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The Persian Gulf TV War

Chapter 8

Countdown to the Ground War

And so the media propaganda war continued as the U.S. and Iraq struggled daily to control the flow of information. Iraq seized the offensive on February 15 by issuing its peace communiqué. This proposal created prospects for peace, giving rise to jubilation in parts of the Arab world, as well as producing hope everywhere that the human and environmental destruction would soon cease. The networks extended their morning shows, focused on the Iraqi peace initiative, and put the White House and Pentagon on the defensive. But Bush then took the offensive and gained the upper hand in the propaganda war with the complicity of his coalition partners and the media. The Iraqi peace initiative was rejected as a "cruel hoax" and the war continued.

8.1 Diplomatic Chess Game

There were, however, powerful forces working for peace. The Soviet Union was attempting to produce a peace plan that would bring a quick diplomatic settlement to the war. With Iraqi Foreign Minister Tariq Aziz on route to Moscow to discuss peace initiatives with the Soviets, stories circulated on February 16 that the U.S. had promised not to begin the ground war until the Soviets and Aziz had a chance to discuss Iraqi withdrawal from Kuwait. Throughout the weekend, there was thus speculation concerning a possible diplomatic settlement to the war.

The TV news headlines on February 18 focused on Aziz's meeting with the Soviets and his return to Iraq with a peace proposal from the Soviet Union. "CBS This Morning" stressed that the meeting may have been the last chance to avoid a bloody ground war, but early reports suggested that so far there were no hints of any breakthrough. Gorbachev reportedly told Aziz that Iraq's very survival depended on accepting the peace proposal. The negotiations involved, according to CBS, an all-out diplomatic effort with Gorbachev, foreign minister Alexander Bessmertnykh, top Middle East diplomat Yevgeny Primakov, and other top Soviet officials meeting with the Iraqi foreign minister and Saadoun Hammadi, Iraq's deputy prime minister. After the initial meeting, Aziz did not tip his hand. When asked how the negotiations went, he replied, diplomatically, but somewhat grimly, "We have had cordial and objective discussions of interests of mutual importance with our Soviet friends."

"Recreating" at Kennebunkport, George Bush announced that he was not going to make any news that day and would not comment on the Soviet initiative. White House spokesman Marlin Fitzwater said at midday February 18 that they were waiting for details from the Soviets concerning the Moscow peace initiative but hadn't heard anything yet. Fitzwater added that the time for talking was over and that the United States placed all of its hopes on the coordinated land, air, and sea war that would drive Saddam Hussein out of Kuwait. The ground war had been anticipated all along, according to Fitzwater, and he threatened that the United States stood ready to begin this phase of the war. Fitzwater reiterated the (non-negotiating) U.S. position that they would accept no cease-fire and would only respond favorably if Saddam Hussein left Kuwait "unconditionally, massively, and rapidly." The United States obviously

continued to maintain a tough line, blocking all diplomatic solutions.

On the February 19 "CBS This Morning" the headlines indicated that Aziz was heading to Baghdad with the Soviet peace plan, but Bush saw nothing new in the plan and the heaviest bombing of Baghdad in recent days was taking place. The morning news summary opened with Harry Smith reporting from Saudi Arabia that soldiers were poised for what may be "the biggest battle of the century" and that a last-minute Soviet peace initiative may be "too little, too late." According to Smith, Bush saw nothing in the Soviet peace proposal to prevent a ground war. A flurry of diplomatic activity continued, "but is it going anywhere?" Future journalists might note that what CBS presented as a descriptive analysis of the current state of the war was really a brief for a very specific policy proposal: begin the ground war.

The CBS report presented the Soviet peace initiative, whose contents they didn't even know for sure, in the most negative light. Although CBS conceded that Iraq appeared to be ready to withdraw from Kuwait, they made the ridiculous suggestion that the new Soviet proposal did not differ significantly from the previous Iraqi peace proposal. Their analysis was based on leaks by the German tabloid Bild Zeitung that focused on alleged linkage to the Palestinian question and how the Soviet initiative would preserve Saddam Hussein's power and Iraqi borders. Thus, what masqueraded as a news report described rumored features of the Soviet peace proposal as actual fact and presented the plan in a way to make it appear unappealing to a country that still had deep suspicions of the Soviet Union and a hatred of Saddam Hussein.

The CBS report next showed Aziz meeting with Iranian President Hashemi Rafsanjani, another bête noire of the U.S. government and public, editorializing that since Saddam Hussein had not even seen the text of the Soviet initiative, optimism would be premature. CBS correspondent Randall Pinkston reported from the White House that optimism would be premature there, too. The Bush administration had not yet rejected the Gorbachev peace plan, but the military campaign continued apace. According to CBS, the White House claimed that the Soviets had not asked for a delay in the ground war (this is clearly mis- or disinformation, as Primakov had pleaded for a delay in the ground war the night before on ABC and CNN). The assault in the air continued, as did preparations for a ground war, and CBS pictured troops testing weapons, reporting that "all systems are being readied" in a "ground rehearsal" for the land offensive--precisely the line that the Pentagon was putting out.

After some more news, CBS cut to Harry Smith in Saudi Arabia, interviewing Dan Rather, who, outfitted in a brown safari jacket, was serving as a booster for the Pentagon faction that wanted a ground war. Rather told Smith that by the next day a decision would be made for the ground war that would unleash the next phase of the war later in the week. He predicted that the Bush administration would wait just one day for the Soviet negotiations with Iraq to play out before deciding on the ground war and that it would then take a couple more days for the United States to organize the actual start of the battle. The CBS anchor then threw cold water on the Soviet peace proposal, saying: "Quite frankly, the deal being offered by the Soviet looks like about the same that President Bush could have gotten anytime along the way during the last months." This was the rankest nonsense, for Iraq had never before agreed to withdraw unconditionally from Kuwait and Rather had no idea what was really in the Soviet proposal.

Harry Smith then asked Rather if the United States could live with Saddam Hussein in power and Rather answered, "I doubt it," adding that Gorbachev had tried "to deal himself a pretty strong hand,"

positioning himself for the postwar world, and "I don't think President Bush can buy any such arrangement, but we'll see in the next 24 to 36 hours." Smith then asked, in his high-pitched, grating voice, if the Soviets were back in the "influence-peddling business." Rather answered that the Soviet military was reasserting itself again after the period of liberalization, so it's not a New World Order that Gorbachev was talking about; it's a throwback to the old world order, with the United States and Soviet Union fighting for world influence and power. Thus, Rather dismissed the Gorbachev peace plan as a mere move in world power politics between the former cold war antagonists. Returning to discuss the battlefield preparations, Smith opined that "it is amazing to think about what is amassed on the border" and wondered if the momentum for a ground war could stop. Rather deployed a poker analogy and said that Bush now has to call, raise, or fold (it would be interesting to know what Rather considered "calling," "raising" or "folding").

Continuing his sophistry and Pentagon war-faction propaganda in the analogical mode, Rather reflected, using the brutal phrase of General Powell, that "there is this great [allied] military presence in place where he [i.e. Bush] has to move it or lose it." Once again, this was absurd: Although there were arguments circulating that a military force could not maintain a high stage of readiness for more than three to seven days, to say that failing to begin the ground war immediately would cause the U.S.-led coalition to "lose" its military momentum was ludicrous. Instead, we see the extent to which some in the military were itching to fight their ground war and how some in the media, like Dan Rather and Harry Smith, were helping them. Smith closed his carefully orchestrated propaganda offensive in favor of the ground war by evoking an image of the "killing field" of Kuwait and Iraqi massacres, and he asked Rather if Bush accepted the Soviet peace proposal, presumably without destroying totally Saddam Hussein and his military, could he claim victory? Rather answered "perhaps," but then went on to imply that it would be better if the Iraqis could be defeated militarily and Saddam Hussein could be eliminated completely, so that the United States could say: "We've completed our mission; we got, by our definition, total victory," or else, Rather implied, the United States would have to "settle for something less."

In making their brief for a ground war and the elimination of Saddam Hussein, Dan Rather was overlooking the fact that such a course of action would go beyond the UN mandate, which merely sanctioned forcing the withdrawal of Saddam Hussein from Kuwait. Moreover, a ground war that invaded Iraq and got bogged down in "enemy territory" might fracture the coalition, position the United States as an aggressor, and produce immense suffering and death. But no matter, it would provide great drama, great excitement, and presumably great ratings for CBS and Dan Rather.

