

Douglas Kellner The Persian Gulf TV War

Chapter 7

The Pounding of Iraq

Day after day, the U.S.-led multinational coalition continued the relentless pounding of Iraq. Eventually, a certain repetitive quality to the war set in and watching the TV coverage was increasingly oppressive. Everyday was the same: military headlines and war stories on morning shows; the military briefers providing the latest kill counts with the compliant reporters sparring a little but generally asking all questions within the parameters of the Pentagon discourse; Peter Arnett providing accounts of the latest damage to civilian targets and civilian casualties in Iraq from coalition bombing; CNN recycling the same images and interviewing the same military "experts" who would say more or less the same predictable things; the Big Three networks trying to squeeze the sound bites of the day into their prime time news with occasional but generally repetitive and uninformative specials; the Scud wars continuing apace; and all talk centering on whether or when the ground war would erupt, bringing new drama and fresh blood to the screen.¹

Consequently, watching the Persian Gulf TV war became progressively numbing. Videocassettes of precision bombing, images of U.S. ships pounding Iraqi positions in Kuwait, and reports of coalition planes pummeling the Republican Guard, Iraqi troops, and cities normalized carnage and a culture of brutality. There were daily squabbles over bomb damage assessment, debates over the targeting and attrition of the Republican Guard, reports on the great successes of the high-tech weapon systems, the (largely imaginary) horrors of chemical weapons and terrorism, and the impact of the war on the home front. Rep. Dan Burton (R-Calif.) recommended dropping nuclear weapons on the Iraqis to limit U.S. casualties, urging this demented action on the floor of Congress and CNN's Crossfire. Others called for the ground war to begin, although some recommended continued pounding of the Iraqi forces in the air war so that the ground war would be a mere "mopping-up" operation.

Even the daily propaganda line became repetitive, with Bush and the Pentagon reiterating "We are on course. We are following the plan; everything is going well." They also repeated the same Big Lies everyday: we are not targeting civilian areas; we are not planning to destroy Iraq, but merely want to get Iraqi troops out of Kuwait; we tried every diplomatic effort to negotiate a peaceful settlement; we can't pause in the bombing to negotiate a cease-fire and possible peace because this will aid the enemy; we are kind, good, and just, and our enemy is absolutely evil, so all good Americans must stand behind their country, their president, and their troops. And behind the veil of administration rhetoric, the bombing and killing continued relentlessly.

7.1 "Allied Pounding of Iraqi Targets Continues"

On February 5, NBC's Faith Daniels opened the "Today" show news summary with the simple sentence "Allied pounding of Iraqi targets continues today." A local university newspaper, the Daily Texan, had the headline "Allied forces continue to pummel Iraq." Throughout the day, CNN used the headline "Allied bombing of Iraq remains relentless."² These headlines are obviously an accurate description of what had been going on since day one of the war, and appeared to be an objective, non-controversial, and

professional journalistic description of the Persian Gulf war. But what does the headline really signify? What is it communicating and what is it hiding? As an exercise in political semantics, let us unpack the sentence "Allied Pounding of Iraqi Targets Continues" to try to reveal the horror behind the abstractions of the phrase and to see how such innocent journalistic discourse hid the suffering and death caused by the coalition bombing.

Note first the phrase "Iraqi targets," the object of the sentence. What does this mean? In itself, "target" is totally abstract: it could be referring to just about anything. But what does the phrase signify and what does it hide? George Bush and the U.S. military would no doubt read "Iraqi targets" as military targets and leave it at that. But using an article in the February 5 New York Times and Peter Arnett's report from CNN on that day, we might be able to get a more concrete sense of the phrase. The New York Times buried a story on the bottom of p. A6 with a headline: "Baghdad Jolted by Waves of B-52 Attacks." The story described heavy bombardment by three waves of allied aircraft, which "apparently included B-52 bombers, the biggest in the American arsenal." The correspondent told of antiaircraft fire piercing the sky and "terrified civilians huddled in air-raid shelters." Further,

The air strikes have crippled Iraq's infrastructure and turned life for its people into misery. There is no power and little water in any of Iraq's major cities.

The last raid began on Sunday night just before midnight. Enormous blasts shook houses on the city's fringes and sent gusts of hot air across the sprawling capital. A second wave began at 3 a.m. today and a third before dawn.

"What is there left to attack?" asked a resident as he emerged from an air-raid shelter, red-eyed from lack of sleep. "Have they not destroyed everything already? Will they never stop?"

On tours of several provincial cities organized by the Iraqi government, a group of international correspondents saw scenes of devastation in populated areas.

In the town of Najaf, 120 miles south of Baghdad, residents said today that planes of the alliance against Iraq had dropped 12 bombs on a residential area some three miles from one of the holiest Shiite Muslim shrines, killing at least 20 people and wounding dozens (New York Times, Feb. 5, p. A6).

The Times story makes clear that "Iraqi targets" involve the country's economic infrastructure and civilian lives and property, as well as properly military targets. During the day of February 5, the TV networks reported repeatedly that the allied bombing campaign had involved one sortie per minute over the entirety of the war—obviously a lot of Iraqi targets were being hit. In Peter Arnett's daily CNN report on February 5, an air-raid alert went on and he noted that there had already been four raids in the early morning with major air strikes. The attacks seemed to hit targets in the suburbs and Arnett heard bombs falling in the distance. All lights were suddenly turned off in the hotel, and with a flashlight in the dark Arnett related that there was no more gasoline for sale in Iraq; pictures showed long lines of cars waiting for gas, which was

abruptly cut off, forcing would-be customers to walk away with empty gas cans, while others pushed cars without gas to the sides of the street. In addition, there was no more heating oil during the coldest part of year.

The Iraqis continued to claim, Arnett reported, that the coalition forces were deliberately aiming at civilian targets. Iraqi Foreign Minister Tariq Aziz had written a letter to the UN, complaining that UN silence in the face of the bombing of Baghdad violated the UN Charter. The Iraqis claimed that the bombing had destroyed their communications centers, dams, factories, and oil refineries. There was a pall of smoke around Baghdad every day from burning oil refineries and allied bombing hit civilian targets around Baghdad constantly—a fact confirmed by international journalists, Arnett noted. As Arnett gave his report, another air-raid alert began and he stated that there was usually about ten minutes between the warning and attacks. The bombing began and the camera panned to the dark sky illuminated with sparks of flashing anti-aircraft fire. Earlier, Arnett reported, the bombing had shaken his hotel and rattled the windows. The image of a flashlight pointing at Arnett's face in the darkness of Baghdad during an air attack created a surreal effect. Such reports were among live television's most memorable moments: history recorded as it happened.

Arnett recounted that in addition to the bombings and missile attacks there were reports of raids by B-52 bombers, which were portrayed as a terror bombing by the local press. In some of the visits to civilian areas, the Iraqi government told Arnett that the devastation was the result of B-52 strikes. To CNN anchor John Holliman, Arnett said that the bombing had moved from the center of town to the periphery. Holliman asked what Arnett thought was causing civilian damage, and he replied that he had been to places with over forty bomb craters, so that there was definitely systematic bombing of civilian targets. Holliman then brought up the argument, heard daily in the media, that the damage resulted from stray anti-aircraft fire. Arnett rebutted the claim, arguing that stray "triple-A fire does not cause twenty-foot-deep craters." Despite all of the talk about precision bombing, Arnett noted, it was clear that there had been a lot of civilian damage. The Cruise missiles were especially hated by the people, who believed that the missiles were not clearly targeted. The people of Baghdad, Arnett said, felt safer when airplanes came over the city than when the Cruise missiles flew over.³ There was tremendous bitterness in the city that the bombing war focused so relentlessly on Baghdad, although the war was supposed to be about Kuwait. People were asking Arnett: "Why here and not Kuwait?"

Thus, in both a New York Times article on the allied bombing of Baghdad and Peter Arnett's live CNN report the "Iraqi targets" include innocent civilians—their lives and possessions—and the social and economic as well as the military infrastructure of Iraq.⁴ Civilian life had been reduced to the struggle for survival. "Iraqi targets" also included oil refineries and chemical, biological, and nuclear facilities; many believed that this bombing was producing an environmental holocaust (see 5.2, 5.3, and 10.3). The media revealed little, however, about the effects of allied bombing against the Republican Guards and Iraqi troops in Kuwait and southern Iraq. One can imagine that the bombing was fierce and took countless casualties. The U.S. denied that they used B-52 carpet-bombing on civilians, but they admitted, even bragged of, their heavy bombing of the Iraqi military. Indeed, the mode of destruction of the B-52 is almost exclusively carpet-bombing on a massive scale; one load of bombs can destroy an area encompassing several football fields. But many other planes and killing systems also were used, including napalm, which, like the B-52, gained notoriety during the Vietnam era. Reports began to surface around February 22 that napalm bombs were being used on Iraqi targets. Napalm is a highly controversial incendiary weapon that spreads a ball of fire over its target. It burns and defaces its survivors horribly, sticking to and eating away the skin. On February 22, BBC-1 had a report on napalm, confirming its use by the U.S.-led coalition forces. The video footage showed

a U.S. Air Force ground worker loading napalm bombs onto a plane and putting fuses into the bombs. Reporter Brian Barron stated:

Napalm is an old and crude bomb alongside much of the allies' high-tech arsenal. But it is a terrifying weapon that kills both by burning and suffocation. Until today, there had been speculation the Americans would hold it in reserve for massive retaliation if the Iraqis carried out their threat to use chemical weapons of mass destruction.

Explaining the use of napalm, former Reagan administration official Kenneth Adelman declared on BBC-4 radio: "Well, I think the objective was to make sure that the [Iraqi military], behind the lines, er, was as wiped out as possible so that we would not risk American and British boys if we needed to go on the ground war." Adelman speculated that aversion to napalm in Vietnam resulted from the inability to tell who was the "enemy" and who were innocent peasants, but in the Gulf war, "it's quite clear, they wear uniforms, they sit in tanks, they cook over fire or whatever they do, they look like military, they are military and they're clearly identified as such. And so I think that it is proper in that time to kind of weed 'em out."

And so Iraqis conscripted by Saddam Hussein were the targets of allied bombing, "weeded out" by B-52s, napalm, and other weaponry. The Los Angeles Times published an article on February 24 on "Ordinance: High Tech's Gory Side" that described white phosphorus howitzer shells which burst "high-velocity, burning white phosphorus particles over a limited area. The fragments can continue to burn hours after they have penetrated a soldier's body, creating deep lesions." Other exotic devices include the Beehive system in which shells are fired out of a cannon that spits out 8,800 "tiny darts with razor edges capable of causing deep wounds." These weapons are intended to produce injuries rather than death because in the words of one munitions expert: "Injury raises hell with the enemy's logistics load. With the dead, he doesn't have to do anything. But with a wounded [soldier], he has a huge logistics problem, requiring all kinds of transportation and medical care."

Other weapons were intended, however, to maximize the kill ratio. Fuel-air explosives disperse "highly flammable liquid over a large area and then detonate it, creating a huge pressure shock that can knock down buildings and exceed the 90-pound-per-square-inch [blast pressure] lethality limit for humans." A "shape charge" is an explosive that on detonation "creates a jet traveling at up to 25,000 feet per second that cuts through armor. Once through the armor, the jet sends a blinding flash of light into the tank, followed by shattered fragments of tank armor flying at high velocity." U.S. artillery shells "contain up to 88 bomblets that cover a huge area of a battlefield. They are capable of destroying lightly armored vehicles, such as personnel carriers, with hollow-point, armor-piercing heads and of incapacitating soldiers with secondary fragmentation. ICM bomblets have an estimated 50 percent probability of killing a soldier at 15 meters. By spreading 88 submunitions, rather than a single large blast, the ICM can kill four times as many soldiers" (Los Angeles Times, Feb. 24, 1991).

