Iraq, of an ancient Christian church that had been bombed, with tearful worshippers attending a service. The Pentagon reported that afternoon that they did not bomb religious sites and denied involvement in the bombing. More forthcoming for once, General Schwarzkopf admitted in his January 27 briefing, in response to a question concerning the bombing of the church: "These things happen. I've been bombed by our own Air Force. I don't think that they did it intentionally... but you have to understand that bomb racks get hung up and drop." General Schwarzkopf denied that allied forces were carpet-bombing civilian areas and rejected this nasty term from

the days of Vietnam. He insisted that his bombing was not indiscriminate, that he used appropriate weapons for appropriate targets, and tried to avoid civilian targets. At this briefing, Schwarzkopf repeated that the milk factory contained a biological weapons component (see 4.2) and went so far as to claim that coalition bombing was so precise that it damaged "only that part of the facility that [was]... a research facility for biological warfare." This ridiculous claim was belied by the images of the milk factory reduced to rubble by Schwarzkopf's "discriminate" bombing with "appropriate weapons."

In the days to come, the networks showed picture after picture of the bombing of civilian targets in Iraq and began presenting images of civilian casualties. On January 26 CBS News broadcast images from Iraqi TV of dead children in a morgue and images of widespread damage to residential areas from the allied bombing. The video pictured at least ten dead children and presented perhaps the first images of Iraqi civilian casualties. This footage was, as NBC pointed out, given to the networks in Jordan without commentary or explanation; the images might have been images of children killed in a previous war and thus, strictly speaking, propaganda, although Iraq was to produce many pictures of dead and wounded civilians who were victims of U.S. bombing. CBS indicated that while the few foreign journalists in Iraq were prohibited from reporting on military targets, they were now allowed to report on civilian bombings. The footage showed many images of the rubble of civilian buildings allegedly caused by allied bombings and the destruction of a Christian church in northern Iraq, earlier shown on CNN. Taking the Pentagon propaganda line at face value, the CBS report noted that the town of al-Dour was a military communications site and a storage place for chemical weapons, thus changing the story fed to CNN that depicted it as a military communications center with chemical weapons produced in the nearby town of Sammara. Obviously, like Winston Smith in Orwell's 1984, the Pentagon changed its line from day to day to meet its propaganda needs and the television networks dutifully reported whatever they were fed.

When Arnett was told that the Pentagon claimed that there were military targets close to the al-Dour area, he responded by asking "how close is close?" and insisted that he saw no military targets in or near the town. In his January 27 CNN report, Arnett told how he visited the Jerma general hospital in Baghdad, which is one of twenty that was taking care of civilian and military wounded from the coalition bombing. The hospital, according to the Iraqis, had 120 victims of the U.S. bombing and Arnett interviewed a woman who was in a car with her family when a bomb dropped near her, wounding her in the arm. Another victim was having lunch in his backyard with his family when a missile hit nearby. Arnett noted that the rush of patients had depleted the blood supply, and local papers urged citizens to donate blood. Antibiotics were also depleted and beds were in short supply. Finally, Arnett reported how members of a family profusely bleeding from the bombing were brought in and put into beds in the hallway of the hospital, as the video footage showed.

The presentation of Iraqi civilian casualties in Iraq by U.S. television was deplorable. For weeks, Arnett's reports of civilian casualties were invariably labeled as "propaganda," even when accompanied by pictures. For the first week or so of the war, Iraq refrained from releasing information or pictures of the bombing of civilian sites or damage to civilians. But then video and reports of civilian casualties started pouring out of Iraq via Baghdad TV, Peter Arnett, and other foreign correspondents. These sources sent forth picture after picture until the end of the war of destroyed buildings and injured or killed Iraqi civilians. While the media repeatedly reported as fact the wildest assertions of George Bush or the U.S. military (i.e., that the Patriot missile had a perfect intercept record against the Scuds; that the targets they were hitting were all military targets; and so on), every time a picture or report of civilian casualties came out of Baghdad, the networks went out of their way to label it as "propaganda." At the end of the "NBC

Nightly News" on January 27, after a report full of pictures of civilian casualties in Baghdad, correspondent Dennis Murphy concluded: "Until we get some Western reporters and photographers in there to vouch for it, I think we'll have to call it propaganda." With a broad smile, anchor Garrick Utley replied, "That's a pretty good name for it." Dead Iraqis were thus reduced to propaganda by the media war team.

