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60 MINUTES INTERVIEW WITH SADDAM HUSSEIN-SEPTEMBER 13, 1988



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60 MINUTES INTERVIEW WITH SADDAM HUSSEIN—SEPTEMBER 13, 1988

Wallace: Good evening. This is Mike Wallace. We have an extraordinary interview to air tonight. After considerable effort, I managed to convince Saddam Hussein to give us his own post-mortem on the Iran-Iraq War that ended earlier this year. The story you are about to see is true. I have to forewarn viewers with small children that due to Mr. Saddam's character and the fact that his statements have not been edited, this program may not be appropriate for viewers of all ages.

We turn now to one of the Presidential palaces in Baghdad where I was ushered in, blind-folded, to meet with Mr. Hussein. Since camera crews were not allowed I will describe as best I can our surroundings. I am seated on a small chair in the center of a very large, opulent room. Saddam is seated in a higher chair to my left with a fully armed guard on each side. In fact, I am also being treated to such guard protection. Saddam offers me a drink. I decide to politely refuse, and the interview begins.

Mr. Hussein, Saddam, if I may call you that, did you accomplish what you set out to do in this war?

Saddam: Of course, I won the war. Khomeini's Iran is in ruins. I predict his military will not recover for another 5 years at least.¹ I have upset the balance of power between Iraq and Iran and now we are the more powerful. I have built up the fourth largest military in the world.² I am a clear leader in the Arab Community.

¹ John F. Antal, "The Iraqi Army Forged in the Gulf War," *Military Review* (February 1991):67.

² Stephen C. Pelletiere and LTC Douglas Johnson II, FMRF-203 Lessons Learned: Iran-Iraq War Vol. I, (Marine Corps Historical Publication, Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College, Dec 1990):46.

Wallace: I wonder if we might walk through the war together and you could provide us with your thoughts on how you accomplished your great success. Perhaps, we might begin with what motivated you to initiate this conflict on September 22, 1980?

Saddam: That dog Khomeini wanted to overthrow me! His policy to export radical Islamic fundamentalism throughout the region, coupled with his attempts to incite my Shia population, made this perfectly clear. I had extended a hand of goodwill to him upon his assumption of leadership, and again in August 1979, but my gestures were spurned.³ Instead, he was no doubt fomenting the riots taking place in Iraq, especially in the south where the Shias are most prevalent. Khomeini's troops were training Iraqi Shia's in guerilla warfare and exporting them back to Iraq to prepare to attack me!⁴ His navy was conducting maneuvers off our southern coast. It appeared that Iran might even use its navy and access to the sea to seize Bahrain as a base from which to attack Iraqi shipping, thereby denying me the golden fruit of my economic policy of liberalizing trade.⁵ Do you know he was even subsidizing a revolt among the Iraqi Kurds!⁶ And, sure enough, on June 9, Khomeini called on Iraqi Shias to overthrow me! A message reinforced only a day or two later, when Bani Sadr noted Iran might itself go to war if the border situation did not get better.⁷ The situation? Who was fomenting the situation? Iran!

³ Efraim Karsh and Inari Rausti, "Deciding on War," Chapter 6 from Saddam Hussein: A Political Biography (New York: Free Press/MacMillan, 1991):137-8.

⁴ Dilip Hiro, "Roots of Conflict: After the Iranian Revolution," in the Longest War: The Iran-Iraq Military Conflict (New York:Routledge, 1991):35.

⁵ Stephen C. Pelletiere, "Iraq's Decision to Go to War", Chapter 2 in The Iran-Iraq War: Chaos in a Vacuum, (New York: Praeger, 1992): 30.

⁶ Philip Robins, "Iraq in the Gulf War: Objectives, Strategies and Problems," Chapter 5 in Hanns W. Maull and Otto Pick, The Gulf War: Regional and International Dimensions, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988): 46.

⁷ Karsh and Rausti, 146.

Iran had begun border clashes and they were escalating. By August we began heavy fighting with tanks, artillery duels and air strikes.⁸

The “situation” was clear. The uncompromising nature of Islam and Khomeini gave me no choice, but to turn, in the last resort of course, to war to stop his revolution.⁹ I began to consider military operations in the summer of 1980. Strategically, I knew I had to strike soon or it might become too late. Iran was vulnerable now. Naturally, I would have liked to await the delivery of the hundreds of new tanks, armored personnel carriers, four frigates, six corvettes, and 60 new Mirage fighters scheduled for delivery in 1981. But, with the training time needed to ensure my forces could use these new weapons effectively, I might have had to postpone the attack until July 1981!¹⁰ By that time, Khomeini could have consolidated his hold on Iran. And, of course, I did not want to give him a chance to resolve the hostage crisis with the Americans. I preferred to meet him on the battlefield while most of the world was still siding against him. So you see, I had the diplomatic and military edge at this time.