Before the war, James Ridgeway reported that the United States was deploying antitank shells that were made out of depleted Uranium (Village Voice, Jan. 15, 1991). His disturbing story explained that, "The U.S. Army is equipped with high-tech munitions made from nuclear wastes that can melt through the layers of armor protecting the Iraqi crews, burning them alive. Not coincidentally, those same tank-killing shells will probably turn the Iraqi desert into a permanently toxic hellhole for generations to come." The report was ignored by the mainstream media in the United States but a British TV news program in late January depicted

fighter plane cannons that "shoot uranium cased shells." The Scottish church group Gulfwatch reported that these shells were made out of leftover Uranium-238, which is a byproduct of the nuclear weapons and power industry (PeaceNet, mideast.forum, Feb. 8). Gulfwatch described how they are constructed and their lethal effects, citing the Occupational Health and Radiation Safety Department at the University of Pittsburgh, which claimed: "Technically, these shells are below danger standards for nuclear material but definitely radioactive. The main environmental danger comes from the fact that in a ground war the desert may be littered with thousands of them and thus poisoned for generations. Uranium-238 is an extremely toxic chemical, and, if you survive the wound, the metal will cause kidney failure."

So the "Iraqi targets" were getting bombed by some rather fierce munitions. Now let us focus on who is doing the bombing according to the standard Persian Gulf war discourse. The headlines signify that the instigators are the "allies." This term "allies" resonates with the historical memory of World War II when an alliance of (mostly) democratic nations fought fascism in a war that most people believed was just. From the beginning of the Gulf war, the phrase "allies" was used to describe the forces that relentlessly waged war against Iraq, but the term "U.S.-led multinational coalition" is more accurate. For it was clearly George Bush who mobilized this force, whose troops organized, planned, and began the military action. Although it was UN resolutions which legitimated the attack on Iraq, the UN played no further role in the war and the coalition was totally under U.S. command, and the U.S. forces were doing most of the fighting and bombing. To be sure, the British were also deeply involved in the bombing, as were the French, Saudis, and a few other nations to a lesser extent. But the overwhelming majority of the sorties into Iraq were carried out by U.S. forces. So it was primarily the forces of Bush and the Pentagon who were pounding and pummeling Iraq and the term "the allies" obscures this crucial fact.

The discourse of the allies also refers to what most people considered a "just war" during World War II against a dangerous enemy who was a real threat to nations throughout the world. It is arguable, however, that the Gulf War was not a "just war" in the classical sense as questions were raised concerning whether the Bush administration took every possible measure to prevent the war (see 1.2) and whether the extent of the pounding of Iraq was proportionate to the threat that Iraq posed to its neighbors.⁵ Indeed, it is ludicrous to compare Iraq with Nazi Germany or the Iraqi threat with that faced by the allies in World War II, who were confronting the fascist forces of Germany, Italy, and Japan.

Next, let's do a conceptual analysis of the phrase "pounding." The term has the connotation of a boxing match in which two more or less equally matched forces fight it out in the ring. The Gulf war, however, involves two of the most mismatched forces in history, in which a giant bully and its bully friends pound and stomp on a much smaller bully. Moreover, the pounding really involved the killing and slaughter of the Iraqi people and the destruction of their economic infrastructure. Thus terms like "pounding" or "pummeling" however brutal and graphic, are really mild in comparison with the deadly destruction that was inflicted daily on Iraq.

Indeed, in both the New York Times and CNN Arnett report, it was noted that one type of plane bombing Iraqi targets was the fabled B-52, renowned for its Vietnam carpet-bombing (see Gibson 1986). The B-52 bomber is a rather big, slow, and clumsy plane that is distinctive for the amount of bombs that it is able to drop. ABC reported that the plane can drop twenty-five tons of bombs in one flight and all of the networks featured reports on B-52 cluster-bombing and descriptions of the tremendous damage done by B-52 attacks. Using cluster bombs, a B-52 can deliver more than 8,00 bomblets in a single mission; upon impact, the bomblets are dispersed over a wide area and then explode (Walker 1992, p. 87). But in Vietnam, as B-52s

were vulnerable to anti-aircraft fire, they were modified so that they could fly higher and drop their murderous loads out of the range of anti-aircraft fire. This makes them not one of the precision smart-bomb delivery systems, but solely weapons of terror and death.

Yet after a B-52 crashed the weekend of February 3 on the way back to its base in Diego Garcia, the TV networks reported that B-52s were extremely old and perhaps obsolete in an era of high-tech bombing. TV also showed protests against B-52s using bases in Spain, where thousands of people demonstrated against the servicing of this death machine on Spanish soil. The British had smaller, quieter protests against the B-52s based in their country. Only after diplomatic maneuvering did France allow the plane to fly over its airspace.

To explicate further the mode of destruction in the "pounding" of Iraqi targets, we might consider a CNN interview with a British bombing crew just back from some action in Iraq. When asked about reports that they had bombed a lot of civilian targets and caused civilian casualties, a member of the crew answered: "We go about and drop our bombs and if they hit civilian targets, that's tough." The interviewer, supporting this point of view, chimed in, "That's war," and the bombardier answered, "Absolutely." So "pounding" involves killing people and destroying targets, whether military or civilian, and many of those dropping the bombs go about their daily business without a pang of conscience, with the media defending their slaughter of innocents.

During Vietnam, Gibson (1987) and others pointed out that high-tech bombing was increasingly abstract with pilots merely interacting with technology rather than perceiving the actual effects of their bombing on people and the environment. Much of the bombing in the Gulf war was even more abstract, utilizing laser-guided computers where the pilot merely pushed buttons and the weapon found its own target. The months preceding the bombing of Baghdad involved detailed "software work" to digitally map and plot strategic installations there. The [computer] networks were then used to keep track of targets in real time, to program and guide 'precision long-range weapons,' and then to undertake 'battle damage assessment.' The whole network formed a kind of cybernetic input and feedback loop" (Robins and Levidow 1991, p. 324).

In this situation, the bombing crews were merely nodes in a system, technical operatives who pushed buttons to release bombs or missiles at targets "derealized" into mere data on a computer screen. In many cases, it was the computer program that guided the bombing "mission," so that the pilots merely flew to their site, avoided anti-aircraft fire, dropped their munitions, and flew away. Moreover, the whole experience had a video game feel to it and if one had been excited by playing bombing games in simulators, the whole experience had a positive libidinal charge. In fact, some of the TV commentators and military experts seemed to be having orgasms in their ecstasies over the video bombing footage, as they "oohed" and "ahhed" over the bombing videos, as if they were getting libidinal enjoyment from watching the pornography of destruction.⁶ In celebrating the technology of destruction, the media thus transformed the bombing into a positive and celebratory experience rather than one of tragic empathy with human suffering.

Finally, let us focus on the last term in the headline "Allied pounding of Iraqi targets continues." The verb "continues" signifies that every day since the beginning of the war, the U.S.-led coalition has carried out thousands of sorties per day, almost one every minute, the war managers bragged. The Gulf war exhibited the most massive concentration of air power and eventually involved the most massive bombing of a single target country in military history. The verb "continues" thus signifies the daily bombing assaults on Iraq which eventually unloaded tons of explosives on that country. After the war, General Merrill McPeak (1991)

indicated that the U.S.-led coalition forces flew 110,000 sorties and dropped 88,500 tons of bombs: "this is about half again as much tonnage as we dropped during the entire war in Vietnam. In 43 days, we--in other words, we far exceeded our tonnage of precision-guided munitions in a war that lasted eight or nine years."

At the British military briefing on February 5, Captain Niall Irving picked up on the discourse of "continues," stating: "Allied forces are continuing to apply a grinding wheel to the Iraqi military machine." The sparks of secondary explosions signified to him that the grinding was continuously having the desired effects. Speaking of a recent massive bombing attack, Irving quoted a British source who described a massive explosion, claiming: "I think that we just woke up the whole of Iraq." In a January 30 military briefing, General Schwarzkopf bragged that a "secondary explosion we had the other day registered at 12" on a scale of 1 to 10. So continuing the bombing meant proudly bombing Iraq until it was blasted into permanent sleeplessness and reduced to rubble.

The key point, however, is that many Iraqi civilian targets were being destroyed, although the U.S. military was denying this. George Bush said repeatedly that he had no quarrel with the Iraqi people, just Saddam Hussein. Yet the U.S.-led coalition dropped thousands of tons of bombs on defenseless civilians. As Tristan Coffin put it on CNN, the Iraqis are learning what a First World power can do to a Third World power. Indeed, he was right, though this was nothing to boast about. In the Gulf war, the most heavily armed nation on earth, with the most sophisticated high-tech weapons ever, systematically destroyed the military and economic infrastructure of a Third World country equipped with a 1960s-type military apparatus of tanks, missiles, and artillery that was almost helpless against the U.S. war machine. The great military victory celebrated by the media and the public was thus really nothing more than the slaughter of a third-rate military force by the most massive and lethal military force ever assembled. Some victory.

7.2 The Bombing of Basra

On January 29, reports began circulating almost daily on the bombing of Basra, Iraq's second largest city with over 800,000 inhabitants, located in the south on the road to Kuwait City, not far from the border. Basra was a fabled ancient city, said to be the home of Sinbad the Sailor; the Tigris and Euphrates rivers join there to form the Shatt-al-Arab waterway leading to the Gulf, thus it is Iraq's most important port city. During the Iran-Iraq war it experienced significant destruction from Iranian bombing. Basra was also in the vicinity of much of Iraq's military industry and was the staging ground for Iraqi supply operations to the theater of war in Kuwait. The city was thus deemed an important military target and suffered heavy bombing in daily raids.

During the first week of February TV reports showed footage of bombed-out civilian areas of Basra and a hospital that had been bombed, and had several reports of civilian casualties. One CNN report of February 1 showed a dead child being pulled out of the rubble of a destroyed building. Hospital scenes showed large numbers of civilian casualties from the coalition bombing. A Los Angeles Times article (Feb. 5, 1991) interviewed refugees from the area who testified that the massive allied bombing had destroyed Basra's communication centers, oil refineries, major government buildings, and hundreds of storage facilities that contained everything from food to ammunition. Indeed, Iranian television reported in late January of powerful explosions heard in the city, the rumble of bombing, and reports of massive oil-refinery fires that shot plumes of flame and smoke high into the air. Refugees stated that the bombing "raids have left a hellish nightmare of fire and smoke so dense that the sun hasn't been clearly visible for several days at a time."

Witnesses also reported that air strikes leveled entire city blocks in civilian areas and left "bomb craters the size of football fields and an untold number of casualties" (Feb. 5, 1991). An article in the Miami Herald (Feb. 10, 1991, pp. A1, A23) quoted a Jordanian refugee who stated: "Basra is totally damaged. There is no petrol, no water. There are people dead in the roads and nobody is moving them... People are drinking from the sewers. They have cans and they are filling them. I was driving carefully because of all the holes in the road and the dead bodies." Former U.S. attorney general Ramsey Clark reported following a trip to Iraq that:

In Basra, you can see six continuous city blocks that are almost rubble. They were homes. You'd see a guy sitting out there because they kind of watch over what's left....We saw hundreds of dwellings demolished.... The central market in Basra has about a thousand shops--and here you see a crater that's bigger than the White House swimming pool, except it's round. It's right at the entrance to the market and [the bomb] shattered everything, and it landed right on a supermarket. It's not there anymore. I mean it's just gone. And around, you just see damage, and there's no possible military target there. Driving through the countryside, you see food-processing places, if they're big, fairly systematically hit.

The mosques: We came upon one mosque in Basra--it was particularly tragic, it was way out in the countryside....There were three or four bombs that hit around there that just kind of messed everything up. When you hit a mosque, it's got no internal support, just this big dome, so it just comes down. It collapses in rubble. And there was a family of 12 who had sought refuge in there....They found 10 bodies in the mosque. The minaret was still standing there. Every type of civilian structure you could think of. (Broadcast over WBAI-FM Radio and transcribed on PeaceNet, Mideast.gulf, Feb. 12, 1991).⁷

In his Sunday, February 10, report from Baghdad, Peter Arnett noted that the governor of the province of Basra told them that two hundred civilians had been killed in the past few days; the journalists saw destroyed homes, neighborhoods, and a mosque that had been bombed out, taking video footage of this damage, but they were not allowed to see military targets. Civil defense authorities claimed that cluster bombs were used against civilian neighborhoods and video images showed casings of these antipersonnel weapons that were used; the bomblets inside explode like hand grenades. The foreign correspondents visited a hospital where they were told that sixty civilians were treated each day. Many injuries came from collapsing roofs in the poorest neighborhoods of the city. The report was illustrated by poignant pictures of women and children in a hospital, a child splattered with blood; a dazed mother in bed with bandages and her injured child beside her; pile after pile of rubble of bombed-out buildings illustrated the report. Arnett concluded that Basra was in the front line of the war, yet people were saying that they were ready to defend it and were prepared to withstand the heavy bombing raids.