One wonders what the network flacks thought that ten days of the heaviest bombing in the most massive air war in history were going to produce? Even military apologists like General Schwarzkopf conceded that there were going to be civilian casualties in such bombing raids, so why did the media insist that totally plausible claims from Iraq that innocent civilians were casualties of war be labeled "propaganda," while U.S. disinformation was presented as factual information? Obviously, U.S. propaganda was more clever and effective than Iraqi propaganda—at least to viewers in the United States. Iraq began by making ridiculous claims concerning how many planes they had shot down and claimed victory when obviously they were suffering defeat. Henceforth, all discourse that emerged from Iraq was ridiculed as propaganda discourse and pure disinformation.

Furthermore, in a propaganda war, everything that the other side says and shows will naturally be seen as propaganda while one's own side is seen to speak the truth. But the mainstream media should have shown some skepticism and critical awareness. They should have questioned the official reports by the Bush administration and Pentagon and done a better job of labeling its management of information as propaganda, or at least as a slanted perspective opposed by a different perspective. They also should have avoided the double standard of labelling everything that came out of Iraq as subject to government censorship, as propaganda, whereas they rarely did this with reports coming out of Saudi Arabia or out of U.S. military pool footage, which was equally subject to censorship and often equally propagandistic. And they should not have allowed so many of their own "military experts" to simply serve as conduits for U.S. disinformation which put the Pentagon-spin on all controversial events and policies.

The reports coming out of Iraq were the only reports that showed the actual consequences of war, with the exception of the highly censored reports concerning Scud missile attacks on Israel and Saudi Arabia. During this period, there were descriptions on all the networks of the destruction of civilian trucks on the Baghdad/Amman road and the killing of at least four Jordanian civilian truck drivers on the road. There were interviews with other truck drivers in the hospital in Amman who described how they had been bombed by allied planes; refugees who traveled down that road told similar tales. Evidently, the road was used for the transportation of mobile Scud missile launchers and in the obsession to destroy the Scuds, the U.S.-led coalition bombed every truck in sight, killing many civilians in the process.

Arnett and his colleagues posted daily graphic and poignant reports of destruction of civilian targets in Iraq. Despite these graphic and disturbing reports, bolstered by video images, a Times-Mirror survey of January 31, 1991, revealed that 78 percent of the public believed that the military was not hiding anything embarrassing about its conduct of the war and was telling everything it prudently could. When CNN began broadcasting pictures of civilian casualties in Iraq, many people criticized it for broadcasting Peter Arnett's live reports from Baghdad and allegedly articulating the Iraqi point of view. Forty-five percent of respondents to the Times-Mirror poll expressed disapproval of American media broadcasting of Iraqi-censored reports from Baghdad, and a large number of viewers also feared that TV would provide information useful to the Iraqi government, even claiming that there was too much information revealed in military briefings, which might aid the enemy. Although the media themselves often criticized the

censorship restrictions, the Times-Mirror poll indicated that nearly eight out of ten Americans supported the Pentagon restrictions on the press and that six out of ten said that the military should exert more control. And as I noted at the beginning of this chapter, most respondents believed that media coverage was "objective" and "accurate," with eight out of ten saying that the press did an excellent job.

In response to these findings, Cees Hamelink commented (1991, p. 4): "If any manufacturer had put on the market a product as defective and unreliable as media performance during the Gulf War, there would have been a vast consumer uproar. However, when people were sold televised lies, they did not seem to care. This public complacency about and uncritical acceptance of disinformation and propaganda have also seriously contributed to the violation of human rights" (i.e. the media's right to seek information blocked by military censorship, the public's right to know, the prohibition of war propaganda and so on). Thus, the public blamed the messenger for disturbing news, preferring not to know the awful truth behind the scenes of the Persian Gulf TV war.

6.4 The Battle of Khafji

On a daily basis, the Pentagon claimed that their plan was unfolding on track, although insiders claimed that, in fact, the U.S. military had planned for a ten-day air war and that bad weather, Scuds, and a more extensive Iraqi military machine than they had calculated postponed the eventual ground war.¹⁷ In his briefing of January 30, General Schwarzkopf claimed that the U.S.-led coalition was achieving all of its objectives: "By every measure--by every measure--our campaign plan is very much on schedule." Schwarzkopf's briefing was full of bluster, videotapes of precision bombing and a series of lies, exaggerations, and oddities. For instance, he claimed that in the Scud wars the record was thirty-three Scuds fired and thirty-three Patriot intercepts, although this was obviously false. The general stated that they had attacked thirty-eight airfields and flown 1,300 sorties against the airfields and "at least nine of them are nonoperational." Making 1,300 sorties to knock out nine airfields seemed to be rather excessive overall, especially when Iraqi planes did not seem eager to fight and were posing little, if any, threat to the coalition operations. Moreover, he claimed that "almost 1,500" sorties had been launched against Iraqi Scuds, a figure that seemed excessive from a military point of view if, as Schwarzkopf constantly claimed, the Scuds were not really a military threat or weapon. Schwarzkopf claimed further that the allies had attacked thirty-three bridges with 790 sorties, which raised the question of why it took so many sorties to knock out these bridges if, as in a couple of the videotapes he played that very day, the bombing was so precise? Schwarzkopf claimed that the bombing campaign had cut the Iraqi supply operations from about 20,000 tons per day needed to supply the Iraqi troops to 2,000 tons per day, figures that seemed rather arbitrary and unconvincing. And, as I note below, Schwartzkopf falsely claimed that it was Saudi forces that were ejecting the Iraqis from Khafji when, in fact, it was U.S. forces who were doing much of the real fighting.

