

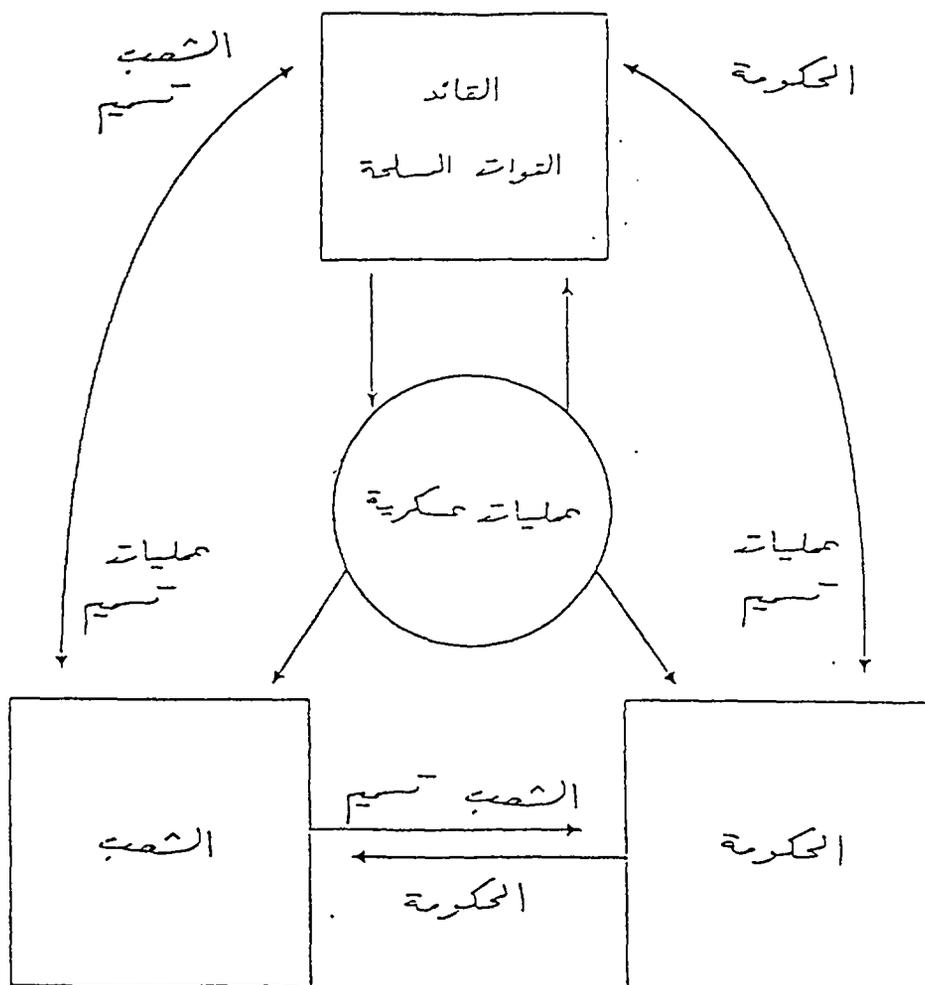
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SADDAM HUSSEIN: A Disciple of al-Clausewitz?



Foundations in Military Thought and Strategy

Writing Requirement

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Seminar E (Col Barriteau)

6 November 1992

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1. REPORT DATE 06 NOV 1993		2. REPORT TYPE		3. DATES COVERED 06-11-1992 to 06-11-1992	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE Saddam Hussein: A Disciple of al-Clausewitz?				5a. CONTRACT NUMBER	
				5b. GRANT NUMBER	
				5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER	
6. AUTHOR(S)				5d. PROJECT NUMBER	
				5e. TASK NUMBER	
				5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER	
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) National War College, 300 5th Avenue, Fort Lesley J. McNair, Washington, DC, 20319-6000				8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)				10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)	
				11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)	
12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for public release; distribution unlimited					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES					
14. ABSTRACT see report					
15. SUBJECT TERMS					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT	18. NUMBER OF PAGES 17	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT unclassified	b. ABSTRACT unclassified	c. THIS PAGE unclassified			

The familiar call to prayer woke Saddam Hussein as local muezzins in the Baghdad minarets joined the cacophony of male voices chanting "Allahu Akbar." Saddam's reading light was still on and a copy of Ahn al-harb lay open across his chest--right where it had fallen last night when Saddam dozed off.¹

Half asleep, Saddam kneeled toward Mecca on his prayer rug and mumbled some obligatory prayers. His thoughts, however, were not focused on heaven--his mind was preoccupied with the theories of al-Clausewitz which had recently been translated into Arabic. Saddam liked the concept of the "paradoxical trinity" and had used it to develop his strategy to fight the American-led Coalition.²

Saddam listened to the news as he shaved. Celebrating the 17th anniversary of the October War, the news commentator recalled how Sadat had taken on a more powerful enemy and survived to emerge as a great leader.³ Saddam was convinced his new strategy would bring both a long-term victory and personal success.