After the war, Louise Cainkar, the director of the Palestine Human Rights Information Center, visited Basra and described visiting five different civilian sectors of the city that had suffered heavily from coalition bombing. She said that residents of the Ma'kel neighborhood reported 400 civilians had died from coalition bombing (1991, p. 343). According to Cainkar, "[h]ospital statistics for Basra city from the Ministry of

Health show 681 civilian injury hospital admissions between January 17 and February 16, of whom 285 subsequently died. This of course reflects only a portion of civilians killed by bombs, as many never reach a hospital" (1991, p. 343).

In future histories of the Persian Gulf war, the U.S. bombing of Baghdad and Basra may be read as one of the great crimes of the century. However, the enormity of the destruction of the cities and civilians was covered over during the war by a veil of hypocrisy as U.S. officials repeated over and over that they were not targeting civilians, that there was remarkably little civilian damage because of precise targeting and smart bombs. Yet Peter Arnett's and the other reports of the foreign correspondents in Iraq provided visual evidence refuting the claims of the war managers that they were avoiding civilian casualties.

During the weekend of February 8-9, a verbal attack by Senator Alan Simpson (R-Wyo.) on Peter Arnett was also much discussed in the media.⁸ Simpson had called Arnett an Iraqi "sympathizer" who had earlier "sympathized" with the communists in the Vietnam war. In a racist and McCarthyist slur, Simpson claimed that Arnett's wife was Vietnamese and her brother was allegedly a Viet Cong (the latter was a lie). Although almost every major commentator in the country defended Arnett against this sleazy attack, no one stressed the close relationship between Simpson and the Bush administration, or recalled how during the Iran/Contra scandal, Simpson was a hardball defender of the Reagan administration and critic of the press. None recalled that Bush's press secretary, Marlin Fitzwater, had already taken potshots at Arnett; nor did these commentators report that there had been significant attacks on Arnett from the right since the beginning of the war, as evidenced by CNN's own letters that they read on the air as well as the attacks evident in radio and television talk shows. Simpson was thus once again a hatchet man for a Republican administration, carrying out a shoddy attack on an honorable journalist by using McCarthyist tactics as a surrogate and point man for the Bush administration.⁹

Simpson was also hypocritical because he never spoke out against Saddam Hussein before the war and was even one of those senators who had visited Iraq during the summer of 1990 when he, along with Senate Minority Leader Robert Dole, had been obsequious to Hussein. The U.S. senators visited Hussein on his birthday and may have sent a signal that he could get away with military aggression against Kuwait. Simpson denied this, but TV pictures showed him, Dole, and the others fawning over Saddam Hussein, whom they later hypocritically vilified. A transcript of the visit reveals that Simpson told Hussein, "I believe that your problems lie with the Western media, and not with the U.S. government. As long as you are isolated from the media, the press--and it is a haughty and pampered press--they all consider themselves political geniuses... What I advise is that you invite them to come here and see for themselves" (Simpson, in Ridgeway 1991, p. 37). Moreover, Peter Arnett revealed after the war that Simpson and other senators "upbraided" him and other journalists in Jerusalem in April 1990 "about our coverage of Hussein, who was threatening to incinerate Israel at the time... We still do have the video, senator," Arnett said (Broadcasting, May 25 1991, p. 91).

During the same weekend that Simpson's attack on Arnett was being discussed, Basra was suddenly very visible on U.S. television with pictures of bombing rubble and civilian casualties in hospitals appearing on CNN and other networks. The bombing of Basra was becoming a key issue in the propaganda war. During a February 11 briefing with General Richard ("Butch") Neal, Charlayne Hunter-Gault of the "MacNeil/Lehrer News Hour" pointed to the pictures that showed women, children, and others hurt by the bombing campaign, and remarked that the "pictures are pretty astonishing" She asked what the coalition planned to do differently in response to these pictures. Neal repeated that they were doing everything possible to avoid

civilian collateral damage, and then became agitated and incoherent. He noted that there were conflicting reports, some indicating few or no civilian casualties, while others indicated great damage to civilians. Taking the offensive, Neal argued that the press in Iraq is "censored" and one should not credit the reports of damage to civilians; as an example, he cited the story of a soldier in a hospital, who was wrapped in a blanket before the camera came, covering his uniform, so that he would appear to be a civilian casualty. "You can't credit such reports," Neal insisted and after a couple of incoherent remarks concluded: "So I'll just leave it at that."

But the reporters persevered. One indicated that Basra had almost emptied out and had become a ghost town during the Iran-Iraq war and that the allied bombing was threatening to make it a ghost town once more. With glee, Neal seized upon the great destruction it had undergone in the earlier war and suggested that the films of rubble being shown on TV were pictures left over from that war, or pictures of rubble remaining from the last war. This claim was incredible and could have easily been confirmed or disproven by the fifteen or so foreign reporters who had visited Basra. (Basra had been rebuilt after the Iran-Iraq war so that the rubble would not have been a leftover from the previous war). Another reporter, evoking a phrase from Vietnam, suggested that if the coalition forces wished to win the "hearts and minds" of the Iraqi people, then such heavy bombing made it likely that the people being bombed would not be able to perceive the Americans as anything but callous. Neal noted that the pictures of the bombing of bridges in Baghdad pointed to the precise surgical bombing that avoided civilian casualties and hypocritically affirmed once again that with their precision bombing they were avoiding civilian casualties.

General Neal admitted that the coalition forces considered Basra a military town, suggesting that the entire area was a legitimate military target. He also admitted coalition targeting of chemical-weapons facilities and storage plants in the area. When a reporter asked about the U.S. "concern for contamination," Neal answered that the United States was trying to limit any contamination by using munitions appropriate to the targets, but then admitted: "Let's be frank, we don't put these facilities there." Thus, the coalition forces admitted bombing sensitive chemical facilities, but Neal evaded once again the question of potentially devastating chemical contamination of the environment from such bombing.

Indeed, there were many reports of significant chemical, biological, and nuclear contamination from the U.S.-led coalition bombing. As noted earlier, on January 27, brief TV reports appeared concerning the possibility of chemical contamination of northern Saudi Arabia from the bombing of weapons facilities or storage depots in Iraq. Furthermore, many independent sources provided information on contamination from the coalition bombing. For example, Environment News Service on February 11, 1991, reported:

An unknown and rapidly progressing disease has reportedly been unleashed after a bacteriological weapons production plant near the Iraqi capital of Baghdad was bombed by coalition forces. Fifty out of one hundred servicemen guarding the plant died in a Baghdad hospital shortly after being admitted. According to a report from Tass News Agency Sunday, an Egyptian physician who had been working in the hospital told a Cairo-based newspaper that the guards had lung damage and injuries to their circulatory and intestinal systems. The physician said efforts to contain the disease were unsuccessful, and it was spreading in Baghdad (cited from PeaceNet, mideast.gulf).¹⁰

A reporter also noted in the February 11 briefing with Gen. Neal that a Basra oil refinery was

attacked and a lot of smoke was seen billowing over the border. Should people, the reporter asked, be advised to leave the area? Neal admitted that they attacked Iraqi oil production and storage facilities, but would not confirm the specific hit and did not provide any advice to the people of Basra as to whether they should abandon their city to escape from U.S. environmental terrorism. A reporter then came back again to the sensitive issue of chemical contamination and asked which munitions target chemical weapons facilities, and Neal answered that serious consideration was given to "sensitive type targets like that to make sure that we can minimize collateral damage," but didn't go into any details and quickly broke away from this sensitive issue.¹¹

In general, TV commentators and military experts avoided the discussion of chemical, nuclear, and biological contamination like the plague, which indeed the coalition bombing may have unleashed. The network news operations almost never mentioned it: it became something that polite people did not discuss. By contrast, some of the reporters in the field seemed to be very concerned about environmental contamination, and there were reports that it was indeed a major problem that the politicians and military attempted to cover up with the ultimate complicity of the mainstream media which never systematically pursued the issue.

There was also little or no debate on the ethics of the bombing of bridges. In his WBAI radio report on his trip to Baghdad, Ramsey Clark noted:

You see extensive bombing around bridges. It's hard to hit a bridge, apparently. I even saw a U.S. Government count and they said it took 500 and some sorties to hit bridges, and they hit 31. But there are people living all around them. There's a big river through Baghdad and there are a lot of bridges across it. And people don't stay away from them. They build right up toward them. In Baghdad, the Ministry of Justice building has all its windows shattered. And right there—and I think he was trying to hit the bridge, probably, because there's just absolutely nothing else there [remaining]. But he didn't hit the bridge and he had four bombs coming in there, and he just knocked out all these—it's a poor part of town—little shops and stores. And the merchants and the people who survived, they've lost everything, and their families were killed and all (PeaceNet, mideast.gulf, Feb. 12, 1991).

On February 11, Ramsey Clark cited on ABC the bombing of Baghdad bridges as evidence of focus on civilian targets, since people used these bridges and have their lives disrupted by the destruction of the bridges that they need to get from one part of the town to another. Peter Arnett's daily report from Baghdad that day showed the pictures of the bombed out bridges and had clips about people complaining that these attacks had killed civilians in the area. In a White House briefing the same day, Marlin Fitzwater found it "disturbing" that someone was "buying the evidence" that there was significant civilian damage in Iraq. This was in part a slam at Gorbachev who was arguing that U.S. bombing of Iraq was exceeding the UN mandate. In making the inane suggestion that the evidence of one's own eyes and the witness of reporters, day after the day, was duping people to "buy into Iraqi propaganda," Fitzwater was conceding that the Iraqis were scoring points in the propaganda war with civilian "collateral damage."

Yet the deaths of innocent civilians and the destruction of the infrastructure of Iraq received little sympathy in the mainstream media, or from members of the coalition against Iraq. Moshe Arens, Israel's defense minister, told reporters after a meeting with Bush on February 10 that the Israelis were suffering from the worst bombing incurred by "Western" nations since World War II. Obviously, Vietnamese, Iraqi, and

Palestinian and Lebanese people who suffered from U.S. and Israeli bombing and died in the thousands did not count. Only victims from "Western" nations presumably deserve sympathy. Indeed, there was an incredible double standard at work in the relative sympathies mustered by the network commentators toward various victims of war. Images of Israelis suffering from Iraqi Scud attacks aroused great compassion in the normally cool network anchors and correspondents. Yet, with some exceptions, the images of dead Iraqi civilians, which would become more gruesome and graphic as the war went on, were depicted as a propaganda ploy of Saddam Hussein. As noted earlier, the first images of Iraqi victims of war led NBC commentators to call these images mere Iraqi propaganda (see 6.3), and Norman Solomon collected some other examples:

As soon as the war began, Time magazine defined 'collateral damage' this way--"a term meaning dead or wounded civilians who should have picked a safer neighborhood." In U.S. news media, the rare mention of civilian casualties is routinely followed by immediate denial of responsibility. "We must point out again and again that it is Saddam Hussein who put these innocents in harm's way," Tom Brokaw declared on NBC, a network owned by one of the nation's largest military contractors, General Electric. "The MacNeal-Lehrer News Hour"--one of TV's leading war boosters--aired a few moments of civilian casualty footage from Iraq, only to debunk it as "heavy-handed manipulation." On CBS, reporter Ron Allen said that "Iraq is trying to gain sympathy" by showing grisly film of bombed civilian sites. Connie Chung chimed in that Saddam is "trying to break the resolve of the United States and its allies." (PeaceNet, mideast.media, Feb. 4, 1991).

Solomon, as well as Pratt (1991) and Umberson and Henderson (1991), argued that there was a massive denial underway during the Gulf war, in which the U.S. refused to take any responsibility for Iraqi suffering, blaming it all on Saddam Hussein. Pratt (1991) commented that the war hysteria evident during the Gulf war represented a displacement of fear and anxiety that led to the search for alien scapegoats and the use of brute force to establish a (false) collective feeling of power and identity. When people feel threatened and insecure, they seek scapegoats; throughout U.S. history Native Americans and other people of color, communists, and various domestic and foreign "enemies" have served as scapegoats. During the Gulf war, Iraqis were scapegoated as threats to the U.S. economy and "American way of life." Higher energy prices, inflation, the loss of jobs, and a declining economy were blamed on Saddam Hussein and the Iraqis, and Americans apparently felt satisfaction in seeing them punished and experienced empowerment through identification with U.S. military and technological might.