Indeed, why would Rather, supposedly a liberal critic of George Bush, support Bush's not-too-secret agenda to have the Soviet peace proposal fail so that the ground war could be launched? I would speculate that Rather's partisanship for the military option and expanding the U.S. war aims to the elimination of Saddam Hussein was partly opportunism and partly Rather falling prey to war fever himself. In appraising this episode, one should note that the ratings of Rather and CBS News had been steadily deteriorating throughout the Gulf war in comparison to CNN and the other networks. Just the week before, CBS News had fired one of its main news producers, and there were rumors that Rather might lose his anchor position or be forced to share it with a female co-anchor.¹ So with his very survival at stake in the competitive world of television ratings, Rather traveled to Saudi Arabia so that he could be on the scene to narrate the ground war, the greatest battle of all time which he would be in a good position to present, live on the scene.

And so did the fundamental opportunism of commercial television show its corrupt face. Polls indicated that the audience was overwhelmingly for the war, and Rather, who seemed previously to be trying his best to do balanced, nonpartisan reporting, now began playing to the prowar audience. It was obvious that the TV audience was solidly rooting for a U.S. victory and Iraqi defeat, and Rather played to this constituency, becoming a booster for the military and all-out champion of the ground war. Consequently, Rather promoted the military line that the ground war was ready, that the troops were "good to go," "coiled to spring" (one of Rather's favorite metaphors). He therefore attacked the Soviet peace proposal on February 19, putting his prestige and power in the service of specific policy aims, taking sides in a momentous decision concerning war or peace with lives in the balance. By departing from his journalistic role as mediator, Rather disgraced CBS News in one of the most shameful episodes in the history of broadcasting, which will produce a stain on Rather's record forever.

Other networks were equally hostile to the Soviet peace initiative, thus supporting the prowar position of the Bush administration. The Soviet peace proposal was called a "tragedy" on PBS's "MacNeil/Lehrer NewsHour" and a "nightmare" and "the worst possible scenario" by Tom Brokaw on February 21 on NBC. By promoting the military option, NBC was boosting the interests of its owner, weapons producer General Electric, which obviously would profit from an all-out ground war that would deplete military stocks and provide more free advertising for military weapons systems. ABC and CNN were more even-handed in presenting the war or peace option, and on February 19 (the day of the Rather-Smith attack on the Soviet peace proposal) by the time the "CBS Evening News" came on, their report was more balanced too. Perhaps the producers in New York were appalled by Rather's performance on the CBS morning show, reined him in, and made a more balanced presentation of the options confronting the players in the Gulf war (it appeared to me, in fact, that the segments with Rather were taped that night, instead of being broadcast live as was typical, perhaps so that CBS could maintain editorial control).

On February 21, Tariq Aziz was once again in Moscow to discuss the new Soviet peace initiative. There were rumors that he carried a personal letter from Saddam Hussein to Gorbachev, and the peace camp once more hoped that this meeting would produce a diplomatic settlement. A couple of hours after the meeting began, late afternoon, EST, CNN showed a breathless and excited spokesman for Gorbachev, Vitaly Ignatenko, bursting into the press room to announce that Iraq and the Soviet Union had just agreed to an eight-point peace proposal that could form the basis for a negotiated settlement of the war. During the rest of the day the proposal was the focus of news and discussion programs and it appeared that a diplomatic settlement might be found after all.

During the morning of February 22, the seesaw between war and peace continued. Reports went back and forth between those urging a diplomatic solution and arguing that the Soviet initiative provided a rational basis for discussion contrasted to those claiming that only the decisive military victory that a ground war could bring would suffice. The debate was interrupted around 10:45 a.m. when Bush walked out of the White House toward a microphone in the Rose Garden, where he read a statement. Dan Quayle stood behind him looking vice-presidential while the war team members--Brent Scowcroft, John Sununu, and James Baker--stood in the wings looking statesmanly. Bush's eyes were down on his text throughout the reading and he appeared grim but determined. He began by stating that the United States and its allies were committed to the UN resolutions calling for Saddam Hussein to immediately and unconditionally leave Kuwait. Bush said that in view of the Soviet initiative--"which very frankly we appreciate--we wanted to set forth this morning the specific criteria that will insure Saddam Hussein complies with the

UN mandate." Bush cited Hussein's defiant speech of the previous day and then his adherence to the Soviet peace proposal, which "on the face of it appears more reasonable." But, Bush argued, the Iraqis agreed to "unconditional" withdrawal only to set out a number of conditions that would be unacceptable to the coalition and to the UN resolutions.

More important and more urgently, Bush said, we have learned this morning that Saddam was launching a scorched earth policy in Kuwait, knowing perhaps that he will be forced to leave (note how Bush is reducing the Iraqis, whose military he has just ordered to be annihilated, to Saddam Hussein). He, Bush continued, is setting on fire the oil production facilities, oil terminals, and storage facilities of the country. Indeed, he is destroying the entire oil production system of Kuwait; at the same time that his foreign minister was talking peace, he was launching Scud missiles. In view of recent events, Bush affirmed, "I have decided to make public with specificity just exactly what is required of Iraq if a ground war is to be avoided." Bush asserted that the coalition will give Saddam Hussein until noon Saturday "to do what he must do." By Saturday at 12 noon, he must begin withdrawing from Kuwait, Bush warned. Saddam Hussein must come on the radio to publicly state that he is withdrawing and that he will follow the UN resolutions. The deadline was thus set for High Noon the next day for what turned out to be the final stage of the Showdown in the Gulf.

8.2 High Noon

From the beginning of the Persian Gulf war, the U.S. military insisted that it had a "plan" to win the war, involving air, land, and sea forces, with an intent to "cut off and kill" the Iraqi forces. The U.S. military regularly claimed that it was on schedule, that all was proceeding on course, and that the air war was achieving its goals. Debates emerged as to whether the ground war was necessary to achieve victory and whether the air war had indeed "attrited" the Iraqi military sufficiently to guarantee a coalition victory with minimal casualties. While the pundits debated these issues, however, the Pentagon and Bush administration inexorably moved toward the ground war which would realize their plan.

On Saturday, February 23, the countdown began. Early reports suggested that diplomatic efforts had failed and that events were relentlessly moving toward the final ground conflict. The network news reports indicated that Tariq Aziz had left Moscow without reaching a settlement on a new plan that would mediate the differences between the Soviet and U.S. peace proposals. As the deadline approached, there were no responses from Iraq and no signs of any imminent Iraqi withdrawal.

Before leaving Moscow, Tariq Aziz and his Iraqi colleagues held a news conference and announced that they sought a peaceful resolution to the war and fully endorsed the Soviet peace plan. Shortly thereafter, Gorbachev's spokesman, Vitaly Ignatenko, held a news conference and spoke of the tragedy of the failure of negotiations. In a somber mood, he spoke of the lives that would be lost if the ground war began. Ignatenko spoke of Gorbachev's efforts to solve the problem, mentioning the intense telephone conversation between Bush and Gorbachev, and of Gorbachev's readiness to continue working to achieve peace.

In a sense, Bush's refusal to work with Gorbachev's plan to bring about a diplomatic solution to the war sealed the Soviet leader's fate. Broad segments of the Soviet power structure were outraged by Gorbachev's policies in the war. Previously, anger at Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze's

complicity with the UN resolutions and U.S. policy led to his resignation in December 1990. Frequent reports surfaced that the Soviet military was outraged that one of its favorite client states, Iraq, was about to have its military forces, which the Soviets had helped to build up, destroyed. Soviet leaders were deeply upset that the United States was apparently becoming a superpower in the region, with its military forces positioned dangerously close to the Soviet border. There was worry that the war could enflame the Soviet Islamic population and drive it to revolt. And communist hardliners saw Gorbachev's capitulation to Bush as producing a dangerous situation where one dominant superpower dictated foreign policy.

The conditions for a coup and Gorbachev's overthrow were thus at hand, and Bush, instead of working with Gorbachev for a diplomatic solution, humiliated the Soviet leader, who was desperately seeking a peaceful settlement to the conflict. Bush effectively cut Gorbachev "out of the loop" in the Gulf war and made a fool out of him; while Gorbachev called for peace and negotiations Bush and his clique were planning their ground war. Although Bush and his war team presumably told other allied leaders what the real plans were, Gorbachev was kept in the dark. Gorbachev thus appeared ineffectual and irrelevant while Bush appeared as the real mover and shaker of world politics. Consequently, when the communist hardliners overthrew Gorbachev in August 1991, barely a year after Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, Bush had contributed significantly to Gorbachev's fate, weakening him to an extent that he would soon be forced out of power, thanks in part to his "friend" George Bush.