The so-called "battle of Khafji" was the only skirmish in the Gulf war where troops actually shot at and killed each other and the ways that the U.S. military manipulated information concerning this minor event revealed the extent of their total control of news and information. The first reports of the fighting came via late night TV accounts of heavy fighting along the border over Saudi Arabia and Kuwait and were confirmed by Pentagon spokesperson Mike Gallagher in Saudi Arabia: "Preliminary reports indicate that there was contact with enemy forces at three different locations along the border. The contact began last night and continued until early this morning when contact was broken off. These reports indicate heavy losses of both personnel and equipment on the Iraqi side and light losses to U.S. Marines and other

coalition forces." The CNN commentary disclosed that the fighting began around 9:35 p.m. Saudi time at three different spots on the border of Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, including Khafji. The Iraqis staged "probing attacks" that were countered by intense fire, resulting in heavy casualties for the Iraqis when allied forces counterattacked. According to CNN, the U.S. Marines and allies did experience some casualties, and the fighting stopped around 3:00 a.m., though air attacks on retreating Iraqi troops continued. Baghdad radio, CNN noted, claimed that their forces staged a massive ground attack on Saudi Arabia, but there was no confirmation of this.

Gallagher's briefing and the CNN gloss, based on information fed to them by the military, provides a good example of how the military managed information during the Persian Gulf war. The Khafji incident was the first ground battle of the war, the first time that Iraqi ground fighting inflicted casualties on U.S. and allied troops, the first (and only) time that Iraq had occupied, however briefly, Saudi Arabian soil. From start to finish the U.S. military attempted to manage the information of the event, providing one false report after another. Gallagher's initial report was erroneous in claiming that fighting had broken off, because Iraqi troops occupied the city of Khafji. It would be several days before they retreated, surrendered, or were killed.

For some time CNN and then the other networks repeated this story when they began their morning shows, and there was intense speculation over why the Iraqis chose to cross the Saudi border and engage the coalition troops. Discussion focused on the possibility that Iraq was trying to drive the U.S. prematurely into a ground war. Reflecting the opinion of the military, CNN Pentagon correspondent Gene Randall reported that despite the attack of the previous night, the coalition would choose the time and the place for the ground war. CNN's military "analyst," retired General Perry Smith, concurred, stating that Saddam Hussein was "trying to get us involved, he wants to draw us into combat; clearly what he would like to do is bloody us, get us bogged down."

CBS's first report of the day on January 30 from their Pentagon correspondent Jim Stewart also claimed that a battalion size incursion by the Iraqis around Khafji and other points of the Saudi border was repulsed by U.S. troops and their allies. The reports from the war front in Saudi Arabia painted a different picture, however, by midmorning. CNN's Charles Jaco explained that the initial reports that the Iraqis were driven back with heavy losses originated from a San Diego Tribune pool reporter. Now, he said, there were reports that Iraqi troops had driven down to Khafji and still occupied the city and had not retreated across the border. Blaming the disinformation on the San Diego pool reporter, however, was misleading because the military fed the pool reporter the same story that Gallagher and the Pentagon were feeding reporters, so clearly the Pentagon was controlling the disinformation flow. Yet Jaco did note that it was not clear why the Iraqi troops encountered little or no resistance when they came across the border and made it all the way to Khafji. The Saudis were supposed to defend the border region, with the United States behind them.

Throughout the morning, CNN's Perry Smith put a rosy glow on the reports. Earlier, he claimed that the United States used airpower and "good tactics" to repulse the invading Iraqi forces. Continuing his speculation, Smith described what tanks and planes were engaged in the battle and confidently recounted what happened. Within minutes, Jaco came back on from Saudi Arabia and gave another list of planes used in the battle, totally different from Smith's list, making it laughably clear that Smith's analysis was sheer fantasy. Later, Schwarzkopf claimed that an entirely different set of planes were used in attacking the invading Iraqi forces, suggesting how useless the military reports from Saudi Arabia were in an

environment of controlled information.