The personalization of the Iraqi enemy in the figure of Saddam Hussein allowed the Iraqi president to be the ultimate scapegoat. One soldier reported: "No one talks about 'the enemy.' They talk about Saddam Hussein. 'Hussein did this.' 'Hussein did that'" (cited in Anderson and van Atta 1991, p. 165). Bush, Schwarzkopf, and others also routinely blamed the war and all suffering on Saddam Hussein. This scapegoating of Hussein allowed the United States to legitimate its destruction of the Iraqis, but such transference of guilt from Hussein to the Iraqi people was hypocritical because the Iraqi people, too, were victims of Hussein's oppression yet it was they who were receiving the brunt of the violent U.S. bombing.

The denial of U.S. guilt for the slaughter of Iraqis was also aided, as Umberson and Henderson (1991) argued, by reifying the enemy and personifying things. Bombs were "smart" and equipment was "killed," thus making it a "casualty of war." "Tank units," "Scud missile launchers," Iraqi aircraft, and "assets" were

killed, not people. When people were referred to they were reified and dehumanized. The "elite Republican Guard units" were reified as things and a number of euphemisms were employed for killing (see 6.11). Worse still, racist epithets such as "cockroaches," "sand niggers," "camel jockeys," and other dehumanizing terms were used to describe the Iraqis, while their slaughter was described in hunting terms as "a turkey shoot," "shooting fish in a barrel," or "clubbing seals."

Denial is often coupled with projection and throughout the crisis and the war all evil was projected onto the Iraqis while the American effort was described as "just" and "moral." Such blatant projection involved the denial of the suffering caused by the U.S.-led coalition bombing and the fact that the Gulf war was a human and ecological holocaust for the people of the Middle East. Indeed, the extent of the U.S. brutality was so great that it would be difficult for the media boosters and fans of the war to look the results of U.S. bombing in the face without shame and guilt. Thus the media and other promoters of the war regularly blamed all of the war's destruction on Iraq--a phenomenon that would be most evident in the U.S. bombing of an Iraqi civilian shelter.

7.3 Baghdad Atrocity

Early in the morning on February 13, Peter Arnett reported that during the night huge bombs had rained down on the city of Baghdad and hit a bomb shelter in a civilian area, causing many civilian deaths. The early video footage showed people milling around a huge mass of concrete and steel with smoke emerging from a hole in the ground. Around 6 a.m. EST, Arnett came on again and said that the picture was now becoming a little clearer concerning what had happened. Reporters were taken to the Amiriya area of Baghdad where hundreds of people were trapped in a bomb shelter that was directly hit by U.S. bombs. Arnett interviewed a minister of health on the scene who said that the first bomb cut a hole in the roof and the second bomb went straight through the hole and exploded, causing a massive fire in the shelter and preventing Iraqi civilian defense from rescuing the people inside. The minister claimed that the neighborhood was civilian and that the bombing attack was a "criminal, premeditated, and well-planned attack against the civilians."

The images broadcast on CNN showed people waiting anxiously outside the destroyed shelter while firemen were fighting a fire in it. Other images of the area showed houses, a school, a supermarket, and a mosque, with no evidence of military targets. Arnett reported that he and other journalists then went to a local hospital where there were bodies of thirty dead women and children, and ten more in a truck outside. The bodies were charred beyond recognition, and the Iraqis were claiming that there were as many as one thousand people sleeping in the shelter and that perhaps as many as four hundred were killed. The bombing reportedly occurred at 4:45 a.m. Baghdad time, and Arnett described the attack as part of a series of heavy bombing raids that night. Since the bombing had begun, he explained, hundreds of people had slept regularly in the bomb shelter. When the foreign correspondents arrived, one truckload of bodies had been driven away and the CNN cameraman reportedly saw many bodies dragged out of the charred remains. In response to whether the Iraqis were censoring this story, Arnett replied that they had told the correspondents for the first time that their copy would not be subject to any censorship nor would there be any Iraqi authorities with him as he gave the report. He was free to report exactly what he saw.

In their early morning news reports, ABC buried the story of the atrocity of Amiriya in the middle of their headlines and coded it as a possible propaganda ploy by the Iraqis. Mike Schneider reported that "there is a new claim now from Iraq about the allies allegedly hitting civilian areas of Baghdad. Reporters were taken today to what is left of a building in the center of the city. Iraqis say that it was a bomb shelter that was hit

by allied bombs. They claim now that some four hundred people were killed in this one incident. Of course, the claims could not be independently confirmed. Keep in mind that everything that comes out of Iraq now is subject to Iraqi censorship."

The report was accompanied by obscured pictures of some twisted concrete and metal with none of the poignant images of civilian deaths shown in the CNN report. This brief news summary was followed by Schneider saying: "President Bush said that talk of civilian casualties is nothing but propaganda cooked up by Saddam Hussein," accompanied by a clip of Bush complaining. In fact, the ABC report revealed itself to be pure propaganda for the military and Bush administration. First, note how the ABC report framed the story as mere Iraqi propaganda using the terms "claim," "allegedly," and "subject to government censorship." By stating that, "of course, the claims could not be independently confirmed," one is positioned to view the report skeptically and the "of course" serves as a wink to the viewer that naturally you don't want to believe this Iraqi propaganda. The disclaimer that the "claims could not be independently confirmed," however, is somewhat disingenuous, as ABC could have listened to the CNN report by Peter Arnett, which was shown at least a half an hour before; they could have also asked their own correspondent on the scene what he could confirm, or cited an AP report on the bombing. And ABC could have viewed the pictures of the carnage, already on the satellite, to discern if there might actually be some "confirmation" that an atrocity had occurred.

Every war has its memorable events, those images that are seared into one's mind forever and that constitute one's picture of the war. Images of atrocities of war are especially unforgettable; during the Vietnam war, pictures of Buddhist monks burning themselves in Saigon as a protest against the war were especially powerful, as were images of U.S. soldiers torching peasant huts with cigarette lighters, of B-52 airplanes dropping high explosive bombs with great fireballs exploding below, of a young girl running down a road with a group of refugees, her naked body scarred by napalm. These are the images of Vietnam that haunt the memory and create a picture of the horrors of war. Would the atrocities of Baghdad reach this status? Not if the Bush administration and Pentagon propaganda apparatus could help it.

The first official response came from the Pentagon with CNN reporting that the military was claiming that they had no way of determining whether the target was an air-raid shelter, if it was a civilian or a military target, and if the charred bodies were civilian or military. The Pentagon insisted that the United States was not in the practice of targeting civilians and stated that if the attack did take place, they "would feel badly about it." The Pentagon "bridles" at the suggestion that there be an "investigation" because that implied wrong-doing though they would perform the usual "bomb damage assessment." CBS's Jim Stewart at the Pentagon said that officials were caught by surprise by the report and claimed to have no evidence of the bombing, saying that the only evidence is "Iraqi government cleared and censored film." Anchor Harry Smith in Saudi Arabia, obviously reproducing a propaganda line fed him by his U.S. military handlers, mentioned that the Iraqis had been putting military facilities in civilian areas, as if this justified bombing civilians in a bomb shelter. He generally scoffed at the claim of the bombing of a civilian target, implying that the reports were mere propaganda, thus showing himself to be eager to promote the Pentagon line from his spot in Saudi Arabia.

CBS's Randall Pinkston reported from the White House that so far there was no official U.S. reaction to the destruction of the bomb shelter in suburban Baghdad. Pinkston reproduced Pentagon sophistries that perhaps the Iraqis "placed civilians in harm's way" (in bomb shelters!) or that charred bodies were perhaps military personnel dressed up as civilians (disregarding reports that foreign reporters had seen charred bodies

of women and children pulled out of the shelter). Pinkston commented that the Bush administration had been concerned about reports involving Iraqi civilian casualties as part of a "propaganda war." CBS then broadcast a series of remarks by Bush:

February 6: "I am annoyed at the propaganda coming out of Baghdad about targeting civilians."

February 11: "I would be remiss if I did not reassure the American people that this war was fought with high-tech."

February 12: "I think that there is a conscientious [sic] effort on [Saddam Hussein's] part to try to raise the propaganda value, accusing us of indiscriminate bombing of civilians and it's simply not true."

Obviously, Bush's repeated disclaimers indicated that the issue of civilian casualties was a sensitive one, and the Bush administration propaganda machine now faced their greatest challenge: to put an effective spin on the Baghdad atrocities.

Although the Bush administration and the mainstream media now regularly stressed that Iraq was carrying out a "propaganda war", the latter failed to recognize the propaganda efforts of the Bush administration and Pentagon. Later in their morning show, ABC broadcast a powerful segment on the bombing by correspondent Bill Blakemore in Baghdad. Blakemore graphically described the bloody casualties that he and other reporters saw in the shelter and graphic images of bloody bodies illustrated his text. One saw Blakemore and other reporters penetrate into the smoky shelter, going as far into it "as the heat and smoke would let us." One Iraqi man told Blakemore that "I swear to God. I will get my revenge on Bush if it takes my ten generations." There were images of pools of blood on the floor and bodies and body parts "of women and children who usually sleep in the shelter at night." One man was looking for "eleven of my own" in tremendous despair. A piece of the bomb with writing in English was displayed and the report then cut to depict a collection of bodies at a hospital. An angry doctor said: "Do you call this justice? Who dares to say that 'we don't hit civilians.'" Some badly burned children who escaped and whose families had died inside inside the shelter were shown and interviewed. A woman screamed at the reporters: "For what? For oil, you would do this?"

Mike Schneider reminded the audience that Blakemore's report was subject to scrutiny by Iraqi government censors and then discussed the propaganda value of the pictures as well as the alleged fact that Saddam Hussein planted civilians in military targets. As it turned out, these reports were not censored by the Iraqis and to reduce these harrowing pictures to "propaganda" was obscene; earlier, Schneider had acted as if the stories of the civilian deaths were mere propaganda and when confronted with striking pictures, he continued to interpret the event as propaganda and to blame the deaths on Saddam Hussein, revealing himself to be nothing more than a propaganda agent for the Bush administration and U.S. military.

Throughout the morning, the Pentagon repeated that their bombing practices and U.S. policy were to minimize civilian casualties, though they knew that there would be some such casualties. The Pentagon now also added that they were going to bomb anti-aircraft artillery, even if it was to be placed in civilian areas, reversing an earlier stated policy and suggesting that the Baghdad incident was not going to temper their bombing practices. At the morning U.S. military briefing in Saudi Arabia, delayed to get its propaganda line

together, Gen. Richard "Butch" Neal launched into what might be the Biggest Lie in a campaign of Big Lies. Neal appeared drawn and pinched and seemed extremely tense. His report of the dull and deadly statistics was longer than usual and appeared monstrous and inhuman in the face of the human tragedies hidden by the bland numbers of the daily kill rate. Finally, Neal commented on the "bunker strike that has had so much play over this past morning. I'm here to tell you that it was a military bunker. It was a command and control facility We have been systematically attacking these bunkers since the beginning of the campaign."

Neal went on to explain that it was an "active bunker" with a "hardened shelter," with a roof that had been recently painted to camouflage it, and that "we have no explanation why there were civilians in this bunker." He insisted that they had accurate intelligence that this was a military installation and had precisely targeted the building. Neal advised that civilians would be safer if they stayed in a residential area, though, in fact, the Amiriya shelter was built for the people in that residential area. Neal had no answer for the repeated questions concerning why, if U.S. intelligence was so great, they did not know that civilians were sleeping in the building. Neal speculated that perhaps the victims were members of the family of the military personnel who work there.

And now what would the CNN spin doctors say? Anchor Reid Collins evenhandedly noted that there were conflicting reports as to whether the building was a military or civilian shelter and CNN military "analyst" James Blackwell came on to try to put a positive Pentagon spin on the bombing. Throughout the day, Blackwell, Perry Smith, and CNN's other military commentators would do their best to argue that the shelter was a military command-and-control center, showing once again how "military analysts" were just mouthpieces for the Pentagon. Blackwell correctly noted that the military was not passing the episode off as a case of mistaken bombing. Rather, it was claiming that the building was an active target and that it had observed military personnel going in and out of the shelter and had detected electronic messages coming out of that were being sent to control operations in the Kuwaiti theater. Blackwell claimed that pilots had told him that the building did not appear to be a civilian bomb shelter, at least from the air, and concluded himself that if Saddam Hussein was putting civilians in it, then that was criminal.