In retrospect, it is clear that Bush did not want to negotiate an end to the war; during the entire crisis in the Gulf and the Gulf war he never made any effort whatsoever to negotiate a settlement. Bush's tone, which was harsh, blunt, and unnuanced, precluded negotiation. He delivered imperatives in the ultimatum mode instead of providing positions to discuss. He imposed deadlines, one impossibly short, rather than seeking dialogue and genuine negotiation. His style was aggressive, macho, and insulting. Future students of negotiation should observe Bush's behavior as a textbook example of how not to comport oneself in situations of conflict, as a classic case of a non-negotiating stance.

There was also a question of the discourse of time in Bush's ultimatum. All forms of Bush's "diplomacy" employed the phrase that Iraq "must" withdraw "immediately" from Kuwait and at the end Bush gave the Iraqis a twenty-four hour deadline: surrender immediately or face destruction. Such a mode of temporal imperatives clashed with different rhythms of time in many parts of the world; in the Arab world, time is not parceled into well-differentiated bundles and periods, and people do not utilize such rigid time schedules. Thus, Bush was imposing his Western time and mode of discourse on a culture with a different attitude toward time. There is some question, however, as to whether Bush's ultimatum merely revealed cultural insensitivity and a failure to understand cultural differences on the part of an imperial Western ego, or whether Bush maneuvered aggressively to insure that there would be no diplomatic solution so that he could gain power and glory from a successful war.

In addition to the political and military pressures to win a total victory and destroy Iraq, there was speculation that Bush was obsessed with Saddam Hussein, that he had personalized the conflict to such an extent that he was determined to humiliate and destroy the Iraqi leader. On the February 24 "CBS Sunday Morning Show," for instance, anchor Charles Kuralt asked White House correspondent Bill Plante why the ground war was necessary, given Iraq's stated willingness to withdraw from Kuwait. Plante admitted that there was little real difference between the Soviet and U.S. proposals but claimed that without the ground war Bush would not have been able "to humiliate Saddam Hussein. He really wanted to go mano-a-

mano [hand-to-hand] with Hussein." This is probably true, but it subjectivizes Bush's motivations for pursuing the war, thus covering over the economic and political imperatives to build up the military and his presidency, as well as the economic interests of certain corporate sectors who wanted to control the flow of oil and promote weapons sales in the area. In fact, when the war was over, Bush did not pursue the overthrow of Hussein, as we shall see in 10.4.

8.3 On the Threshold

CBS's logo "Showdown in the Gulf" highlighted the mythic frames of entertainment through which the television networks were presenting the Gulf war, and George Bush played to these frames with his noon deadline, evoking the final showdown between "good" and "evil," as in the Western classic High Noon. As the morning of February 22 passed and the deadline neared it was increasingly apparent that there would be no diplomatic solution. On CBS, Randall Pinkston at the White House reported that the Bush administration was stating categorically that the Soviet plan was "without effect" and "absolutely unacceptable," and that its military option was the only plan that could resolve the crisis. CBS's Betsy Aaron in Baghdad reported that thick black clouds of smoke from the previous day's bombing surrounded the city. It was a rather strange atmosphere, she said, because the radio was not telling people of the impending crisis of diplomacy, so they are going about their business as normal. Aaron stated how the foreign correspondents were taken to power plants that were first made inoperable by coalition forces using silicon and then, two days later, bombed into rubble. The message was that the allies were brutally bombing Iraqi civilian facilities, the very heart of a city, and that the facilities would take years to rebuild.

Christiane Amanpour in Baghdad reported a deep sense of pessimism in the city in her early morning CNN report of February 23. The Iraqis in Baghdad, she noted, cannot understand why there would be more war when they had agreed to the Soviet proposal. Amanpour observed that there was a major shift over the past days from optimism to pessimism, with all hopes crushed. From Saudi Arabia, CNN correspondent Rick Sallinger commented that there was no evidence that Iraq was planning any troop pullout. There was no movement of Iraqi troops, so it appeared that once again Saddam Hussein was ignoring a Bush ultimatum. There was still no schedule for a ground war, Sallinger claimed (though, in fact, the order was already in place), but the U.S. troops were ready, "even chomping at the bit," despite fear of casualties. CNN's Charles Jaco in Saudi Arabia said that military authorities warned that only if Iraqi troops packed up and left immediately would the ground war be averted. Jaco noted that the U.S. military affirmed that the ground war would be sudden, massive, and violent, "like getting hit in the face with a baseball bat."

CBS's Harry Smith reported that there were now over 150 oil wells on fire in Kuwait, and hundreds of others were mined and ready to be detonated and set aflame. Kuwaiti civilians were reportedly being rounded up, according to the Kuwaiti ambassador, and many were being executed on the spot. Bush had cited these claims the day before in order to legitimate his decision to immediately begin the ground campaign rather than to wait for the Soviet diplomatic initiative to play out. As we shall see, while the Iraqis had torched many Kuwaiti oil wells, at this point the U.S. propaganda machine was exaggerating the alleged atrocities against Kuwaitis (see 10.1). Once again, we see how Harry Smith was being used as a propaganda agent for the U.S. military, which fed him (dis)information that he dutifully reproduced for the TV audience.

Back in their studio in N.Y., CBS projected a computer simulation of the battlefield, and their military adviser Gen. Crist demonstrated what the ground war might look like, using the standard images of mounds of sand dunes, called berms, fashioned into fortifications, ditches full of burning oil, barbed wire, mine fields, tank and artillery fortifications, and Iraqi troops armed with chemical weapons. For the past days, all of the networks were utilizing similar models or computer simulations of the horrible Iraqi fortifications across the border into Kuwait and throughout the country. As it would turn out, these models also were either gross exaggerations or sheer disinformation.

At midmorning, shortly before the High Noon deadline, a last-ditch hope for peace briefly flickered. CNN and CBS announced that at a UN Security Council meeting, the Soviet peace proposal would be discussed and that the Soviets were working hard to achieve a last-minute diplomatic solution. CBS reported that all day Gorbachev had been talking with world leaders to try to get support for his peace plan, arguing that with UN mediation perhaps a compromise could be worked out. It was reported that James Baker had talked at great length with Soviet Foreign Minister Bessmertnykh about the Soviet plan with Bessmertnykh arguing that the Soviet and U.S. plans were practically the same. The United States, however, reportedly insisted that there were major differences, focusing on the cancellation of some of the UN resolutions in the Soviet plan. At the UN meeting the U.S. did not want to have a showdown with the Soviets, according to the TV reports, and they praised the Soviet effort (while fearing that the Soviets could force the issue, an outcome which they viewed with some concern).

CBS's Bob Fall at the UN reported that the Soviets were expected to ask for action from the Security Council, and not just a discussion of the Soviet peace proposal. The Soviets wanted to see if there was a possibility of a merger of the U.S. and Soviet proposals; several delegates were pushing this. U.S. Ambassador Thomas Pickering said that this was not what the United States wanted and ducked a question as to whether the U.S. would support a diplomatic settlement. For the next hours, there was intense speculation as to whether Aziz had agreed at the last minute to negotiate the U.S. proposals or whether the Soviets were floating a rumor to provide more time for negotiation. Typically, Dan Rather and CBS were downplaying the diplomatic side and playing up the military aspects of the ground war. In a Saturday "High Noon" "CBS News Special," Col. Mitch Mitchell stated that there was evidence that the ground offensive was rapidly approaching and that it was merely a matter of the timetable count-down. This escalation of the war was full of risks, he noted, but "with much greater gain."

CBS's Bob Schieffer claimed that the largest land battle in history was shaping up, hyping the coming massacre as a significant military engagement. CBS presented a computer simulation model of the coming ground war which was interrupted by sirens going off in Israel. CBS reported that Israel was in a state of panic and at least one Scud had been launched. The Israelis expected a major chemical attack and Tom Fenton reported that the Israelis wanted a ground war in order to destroy Saddam Hussein's military completely. Israeli officials thought that if Hussein's regime remained in power, it would constitute a great threat to Israel.²

Dan Rather came on the screen to narrate that the decisive hour in the Persian Gulf war deadline had now passed: Baghdad was being bombed heavily; Scud attacks were hitting Israel; Kuwait was burning, a vision of hell, with 200 oil installations on fire and systematic executions taking place in the street. Meanwhile U.S. troops near the border prepared for the ground war. Rather played the drama to the hilt, acting out a countdown to war as emotionally and dramatically as he could. He obviously wanted

to highlight the drama of the ground war and seemed uninterested in the diplomatic initiatives. CNN, meanwhile, played the diplomacy theme, interpreting and analyzing the Tariq Aziz response to the Soviets and following closely the activity at the UN.