Perry Smith had also praised the smart bombs that had supposedly repulsed and destroyed some of the invading Iraqi units. It was later revealed, however, that the "smart bombs" had stupidly destroyed two U.S. light armored vehicles (LAV), killing the Marines inside with "friendly fire." Thus, everything that retired General Perry Smith was saying was hot air or propaganda with no informational content, raising the question of why CNN employed pro-military flacks as "analysts." All Smith did throughout the war was to try to put a positive Pentagon spin on everything that happened.¹⁸ Likewise, CNN military analyst, James Blackwell and Pentagon correspondents Wolf Blitzer and Gene Randall gave instant analysis after every Pentagon briefing, serving as mere Pentagon transmission belts, faithfully reporting whatever the Pentagon told them without any critical analysis or skepticism. Smith and Blackwell put a positive pro-Pentagon spin on events and thus were mere PR adjuncts of the military. Consequently, while all of the reports from Iraq were labeled "Cleared by Iraqi Government Censors," and video was sometimes labelled, or described as "Iraqi government propaganda," CNN should have also labeled everything that their military analysts and Pentagon correspondents said as "Pentagon propaganda."

Some of CNN's correspondents in the field were equally as servile and uncritical as their Pentagon flacks in the United States, whereas other CNN correspondents did their best to compare government reports with other news sources, but this was difficult. For example, CNN's Charles Jaco in Saudi Arabia was trying his best to sort out fact from fiction in the battle of Khafji on January 30, but was continually fed disinformation from the U.S. military that he then relayed immediately in his TV accounts. In this way, the Pentagon was able to control the flow of information, but this time their disinformation came back to haunt them, as one after another of their propaganda lines were refuted. Projecting the image that the Pentagon desired, Jaco reported that Qatari and Saudi troops were currently fighting in Khafji while the Marines blocked the road to the south. It turned out that this, too, was disinformation, fed by the U.S. military for political reasons so that it would look like the Arab troops fought the Iraqis on their own. It was revealed later, however, that U.S. Marines were heavily involved in the fighting, lobbing artillery shells into the city, bombing the Iraqis with cluster bombs and missiles, controlling the fighting within the city, and even engaging in hand-to-hand combat.

Jaco also recounted that initially the Saudis thought that the Iraqi forces came over to surrender, but they then engaged them in battle, driving them back. There were, according to the Saudis, about eighty Iraqi vehicles with about 1,000 troops engaged. It appeared that the Iraqis fooled the Saudis by pointing the turrets of their tanks to the rear in the sign of surrender, but instead of giving up, they turned their guns on the Saudi forces and opened fire. The Saudis fled, allowing the Iraqis to move quickly to Khafji, about twelve miles from the Saudi/Kuwaiti border, and to occupy the town. Khafji, we may recall, was the site of Iraqi bombardment by artillery fire the first night of the war. An oil refinery had been set on fire, the inhabitants of the town fled, and it became a ghost town. Khafji was also the site where oil was discovered rolling in on the beaches and killing wildlife.

In any case, the Iraqis caught the Saudis and the allied forces by surprise, though, of course, General Schwarzkopf denied this in his military briefing later in the morning of January 30. NBC's Arthur Kent, however, noted in his report of January 31 that it violated every military rule to allow your enemy to take a site like an abandoned city where they could mount a defensive operation. On February 1, Kent claimed that the easy Iraqi advance toward Khafji revealed weaknesses in coalition reconnaissance and

reaction. The Pentagon, however, claimed that it had purposely broken the rule book, claiming that the coalition forces were prepared to allow the Iraqis to occupy the city and were not surprised by the incursion, always trying to put a positive spin on events, however negative.

In a sense, the battle of Khafji turned out to be the only battle in the entire war where troops on both sides actually shot at and killed each other. The air war wasn't really a war at all, as the Iraqi Air Force never engaged the coalition planes, which bombed Iraqi targets more or less at will. And the ground war, as we shall see, was more of a massacre than actual combat between two sides. But the battle of Khafji was a potential embarrassment for the U.S.-led coalition forces. The Saudis had allowed the Iraqis to fool them and then marched down the coast to occupy a Saudi town. As it turned out, they were unable to take back the town without U.S. help, but the U.S. military did their best to make it appear that the Saudis were "mopping up." In his afternoon briefing on January 30, General Schwarzkopf admitted that fighting was still going on in Khafji, but claimed that "the Saudis are moving forces into al-Khafji to eject any Iraqi that may be in that area," as if the Saudis alone were doing the fighting; later it was revealed that U.S. forces were heavily involved, as were Qatari forces, and that Schwarzkopf and the U.S. military were concealing U.S. involvement for purely political reasons, to create the impression that Arab forces led by the heroic Saudis did the fighting.¹⁹