Reid Collins asked what if the building was a military facility during the day and a civilian shelter at night? Blackwell replied that Gen. Neal claimed that they had no information that there were any civilians at all in the shelter. CNN Pentagon correspondent Gene Randall reasonably asked if the bombing and death toll pointed to a failure in the Pentagon's intelligence; Blackwell merely deflected the question. The rest of the day the Big Three networks returned to their regular programming of game shows and soap operas, leaving one of the major dramas of the war to play out solely on CNN. Peter Arnett reported live from Baghdad at 10:54 a.m. that 200 bodies had been taken out of the shelter and they were all women and children--he put special emphasis on the word "shelter" whereas the U.S. military apologists in the media would use the term "bunker." The manager of the shelter told Arnett that there were still about 300 more people in the building. The manager insisted that there were no military personnel or activities in it and that the shelter was purely for civilians. Indeed, no men were allowed in the shelter, which was for women and children only. The video, in fact, depicted the men waiting outside the shelter, visibly upset, in grief as they saw the charred bodies being pulled out. The report cut to an interview in the hospital with a survivor of the bombing, a young boy with severe burns who told how the bombs hit; he and a few others crawled out and he told how his mother and sisters were burned to death; he woke up on fire and turned to his mother who was already a lump of burned flesh; then he crawled out, his clothes burned off, and his body suffering from burns.

After the Saudi military briefing, which reproduced the U.S. propaganda line of the day, CNN brought

on an eager Major Gen. Perry Smith who provided his analysis of the mystery of the bunker/shelter. Smith said that if you look at the video of the reinforced concrete, the multilayers of stairs, and the steel doors, you can see that it is a military shelter. CNN anchor Bob Cain asked if these features were not similar to a civilian shelter, and Smith answered no, that he was familiar with military bunkers and the "luxury" features were not in civilian shelters (Smith failed to specify what the luxury features were, which were certainly not visible in the video). Cain then raised the question of who the civilians might have been and Smith repeated the Pentagon line that they might have been families of the military personnel who worked in the bunker, speculating that it could also be that "he [Saddam Hussein] put a lot of civilians in there," knowing that it might be struck, to create propaganda effects around the world.

Smith's claim that this was certainly a military bunker was pure bluster. On Britain's BBC 2 (Feb. 13) a military expert, Dr. David Manley, a U.K. government's Home Office civil defence adviser, put the U.S. version in question. Manley had actually been inside both Iraqi civilian and military shelters and stated that "it was definitely a bomb-shelter. Very poorly designed and constructed--one thing, it seemed to burst open very, very easily, with these bombs. And it was penetrated very easily and from the steel and from the concrete and I would be very surprised if it was rolled steel or [that] the concrete could fetch over 50 newtons [which] is what we specify for civilian nuclear shelters. The military shelters of Saddam Hussein are very good. We do know that." The BBC interviewer went on to ask:

Now, the suggestion is that it may have been originally a civilian shelter but that it had been converted to military purposes and perhaps it had a dual function--perhaps a civilian bomb-shelter on top and a military command and control centre underneath. Does that make sense?

Dr. Manley: No. I would not agree with that practice at all, technically. You can't just convert a civilian shelter into a military shelter. There are many, many aspects to be considered on this. I rather think that it was used for civilians....

Presenter: But the Americans say that they had good electronic intelligence that military signals were passing in and out of this bunker at an increasing frequency over the last week.

Dr. Manley: Well, it may well be so, because the communication equipment may have been stored partly in these shelters. Most countries have quite sophisticated networks of communications equipment. But I don't agree that this was one of his military shelters.

As the day went on, as we shall see, substantial evidence indicated that the bombing target was a civilian shelter and that the U.S. had massacred innocent civilians; after the war, more evidence appeared to confirm this view. Such an atrocity was bound to elicit world outrage. From the UN, CNN correspondent Jeanne Moos reported that the U.S. ambassador came with John Kelly, a big gun in the State Department, to meet with Javier Perez de Cueller, the UN Secretary General. The Cuban UN representative had said that the bombing had been going on around the clock for twenty-seven days already and had regularly been hitting populated areas and causing civilian deaths. There was a strong movement afoot in the UN to reconsider the Security Council resolution allowing force to resolve the crisis in the Gulf, and the United States was doing

everything possible to head off further debate, especially in public.

Later in the morning there was an announcement by Press Secretary Marlin Fitzwater, who stated: "Last night, coalition forces bombed a military command and control center in Baghdad that, according to press reports, resulted in a number of civilian casualties. The loss of civilian lives in time of war is a truly tragic consequence. It saddens everyone to know that innocent people may have died in the course of military conflict. Americans treat human life as our most precious value." After this stunning piece of hypocrisy, Fitzwater went on to claim that the "bunker was a military target,...a command and control center that fed instructions directly to the Iraqi war machine," painted and camouflaged to avoid detection, and well-documented as a military target. But the only "arguments" so far officially advanced was the claim that the building was camouflaged, that there were military messages transmitted from it, and that Iraqi military personnel were seen entering the building during the day.

Several TV commentators that day went to the roof of the shelter and the video showed that there was obviously no camouflage on the shelter, that it had a merely sand and gravel flat roof; inspection of the building by journalists on the scene revealed no evidence of any communications gear or other military material in the shelter. To the U.S. claims that they detected Iraqi military personnel entering the shelter, the question was raised concerning why the same intelligence did not show civilians entering every evening and leaving every morning, as had occurred throughout the war. One military flack argued that it would be impossible to detect civilians going in at night because the U.S. satellite pictures could not detect this in the darkness, but the answer evaded the question of why the satellite did not detect civilians coming out of the shelter in the daylight and, in fact, the United States refused to answer questions concerning whether their satellite photos had a night capacity.

Fitzwater repeated that the United States did not know why civilians were in the structure, "but we do know that Saddam Hussein does not share our value in the sanctity of life." After concluding with a litany of the crimes of Saddam Hussein, including a new report that two Iraqi planes have been parked beside an ancient archaeological site, Fitzwater abruptly broke off, saying, "Thank you very much," and walked away without taking any questions, as a reporter shouted after him: "What do you mean, thank you, we want to ask you questions!"

The noon CNN telecast was headlined: "Conflicting reports out of the war zone." CNN announced that so far there were only eight survivors, and that the bombed building was just one of many targets during a twelve hour bombing raid. (Another of the bombed buildings was right across the street from the Al Rashid Hotel where the foreign journalists and Soviet diplomats were staying). CNN then ran an ITN report by a shaken Brent Sadler who described the target as "obviously a civilian shelter" that was filled with "civilians escaping from the nightly bombing." The report contained the most graphic and horrific images so far of incinerated people, agonized families, dazed crowds, and upset journalists, powerful visual evidence that the shelter was undeniably used by civilians. One saw twisted steel and concrete with bunkers, obviously for sleeping. Iraqi civilian defense teams fought through the blazing fire trying to save people; one victim after another was pulled out, a blanket wrapped around their charred remains as the crowd broke into collective grief each time a new victim was brought out of the inferno.

Despite the visual evidence, CNN's military apologist, James Blackwell, came on again, determined to win points for the Pentagon, and did an "analysis" of the video clips of the building bombed to "prove" that it was a military bunker. Notice, he said, the steel doors that prevent people from coming in; look at the shelter

sign in English, which looks like a Civilian Defense sign in the United States; look at the barbed wire around the building; look at the reinforced concrete--all signs, Blackwell reassured us, that it was a military bunker. He admitted that, "of course," the allies can't provide any counterevidence in the "public relations" campaign unless they release the evidence of the intelligence that established that this was a military facility, again reducing the images of Iraqi civilian casualties to propaganda. When asked why so many civilians were sleeping in the building, Blackwell repeated Perry Smith's speculation that perhaps the families of the military people who worked there slept in the bunker at night. He insisted that the bunker was like the one used by Saddam Hussein, stocked for the families of the military. But, he concluded, the more "macabre" reason for the civilian occupants might be that Saddam Hussein has pursued a new policy of moving civilians into these areas as human shields. At this point, Reid Collins cut off Blackwell's "analysis of what happened last night," while Bobby Battista looked down and away from the camera as she cut to a commercial break.

James Blackwell and Perry Smith thus not only repeated every Pentagon lie but attempted to construct "arguments" of their own concerning why the building was clearly a military shelter. None of their arguments, however, would stand up: It had been established that the shelter was built for civilians and that the dual language signs were typical in Baghdad, so there was nothing suspicious about the shelter sign being in English. The barbed-wire fence around it could be explained on the ground that there were only a few shelters in the city for civilians, that only a small percent of the people of Baghdad had access to these shelters.¹² Because of the scarcity of shelters, people in the neighborhood were given passes to sleep in them, requiring control of access via fences and entrance through a main door. Every honest reporter and all fair-minded experts who had actually visited Iraqi shelters affirmed that this was a civilian shelter, that the Iraqi military would not use such a building for its operations, that they would not allow civilians into their secret military bunkers, and that all the Pentagon arguments were mere sophistries. As Peter Arnett stated, "this is Iraq" where the military keeps their command-and-control centers away from the public and never allows the public access to sensitive facilities.

During the afternoon Pentagon military briefing in Washington, Pete Williams, Capt. Dave Herrington, and General Tom Kelly repeated the old lies and added some new ones. Kelly noted that because "there has been a lot of interest" in the bombing of the facility in Baghdad, Herrington would provide a briefing on this. Herrington brought out a map of the center of Baghdad, which contained the command-and-control headquarters during the beginning of the campaign, though, he explained, because these were bombed early in the war, the Iraqis were forced out into alternate command-and-control facilities in other parts of the city, such as the Amiriya center. The next diagram contained a close-up drawing of the "bunker" bounded by a residential area, near a school and a mosque. Because the building was near civilian facilities, Herrington commented, the U.S.-led coalition chose the middle of the night for their raid and used precision weapons. Herrington emotionally stated that it "deeply hurt him as an American" that Saddam Hussein put civilians in the military facility. It seemed to be hurting the press corps in the room as Americans that they were forced to hear their government lie in such a blatant fashion; the military correspondents looked terribly forlorn and upset.

Herrington's "story" got somewhat out of control as he explained that the shelter was converted in the late 1980s to a military bunker. Earlier, it had been claimed that in 1985 the shelter had been upgraded to a military bunker, but now Herrington had a more elaborate story about how the shelter was hardened so that "it could even withstand a nuclear attack." This was a bit much, so Kelly had to jump in and explain that the reinforcements would protect the communications equipment from the radiation of an explosion in the area. Picking up his story, Herrington insisted that the bunker was full of military communications equipment and

repeated the earlier lies that the building was a military bunker. The reporters focused on the issue of why—if the Pentagon had so much intelligence concerning this shelter—they didn't know that civilians were in the building. Kelly lamely responded that there was "no logic" in civilians going into a building with a camouflaged, painted roof and insisted, beyond logic, that the intelligence sources had never sighted any civilians going into the shelter (whereas civilians had been going into the shelter every night and leaving every morning).

Soon after, varying interpretations would emerge of why the United States targeted the civilian shelter. Retired Air Force Chief Michael Dugan told the London Times that the military had simply made a targeting mistake and that intelligence identifying it as a military command bunker was out of date (Feb. 17, 1991, p. A1). Newsweek (Feb. 25, 1991, p. 20) and various commentators on CNN circulated the story that the United States believed that high-ranking Baath party officials and their families were sleeping in the shelter and that the building was targeted to eliminate the Iraqi political leadership or to give them the "message" that Saddam Hussein was threatening their survival so that they would overthrow him.¹³ The Washington Post combined the two stories, reporting that the shelter/bunker had been placed on the U.S. military target list months ago, after intelligence experts concluded that it was a bunker designed to shelter senior Iraqi leaders but were unaware that civilians were now sleeping in it (Feb. 14, 1991). After the war, Arnett noted that "the hot rumor was that Saddam Hussein was there two hours before" the bombing, but that he could not go on the air with that information (Broadcasting, Mar. 25, 1991, p. 91).