NBC's Pentagon correspondent Fred Francis reported around 12:55 p.m. that the ground war had started because the United States was already jamming Iraqi radar. Some minutes later Francis broke in with the remark that General Schwarzkopf had given the order to begin the ground war. This meant, he suggested, that in the next two days the Iraqi forces in Kuwait would be circled. Francis claimed that President Bush really didn't want Iraq to withdraw because they would preserve too much military equipment and the U.S. would have to keep at least 200,000 troops in the area. In addition, Bush wanted to stop immediately the reign of terror in Kuwait City. The NBC anchors, Garrick Utley and Tom Brokaw in Saudi Arabia, then announced that the ground war had begun, though this would not be certain for some hours, and that afternoon at the Pentagon in Washington the briefers scoffed at the NBC report, which turned out to be quite accurate.

At 1:00 p.m., NBC cut off its war coverage and soon ABC and CBS also concluded their morning news schedules and returned to the usual Saturday afternoon fare, so only CNN would follow the story for the rest of the afternoon. Rumors that Iraq had agreed to the Soviet peace proposal continued to circulate in the UN, but Bush released a letter saying: "We regret that Saddam Hussein took no action before the noon deadline to comply with the United Nations resolutions. We remain determined to fulfill the U.N. resolutions. Military action continues on schedule and according to plan." A bit later as the Soviets worked feverishly in the UN to integrate the U.S./Soviet peace initiatives, Marlin Fitzwater released a document pointing out that the deadline had passed and the United States had received no communication from the UN that the Iraqis planned to meet its ultimatum. Furthermore:

Iraq continues its scorched earth policy in Kuwait, setting fire to oil facilities. It is a continuing outrage that Saddam Hussein is still intent upon destroying Kuwait and its people, still intent upon inflicting the most brutal kind of rule on his own population, yet appears to have no intention to comply with the U.N. resolutions. Indeed, Saddam Hussein's only response to the U.S. ultimatum at noon was to launch another Scud missile attack on Israel. The coalition forces have no alternative but to continue to prosecute the war.

This remarkable, terse document provided a tightly encapsulated legitimation of U.S. escalation to the ground war phase. Saddam Hussein had not yet officially responded to Bush's ultimatum (though it was not certain that the ultimatum had any legal force). Then, Fitzwater evoked the horror of Iraq torching Kuwaiti oil, destroying the very substance that the United States had, initially at least, come to recover. Next, Saddam Hussein himself was portrayed as an international outlaw, destroying Kuwait and its people, as well as a tyrant, brutally ruling his own people. The Bush administration continued its relentless demonization of Saddam Hussein, making the hated dictator the target of its terse rhetoric, and, by implication, his destruction the raison d'etre of the war. Its rhetoric, however, ultimately trapped the administration in a contradiction as it attacked Saddam Hussein as an oppressor of his people, thus positioning his people as victims. Yet by continuing the war it would be his people, the innocent victims of the Bush rhetoric, who would bear the brunt of the U.S.-led coalition attack.

Throughout the afternoon, there was intense UN activity to try to produce a last-minute diplomatic settlement, but the United States blocked all of these efforts. That night, after the ground war began, various UN ambassadors, such as the Yemenese one, bitterly said that the Bush administration had used and abused the UN, mobilizing support for its use of force and then relegating the UN to the sidelines. The United States, he complained, was refusing to cooperate with efforts at producing a negotiated settlement, which was precisely what the UN was intended to do. Apparently, in Bush's New World Order it was war and not diplomacy that would resolve problems, and military power would enforce security and order.

CNN military analyst retired General Perry Smith continued to misanalyze the military situation in a report on Saturday afternoon in which he stated that there had not been any surge of air strikes or massive movement of allied forces. Nor had there been any major forays into enemy territory, so he concluded that the coalition forces needed a few more days to "soften" the enemy before the ground war started. In fact, there had been forays into Kuwait and Iraq over the past days and the ground war was about to be launched as he spoke. In retrospect, it is not clear if Smith was consciously giving the Iraqis disinformation, as it was well known that Iraq constantly monitored CNN, or if he was just misinformed himself. In any case, Smith's presence raised the question of whether exmilitary men, with close connections to the military establishment, should be hired as military consultants during war as: (1) they can be expected to serve as conduits for military propaganda, as Smith constantly did; and (2) they might consciously misinform the TV audiences while giving out the disinformation that the military wants communicated.

On the "CBS Evening News," Bob Schieffer reported that everything was in place for a battle of epic proportions and that Iraq's scorched-earth policy and killing of Kuwaiti civilians gave a new urgency to launching the ground war. Schieffer claimed that the order for a ground war had gone out and it was now merely a matter of timing. CBS discussed the failed Soviet peace proposal, and the Kuwaiti ambassador stated that he would see a liberated Kuwait soon. The White House, according to CBS, believed that the ground campaign would be very, very quick, with limited casualties, and that the allies will deliver a blow from which Hussein will "never recover."

From Saudi Arabia, Dan Rather pointed out that advanced elements of the multinational forces were already in Iraq and Kuwait and that the allies were "leaning forward," preparing for the major invasion. There were reports of increased Iraqi border casualties and the constant drone of planes in a record 1,200 sorties over Kuwait, another sign that the ground war was coming quickly. Along the borders, the U.S. troops were massed for the ground war and it was now "hammer time." Rather noted again the reports of atrocities against Kuwaiti civilians, the 200 oil-field fires, and intelligence sources who mentioned a roundup of Kuwaitis. Waxing rhetorical, Rather described the roar of planes and the sound of war as planes took off in the background. The battle plan was described as fast moving, complicated, and high risk. Commanders hoped for a quick strike and a quick win. The battlefield plan included a "vertical envelopment" in which paratroopers would penetrate behind enemy lines. Pentagon officials believed that the Iraqis would be crushed, that they were on the verge of collapsing, and that massive surrenders and disorderly retreats were expected when the coalition forces went on the offensive. Rather quoted with approval a rather brutal military official who stated that the Iraqis were "on their knees and we'd like to have them flat on their backs."

Throughout the evening, CBS's Eric Engberg, reported the claims that Kuwaitis were being pulled from the streets in roundups apparently aimed at getting rid of witnesses to earlier atrocities. CBS Pentagon correspondent David Martin stated that the schedule of the ground war was moved up because of these atrocity stories. It would turn out, however, that the ground war had been scheduled for days to unfold at the day and hour that it actually started and that the atrocity stories which the media bought into were merely part of a propaganda campaign to help legitimate the coming slaughter of Iraqi troops.

In the early evening, CBS's Dan Rather described "the first video of the ground war," showing an Apache attack helicopter shooting and tearing apart Iraqi troops.³ The ground war massacre was thus underway, though the media would celebrate it as a great victory. Around 8:30 p.m., in response to a question from Rather, David Martin replied that the opening phases of the ground war had begun, with U.S. troops in Kuwait where they would stay until Kuwait was liberated. Moments later, CBS's Bill Plante announced that President Bush was to arrive back into Washington shortly to make a TV address to the nation and there was no longer any doubt but that the U.S.-led coalition ground offensive was now under way.

ABC's Sam Donaldson reported from Saudi Arabia that there was a broad offensive about 2,000 kilometers [1,200 miles] along the northern Saudi Arabia and Iraqi borders that would follow "classic AirLand doctrine," which meant going after second- and third-line Iraqi troops to cut them off. It was planned to begin, he said at 8:00 p.m. EST and as he gave his report there was a Scud attack on Saudi Arabia and ABC lost its satellite connection. ABC's Brit Hume reported that Bush's war team was assembled in the White House and that the order had been given to begin the ground war. Bush was scheduled to arrive soon to give a speech announcing and explaining the launching of the ground war. Dan Rather and Tom Brokaw were under Scud attack in Saudi Arabia and temporarily relinquished their anchor positions, and the military experts assembled to describe the AirLand war as it began to unfold.

8.4 Air Land War

For the rest of the evening, all of the networks discussed the new ground war phase of the campaign. As the military experts explained the disposition of the troops, the U.S. strategy, and the likely outcome, it was amazing how much was known in advance concerning the coalition plans and strategy. It appears that NBC and CBS had been clued in rather precisely as to the day and hour when the ground war would begin and all of their "experts" seemed to have had a good idea of the strategy, which had been leaking through the Pentagon for days and was picked up by the military analysts who still had access to insider information.