Indeed, Brig General Pat Stevens, in the Saudi Arabia military briefing on January 31, claimed that it was solely Saudi and Qatari forces who engaged in the fighting, with Marine Cobra helicopters supporting the action. He claimed that no Marine ground units were engaged in Khafji and that Saudi forces had taken and secured the city. When skeptical reporters said that they had reports of U.S. artillery forces engaged in the action, as was seen by TV viewers, Stevens insisted again that "U.S. forces were not engaged in that action," which was simply not true. Later it became clear that the U.S. military officers did everything possible to glorify the action of the Arab forces for political purposes while downplaying the fierceness of the Iraqis. It turned out that the Saudis were rather incompetent and, according to a U.S. Marine involved in the action, Saudi armored personnel carriers had been firing "toward the Iraqis, toward our position, toward other Saudis, everywhere, at anything that moved, even at things that didn't move" (New York Times, Feb. 2, p. A5). It also leaked out that although many Iraqis were taken POW and some were killed, a large number got away, driving out of the city back into Kuwait.

Video footage of the "battle" had a Keystone Cops movie quality to it: U.S. Marines raced into the city to try to rescue some U.S. forces and fled when fired on. The marine in charge of the rescue, Major Craig Huddleston, who cockily said earlier that his marines were going to march into the city and "spank" the Iraqis who'd better "call 911 for help," was almost in tears as he told of the failure to find the missing U.S. soldiers. Iraqi radio claimed the capture of U.S. women soldiers in the fighting around Khafji, and the United States admitted that a woman soldier was missing, giving rise to spirited debate over whether women should be allowed so close to the front. TV viewers were treated to images of Saudis and U.S. forces firing at a high-rise apartment building, where the Iraqis were allegedly holed up to direct the fire of their units; eventually, the building was demolished, as allied forces were evidently prepared to destroy Saudi Arabia to liberate Kuwait. Of course, the Saudis, with the complicity of the U.S. military and media, presented the unsavory episode as a great victory for the allied forces in which the Saudis performed heroically and vindicated themselves militarily. A Saudi prince went on U.S. television to bask in the glory of victory and Saudi General Khalid bin Sultan told reporters that the Iraqi attack was a "suicide mission," although a U.S. official told the Washington Post that the operation "was wellplanned, even sophisticated in part" (Feb. 2, p. A16).

Media reports later revealed that two U.S. reconnaissance units were in the town, directing the fighting and fiercely engaging the Iraqis, that U.S. artillery fire, helicopters, and tactical fighter planes played important roles in the fighting, and that Schwarzkopf, Stevens, and others thus flatly lied when claiming that the United States was not engaged in the fighting. Interestingly, when a general's credibility, such as General Stevens's, suffered after being caught up in obvious lies, he was usually replaced in the morning Saudi Arabia briefing room by a fresh information manager and he soon disappeared from public view. Schwarzkopf, however, continued to lie throughout the war and was rarely challenged by the press.

The Pentagon propaganda apparatus also tried to hide another embarrassing story. The Pentagon initially fed to the press the story that the eleven marines killed in the two light-armored vehicles in the engagement to the northwest of Khafji died when their vehicles were destroyed by Iraqi tanks. Rumors began circulating that friendly fire killed the marines. When asked to comment on this during the January 31 Pentagon briefing in Washington, General Thomas Kelly first insisted that the marines killed were hit by enemy gunfire, but when pushed admitted that the command in the field was looking into the possibility that friendly fire had caused their death. "I don't think it was [the cause]", Kelly said, but it was being investigated. A few days later, the U.S. military finally admitted that friendly fire had killed the marines; indeed, "friendly fire" produced most of the U.S. casualties during the ground skirmishes of the first several weeks, leading to heated debates concerning the possibility of serious operational difficulties in the U.S. war machine.²⁰

The Iraqi incursion into Khafji obviously embarrassed the U.S. military. They had covered over the facts that fighting continued for days in the city, that the United States had played a key role in finally destroying the Iraqis, and that friendly fire had killed the U.S. marines and not Iraqi tanks. General Schwarzkopf played down the importance of the Khafji incident, saying that it was "about as significant as a mosquito on an elephant." Although that might have been true from a military point of view, obviously the disinformation campaign carried out by the U.S. military showed that from the standpoint of the propaganda war the incident was significant. The Iraqis celebrated the battle as a great victory, crowing that they had penetrated Saudi Arabia, captured a city, fought intensely for at least three days, and inflicted casualties on the allied forces.