ABC and some commentators on CNN proposed the "dual use" theory, suggesting that the building was both a civilian sleeping shelter and a military bunker. Ted Koppel, for instance, on the February 13 "Nightline" floated this theory, quoting a writer with the prestigious Jane's Weekly defense magazine, who claimed that dual use was typical of Iraqi installations. Koppel opened his program by naively stating that "there was no reason to doubt the American claim that it was a military shelter." Yet ABC's Baghdad correspondent, Bill Blakemore, had interviewed many people on the scene, all of whom assured him that civilian women and children had been sleeping in the shelter every night since the war had begun. Blakemore also insisted that he was assured by all of the people he interviewed that there was no military activity in the bunker and he commented that he had seen no evidence of any military or communications equipment.

The "dual use" theory would have to explain why the Iraqis, known for security paranoia and ultrasecret military installations, would allow civilians to sleep in a highly sensitive command-and-control center. The obvious answer was that they would not and that the Bush administration and military were simply lying. On an Arts and Entertainment cable channel (A&E) documentary series on Operation Desert Storm, produced by the BBC, the former director of the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), Lt. Gen. Leonard Perroots, flatly admitted that the United States made a mistake in bombing the shelter and was "without the most current information."¹⁴ Moreover, in an interview with USA Today on March 19, 1991, the chief of the Air Force, General Merrill McPeak, admitted that: "There is no doubt that we made some mistakes of what we bombed. I know of several. I have photographic evidence of several where the pilots just acquired the wrong target." As to whether this included the bomb shelter and infant formula factory, USA Today noted that McPeak "declined to give more details--mainly, he said, because he had been overruled by his superiors on talking about the matter. 'It ain't my call. I made some recommendations about this and got turned around, quite frankly'" (USA Today, March 19, 1991).¹⁵

After the war, Louise Cainkar of the Palestine Human Rights Information Center visited Baghdad and interviewed a large number of people from the neighborhood (1991, 341ff.). Her research indicated that local

residents slept nightly in the shelter; males over the age of sixteen were not allowed in the shelter, with the exception of older men. The shelter held 2,000 residents and there were estimates that at least 1,600 died. During the summer of 1991, a PBS crew inspected the bunker and could also find no evidence that there was any military equipment in the shelter. In this Frontline documentary, however, Col. John Warden, the Pentagon spokesperson interviewed, continued to claim, against all evidence, that it was a military bunker. Likewise, Dick Cheney continued to claim that it was a military bunker in a 1992 documentary shown on the Discovery Channel, put together by conservative Richard Perle and the American Enterprise Institute, obviously dedicated to the enterprise of the perpetuation of Big Lies.¹⁶

Despite the slimness of its "evidence," the Pentagon insisted immediately and categorically that the Baghdad shelter was a military command-and-control center and has stuck with the story to the present. Throughout the Gulf war, the military adopted a policy of quick, immediate, bold, and bald-faced lies to hide their crimes. The United States wanted at all costs to maintain the illusion that their bombing was precise, based on accurate intelligence, and avoided civilian casualties. They were especially concerned to deny that they were hitting civilian targets and thus immediately claimed that Iraqi civilian targets hit were military installations when accused of hitting targets like the infant formula factory or bomb shelter. Previously, the military had attempted to manage bad news by restricting access to it, by presenting it as an isolated incident to be expected in the fog of war, and by allowing it to dribble out in a controlled seepage over a number of days or weeks. But in an age of instant information this policy was not good enough for the war image managers, so they resorted to the policy of the instant and fast lie to deal with "damage control."

The mainstream media, however, showed little interest in pursuing the story of the shelter bombing. The next morning at the military briefings the incident was not mentioned. The story was yesterday's news overcome in interest by the latest military trivia of the day. Or perhaps the press was embarrassed by the magnitude and outrageousness of the Pentagon's lying and fearful of losing contacts with the Pentagon brass, reporters simply shut up and kept their doubts to themselves. In the absence of critical media discourse, however, the policy of Big Lies to cover over major crimes seemed to work. Most of the callers to radio and TV call-in programs bought the line that the shelter was a military bunker and a legitimate military target; an ABC News/Washington Post poll on February 15, 1991, for instance, asked: "Who is most responsible for the civilian bombing deaths?" and answered: "Saddam Hussein, sixty-seven percent, Iraq, twelve percent, U.S. seven percent." The public seemed to have bought into the war aims and propaganda and was not going to be deterred in its desire for U.S. victory by mere Iraqi casualties. Bush's propaganda campaign of demonizing the Iraqis was apparently successful and the public was willing to believe the worst of them and to believe what it was told by its Masters of War, despite the facts.

While the bombing campaign was relentlessly destroying Iraq, other events were spinning out of control again in the Gulf war. Several oil spills were polluting the Gulf, some of which were attributed to the U.S. military; over fifty oil well fires burned in Kuwait and the U.S. military had admitted that coalition bombing might have caused many of the fires, though they continued to claim as well that the Iraqis were torching wells. CNN reported on February 13 that Kuwait had become a smoky hell where men and machines were being relentlessly bombed by continual coalition sorties and dozens of oil fires were burning out of control. Later that morning, another atrocity was reported: an allied bombing of a Kuwaiti bus near the border that killed thirty people, mostly refugees seeking to escape the country. Stories also began emerging from Saudi Arabia about "killing boxes": the military was dividing Kuwait into zones, or boxes, and destroying everything in the box and then going on to the next box. The coalition air war was destroying Kuwait in order to save it.¹⁷

7.4 Iraqi Peace Communiqué

The worst civilian bombing casualties of the war so far came at a bad time for Bush as he was torn between starting the ground war immediately and waiting for more bombing--perhaps several weeks more--to destroy to the maximum Iraq's military and industry. But the Soviets and Iraqis were floating peace initiatives, and the UN was clamoring for a public debate the very day of the Baghdad atrocity. That event only increased calls for peace and a negotiated settlement--which would rob Bush and the military of the pleasures of a decisive defeat of Saddam Hussein's military and a ground war.

On Friday morning, February 15, a startling communiqué came out of Iraq at about 5:30 a.m. EST. For the first time, it appeared that Iraq had officially agreed to withdraw from Kuwait as stipulated by UN resolution 660, which stipulated that Iraq should unconditionally withdraw from Kuwait. The proposal included, to be sure, the usual demand for linkage with issues that Iraq wanted negotiated (withdrawal of Israel from Palestinian lands, withdrawal of Syria from Lebanon, and so on). But the key issue was that this was the first time that Iraq had ever officially agreed to begin negotiating to get out of Kuwait and to meet the UN resolutions.

Clearly, this was a big story that could be the turning point of the war: The long-awaited diplomatic breakthrough (by everyone but the Bush administration). CNN broadcast the communiqué as soon as it appeared and focused on the story for the rest of the day. From Iraq, Peter Arnett reported great excitement in the Al-Rashid Hotel where news of the Iraqi offer to withdraw from Kuwait was met by "sighs of relief" and people in the street began shooting guns in celebration. Iraqi officials cautioned the news media that the communiqué was just a proposal and that people didn't understand what it meant yet so reporters were asked to stay in the hotel and not meet with the public. Arnett stressed, however, that for the first time Iraq had agreed to withdraw from Kuwait. He suggested that the Palestinian reference and the other linkages were for "domestic consumption" and for the Arab world at large and that the communiqué signaled that the Iraqis were ready to negotiate. What was important, he insisted, was that the Iraqis had agreed to withdraw from Kuwait and to abide by UN resolution 660.

On "CBS This Morning" U.S. troops interviewed in Saudi Arabia reacted in a mixed fashion: some were joyful and eager to get home alive; others were skeptical; the hard-nosed military types who wanted the satisfaction of ground war and a decisive victory were grim and noncommittal. The Kuwaitis were also reacting variously, with some celebrating immediately and others sounding more skeptical and not trusting the Iraqis. The Saudis were ambiguous in their response and difficult to interpret. The Iraqis were cautious, waiting for the United States to respond.

Interestingly, one could easily tell that morning which network anchors, correspondents, and experts wanted negotiations and wished an end to the war, and which ones wanted to continue the war to destroy the Iraqis. NBC's "Today" host Bryant Gumbel opened by saying, "We greet you with some stunning news, some very hopeful news. Baghdad radio is reporting this morning that Iraq is prepared to withdraw from Kuwait." "CBS This Morning" co-anchor Harry Smith flatly stated, "This war, for a lot of intents and purposes, is over," adding uncouthly that the Iraqis "have had the royal snot beaten out of them." On CBS, supposed liberal Juan Williams was negative toward the peace proposal, which he saw as "very iffy," commenting that the Iraqi communiqué "adds to the sense of confusion." Neoconservative Fred Barnes cautioned that the Bush administration must handle this very carefully because Washington does not want to

give Saddam a propaganda victory by making it appear that Iraq wants peace while Bush wants war. Former Carter administration official Daniel Aaron said on CBS that the Bush administration cannot act too skeptically about this, and treat it like a "dirty diaper," or Bush will come off as against peace. If Bush treated it too skeptically and then moved into a ground war, it would be received very badly politically, Aaron warned, and then pointed to the need to negotiate a cease-fire to put an end to the war.

Those who were positive and wanted peace stressed the novel elements of the Iraqi communiqué and argued that now was the time for serious negotiations and steps toward peace. Those who wanted to continue the war remarked that there was nothing new, that Saddam Hussein had always wanted linkage and had conditions for withdrawal while the Bush administration insisted on "unconditional withdrawal." The positive response was that the Iraqi communiqué should be read as a signal that Iraq was finally ready to negotiate and that now there was the need for creative ideas that would bring an end to the war. Roger Fisher of the Harvard Negotiation Project proposed that the UN meet immediately to initiate a 48-hour cease-fire to allow negotiations to begin. Quite realistically, Fisher said that "one cannot expect these people to cry Uncle! Uncle!" Instead, the governments should enter into a serious negotiating process.

Apparently, the White House and Pentagon were caught off guard by Hussein's peace feeler and the episode appeared as another Iraqi surprise. Once again, Iraq seemed to be taking the offensive in the propaganda war, saying for the first time that it would withdraw its troops from Kuwait. The Iraqi communiqué was a clever move indicating that Saddam Hussein definitely wanted to survive and was not prepared to go down in martyrdom. His timing was on target: Throughout the world, the most intense anti-American sentiment yet to emerge surfaced after the U.S. bombing of the civilian shelter in Baghdad caused hundreds of deaths. On the down side for Iraq, its military was being systematically destroyed as it was losing millions of dollars of military equipment per day by allied bombing. Indeed, the Iraqi army was perhaps on the eve of destruction. Rumors were flying fast that the ground war was imminent, that it could begin any minute, and would probably begin sooner rather than later. Obviously, Saddam had to do something to avoid a massive military defeat.

By taking the offensive in the propaganda war, Iraq put Bush in a tricky position. The coalition was showing its first cracks, with Spain demanding a halt to the bombing and the Arab masses and others outraged by U.S. killing of innocent civilians. On the other hand, the air war was proceeding brilliantly, according to the Pentagon, but there would no doubt be many forces within the coalition who would want a cease-fire and negotiations. Others, however, would prefer the total destruction of Saddam Hussein and his regime. Likewise, there were probably similar divisions within the Bush administration and within the U.S. military in Saudi Arabia, as some troops reacted positively and hopefully, while others reacted negatively and skeptically.

Reaction from the Pentagon seemed to be overwhelmingly negative and hostile to the Iraqi communiqué; the State Department at first reacted much more positively, pointing to a split within the Bush administration. The split had surfaced earlier when the State Department had floated a joint Soviet-U.S. peace initiative the night of Bush's State of the Union address, to the disgust and anger of the hawks in the Bush administration and Pentagon who wanted a smashing military victory. How, indeed, would the Bush administration respond to the Iraqi communiqué? According to CBS, the White House's first response was that it was studying the document and wanted to see the fine print, complaining that it was receiving its information third-hand from the news media. It also insisted that the prosecution of the war would not stop. CNN's Charles Bierbauer reported that there was a frenzy in the White House which had announced a

briefing and then announced a slight delay, as they tried to formulate their response to the Iraqi initiative.

While waiting for the briefing, CBS's White House correspondent, Randall Pinkston, suggested that if the White House rejected the proposal out of hand, Saddam Hussein would win a propaganda victory of sorts, highlighting the Bush administration dilemma. Suddenly, Marlin Fitzwater appeared and asserted that the White House had not yet fully examined the statement, but it clearly contained conditions which are objectionable. "Promises alone are not enough," Fitzwater insisted, "there must also be concrete actions on the ground." While the CBS commentator put a positive spin on Fitzwater's reaction because he did not completely reject the Iraqi initiative, ABC's Ann Compton put an extremely negative spin on it. Compton revealed that White House officials indicated that the more they examined it, the worse it looks. They were, she explained, beginning to present it as a "real disappointment, because the statement raises the hopes of people around the world." The problem, the White House insisted to the correspondents, is the "conditions," which were turning the Bush administration more sour on the Iraqi communiqué by the moment.