All of the TV military commentators explained that the concept of an AirLand battle involved coordinated operations that use several different methods of attack at once: ground attacks, amphibious attacks, and air attacks by helicopters and multiple launch rockets, which can launch bomblets that could cover an area the size of a football field and virtually halt any kind of military action. The AirLand war doctrine had been developed to fight the Soviets in a war in Europe, or the Middle East, where the U.S. forces would face superior ground forces but would possess superior air power and high-tech weapons. The concept was the U.S. military response to the policy of gradual escalation carried Vietnam that had resulted in failure. AirLand battle doctrine, by contrast, was intended to overpower the enemy with a

quick and massive assault that would wipe out as many enemy forces as possible during the early hours of attack. Once the enemy was initially overpowered the goal was to exterminate as many of its forces as possible, as quickly as possible. The AirLand war was thus the specific form of technowar employed in the Persian Gulf after the forty days of air war which had aimed at weakening the Iraqi troops so as to facilitate the total destruction of their forces.

Reports appeared on all of the networks that the coalition had been clearing the fields of mines over the border and that coalition troops intended to outflank the Iraqi artillery, cut them off, and destroy them with combined air and land assault. On ABC, Tony Cordesman claimed that the coalition forces had been pounding the Iraqi border positions for days and had probably destroyed much of their artillery. ABC's other military consultant, Gen. Bernard Trainor described the variety of different operations that could be used: breaching the border, in which engineers make a path to get through mines and Iraqi troops; "sledge hammer" operations that would pound through Iraq's defenses over the Kuwait border; flanking operations; air assault attacks; air envelopment with camps set up in Iraq; and an amphibious attack from the sea. He suggested that all or some of these operations would be employed.

ABC's Tony Cordesman claimed that with this range of strategies the coalition forces could fight the enemy at a distance, and when close range encounters occur, the coalition would prevail because its tanks had greater accuracy, velocity, visibility, and range than the Iraqi tanks and ground forces. Gen. Trainor added on ABC that Iraq had very rudimentary intelligence operations and thus wouldn't have much knowledge about what was actually going on and, consequently, would have little possibility of counterattack. As the evening proceeded, in fact, the networks provided account after account of the technological superiority of U.S. equipment and weapons which would, indeed, produce a decisive victory. Dan Rather stressed that Saddam Hussein had to fight a "one-dimensional war," having only ground forces, while the allies were multidimensional with air, sea, and ground forces. At the same time as Cordesman and Trainor on ABC were describing the U.S. plan, CBS's Rather used an even more detailed map to show the various lines of attack, pointing precisely to where different army and marine units were attacking and advancing. Rather also continually suggested that, in reference to the rumor that an amphibious assault was underway, "there is a school of thought that thinks that this might be a feint"--and indeed it was. Obviously, Rather had been rewarded for his faithful promotion of the ground war and hyping up the military with some very detailed insider information and he displayed it with great pride.

In fact, it seemed that the networks knew exactly what the order of battle was and provided remarkably accurate early reports on what the general plan was, though there would be some errors concerning alleged successes in the early reports. But the ubiquitous accounts of Iraqi chemical weapons and potential chemical attacks were exaggerated and, as it turned out, Iraq had little with which they could counter the massive allied attack. The first piece of disinformation came from NBC's Fred Francis. Either his Pentagon sources misled him or he was willingly conveying disinformation to fool the Iraqis when he reported that Failaka Island, twenty miles from Kuwait City, had been taken. For days, Francis had claimed that the allies had been dropping daisy cutter bombs on the island to drive out the perhaps 500 to 800 Iraqis who occupied it. According to Francis's sources, marines had just landed on the island and found hundreds of dead bodies. For the next day or so, others would repeat this story, which turned out to be totally false, as the Iraqi occupants of Failaka Island would not surrender until after the war was over.

In a fascinating exchange between Francis and NBC anchor Tom Brokaw, both admitted that they

had known for days that the ground war would be launched on February 24. Francis chuckled with insider superiority and explained how the Bush administration had let Gorbachev "play out his hand" at diplomacy, but that the ground war was planned all along anyway and there was no desire in the Administration or Pentagon to deflect its plans. Francis noted that "the 24th was a very rich day indeed" for the invasion because the 25th is Kuwaiti independence day. This explanation, however, was rather naive and assumed that the end of the whole campaign was the liberation of Kuwait, while, as I shall argue later, there were other ultimate aims in the minds of the Bush administration and Pentagon.

Francis also indicated that he had been told by the Pentagon earlier in the week that Saturday would be the day when the ground offensive began, if the peace negotiations failed. Francis revealed that he had discussed his privileged information with Brokaw and NBC previously "so that we could make our preparations." This was a fairly astonishing revelation, indicating that the Pentagon had chosen to leak news of the coming AirLand war to NBC, the network owned by GE/RCA, two of the largest contractors of military equipment, so that they could prepare themselves for good coverage of the event. This would mean that it would be in the interest of the network to present the peace negotiations negatively and to promote the ground war, both in terms of the war contracts of the owners of NBC/RCA/GE and in terms of the ratings and prestige of their news team, which could win attention and ratings through their well-prepared war coverage.

It was likely that Dan Rather and CBS were also given fairly precise information that the ground war was on track for the weekend of February 23, and that this information might have encouraged the CBS anchor to present the peace negotiations negatively and to promote the war option so that he could have the thrill of covering the AirLand war. As we have seen, CBS was well prepared for the ground war, which gave Rather an opportunity to dramatically narrate the events, putting him in the league of Edward R. Murrow, CBS's World War II star correspondent--as well as giving Rather an opportunity to boost his ratings in the highly competitive network news game by identifying with the new patriotism and demonstrating his closeness with the military operation and personnel.

Rather claimed around 9:00 p.m. that the main coalition force was beginning to thrust deeply into Iraq, a flanking movement designed not only to encircle the Iraqi forces in Kuwait, but to ultimately bottle up the Republican Guards. Rather described the AirLand war doctrine as a plan to fight an enemy that would outnumber them, and the United States hoped that this plan would be successful in the open desert where they would face the fourth largest army in the world--a hyperbolic puffing up of the Iraqi army that occurred constantly throughout the crisis and war and that would reveal itself to be empty rhetoric. Although Rather continued to hype the war as a titanic battle between powerful forces, this puffery was highly misleading; the forces were totally unequal, and the war would result in the massacre of the Iraqi military with few U.S. casualties.

On CBS, General Crist explained that General Schwarzkopf was worried about putting together his "battlefield ballet," with sweeps going in different directions and needing to be put together in a very careful way. Crist said that his friend "Norm" [Schwarzkopf] needed to have all the sweeps work together and "if the music misses the dance step, there could be a problem," as all plans are subject to Murphy's law: If something can go wrong, it probably will. Crist believed that Schwarzkopf had been working on his plan for at least six months; if it worked it would destroy the Iraqi army with minimal U.S. casualties. Crist then described the tremendously complicated logistics that would provide supplies to the troops,

especially fuel, which tanks and armored vehicles eat up quickly and which would be needed to keep the troops moving forward.

Although bad weather or strong Iraqi counterattacks might have made logistics difficult, the overall superiority of allied forces ultimately rendered them invulnerable. Serving as Pentagon PR man, Bob Schieffer gushed that the ensuing battle will be "one of the greatest land battles in the history of warfare." The entire circumference of the battlefield was one thousand miles--almost as large as World War I battlefields--with about one million troops deployed--a ridiculous exaggeration as it would turn out (see 9.3). Rather concluded by noting that the full sweep of the ground war west into southern Iraq was now underway. With this operation, the United States would try to draw the elite Republican Guard troops out to fight and would "hammer the hell out of them," Rather emphasized.

Throughout the evening, it had been announced that President Bush would appear around 10:00 p.m. to tell why he felt that it was necessary to use force, to turn to ground war, to get the Iraqis out of Kuwait, rather than continuing the air war or seeking diplomacy. At the appointed time, Bush entered the White House briefing room and stated:

Yesterday, after conferring with my senior National Security advisers and following extensive consultation with our coalition partners, Saddam Hussein was given one last chance, set forth in very explicit terms, to do what he should have done more than six months ago: withdraw from Kuwait without conditions or further delay and comply fully with resolutions passed by the United Nations Security Council.