Interestingly, reporters, mostly British, independent of the press pool, broke the information that the fighting continued when the U.S. military declared that the fighting was over. Independent reporters also disclosed the role of the U.S. Marines in the battle and exposed the Pentagon cover-up of the friendly fire killings. This showed that the pool system primarily functioned as a Pentagon tool of information management that kept reporters away from information that the military did not want disseminated and that used them as a conduit for the information which they wanted to circulate. The Khafji incident also revealed the complicity of the U.S. media in this system, as when reporter Robert Fisk of the British newspaper The Independent described how the pool was misled by their military "minders" into communicating the retaking of Khafji when, in fact, fighting continued. Fisk (in Ridgeway 1991, pp. 218-219) recounted that when British journalists, not in the pool, returned to the scene to investigate, NBC correspondent Brad Willis yelled: "You asshole! You'll prevent us from working. You're not allowed here. Get out. Go back to Dhahran." Willis then called over a U.S. Marine public affairs officer who told the reporter that he was not allowed to talk to the marines.

It was also reported that a French TV crew that arrived on the outskirts of Khafji was "greeted by

angry shouts from attending pool reporters": "According to producer Alain Debos, the crew was forced at gunpoint by Marines to give up videotape it had shot of a wounded U.S. soldier" (Time, Feb. 18, 1991, p. 39). Above all, the U.S. military wanted to avoid images of dead or wounded U.S. soldiers. Moreover, a few days before the battle of Khafji, NBC's Arthur Kent confronted the Pentagon (dis)information officer Pete Williams and asked him why the Pentagon did not allow the pool team that was in Khafji when the oil spill story broke to visit the spill area. Brad Willis had complained to Kent that the pool managers hadn't even told the pool reporters of the oil spill in the area, which had been discovered by a British TV team doing independent reporting. Perhaps, the U.S. military was afraid that journalists would discover that the United States rather than the Iraqis, was responsible for that specific spill, as British and French reporters were indeed to argue while the U.S. media for the most part reproduced the U.S. military/Bush administration propaganda line that the Iraqis alone were responsible for the oil spills.

During the day of January 31, CNN reported repeatedly that 60,000 Iraqi troops were massed around the Kuwaiti town of al-Wafra; later they reported that 800 to 1,000 Iraqi tanks were on the move in Kuwait, perhaps to invade Saudi Arabia. At the end of the CBS news, Dan Rather dramatically reported stories of a convoy of 1,000 Iraqi military vehicles moving through southern Kuwait toward Saudi Arabia and that pool reporters were saying that the sounds of war, including heavy bombing, were heard around the Saudi border. The alarming story of the Iraqi concentration of troops in the border area continued to circulate through the evening. At 10:00 p.m., CNN reported that hundreds of Iraqi vehicles were heading south toward the border; reports at 11:03 p.m. indicated that a ten-mile column of Iraqi tanks and troops was snaking its way down south, suggesting that an Iraqi invasion of Saudi Arabia may have been underway. During the next day, February 1, these reports continued to circulate. The military briefers refused to comment on them, creating speculation by the press that the military was once again concealing something important. The press in Saudi Arabia was becoming increasingly testy, leading Schwarzkopf to limit the daily news briefings to a maximum of thirty minutes.

But the major Iraqi attack on Saudi Arabia never materialized. CNN military analyst Perry Smith later claimed (1991) that a big Iraqi offensive was indeed under way, which, had it gained momentum, could have produced "considerable ground engagements and heavy casualties" (pp. 58-59). If this is true, it is curious that the U.S. military never disclosed this and for several days simply denied that a major Iraqi offensive was under way. Indeed, CNN reporters in Saudi Arabia claimed that officials were telling them that the Iraqi troops were moving south and west because it was apparent that the U.S. ground war offensive would take place to the west and the Iraqis wanted to locate more troops in a defensive position there. These Iraqi troops on the move were vulnerable to air attack and Iraqi tanks were destroyed in a "turkey shoot" during the troop movement. The New York Times related: "A pool reporter with the British Fourth Armored Brigade said he had watched all day as United States' B-52 bombers passed overhead, refueled and then pummeled the Iraqi column. He spoke of fierce fighting spread across a front stretching more than 150 miles inland from the sea and quoted intelligence reports as saying 100 Iraqi tanks had been wiped out" (Feb. 1, 1991, p. A1). The war was getting more and more brutal and its brutality will be the subject of the next chapter.

Notes

1. In a 1991 documentary produced by Bill Moyers, "PBS Special Report: After the War," Bush is quoted saying of allied bombing raids: "This has been fantastically accurate and that's because a lot of money went into this high technology weaponry--these laser guided bombs and a lot of other things--stealth technology--many of these technologies ridiculed in the past now coming into their own and saving lives, not only American lives, Coalition lives but the lives of Iraqis."