In fact, such a peace proposal was the "worst nightmare" for the Bush administration, which wanted military victory to decisively defeat the Iraqis. ABC's John McWethy at the State Department also put a negative spin on it, lips more tightly pursed and forehead more wrinkled than usual for the smooth McWethy. Repeating the Pentagon/White House line of the day, McWethy said that if the Iraqis announce that they will get out of Kuwait unconditionally, the United States will stop the war, but the Bush administration totally rejects all linkage and insists that Iraqi withdrawal be unequivocal. McWethy has long been a spokesperson for the Reagan and Bush administrations, so his negative spin indicated that the administration was trying to promote a negative reaction to the Iraqi peace feeler and ultimately to sabotage it. Putting it bluntly, the Bush administration had continually done everything possible to subvert diplomatic solutions to the crisis and war and continued to pursue a military solution.

Shortly thereafter, ABC's Sam Donaldson described in Saudi Arabia rumors that the ground war was hours away and that Iraq could suffer enormous losses. Donaldson speculated that Iraq had tied the president's hand for the next phase, at least temporarily. To immediately launch a ground war would put the president in an untenable political position, if it appeared that he was launching a bloody war just when peace was possible. It was Donaldson's impression that an Iraqi withdrawal would be an enormous relief to the troops and he also believed that the commanders in the field genuinely did not want to see U.S. soldiers die.

Yet, many in the U.S. political and military establishment downplayed the positive reasons that Saddam Hussein might have to negotiate and withdraw and were wholly negative and skeptical. ABC military commentator Tony Cordesman warned that the military consequences of a cease-fire could be very serious; even a few days could give the Iraqis time to get in supplies, redeploy their troops, move mines, and change the structure of the battlefield, screwing up U.S. military intelligence. There must be an unconditional withdrawal, Cordesman insisted, or American lives will be jeopardized. Cordesman and other military "experts" continued to take this line, using it to justify the slaughter of the Iraqi troops who would soon show themselves to be totally demoralized and incapable of threatening the coalition forces (see Chapters 8 and 9).

The press and political establishment really exhibited their biases that day: Some commentators, troops, and perhaps government officials were ready for a diplomatic solution, while many in the Pentagon, Bush administration, and media wanted the ground offensive to unfold. Some individuals were speaking favorably of the peace initiative as the beginning of a diplomatic solution while others, like ABC's John

McWethy, attacked the Iraqi initiative. Utilizing a highly sophisticated argument, McWethy said that he was told that one key Arabic word in the Iraqi communiqué was translated as a willingness to "abide" by the UN resolution, whereas a more literal translation suggested a mere "readiness to deal with" one UN resolution, which entailed throwing out the other UN resolutions. And then McWethy went into great detail concerning the linkages demanded--precisely the point that the Bush administration would harp on themselves. Diplomatic correspondent McWethy seemed unaware that the linkages were just political rhetoric, as Arnett and others pointed out, and that one begins negotiation by seizing on positive points for negotiation. On the other hand, McWethy also failed to point out that all diplomatic negotiations depend on linkages of some sort, that linkage is part of diplomacy.

Yet, obviously, linkage in this case referred to the Palestinian question and the Bush administration was not going to allow Saddam Hussein to be perceived as the champion of their cause. For decades, the United States had sided with Israel and had opposed all efforts to negotiate a solution to the Palestinian problem which would provide them with a homeland. From the beginning of the crisis in the Gulf, Iraq had insisted that if UN resolutions concerning their actions in Kuwait should be acted upon, then, too, should the UN resolutions calling for a Palestinian homeland--resolutions which Israel had always opposed. Many Palestinians--including the leadership of the PLO--had sided with the Iraqis and Hussein was constantly evoking the issue as part of a negotiated settlement--though ultimately he would drop the issue, as we shall see in the next chapter.¹⁸

On CBS, White House correspondent Leslie Stahl cautioned that an overly negative reaction to the Iraqi communiqué would drive a wedge between the Bush administration, on the one hand, and the American people, many of the troops, and the coalition partners on the other. CBS correspondent Eric Engberg in Saudi Arabia, however, put a purely negative spin on the initiative, noting with a grim countenance that the list of conditions demanded were almost identical with a list from three months ago, so there was "nothing new" on Hussein's "laundry list." Engberg claimed that Iraq's making such demands when it was practically defeated was "laughable," and he suggested that Hussein was "throwing a monkey wrench in the allies' plans." Obviously promoting the position of those who sought a ground war, Engberg said that Iraq was trying to make the coalition forces "look like butchers" if they begin the war when a peace initiative was on the table. As we shall see, CBS's Engberg consistently pushed for the ground war and dutifully conveyed all the information that his Pentagon handlers wanted disseminated once the ground campaign erupted (see Chapters 8-10).

On ABC, Middle East authority William Quandt, obviously favorable to a diplomatic settlement, noted that Iraq had already taken a pounding and could not be a threat to the region, if there was a settlement limiting arms in the region. Also on ABC, Judith Kipper saw the initiative as a "real breakthrough" and predicted that over the weekend there would be some important developments coming out of Moscow, when the Iraqi foreign minister, Tariq Aziz, arrived for negotiations. ABC White House correspondent Ann Compton found a positive sign in that Marlin Fitzwater did not use the word "reject," suggesting that the "White House does not want to slam the door on this." She also speculated that President Bush was genuinely surprised by the peace proposal, as were many in Washington. She did not think that Bush would use the word "reject," which turned out to be correct but off the mark in its optimism.

7.5 A Cruel Hoax

Through the morning, the pundits provided their analyses as the world waited with great anticipation

to learn George Bush's response. At 9:57 a.m., all the networks cut to Bush beginning his address to the American Academy for the Advancement of Science in Washington, so that the world could learn whether there would be war, peace, or just more confusion. Bush disclosed that when he first heard the proposal from Iraq, he was "happy that Saddam Hussein had seemed to realize that he must now withdraw unconditionally from Kuwait, in keeping with the relevant UN resolutions." Bush remarked that from what he saw on TV, there was a "celebratory atmosphere" in Baghdad and elsewhere hopes for peace. But, "regrettably," he concluded that the Iraqi communiqué was a "cruel hoax" played on the Iraqis and everyone else around the world. After closer analysis Bush found that the Iraqi proposal was full of "unacceptable old conditions," with new ones added. He had talked to members of the coalition, "and they recognize that there is nothing new here with the possible exception of [Iraq's] recognizing for the first time that [it] must leave Kuwait." Bush concluded that Iraq "must withdraw without condition. There must be full implementation of all the Security Council resolutions. And there will be no linkage to other problems in the area, and the legitimate rulers of Kuwait must be returned to Kuwait."

After demanding a "massive withdrawal" from Kuwait, Bush suggested that "there's another way for the bloodshed to stop, and that is for the Iraqi military and the Iraqi people to take matters into their own hands, to force Saddam Hussein, the dictator, to step aside." Bush stated that he "feels very sorry for the people in Iraq, and I feel sorry for the families in this country who probably felt as I did this morning when they heard the television, that maybe we really had a shot for peace today. But that's not the case, and we will continue. We will pursue our objectives with honor and decency, and we will not fail."

Bush's statement threw a wet blanket on the world's hopes for peace and made it clear that he was going to pursue a military victory. His hypocritical claim that he "regretted" that the statement was a "cruel hoax" was a sordid piece of blatant propaganda: Clearly, Bush did not want peace or a negotiated settlement. As with all of his previous efforts to block peace negotiations, Bush made categorical demands of the Iraqis (there must be massive withdrawal, no linkage, and so on), rather than sending out any signals for negotiation. Whenever the Iraqis, or the Soviets, or anyone else, put out any peace proposals, Bush invariably harped on the negative features and ignored the positive openings that might be the basis for a negotiated settlement. The rules of diplomatic negotiation, however, dictate that one ignores the negative features and begin with acceptance of the positive features. Furthermore, in the case of the Iraqi proposal, Bush upped the ante, making an aggressive move that he'd never explicitly made previously, asking the Iraqi military and citizens to overthrow Saddam Hussein--a demand that would come to haunt him later (see Chapter 10).

Bush's "feeling sorry" for the people of Baghdad and the world who wanted peace was hypocritical because if he wished, he could easily have negotiated peace. Iraq was beaten militarily and it was obviously in their interest to negotiate. And to say that the allies were pursuing their "objectives with honor and decency" was obscene in view of the killing of innocent civilians, the systematic destruction of the economic infrastructure of Iraq, and the environmental holocaust caused at least in part by allied bombing. Network commentators were visibly depressed by this incredibly hostile and aggressive response to the Iraqi peace feeler. But CBS's Harry Smith in Saudi Arabia, who during the previous hours had noted a variety of possible positive responses to the Iraqi communiqué that could bring an end to the war, gamely joined in and put a negative spin on the Iraqi communiqué, signing off with the summary that the Saudis and Kuwaitis had rejected the proposal and saw it as a deception by Saddam Hussein.

Within the framework of the propaganda war, it was obvious that Bush was trying to regain the offensive and to turn Iraq's positive initiative into something negative: a "cruel hoax" Once again, Bush

pursued the course of the military hardliners by eschewing a negotiated settlement to the hostilities. Bush continued his propaganda offensive in the early afternoon with a speech at the Raytheon Patriot missile factory in Massachusetts. As the networks began to broadcast his speech, Bush was smiling and laughing. He stood up for the Star Spangled Banner, artificially at attention and a little too stiffly. The image framed Bush surrounded by two Patriot missiles, the flag and Raytheon executives, who may have wanted the war to go on forever so as to keep selling their Patriot missiles. A chaplain, who was also a professor of Christian morals, was about to invoke God's blessing, but CNN cut to a Listerine ad telling the audience how to get kinder and gentler breath by buying their mouthwash, thus subverting the Bush administration's carefully orchestrated synthesis of war, business, politics, and religion.

Still holding off their live broadcast until Bush himself began to speak, CNN continued to present the linkage issue in its news summary of the day's events, failing to stress any positive features of the Iraqi communiqué. CNN thus kicked in with the warmongers and had good economic reasons to do so: Their advertising rates had increased fivefold, so they had plenty to lose from the end of war and the inevitable drop in ratings. War was good business and good television. The ground war would be very exciting, would get good ratings, and would fixate the nation once again on television as some people were beginning drift back to ordinary lives and concerns.

After its news summary, CNN cut to Bush, who was getting standing applause from the Patriot missile makers, praised by the president as "the men and women who built the Scud busters." The audience screamed with joy and collectively roared the "woof, woof, woof!" chant, which seemed to be the theme song of Operation Desert Storm. Bush told the cheering crowd how hopes were lifted in downtown Baghdad by the Iraqi initiative, but that the rising hope turned out to be a "cruel hoax, full of unacceptable old conditions," as well as new conditions. Bush affirmed that Saddam Hussein must "withdraw out of Kuwait with no conditions." The audience once again cheered and chanted "woof, woof, woof!" in neofascistic guttural harmony. Bush also repeated his proposal that the Iraqi military and citizens should step in and remove Saddam Hussein. "We have no argument with the people of Iraq. Our differences are with that brutal dictator in Baghdad." The crowd went wild chanting, "Woof, Woof, Woof!", as the camera shifted to frame Bush surrounded by giant Patriot missiles.

CBS cut off at this point as Bush launched into some free advertising for the Patriots, spreading again the lie of their perfect intercept score. But CBS's Bill Plante noted that the Soviets were starting a major peace initiative that should be watched over the weekend. As a response, the prowar crowd soon began resurrecting the cold war ideology, suggesting that all peace initiatives were a commie plot to reposition the Soviet Union in the Middle East after the war. In Israel, Tom Fenton reported that Prime Minister Shamir was upbeat and categorically rejected the Iraqi communiqué; it seemed that every politician in Israel had been brought before the U.S. television cameras that day to reject the Iraqi initiative as a mere propaganda ploy. At the UN, CBS reported that reaction ranged from negative to guardedly negative: the Kuwaiti ambassador stated his government's total rejection of the conditions and only the Yemenese and PLO ambassadors were reportedly positive. (This was a misrepresentation as CNN would repeatedly report from the UN all afternoon that there were both strongly positive and negative responses to the Iraqi communiqué.) Britain's John Major dutifully repeated Bush's propaganda line of the day by dismissing the Iraqi proposal as a "bogus sham," acting again as Bush's puppet, loyally defending Bush's every move and position.