Regrettably, the noon deadline passed without the agreement of the government of Iraq to meet demands of United Nations Security Council Resolution 660, as set forth in the specific terms spelled out by the coalition to withdraw unconditionally from Kuwait.

To the contrary, what we have seen is a redoubling of Saddam Hussein's efforts to destroy completely Kuwait and its people. I have therefore directed General Norman Schwarzkopf, in conjunction with coalition forces, to use all forces available, including ground forces, to eject the Iraqi army from Kuwait... The liberation of Kuwait has now entered a final phase.

It is amazing what Bush did not say in this terse speech. He did not explain in any detail why he went to the ground war and did not continue with the air war. There was nothing on why the diplomatic efforts couldn't work. His only justification for launching the ground war was that Iraq was allegedly accelerating its efforts to destroy Kuwait and its people, but Bush did not document these charges. Instead, he relied on the media propaganda apparatus to dramatize the Iraqi "scorched earth" policy and the accelerated atrocities against Kuwaiti citizens, which he briefly alluded to in his speech, knowing that the compliant mainstream media would flesh out the disinformation stories that were legitimating the ground war.

None of the network correspondents raised any questions concerning the brevity of Bush's speech or the lack of justification for launching a ground war. Note how, once again, Bush personalized the issue, attacking Saddam Hussein's failure to accept the ultimatum as well as his "redoubling" of efforts to destroy Kuwait. Note also the moralistic condemnation of Hussein not doing what "he should have done more than six months ago." And while Bush cloaked his resolution to begin the ground war with legalistic and diplomatic phrases (consultations with our coalition partners), this covered over his own rejection of diplomacy and UN mediation that was close to a settlement, to a peaceful resolution precluded by the ground war.

Instead of raising and discussing these critical issues, the compliant commentators merely praised the president, serving as a PR arm. ABC's conservative White House correspondent Brit Hume stressed how grave and serious President Bush looked, remarking that he'd never seen the president looking so grave. CBS's White House correspondent, Wyatt Andrews, ignored the substance of Bush's speech and focused on the conclusion, where Bush asked everyone to say a prayer for the troops in the Gulf. Andrews described this as "a very solemn ending" and editorialized that the president, despite having ordered a ground war, was quite worried about casualties.⁴

Dan Rather, always given to hyperbole, stated that "never since World War II has there been a night like this." He then offered a probably long-prepared and well-rehearsed panegyric on the troops in the ground war: "We can't know what it is like on the front tonight. We do know officers who can't sleep and young men who have lost what Eric Severid once called the innocence of youth, that they can't die. But now they know." Rather's military populism was getting a bit hard to stomach. On the eve of the Superbowl, he gave the troops in the desert a hearty salute, demonstrating whose side he was on. He often vigorously shook hands with the U.S. military leaders who he interviewed and fervently congratulated military commanders upon their great success in the ground war.

At 10:30 p.m. Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney came on TV to give a briefing and announced that because allied military units were on the move, there would be a news blackout and no more briefings. He claimed that previously "we've been as forthcoming as possible about military operations," a blatant lie—Cheney had inaugurated the tightest restrictions on coverage of military actions in modern U.S. history. Henceforth, however, he ordered the regular briefing schedule to be "suspended without further notice" because we "cannot let Iraqi forces know anything." Given that the Iraqi command-and-control system had supposedly been disrupted, the question arose as to whether the news blackout was to deny the Iraqis intelligence information or the American public information. Needless to say, there was no protest from the press.⁵ (And, of course, when it turned out that the news was good the next morning, the briefings were immediately reinstated so that the military could bask in the glory of their ground war victory).

Continuing his blatant exaggeration of Iraqi military power, Cheney claimed that "casualties will be very, very, very high," as if the Iraqis had significant power to inflict casualties, which, it would soon be obvious, they did not. In the question-and-answer period, Cheney described the ground war as a "major military operation against a well-equipped and well-fortified opponent" and stated that "we do not want to underestimate the risks," but, in retrospect, there hardly appeared to be much risk against the totally demoralized and totally outclassed Iraqi army. Cheney admitted that there was "a planning date and a planning hour when General Schwarzkopf thought that his forces were ready" for the ground war, a date

"subject to change based on weather or changes in the diplomatic situation." Bush had approved the original date, which had been "for some period of time ... this particular day and hour."

Soon after Cheney's speech, Dan Rather appeared in dawn's early light in Saudi Arabia and reported that the troops had been fighting through the night and now that it was dawn, they could see what they'd been doing. Rather announced that one coalition column was going up the superhighway, past Khafji into Kuwait. The Pentagon claimed that they had cut Iraq's fiberoptic cable from the Iraqi military command so that Iraq couldn't talk to its commanders in the field, and thus "must communicate in the clear" (i.e. through shortwave radio), which the United States could intercept; this "keeps him dumb and blind." From one mile from the border of Kuwait, CBS correspondent Bob McKeown informed viewers that bombardment of the Iraqis in Kuwait from every direction shook the earth and that, under that cover, allied tanks moved up to the sand wall and crossed the border into Kuwait. This radio account was presented as the "first report from the battlefield behind the allied line," where McKeown was positioned with Saudi and Qatari Arab forces. No one ever convincingly explained how McKeown got up there and was allowed to continue broadcasting, eventually becoming the first correspondent to reach Kuwait City. Was this a military pay off to CBS for such fine cheerleading or an example of innovative reporting?

McKeown reported that it had been initially presumed that the first Iraqi defense line was eight miles from the border with the classic defense system of trenches, mines, and artillery, but that coalition forces had quickly moved eight to ten miles over the border without meeting any resistance. He described how the ground shook under constant bombardment during the night when bombs hit and concluded that coalition planes and ships were delivering their ordinance on Iraqi positions. Saudi TV revealed that allied forces had crossed the border into Kuwait and were approaching the al-Wafra area. Later in the evening, it was claimed that French legionnaires had thrust twelve miles into Iraq, meeting little resistance. Cairo radio said that Egyptian forces had entered Kuwait. An all-out ground war was thus on, ranging over the full extent of the Saudi and Kuwaiti border, stretching west into Iraq.

Dan Rather concluded his report with a summary of the U.S. troops' movement into Kuwait and southern Iraq and cited a statement from Dick Cheney claiming that it was not a matter of objective policy to change the government of Iraq, that the United States was committed militarily only to getting the Iraqis out of Kuwait. CBS Pentagon correspondent David Martin, either naively or apologetically, said that this makes the ground war pursue a much more limited objective: "the expulsion of Iraqi soldiers from Kuwait with a minimum loss of American life." This was only half true, as would soon be clear. Although the U.S.-led coalition did not go to Baghdad to overthrow Saddam Hussein, it was soon evident that the goal of the war was to destroy the Iraqi military and not just to liberate Kuwait.

Around 11:00 p.m., the networks signed off and it was up to CNN to report the progress of the war. Very little hard information came through that night and, for the most part, CNN merely recycled the evening's momentous news without much analysis, interpretation, or discussion. In a late night report from the Pentagon, CNN's Candy Crowley reported that the Pentagon was presenting the ground war as a major military offensive against a well-armed and a well-fortified enemy and was not underestimating the difficulty involved and would thus block out all news to protect the troops. CNN anchorperson Susan Rook brought up the question of the extent of Iraqi resistance, mentioning the recent report that the French forces had penetrated deep into Iraq without meeting any resistance, and Crowley replied that the Pentagon had admitted that many Iraqi troops were surrendering, but that more resistance would take

place farther within Kuwait. Thus, the Pentagon and its defenders were continuing to project an image of a strong enemy and the possibility of significant resistance by the Iraqis, a picture that would be shattered by the next day.

8.5 Cake Walk

Overnight, bits and pieces of information were dribbling in. Early in the morning of February 24, CNN reported that allied forces had penetrated deep into Iraq and were taking hundreds of prisoners. Coalition forces continued to rush through the gaps in Iraqi defenses prepared by the army engineers. Kuwaiti news agencies claimed that coalition troops had taken the city of Jahruh, outside of Kuwait City, on the road to Basra. The report of the seizure of Failaka Island continued to circulate, though CNN indicated that it was "unconfirmed." It was also announced that amphibious troops had already begun an invasion of Kuwait and that allied paratroopers had landed in Kuwait City; these latter reports turned out to be wrong: although some paratroopers may have landed in Kuwait City, they were not an invasion force. Moreover, the amphibious forces were used as a deception to tie down Iraqi troops on the Gulf shore.