2. For an analysis of theories of mass communication, see Czitrom 1983. I would suggest that the so-called "bullet theory" is a construction of Lazarsfeld and his followers who deny direct media influence in part by setting up a straw-man model. Obviously, the media do not always directly influence the audience and audiences can always decode media texts, producing their own meanings. On the other hand, phenomena like the Gulf war, in which a mass audience is intensely participating in media rituals, may influence audiences more deeply than does, say, normal TV viewing. Obviously, without in-depth research, one cannot know precisely what effects the media had on the audience during the Gulf war, but I am setting forth some hypotheses and speculation which can help interpret the effects of television and the media and at least describe some phenomena which demand further exploration and interpretation.

3. In his book The Territorial Imperative (London: Fontana, 1967), Robert Ardrey tells how he was a young playwright in New York at the time of the Pearl Harbor bombing, thinking only of his career and personal life, when he was transformed overnight into a patriot when he perceived that his country was under attack.

4. In fact, a few in Congress and many of the intellectual establishment did speak out against the war, but their voices were rarely heard in the mainstream media. Issues like the Gulf war constitute an important test of an individual's political morality, and it would be useful to investigate the positions of members of Congress, the media, and the intelligentsia in the United States and other countries in the Gulf war. Many have a lot to answer for.

5. I am grateful to Ericka Virillo for some of the examples of the mythic and ideological resonances of the language of the Gulf war. For an earlier study of the corruption of language by politics and the military, which draws on Orwell and Marcuse, see Kellner 1989b.

6. As Elissa Marder argued in an unpublished paper, "Arbologies of Roland Barthes," the tying of ribbons to trees played on mythological resonances of the sort analyzed by Barthes in Mythologies (1972). The very concept of "Operation Desert Storm" is a mythology in Barthes' sense of naturalizing unnatural events, making a phenomenon of ugly history appear to be an event of nature, an inevitable desert storm bringing just retribution on the evils of Saddam Hussein.

7. This chant and the previous examples of the calling cards were taken from the mideast.forum in the PeaceNet bulletin board of April 19, 1991, which cites its source at "War Watch Special Report, March 1991."

8. The first three examples are from Winter 1991, while the last example is documented in The Texas Observer, April 19, 1991, p. 22. See also Kathy Mitchell's article in The Texas Observer on violence against Palestinian-Americans (Feb. 1991,)

9. The Anti-Discrimination League reported that incidences of violence against Arab-Americans reached an all-time high during 1991, with X occurrences documented; see The New York Times, Feb. X, 1991).

10. An empirical study in Britain revealed that support for the Gulf war was much softer and more ambivalent than the polls indicated. Martin Shaw and Roy Carr-Hill argue that "two surveys of a local population in Northern England, based on random samples of the electorate... {reveal} that while perceptions of the war closely reflected the pictures of the war provided by the media, there was a great deal of anxiety not reflected in national poll findings, and 'resistance' to media coverage--reflected particularly in the finding that large minorities agreed that television and the popular press 'glorified the war too much.'" The authors also claim that their surveys indicated that people's attitude toward the war often varied according to what newspaper they read. "Mass Media and Attitudes to the Gulf War in Britain," in The Electronic Journal of Communication, Vol. 2, No 2 (Fall 1991). I know of no similar in-depth empirical research in the United States that investigated how the population really felt about the war, so one must invariably speculate concerning the state of antiwar sentiment and the depth of prowar sentiment and convictions.

11. Newspaper coverage, as FAIR pointed out, tended to downplay the size of the demonstrations. The New York Times coverage of the January 19 national demonstration against the war in Washington, D.C., consisted of a single photo and caption, which put the size of the crowd at 15,000, as opposed to the official police count of 25,000 or the organizers' estimate of 75,000 (Extra!, May 1991, p. 19). Within a week, TV coverage of the antiwar movement disappeared and one hardly heard from the movement for the rest of the war on the mainstream media.

12. Over 2,500 soldiers filed for conscientious objector status during the war; many troops went AWOL; many filed for dismissal on grounds of homosexuality; and many women soldiers became pregnant; after the war, it was revealed that on one ship, 36 of the 360 women on the ship became pregnant and were sent home, obviously a form of resistance (see The New York Times, April 30, 1991, p. A9).

13. Interestingly, that same morning, the David Brinkley program featured footage of troops in the north of Saudi Arabia in chemical protection suits and with detection devices that indicated that there were dangerous chemicals in the air, presumably from the coalition bombing of chemical and nuclear facilities in Iraq or storage sites in Kuwait. One heard a voice-over of a soldier with a detection device indicating that "we are experiencing a contamination event" and later explaining to the camera that they had detected dangerous chemicals present. One saw some of the same clips, with a barely intelligible explanation on CNN that day, but the topic suddenly disappeared without explanation.