After a breakfast of cheese, olives, hot bread, and tea, Saddam walked over to the office complex adjacent to the Presidential Palace. The door guard saluted sharply as President Hussein approached. Even though at war, Saddam still began each day with a staff meeting in the Palace's underground bunker.

Entering the lobby, Saddam was greeted warmly by his cousin, the new Deputy Prime Minister, Colonel Ala Hussein Ali. Walking together to the elevator, Saddam stated that he would use today's meeting to outline his new strategy for opposing the Coalition. He wanted to be sure his senior advisors and military commanders understood his new strategy and the rationale behind his decisions.

Saddam Briefs

At 0730 sharp, Colonel Mohammed called the conference room to attention as Saddam Hussein and Colonel Hussein Ali entered. Saddam walked to the front of the room instead of taking his usual seat at the opposite end of the table.

Clearing his throat first, Saddam began, "We entered this war with limited political objectives--to raise the price of oil, to regain our 19th province, to control more oil of the reserves, and to gain more influence in the region."⁴

This is no longer a limited war with limited objectives; it's now a total war for survival. I believe we can expect the Coalition to begin attacking our people, armed forces, and government with a variety of political, economic, and military means. My brothers, we must resist these assaults and counterattack."

Saddam Explains the Trinity

Opening his dog-eared copy of Ahn al-harb, Saddam read the following:

"But we should at once distinguish between three things, three broad objectives, which between them cover everything: the armed forces, the country, and the enemy's will."⁵

Closing the book on his finger to hold his place, Saddam glanced around the table at his staff as he summarized the next paragraph from memory, "To defeat a military, the fighting forces must be destroyed until they can no longer fight and the country should be occupied to keep the enemy from raising a fresh army." Saddam opened al-Clausewitz's book again and continued to read:

"Yet both of these things may be done and the war...cannot be considered to have ended so long as the enemies will has not been broken: in other words, so long as the enemy government and its allies have not been driven to ask for peace, or the population made to submit."⁶

Saddam distributed his diagram of the trinity (see front cover).⁷ Using the handout, he explained that each side has three "centers of gravity" in war: the armed forces, the government, and the people. In a limited war, strategy is often designed to defeat only one or maybe two corners of the trinity. In a total war, strategy must protect your own centers of gravity and target each corner of the enemy's trinity--its people, its government, and its military.

"For example," he said, "if the Coalition attacks only our military forces, the most they can win is a limited victory. This is usually only a temporary triumph--much like winning the battle, but not the war. While it wouldn't be good, losing Kuwait militarily would be only a temporary set-back for us."⁸

"If both the military and the government are defeated," he continued, "the Iraqi people would survive to resist. In this case, the Coalition would have to set up a new government or occupy our country. Only by defeating our entire trinity can the Coalition force a lasting change in Iraqi national behavior."

Saddam summarized, "To gain a total victory the Coalition would have to crush all of our armed forces, break the will of our people, and establish a new national government." He then raised his voice for more emphasis, "While it's unlikely the Coalition would wage a total war against us, we must still pursue a strategy of total war if we're to survive even their limited war."

Saddam's View of the Coalition Strategy

"Until the Coalition is mobilized and ready to engage us militarily, they will use economic and political means to attack our people and our government."

Saddam explained that the UN-imposed trade and financial embargo, enforced by the naval blockade, were designed to weaken the will of the Iraqi people.⁹ He then warned that the Coalition would try to isolate and cripple the Iraqi government by restricting international air and sea links, severing credit lines, freezing assets in overseas banks, cutting oil exports through overland pipelines, and urging other nations to break diplomatic ties with Baghdad.¹⁰

The President predicted the Coalition would increase the number of troops in the Gulf dramatically--not only to defend Saudi Arabia, but to force Iraqi troops out of Kuwait. To build public support and preserve coalition unity, Saddam expected the Americans to go for a short war with limited objectives and few casualties.¹¹ The Coalition, he predicted, would use this opportunity to destroy Iraq's nuclear, biological, and chemical weapon production facilities.