The first video pictures of the ground war were presented in a pool report by ITN's Sandy Gall who portrayed coalition forces going across Saddam Hussein's "much vaunted sand fortifications." Gall reported that coalition bombardment of Iraqi positions preceded the incursion of Kuwaiti and Saudi vehicles ten to fifteen miles into Kuwait in the direction of Kuwait City, where the troops "advanced like clockwork." There were no trenches of burning oil, and only a lone Saudi foxhole and broken artillery gun, though some Iraqi prisoners were captured about ten miles in. This first report showed no real opposition from Iraqi forces and the so-called "Saddam line" was appearing to be a myth.

ITN's Jeremy Thompson presented a pool report with the first eyewitness account of the battle area, interviewing U.S. F-15 pilots who described activity all along the border area and fires throughout Kuwait. According to Thompson, coalition troops were racing across the desert in a very broad area with no resistance, while British artillery shelled Iraqi positions. Over 200 burning oil fields created the background to the battle, a scene one U.S. pilot described as "looking like hell." Apache helicopters flew into Iraqi-held territory and used laser-guided technology to find their targets, proving to be very effective tank killers. The British "Desert Rats" (an elite infantry unit) were said to be racing across the desert in the West, and multiple rocket launchers were reportedly firing at Iraqi positions. Thompson concluded that "the full force of Desert Storm is now being unleashed."

Another ITN report, by Geoffrey Archer, described the preparation of the battlefield by fuel-air bombs and napalm and indicated that coalition forces were easily progressing toward Kuwait City through "Iraq's static defenses." Other coalition forces within Iraq were proceeding toward Republican Guard forces, with one division racing as far north as the Euphrates. A Kuwaiti exile claimed that Kuwait City would be liberated by the next day—its independence day. Reports indicated that Iraqi soldiers were surrendering by the thousands.

So far, then, all reports were extremely upbeat, though there was some exaggeration. The first sign that things were going really well, however, was an unscheduled press conference by General Schwarzkopf. Although a news blackout was in effect, obviously Schwarzkopf had some good news and

couldn't wait to brag about the success of his operation. In addition, as CBS correspondent Susan Spencer would report later in the morning, Schwarzkopf broke the announced forty-eight-hour news blackout immediately in order to upstage the Pentagon and be the first to provide the good news. CNN reported later that Schwarzkopf was also concerned because British and French military authorities were giving briefings that gave the impression that they were doing splendidly in conquering Iraqi forces with a little help from the Americans.

So about 9:00 a.m., EST, General Schwarzkopf strode confidently into the briefing room and stated that he would provide a brief assessment of the progress of the ground campaign. Schwarzkopf claimed that the coalition forces had reached all of their first-day objectives and were continuing their attack, speeding to their destinations. With one exception, contact with enemy forces could be characterized as light. A marine task force was counterattacked by enemy armor, but the enemy quickly retreated when fire was returned. Ten hours into the offensive, more than 500 Iraqi prisoners have been taken and "friendly casualties are remarkably light." Schwarzkopf cautioned that the U.S.-led forces were doing very well, but the war was not over yet. Opposition was light, Schwarzkopf conjectured, because of the "excellent job in preparing the battlefield." So far the general was delighted with the progress of the campaign.

The usually loquacious Schwarzkopf answered questions brusquely in a shot-gun fashion and rudely refused any followups, controlling the media as totally as he controlled his troops. Stormin' Norman was also continuing to present the misleading impression that his goal was merely to get Iraqi troops out of Kuwait; indeed in his next major briefing he would concede that his goal was much greater (see 9.3). When asked if the reason that the Iraqi opposition was so light was that allied troops were avoiding a frontal confrontation with the Iraqis, Schwarzkopf answered brutally that: "We're going to go around, over, through, on top, underneath, and any other way it takes to beat them." It would soon appear for anyone with the eyes to see, that the allied troops were merely advancing without opposition and massacring anything in its way in a total slaughter of the Iraqi army that didn't have a chance against the high-tech military forces arrayed against them (see Chapters 9 and 10.2 for details of the carnage).

At this point, however, one did not know whether one should believe Schwarzkopf or not in light of the greatly exaggerated success stories of the first night of the air war when a Pentagon disinformation source claimed that the U.S.-led coalition was winning an overwhelming victory and that the war would soon be over. This time, however, it turned out that Schwarzkopf's confidence and optimism were justified. In retrospect, it would be interesting to know the extent to which the Pentagon knew in advance that they were assured of an easy victory over a demoralized and outclassed Iraqi army, or if they themselves were surprised at the ease of the victory.

CNN's Perry Smith explained that Schwarzkopf was running "a very fast campaign" that would go quickly to victory. It is "more impressive," Gen. Smith enthused, "than anything we've seen in history, even more impressive than the 1967 Israeli campaign" (the Six-Day-War). In fact, it is "one of the most impressive campaigns in history" and would be over in just a matter of days. And so Smith continued his rhetoric in praise of the wonders of the U.S. military, repeated his belief that the first four to six hours were the key, and as the initial phase went so well, the ground war would be an easy "mopping-up operation," and it turned out this time that he was correct. Obviously, Smith's friends in the Pentagon had told him that a rout was at hand and he was able to hype the massacre as a brilliant military victory, continuing his PR work for the Pentagon.

Reporting from Saudi Arabia on the "CBS Sunday Morning" show hosted by Charles Kuralt, Dan Rather followed General Schwarzkopf's briefing with the first footage of surrendering Iraqi soldiers, which showed a couple of scared and hungry-looking fellows who had been dropped into the desert and subjected to incredibly heavy bombardment. Eric Engberg recounted that there were reports from military sources that Kuwait City was now in the hands of the allies. Rather pointed out that the first reports of this success came from Kuwaiti news sources, but now military reports also confirmed this. According to Engberg, U.S. paratroopers made a drop into Kuwait City and the "shock power that airborne forces bring to the battlefield" supposedly overpowered the Iraqis. This was total disinformation as it would take a couple more days to occupy Kuwait City. Engberg then circulated once more the propaganda line of the day concerning the atrocity stories and Iraqi scorched earth policy that he claimed might have encouraged the president to undertake the ground war—this also was total nonsense as the ground war had been planned for weeks and would have taken place independent of alleged Iraqi atrocities, propaganda that the United States was spreading. The compliant Engberg disseminated the horror stories without raising a shadow of doubt, though Dan Rather had to caution him about accepting at face value all of the stories he was being told by the Kuwaiti resistance.

There was, Engberg continued, no word of any amphibious assault, though there were 17,000 marines either proceeding with the assault or holding back. In sum, the coalition offensive was proceeding very smoothly and was encountering only light resistance. After this cheery report, Engberg, who earlier in the week came off as a great enthusiast for the ground war and a great hater of peace talk, put his glasses on, squinted at his list of Pentagon fed "information," and, satisfied that he has presented his "information" as fully as possible, grinned and took his glasses off again.

CBS's military analyst, General Dugan, stated that the whole range of operations were now engaged and were moving forward "forcibly." He claimed that the areas that the allies were fighting in were "well prepared." Dan Rather, waxing poetical, described the Kuwaiti battlefield as an eerie sight as the sun went down, because of the dark, hazy sky produced by over 300 burning oil wells. Using sports metaphors once again, Rather praised General Schwarzkopf's "fast break offensive" and "quick lightning strike for a lightning win." Schwarzkopf would utilize the football metaphor the next day when he described his strategy as a "Hail Mary" play whereby all forces go racing down the field as fast as they can from all sides to score a big win (see 9.3). Rather said that the Iraqis were being "wiped out" by the allied invasion, which was a "blowup" for the allied forces, and if this held up, the war could be over very quickly. Engberg commented that this was precisely the plan—to use armored forces to overpower the Iraqis quickly and drive them to surrender. The cake walk was on and would continue until the high-tech massacre was over.

As the morning proceeded, a significant flow of video came in via pool footage, cleared by military censors, sent up quickly to the satellites, and the networks were airing all footage of the theater of war immediately. Countless replays of desert footage showed forlorn Iraqi prisoners, a few abandoned foxholes, fires burning in oil wells, and allied forces racing unimpeded through Kuwait. Iraqi soldiers were depicted waiting throughout the desert with white flags, ready to surrender, and the allied forces were portrayed rushing through the desert meeting little or no resistance. The "Saddam Line" had turned out to be a fraud promoted equally by the Iraqis and the U.S. military and their compliant media.