14. Some of these football examples are from the Greenpeace Gulf Report on Jan. 18, 1991, Situation Report No. 2 from the PeaceNet mideast.gulf bulletin board. During the ground war, as I shall note in Chapter 9, General Schwarzkopf and media reporters regularly used football metaphors to describe U.S. tactics.

15. Against Bush's claim that he was waging a "just war," former Congressman Father Robert F. Drinan argued in the National Catholic Reporter (Febr. 8, 1991, p. 2) that the U.S. Gulf war policy only met three of the seven criteria for a just war. A minister appearing on CNN's Sonia Friedman show after the war on March 1 properly said that it was literally blasphemous for Bush to invoke the name of God in favor of his murderous war policies. But Bush continued to play the war and religion theme, telling the annual gathering of the Southern Baptist Convention on June 6, 1991, that he recalled praying at Camp David before ordering the start of the Gulf war. According to the New York Times (June 7, 1991), Bush wiped tears away from his eyes as he described praying before ordering the bombing that began the war against Iraq and the 23,000 delegates roared their approval, stood up and shouted "Amen!" Bush was on a political trip, trying to cement alliances with "conservative, church-oriented Republicans whom he and his advisers see as crucial to his political strength" (p. A7).

16. On December 20, 1991, United Press International reported that "President Bush was quoted as saying that if he orders an offensive, Iraqi President Saddam Hussein would get 'his ass kicked.'" Note how Bush personalized the war as an assault against the Iraqi president and how he utilized the puerile metaphor of "kicking ass." Some years earlier, Bush bragged how he was going to "kick ass" in his Vice-Presidential debate with Geraldine Ferraro in 1984.

17. Bob Woodward's article in the Washington Post of Jan. 28 (p. A1, A15) questioned whether the allied bombing campaign was really achieving its aims. Woodward pointed out that despite Pentagon claims that airfields had been 100 percent "neutralized," 65 percent were operational; the Pentagon claimed that it had destroyed 100 percent of Iraqi radar, but Woodward's sources indicated that 20 percent had been replaced; and although the U.S. had claimed that all of Iraq's fixed Scud launchers had been destroyed, Woodward's sources revealed that only eight had been damaged enough to totally disable them. A New York Times story of Feb. 4 quoted Gen. Buster Glossen who stated that unseasonably bad weather had delayed the air war campaign: "Right now we're in day 23 of the overall campaign, but only day 15 or 16 in terms of where we wanted to be in the air war." Glossen confirmed that the weather had caused allied pilots to cancel more than half of their daily bombing raids on top-priority targets in Iraq and Kuwait.

18. In a book published after the war, Smith (1991), admitted that he fought hard within CNN to make sure that the Pentagon point of view got across. He also made a pitch for the importance of having military analysts work with the news networks and claimed, hypocritically, that he was not a Pentagon propagandist. But it was obvious that Smith constantly put the Pentagon spin on events and was particularly concerned to refute the information that Peter Arnett was putting out of Baghdad concerning casualties caused by U.S. bombing. In his book, Smith wondered whether Arnett was anti-U.S. and even a traitor, though he concluded that Arnett was merely a "feeler" who "felt for" the people he covered. On Smith's own account, he constantly told the news production team what to report, chose letters to be read on the air, and helped pick military "experts" as guests. His book clearly reveals his thorough-going promilitary biases and how they shaped his daily activity at CNN. Thus Perry Smith's activity and not Peter Arnett's reporting is one of the scandals of the war, and CNN should critically discuss whether they should let individuals obviously totally committed to a specific policy shape their news operations as they allowed Smith to do in the Gulf war.

19. The Washington Post headlined a February 2, 1991, front-page story with "Iraqi Tactics Surprise U.S. Officials," whereas the U.S. military in Saudi Arabia constantly told reporters that it was not surprised by the Iraqi incursion. In a report on February 4, the New York Times noted that no pool reporters were allowed to watch the fighting at Khafji "so they had to quote staff officers far from the scene, who glorified Saudi and Qatari troops, for political purposes, and understated the fierceness of Iraqi resistance. The best accounts of the fighting at Khafji came from reporters and photographers who got there in violation of the Pentagon ground rules" (p. A6).

20. On August 9, 1991, the New York Times published an article revealing that 20 of 148 American war dead were killed by friendly fire--about 15 percent of U.S. casualties in comparison with a 2 percent rate in World War II, Korea, and Vietnam. Of the 458 U.S. troops wounded, 60 to 70 were wounded by their own forces. Evidently the smart high-tech weapons couldn't tell the difference between friend and foe and in the heat of battle killed everything that generated heat and moved.