Saddam's Strategy to Counter the Coalition

To oppose the Coalition, Saddam had to secure public support, safeguard his government, and fortify his defensive positions in Kuwait. He'd work on these goals and attack the corresponding three corners in the Coalition's trinity.

Saddam then impressed his staff by quoting some of Sun Tzu's principles. "What is of supreme importance in war is to attack the enemy's strategy," he recited. "The next best is to disrupt his alliance."¹² Saddam followed up with his specific strategy to resist Coalition assaults and to counterattack.

The "People" Corner

To foster domestic support, Saddam planned to reduce the affects of the trade embargo by pressuring Jordan to break the sanctions and keep western supply routes open.¹³ In addition, Saddam said he would permit Iraqi soldiers to loot Kuwait and ship the booty back to their families. He would also instruct the army to transport Kuwaiti equipment, hardware, and supplies north in an effort to upgrade Iraqi schools, hospitals, and national infrastructure.¹⁴

Saddam said he planned to mount a massive public relations campaign using billboards along major highways to bolster his domestic image.¹⁵ He would also instruct the state-controlled media network to depict him as a devout Moslem, to put a strong pro-Iraqi spin on international news, and to show the coalition forces as threatening Iraqi sovereign territory--the reclaimed 19th Province.¹⁶

While shoring up domestic public opinion, Saddam would try to weaken the "people" corner of the coalition's trinity. He planned to start by threatening to use expatriate hostages as human shields around his high-value structures. If this threat provoked international outrage, Saddam would try to convince the world he was really a decent family man by visiting a group of captive western expatriates. Dressed in a conservative business suit and remembering to smile (for the television cameras, of course), Saddam would drink their tea, answer their questions, and hold their children. If this gesture didn't improve his international ratings, Saddam would have to consider releasing the hostages.¹⁷

Saddam looked angry when he discussed the Arab nations which supported the Coalition. He would punish these countries through their citizens. In Egypt's case, he would cut off remittances from Egyptian workers in Iraq to get Cairo's attention.¹⁸ He'd also encourage radical Arab groups to demonstrate against the Coalition which he branded as supportive of regimes profiting from economic maldistribution, anti-Islam, pro-Zionist, anti-Palestinian, and anti-Arab.¹⁹

The President then said he would erode Coalition support by raising hopes of peace. Appealing to political doves back home, Saddam would stall the troop build-up with peace initiatives or a promise to withdraw from Kuwait. Saddam would also try to scare coalition supporters by describing the high casualties they'd suffer in the "mother of all battles," especially in a chemical war.²⁰

The "Government" Corner

Saddam had decided to go after this corner by appealing to themes of Arab solidarity. He would endorse Iranian religious leaders who called for a holy war against Western forces.²¹ Saddam would sell his policies as serving Arab and Islamic interests well by linking the Kuwaiti issue to Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank and Gaza Strip, as well as Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon.²²

Saddam would try to convince the major powers that their national self-respect was being undermined by slavish subservience to Washington.²³ He also planned to portray coalition objectives as nothing more than a quest for cheap gas and the restoration of the Emir's corrupt and undemocratic government.²⁴

The "Armed Forces" Corner

Saddam assured his military commanders that they'd get any national assets they needed. He wanted unlimited loyalty from the armed forces--especially the Republican Guards. To recruit allies for his war, Saddam planned to return the land captured from Iran in exchange for a military alliance with Tehran.²⁵

After closing his remarks with a short motivational speech, Saddam walked toward the door. Colonel Mohammed quickly call the room to attention.

Four Months Later--February 1991

Sitting in one of his mobile command centers, Saddam Hussein analyzed the list of facilities bombed by the Coalition. Almost all were military targets.

"I believe the political and military objectives of the coalition forces are now focused primarily on achieving a military victory," Saddam concluded. "These targets are predominately military-related. It doesn't look like the Coalition plans to attack civil government agencies or the will of our people."