In an interesting exchange, ABC military expert Bernard Trainor told Peter Jennings that he was surprised that the Iraqis had shown so little resistance and that the allies punched through their fortifications with "such alacrity." Based on his scrutiny of "unclassified satellite photos," Trainor was led to believe that Iraq had stronger fortifications, even on the front line (though obviously these Iraqi positions had been "attrited" from the heavy bombing). The question that no one posed, though, was whether Schwarzkopf and his commanders, and Bush and his war team, knew all along that the ground war would be a massacre with few casualties or if they too were genuinely surprised.

Later in the morning, CBS's Jim Stewart at the Pentagon advised that reports of Kuwait City's liberation were premature, though allied forces were actually outside of the city. NBC continued to beat the drum of the dramatic success of the AirLand war plan that was meeting little or no resistance, and added that Iraqi soldiers were eager to surrender. ABC's Sam Donaldson narrated a video of Saudi Arabian troops going through the sand fortifications into Kuwait, and the images showed miserable Iraqi bunkers and dejected prisoners of war about ten miles inside Kuwait. In a British ITN report that followed on ABC, the Iraqi defenses looked totally inadequate and Sandy Gall pointed out that there was no flaming oil and no Iraqi resistance, not even any troops. The question at this point was whether all Iraqi frontline defenses had moved back to second and third lines of defense or whether their military had simply collapsed.

After an incredible segment celebrating George Bush (see 10.4), NBC's Pentagon correspondent Fred Francis came on to report that General Powell had just called the president to say that "things are going very well, extremely well." Following this line, Francis claimed that "things are moving very fast, much better than we expected" (note the "we" identifying Francis with the Pentagon). There has been "very little resistance" and "we have so many prisoners that we don't know what to do with them all." The plan, Francis confided, was to go north of the Republican Guard to destroy them or to force a surrender. Once again, a Pentagon insider made it clear that the U.S. military was not just content to drive Iraqis out of Kuwait, but intended to cut off and destroy the Republican Guard, the heart of the Iraqi military.

CBS Pentagon correspondent David Martin supported this appraisal and announced that his sources in the Pentagon claimed that in the first three hours of the war, U.S. casualties were "in the single digits," though Martin warned that the Republican Guards had not been engaged and so things might turn more difficult at this point. Martin noted that the Pentagon was claiming that the Iraqi communication system had been destroyed and that the Iraqi military, including the Republican Guards, did not know what was going on and were thus effectively "shut down" as a coherent fighting force--though this remained to be confirmed. Charles Kuralt, giving away again the true end of the operation, noted that the Republican Guards were going to be surprised when the allied troops "swung down on them." Martin admitted that the whole operation was designed to engage the Republican Guards, saying that the Republican Guards were the "center of gravity" and that the operation was designed to draw them out and to destroy them.

On ABC, military analyst Tony Cordesman indicated that the theater of operations was now cut in half, and both the Republican Guards and Iraqi forces in Kuwait were being encircled for the kill. Peter Jennings asked if perhaps the commentators were not "speaking about this too quickly" and Cordesman admitted that this might be true. Cordesman--who had been one of the major promoters of the ferocious

Iraqi troops armed with powerful fortifications, artillery, and chemical weapons--admitted finally that the first line of defenses was obviously weak. He now believed the Iraqi troops had retreated to the second line of defenses or were killed or captured (as it would turn out, the Iraqis had practically no lines of defense after forty days of fierce pounding). The town of al-Jahra was a key goal, Cordesman explained, as this would provide easy access to Kuwait City and would block any escape (earlier CNN had reported, following Kuwaiti sources, that al-Jahra was seized, but there was no official confirmation). Gen. Bernard Trainor came on and indicated that it appeared that the allies had cut off various avenues of retreat for the Iraqi army, both in Kuwait and southern Iraq, and that they were moving as far north as the Euphrates River to cut off retreating Iraqis from escaping north to Baghdad.

Jennings concluded the ABC report by noting that we were now seeing for the first time the face of the Iraqi army and its suffering on the battlefield. The video images presented the Iraqis as rather wretched and hardly threatening one clip, shown by ABC on this segment and rerun throughout the day, showed an Iraqi soldier about to collapse and kissing his Egyptian captor; another would show surrendering Iraqis kissing the hand of an embarrassed American. In his wrap-up, Jennings summarized the events, citing General Schwarzkopf's claims that everywhere the allied forces had met their first day's objectives with "astonishingly light" casualties and no indications of chemical weapons.

CBS's Eric Engberg described how "Task Force Ripper" easily penetrated Iraqi defenses that were "only lightly defended." The U.S.-led coalition forces also found poorly maintained mine fields and fortifications, which they had easily breached, and quickly moved to the second line of Iraqi defensive fortifications. Things were going equally well here with air power being used to pummel Iraqi troops, making it easy for coalition ground forces to advance. The emphasis now, Engberg claimed, was to shift to close air support for the ground troops as they advanced. The level of sorties had been stepped up, with numerous missions flown in support of marines as they advanced, as well as against Republican Guards in southern Iraq. So, in short, Engberg concluded, there was less trouble getting through Iraqi fortifications than anticipated and Dan Rather summed up the Iraqi plight: "low maintenance, low morale."

Rather concluded by noting that there were many pool reports of penetration into Kuwait by coalition forces, but what the large U.S.-led forces were doing in southern Iraq had been "shrouded in mystery": the 48 hour battle plan was still unfolding and "the questions in the air" concerned how far north into Iraq coalition forces were advancing, whether a deep air envelopment was being employed, where and when coalition forces would turn on the Republican Guard, and whether the Republican Guards would resist. Continuing to play up the drama of the situation, Rather presented the war as an exciting story which would be continued the next day, advising the audience to stay tuned to CBS for any new developments.

In addition to the special news programs covering the ground war, the usual Sunday morning talk programs, such as "This Week With David Brinkley," focused on the Gulf war. On a stunningly ideological episode on Brinkley's program, Jack Smith provided a documentary summary of the week's events that could easily have been produced by the White House, it so perfectly reproduced their propaganda lines. The episode began with images of Iraq's "scorched earth" policy in Kuwait and reports of Iraqi atrocities that legitimated moving into the ground war. Smith presented the week's diplomatic activity, precisely as the Bush administration did, with the Soviets and Iraqis proposing intolerable preconditions that would save Saddam Hussein's face, regime, and military. The Bush administration

refusal to negotiate was presented as manly, and Henry Kissinger came on to indicate that it was necessary to have a "decisive military victory," so that "it is absolutely clear who won and lost."

The message was that Saddam Hussein's survival would be tolerable only if he was totally diminished and his military was destroyed. In the United States, Jack Smith reported, the whole country was behind the war effort and wanted victory. David Gergin of U.S. News and World Report, Reagan's former media director, exulted that "I think now that whatever apprehensions people have had, they are willing to put them aside for the point that we have to finish the job, that we're on the verge of victory, we're about to crush the enemy." In other words, enjoy the slaughter and put all moral concern aside. Smith concluded his report with exultation in the coalition victory and the smashing defeat of Saddam Hussein. The end was near and as we shall see in the next two chapters it would be a bloody one that would be celebrated as a great victory by the U.S. and its coalition allies.

Notes

1. See the Wall Street Journal, Feb. 7, 1991, pp. A1 and A6. Rather had shot down the earlier Iraqi-Soviet peace proposal on February 12 by stating jocularly, "If you consider this a kind of Iraqi-Soviet Scud...Marlin Fitzwater at the White House has fired what amounts to a diplomatic Patriot at it." Thus does Rather imply that a peace proposal is threatening and dangerous and that shooting it down is patriotic.

2. Curiously, twice during the afternoon, a hysterical Tom Fenton reported for CBS from Tel Aviv that Saddam Hussein had accepted the ultimatum, as if a diplomatic solution was indeed at hand; oddly, Dan Rather did not correct him.

3. This and some other brutal videos showing Iraqis being massacred were showed to reporters but not to the public.

4. It seems that the networks are choosing more conservative personnel to serve as White House correspondents. During the Bush era, for example, ABC replaced Sam Donaldson with Brit Hume, and CBS replaced liberal Leslie Stahl with the more conservative Wyatt Andrews. For examples of Hume's liberal bashing, see the rightwing journal Insight, July 29, 1991, pp. 33ff.

5. Later, a rightwing critique of press control emerged evident in the U.S. News and World Report book Triumph Without Victory (1992) which argued that the public was denied access to the heroic achievements of the U.S. military due to the tight censorship of images and news from the front. Actually, the U.S. military has plenty of official tapes and pictures of the ground war which have not yet been released.