CBS cut away at 12:59 p.m. in order to begin the next hour's soap operas (Dan Rather was in Saudi Arabia, possibly anticipating the beginning of the ground war). But ABC televised the latter part of Bush's

speech where he insisted: "We will control the timetable of this engagement, not Saddam Hussein. Kuwait will be liberated!" There was wild cheering for Bush, and ABC returned to its anchors. Peter Jennings commented that Bush's pitch for a renewed strategic defense initiative (SDI) and a Patriot missile-based defense system would get some criticism in Congress, though Jennings thought that Congress and the allies would support Bush's rejection of the Iraqi communiqué, echoed by other members of the coalition. CNN's Charles Bierbauer noted that there was a moment of hope that was dashed when U.S. analysts saw what it was that Saddam Hussein was offering. Bierbauer faithfully parroted the Bush administration line: The proposal that gave rise to hope was a cruel hoax; Iraq must withdraw without condition; there must be full withdrawal from Kuwait; and there must be no linkage to other problems in the area.

Hence, the mainstream media and the coalition countries fell behind Bush immediately in rejecting the peace communiqué, as did most of Congress. The day's collective coalition marching to the White House beat was similar to the response and pulling together after the U.S. bombing of the Iraqi civilian shelter two days earlier. On Sunday, February 17, ABC's David Brinkley promoted his program by asking, "What next in the war after Saddam Hussein's phony peace offer?" The New York Times editorialized on February 20: "The same question can be asked about peace that is reasonable to ask about ground war: What's the rush?"

Hence, during the first few hours after the Iraqi communiqué, members of the U.S. government as well as the coalition governments responded in a mixed way, with some positive reactions, some immediately negative, and some cautious. Yet as soon as Bush came out with a total rejection, with a completely negative response, then other foreign leaders in the coalition and members of his own government kicked in behind him. And the media tended to ape the official line, assuring a ground war and thousands more Iraqi deaths as Bush's thousand points of deadly light continued to illuminate Iraq in daily and nightly bombing raids.

Notes

1. Debates centered on whether the coalition bombing had eliminated an adequate amount of Iraq's military potential to minimize coalition casualties in a ground war. CNN cited a Soviet general reporting from Iraq that ninety percent of U.S. bombs missed their targets; he also claimed that the reduction in sorties after the first week was not the result of bad weather but was caused by increasingly heavy Iraqi artillery fire. CNN also cited a French general who claimed that thirty percent of the Republican Guard military capacity had been taken out, but "Pentagon sources" doubted that much damage had been done to the Guards, and others said that it was impossible to accurately assess their "attrition." This debate concerning how much of Iraq's military capacity the air war was eliminating continued right up until the ground war itself; see the articles in the New York Times (Febr. X, 1991, pp. 1A) and Knud Royce, Newsday, February 19, 1991, p. 4, on the battles within different U.S. intelligence agencies concerning the degree of attrition of the Iraqi military.

2. In one of the comic sections of his unintentionally humorous book, retired General Perry Smith recounts how he almost quit CNN on February 7 when he heard the headline, "Relentless Allied Air Raids on Baghdad Continue" (1991, p. 80). Smith was bothered by the use of the word "relentless." As I argue in this chapter, Smith should have been more worried about the effects of the bombing.

3. The Tomahawk Cruise missile, like the Patriot missile, was one of the systems that the Pentagon and its promoters were claiming to be highly accurate. Newsweek (Feb. 18, 1991) reported that the Pentagon claimed that of the first 52 Cruise missiles fired, 51 had hit their targets and that by the end of the third week 300 Cruise missiles had been fired at Iraq. At this point, the Pentagon was claiming an 85 percent accuracy rate, though outside "experts question whether these figures are inflated, and no one will really know how well the Tomahawk did for months to come" (p. 40). In one piece of free advertising for the missile system, NBC's Tom Aspell disclosed how he had seen the Cruise make a ninety-degree turn to avoid hitting the Al Raschid Hotel and then proceed to demolish its target (or so Aspell assumed). Arnett, however, was receiving many reports from Iraqis that the Cruise missiles were often unguided and missed their targets; one crashed behind the Al Raschid Hotel, smashing servants' quarters, and others hit civilian areas indiscriminately. Patrick Cockburn reported following Cruise missile paths right after they entered Baghdad and discovering that they were hitting civilian areas (The Irish Times, Feb. 2, 1991).

It thus appeared to the Iraqis and some journalists that the Cruise missiles were weapons of terror, much like the Scuds. The U.S. military, unwilling to admit that one of their weapons could misfire, claimed that Cruise failure to hit its target was caused by Iraqi anti-artillery fire that knocked the missile off course. If this was true, then one wonders why the Cruise missiles were fired in the daytime when Iraqi anti-aircraft fire could more easily hit them, increasing the likelihood that the Cruise missiles would hit civilian areas. Finally, in February 1992, Wolf Blitzer announced on CNN that the Pentagon was suspending tests of the Cruise missile in the United States because two missiles had recently misfired and hit civilian areas.

4. A similar report is found in an article by Susan Sachs and Patrick Sloyan, "Allied Raids Taking Massive Toll on Iraq; Reports paint picture of wide devastation," Newsday (Feb. 6, 1991, p. 5). The authors write: "Reports from inside Iraq, from journalists, refugees and Jordanians traveling through the war zone, painted a picture of widespread damage.... American peace activists and refugees fleeing Iraq told reporters of feeling the thundering jolt of bombs falling in Baghdad and the southern port city of Basra, seeing bloodied children hurt by falling debris and watching clouds of black smoke from burning oil refineries and ammunition dumps blot out the sun for hours. Jordanians who had driven from Baghdad to Amman told of seeing dead drivers slumped in blazing oil trucks after air raids."

5. Two key features of classical "just war" theory require that every possible measure is taken to prevent the war and the measures taken must be proportionate to the causes of the war. Other features include: the lack of diplomatic possibilities to resolve the conflict and moral intentions; see Drinan 1991. It is not certain that Bush exhausted diplomatic possibilities, indeed it is more likely that he blocked all diplomacy (see 1.2 and 8.1). And it is questionable whether the Bush administration's war policy was guided by moral intentions.

6. The video replays of the bombings were pornographic in that they provided thrilling voyeurism of forbidden spectacles; they provided close-ups of taboo activity, usually kept secret by the military; they were rather abstract and unemotional, providing images merely of the mechanics of destruction; and they inevitably exploded into a climax.

7. For the poignant testimony of his trip to Iraq in the form of a letter of UN Secretary-General Javier Perez de Cuellar, see Clark et al. 1992, pp. 227-235. Clark was accompanied on his trip by NBC photographer Jon Alpert, who documented the destruction. "NBC Nightly News" was going to broadcast some footage but NBC News executive vice-president Donald Browne refused to air the footage. Moreover, NBC News President Michael Gartner called in Alpert and told him that NBC did not ever want to use anything by him again, thus terminating what had been a brilliant journalistic career for Alpert at NBC! See the account by Michael Hoyt, "Jon Alpert: NBC's Odd Man Out," Columbia Journalism Review, Sept.-Oct. 1991, pp. 44-47. One sees once again the effects of having corporations like GE, closely tied to the military-industrial complex, controlling broadcast institutions.

8. The public attack on Arnett began on January 21 with snipes by Tom Shales in his TV column in the Washington Post who wrote that "troubling questions were being raised by CNN's continuing Baghdad presence. All of Arnett's reports were now being reviewed by Iraqi censors, clouding their credibility and diluting their value" (p. C1). The ignorant Shales seemed unaware that reports from Saudi Arabia were also being reviewed by Saudi government and U.S. military censors (2.2), a fact that he never found "troubling." Shales later accused ABC Baghdad correspondent Bill Blakely of exhibiting "Arnett Syndrome," which Shales defined as "seemingly inexhaustible concern for the welfare of the Iraqis." The intrepid TV warrior Shales also claimed that the "networks may have helped Saddam Hussein" to a "propaganda victory" with their reporting on the Iraqi peace plan (see 7.4 below); quotes taken from The Washington Post, February 16, 1991, p. C1.

9. Not surprisingly, Senator Simpson exhibited the same McCarthyite tactics during the emotional Supreme Court hearings in October 1991 for Clarence Thomas, who was charged by his former assistant Anita Hill of sexual harassment. During the hearings, Simpson waved papers that he possessed, claiming that they were telegrams and faxes containing negative information about Hill, much as Joe McCarthy waved papers saying that he had information about communists during the witch hunts of the 1950s.

10. A note on PeaceNet on February 16 in the mideast.gulf conference indicated that "A letter from CND [Coalition for Nuclear Disarmament] in today's Guardian states ...that the disease is anthrax."

11. Earlier, at a January 30 briefing, General Schwarzkopf had been asked questions about the munitions used on nuclear, biological and chemical facilities and answered: "Every target we have attacked--be it nuclear, chemical or biological--we have very carefully selected the destruction means, okay, after a lot of advice from a lot of very, very prominent scientists. So we selected the destruction means in such a way that we absolutely, almost to a 99.9 percent have assurance [of] no contamination." Every time that Schwarzkopf resorted to such hyperbole, he was trying to conceal something, so one would like to know what "very, very, prominent scientists" recommended, who they were, what actually happened, and what were the environmental consequences of the U.S. bombing of these facilities.

12. The Los Angeles Times had reported earlier in the war that the shelters were reserved for people of the neighborhood in which they were built. An article on January 29, 1991, described

Egyptian workers who ran out of their houses when the bombs started dropping and ran to the shelters: "But there was no room in the shelters," an Egyptian said. "So we would sit beside the door. We felt safer there."

13. The weekly newsmagazines accepted the Pentagon's Big Lie. Both Time (Feb. 25, p. 27) and Newsweek (Feb. 25, p. 18) referred to the building straightforwardly as a "bunker" and failed to raise any questions concerning the Bush administration and Pentagon version.

14. Perroots was a former director of the DIA and "a special consultant to the agency throughout the Gulf war" (The Times (of London), March 25, 1991) who also denied that the infant formula factory was a weapons factory (see 5.2). Perroots claimed that the United States made targeting mistakes in both the infant formula factory bombing and the bomb shelter, admitting, concerning the latter, that: "There was no evidence that it was being used as a command and control bunker at the time of the attack" (March 25, 1991). A search of several data bases disclosed no references to Perroots in the mainstream media in the United States who thus ignored an important source who questioned the "official" U.S. version.

15. Some top journalists also came to doubt the bunker story based on interviews with top government officials. Los Angeles Times Washington bureau chief Jack Nelson stated in a Gannett Foundation symposium: "Another doubtful piece of information concerned the so-called bunker where so many civilians were killed. I've heard it from a very good source in the government that the evidence that it was anything other than a shelter was pretty slim" (cited in LaMay et. al 1991, p. 74).

16. Mythmakers continued to parrot the U.S. government line concerning the atrocities; see Anderson and van Atta (1991) who accepted the Newsweek story, writing: "What is not now in doubt is that these were the families of some of the high Baathist Party and military officials. It was an exclusive air-raid shelter with a high fence to keep out the rabble... It may well have hit Saddam where he would hurt the most" (p. 169). In fact, it was a neighborhood shelter with restricted access. Perry Smith (1991) continued to insist that the bomb shelter was a military bunker, repeating the arguments that had already been refuted (pp. 33ff). Blackwell (1991), who had argued that it was a military bunker for CNN, ignores the episode in his book, attempting to cover over his participation in Pentagon lies.

17. For more accounts of atrocities committed by the U.S.-led coalition bombing, see the "Eyewitness Interviews" and other accounts in Clark et al. 1992.

18. On the intersection of the Palestinian question and the Gulf crisis and war, see the articles by Abu-Lughod, Ashrawi, and Hulaileh in Bennis and Moushabeck 1991; Shiblak in Brittain 1991; Glavanis in Bresheeth and Yuval-David 1991; and Gazilwin in Clark et al.