His military advisors nodded in agreement. Coalition aircraft had bombed air defense facilities, missile sites, offensive conventional weapons, fuel

production facilities, and areas containing weapons of mass destruction. They also attacked Iraqi army units, lines of communication, and storage depots.²⁶

Studying the list, Saddam observed the Coalition was also trying to knock out his military leadership. Numerous bombs had fallen on command headquarters and bunkers, military-related government ministries, organizations for internal control, intelligence and propaganda agencies, and communications facilities.²⁷

Turning to his aide, Saddam boasted, "They may defeat our military forces in Kuwait and they may temporarily paralyze my government, but the Coalition won't get me or break the will of our people--we'll be victorious in the end."

The Coalition's Strategy for Limited War

Saddam's belief that the Coalition was waging a limited war appeared to be correct. President Bush said several times that the United States had no quarrel with the Iraqi people and evidence was strong that coalition pilots were making an effort to minimize civilian casualties and collateral damage.²⁸

Like the civilian population, it appeared most of the Iraqi government wasn't targeted either. The Coalition bombed buildings in Baghdad which were militarily significant or which housed Saddam's regime. Even though General Schwarzkopf stated repeatedly that his pilots weren't trying to kill Saddam Hussein, bomb craters pointed to an effort to incapacitate his leadership.²⁹

The armed forces corner of the trinity was the Coalition's obvious target. Command and control networks were disrupted and intelligence gathering nodes were destroyed. Iraqi troops, facilities, and military equipment were pounded daily to destroy the military's will and capability to fight. The Coalition's objective was to pit its military strengths against Iraqi weaknesses.³⁰

Saddam's Strategy for Total War

Comfortable that he understood the Coalition's objectives and the scope of the war, Saddam began to implement his total war strategy against the trinity.

Target the Coalition People

Soon after the air war began, Saddam ensured CNN reporters got ample film of bomb damage in densely populated areas of Baghdad. One video clip showed a bombed shelter where over 300 Iraqis were killed--mostly women and children.³¹ Another clip announced that an allied POW was killed in a Coalition air raid.³²

Using television effectively, Saddam talked directly to his enemy's people during some interviews. "I wish the Americans well and pray none of their sons will die. All the people of Iraq are grateful to the noble souls in America demonstrating against the war, in France, in Germany, in Spain, and others."³³ Showing his defiant side, Saddam used the airwaves often to tell his countrymen and the world that Iraq would triumph despite the massive aerial pounding.³⁴

Not relying solely on military forces in southern Iraq, Baghdad called for terrorist attacks on allied targets worldwide. "Do not spare any interest of any countries taking part in the aggression against your brethren," Saddam instructed.³⁵ Some Arabs took his challenge seriously as was evidenced in Egypt when 17 Iraq-linked terrorist were arrested with sabotage plans.³⁶

Polarize the Coalition Governments

In addition to flooding international television with video segments designed to show that Saddam's government was firmly in control, Iraq used its diplomats well. Several Iraqi spokesmen appeared regularly on American news and talk show programs, and Foreign Minister Tariq Aziz used the peace talks in Geneva to elevate his status to a par with Secretary of State James Baker.

Saddam tried several different methods to draw Tel Aviv into the Gulf war. If successful, he believed the Coalition would splinter when Arabs would be forced to fight on the same side as Israel. To this end, Saddam fired numerous Scud missiles at Israel and threatened that "if attacked by the U.S.-dominated multinational force, Iraq would strike first at Israel."³⁷ In addition, Saddam persistently urged Syria to switch sides and support Iraq, and he kept the pressure on Jordan's King Hussein to keep the borders open by encouraging anti-American protests.³⁸

Survive the Coalition Military

Aerial bombing was taking its toll and Saddam's goal was to survive. To reduce his losses, Saddam ordered a number of military aircraft flown to Iran to keep them from harm's way. Military leaders stored many of the remaining fighters in hardened shelters and hid other jets in the civilian community.³⁹

Saddam had threatened the use of chemical and biological weapons, but decided against this action.⁴⁰ In addition to escalating the war, he was afraid using these weapons would spark a determined campaign to destroy them in the same way the Coalition had located and bombed Scud missile launchers.

Saddam's only option for survival was to fight. A military defeat was more survivable at this point than surrender. By February, Saddam was ready to trade a limited military defeat in Kuwait for the survival of his regime and his people. Looking beyond the Kuwaiti theater of military operations, Saddam told the New York Times, "Nothing short of victory is acceptable to us. The Iraqi leadership and the people will not give up their country."⁴¹

One Month Later--March 1991

Reclining with his head propped up on two pillows, Saddam watched a television broadcast of his most recent speech. "Dear Brothers, I applaud your victory. You have faced 30 countries and the evil they brought here. Good will triumph over evil. Brave Iraqis, you have won, you are victorious."⁴²

Flipping the channel to CNN, Saddam caught the closing segment of the international news hour. Taking questions from reporters in the Coalition briefing room, General Norman Schwarzkopf remarked, "As far as Saddam Hussein being a great military strategist, he is neither a great military strategist, nor is he schooled in the operational arts, nor is he a tactician, nor is he a general, nor is he a soldier. Other than that he's a great military man."⁴³

As the audience clapped their approval at Schwarzkopf's words of triumph, Saddam wondered what side the old master, al-Clausewitz, would have considered victorious. Coalition forces had achieved a stunning military victory, but

Saddam had survived. He had followed al-Clausewitz's concept of total war and come through with national will still intact, geographical borders unchanged, government leadership in place, and a military still capable of combat.

Saddam clicked the television off as he reached for his worn copy of Ahn al-harb. After skimming through some pages, Saddam read the following quote:

"Lastly, even the ultimate outcome of the war is not always to be regarded as final. The defeated state often considers the outcome merely as a transitory evil, for which a remedy may still be found in political conditions at some later date."⁴⁴

With a knowing grin on his face, Saddam Hussein dozed off to sleep--the copy of Ahn al-harb fell open across his chest.

END NOTES

1. The Arabic phrase, "Ahn al-harb," is a translation of the words, "On War."
2. Detailed explanations of Carl Von Clausewitz's "paradoxical trinity" can be found in his book, On War, ed. and trans. by Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), p. 89, and Peter Paret, ed., Makers of Modern Strategy from Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), pp. 201-210.
3. For good background on Sadat's "battle of destiny," read Bard E. O'Neill, "The October War: A Political-Military Assessment," Air University Review, Volume 25 (Jul-Aug 1974), pp. 27-35.
4. Arthur Goldschmidt, A Concise History of the Middle East, (Boulder: Westview Press, 1991), pp. 366-372.
5. Clausewitz, On War, p. 90.
6. Clausewitz, On War, p. 90.
7. The diagram on the front cover of this paper is an abbreviated Arabic translation of the "paradoxical trinity" handout which was developed by the faculty at National War College. My special thanks to Ambassador David G. Newton for his assistance in the translation.
8. This sentiment was echoed in Damascus when Jordan's Prime Minister, Mudar Badran told his Parliament that "Saddam's withdrawal from Kuwait was a defensive move, not a 'military defeat'." Quoted from "World Leaders think Middle East Long Way from Achieving Peace," The Stars and Stripes, 1 Mar 91, p. 4.
9. UN Security Council Resolution Number 661 (6 Aug 90) imposed a trade and financial embargo on Iraq. UN Security Council Resolution 665 (25 Aug 90) called on UN members cooperating with Kuwait to enforce sanctions by inspecting and verifying cargoes and destinations. "Conduct of the

- Persian Gulf Conflict: Interim Report to Congress," Report submitted by Secretary of Defense Cheney to Congress (Washington: Government Printing Office, July 1991), p. 1-3.
10. UN Security Council Resolution 670 (25 Sep 90) expanded the embargo to include air traffic and called upon UN members to detain Iraqi ships used to break the embargo. Taken from "Conduct of the Persian Gulf Conflict: Interim Report to Congress," p. 2-3.
 11. "Conduct of the Persian Gulf Conflict: Interim Report to Congress," p. 1-1, and Clodfelter, "Of Demons, Storms, and Thunder: A Preliminary Look at Vietnam's Impact on the Persian Gulf Air Campaign," p. 32.
 12. Sun Tzu, The Art of War, translated by Samuel B. Griffith (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), pp. 77-78.
 13. "Conduct of the Persian Gulf Conflict: Interim Report to Congress," p. 2-5.
 14. Theodore Craig, "Kuwait: Background, Restoration, and Questions for the United States," Congressional Research Service Report for Congress, (Washington: Government Printing Office, March 1991), p. 15.
 15. While flying combat missions over Iraq in the F-16, I personally saw some of the large billboards which Saddam Hussein erected along the highways.
 16. Alfred B. Pardos, "Iraq and Kuwait: Conflicting Historical Claims," Congressional Research Service Report for Congress, (Washington: Government Printing Office, Jan 1991), p. 2-5, Goldschmidt, A Concise History of the Middle East, p. 366, and "So Far, So Good," The Stars and Stripes, 18 Jan 91, p. 28.
 17. Quoted in The Stars and Stripes, 30 Jan 91, p. 28, "Saddam expressed regret for releasing the Western hostages prior to the outbreak of hostilities, asking "If we had kept those 5000 hostages here, would President Bush have bombed Baghdad?"

18. Goldschmidt, A Concise History of the Middle East, p. 369.
19. Bard E. O'Neill and Ilana Kass, "The Persian Gulf War: A Political-Military Assessment," Comparative Strategy, Volume 11, Number 2, (London: Taylor and Francis Group, 1992), p. 220, and Goldschmidt, A Concise History of the Middle East, p. 371.
20. "Conduct of the Persian Gulf War: Final Report to Congress," Report submitted by Secretary of Defense Cheney to Congress (Washington: Government Printing Office, Apr 92), p. 95, and O'Neill and Kass, "The Persian Gulf War: A Political-Military Assessment, p. 220.
21. "Conduct of the Persian Gulf War: Final Report to Congress," p. 95.
22. Goldschmidt, A Concise History of the Middle East, p. 371, and O'Neill and Kass, "The Persian Gulf War: A Political-Military Assessment," p. 220.
23. O'Neill and Kass, "The Persian Gulf War: A Political-Military Assessment, p. 220.
24. O'Neill and Kass, "The Persian Gulf War: A Political-Military Assessment, p. 221.
25. Clyde R. Mark and Renee Stasio, "Iraq-Kuwait Crisis: A Chronology of Events July 17, 1990 - May 6, 1991," Congressional Research Service Report for Congress, (Washington: Government Printing Office, May 91), p. 68
26. Mark Clodfelter, "Of Demons, Storms, and Thunder: A Preliminary Look at Vietnam's Impact on the Persian Gulf Air Campaign," Airpower Journal, Winter Issue (Montgomery: Air University Press, 1991), p. 27.
27. Clodfelter, "Of Demons, Storms, and Thunder: A Preliminary Look at Vietnam's Impact on the Persian Gulf Air Campaign," p. 27.
28. Clodfelter, "Of Demons, Storms, and Thunder: A Preliminary Look at Vietnam's Impact on the Persian Gulf Air Campaign," p. 27.
29. "Allied Campaign Going As Planned," The Stars and Stripes, 19 Jan 91, p. 28.

30. "Conduct of the Persian Gulf Conflict: Interim Report to Congress," pp. 2-3, 2-6.
31. Mark and Stasio, "Iraq-Kuwait Crisis: A Chronology of Events July 17, 1990 - May 6, 1991," Congressional Research Service Report for Congress, p. 23, and O'Neill and Kass, "The Persian Gulf War: A Political-Military Assessment, p. 229.
32. "Iraq Says Allied POW Killed," The Stars and Stripes, 30 Jan 91, p. 1.
33. "Defiant Saddam Says War is Just Beginning," The Stars and Stripes, 30 Jan 91, p. 28.
34. "So Far, So Good," The Stars and Stripes, 18 Jan 91, p. 28.
35. "Baghdad Calls for Terrorism Worldwide," The Stars and Stripes, 6 Feb 91, p. 1, and "Conduct of the Persian Gulf War: Final Report to Congress," p. 95.
36. "Egypt Says It Had Arrested Iraq-Linked Terror Suspects," The Stars and Stripes, 6 Feb 91, p. 6.
37. "Iraq Offered Peace Plan," The Stars and Stripes, 14 Jan 91, p. 28.
38. "Iraqi Decoys Shield Scud," The Stars and Stripes, 22 Jan 91, p. 28.
39. George J. Church, "So far, So Good," Time, 28 Jan 91, p. 9, and "Conduct of the Persian Gulf Conflict: Interim Report to Congress," p. 2-7.
40. "Saddam Says War Just Starting, Hints at Destructive Weapons," The Stars and Stripes, 30 Jan 91, p. 1.
41. "Iraq Vows 'Destruction'," The Stars and Stripes, 3 Feb 91, p. 1.
42. "The War Goes On, Bush tells Saddam," The Stars and Stripes, 27 Feb 91, p. 10.
43. Ron Jensen, "Schwarzkopf Scorns Saddam the 'Strategist'," The Stars and Stripes, 1 Mar 91, p. 1.
44. Clausewitz, On War, p. 80.

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