Wallace: But if, as you say, Khomeini was weak, then why was he such a threat to you and your regime? Surely a religious leader with no apparent skills of governance and a population and country recovering from the loss of their leader was no threat to Saddam Hussein?

Saddam: I knew his potency and he was dangerous. Iraq had harbored Khomeini for many years. My population is 65% Shia and Shias constitute the majority of my army. I had reason to be concerned about their loyalty. In March 1980, with the increased political instability in Iraq, resulting from Khomeini’s maniacal revolution, I had had to send a stiff message to the Iraqi

⁸ Ibid., 146.

⁹ Ibid., 147.

¹⁰ William O. Staudenmaier, “A Strategic Analysis,” in The Iran-Iraq War: New Weapons, Old Conflicts, edited by Shirin Tahir-Kheli and Shaheen Ayubi (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1983): 37.

Shias, the Al Daawa especially. This clique of Shias was the most activist and presented the largest threat to my regime. I executed 97 Shias, half of them Al Daawa. Perhaps a miscalculation. On April 1, 1980 those SOBS tried to assassinate my right arm, Tariq Aziz. So, on April 8, I left them in no doubt as to who was in power and quietly executed their leader, Ayatollah Sadr.¹¹

Wallace: If I understand the situation at this time, you had just secured comprehensive leadership of Iraq and had convinced the Iraqi Parliament to accept your invasion of Iran. How could you be so sure you had the backing of the populace?

Saddam: I had spent many years marshalling my power inside Iraq. It was July 16, 1979, when I took over, comprehensively as you say, as President, head of the Revolutionary Command Council and general secretary of the Regional Command of the Baath party. Then I took some precautions. In late July, I further consolidated my power and executed several in the Baath leadership who appeared to be conspiring against my leadership.¹² I carried out a purge of the “dissident elements in the trade unions, the Popular Army, student unions and the local and provincial governments.”

But, I also undertook “popular actions [such] as raising the salaries of the military, police, intelligence, civil service and judiciary.”¹³ I opened the Baath party to the Iraqi Shias. I wanted to co-opt them. In 1979, I spent nearly \$80 million on economic development projects that clearly helped the Shias in Iraq more than any other group. I even created a national holiday in observance of their religious leader, Imam Ali’s birthday.¹⁴

¹¹ Hiro, 35.

¹² Ibid., 30.

¹³ Ibid., 30.

¹⁴ Ibid., 34.

But most important, I had made clear that Iraq would be an Arab secular state. This enabled me to win over much of my population by emphasizing the freedom this gave them to pursue the religion of their choice. I emphasized the cultural and civilizational aspects of Islam rather than its religious and legal aspects. I created a Baath party in which “Kurd and Arab, Sunni and Shia, Christian and Muslim” could work together.¹⁵ I felt I had done my best to ensure all possible support.

Wallace: Weren’t you worried about a misstep in this conflict disrupting the Gulf region and thereby threatening your potential hegemonic interests?

Saddam: I was very careful and prepared well. I had been working hard to create an Iraq-led unity with my Arab brethren after the apostasy of the Camp David Agreement! I had hosted two summits in Baghdad to enable the Arab community to regroup after Egypt’s betrayal.¹⁶ In February 1980, I pressed for a new Arab Charter, calling on my fellow Arabs, especially in the Gulf, to protect Arab property and not seek aid from the great powers.¹⁷ And, I did my homework. In August, before I invaded Iran, I consulted with Kuwait and Saudi Arabia about my plans. I knew I had their support.¹⁸ We had to protect our oil interests and could not afford local political instability.¹⁹ We were in the midst of a world oil boom.²⁰ Khomeini was our mutual enemy due to his hegemonic ambitions. My Arab partners were also vulnerable to his Islamic revolution threat. Bahrain is 70% Shia, Kuwait 30%. Saudi Arabia and the UAE have significant groups of Shias in their countries.²¹

¹⁵ Ibid., 31.

¹⁶ Robins, 48.

¹⁷ Karsh and Rausti, 136.

¹⁸ Hiro, 38.

¹⁹ Pelletiere, 30.

²⁰ Karsh and Rausti, 136.

²¹ Ibid., 29.

I chose my time to strike when Khomeini was militarily weak, so I could be assured of the quickest possible victory with minimal casualties. Indeed, such a victory would be important to my greater goal to obtain support for myself and the Iraqi regime throughout the Arab world. My ultimate goal was to win the conflict and establish a new balance of power in the Arab world in which Iraq had the leadership role. The Shah was gone. Egypt was sidelined by its infidelity to the Arab World when it accepted the Camp David Peace Accord with that atrocity of a country, Israel.²² The Arab states needed strong leadership to face down the growing tide of the fanatical Islamic revolution. We could not just turn our heads.

Wallace: But didn't you worry your invasion of Iran might trigger superpower intervention?

Saddam: No, you were my friend at the time, as was the USSR. The Soviets were supplying me regularly with arms and military advice. Khomeini had made sure you were my friend by detaining 53 of your diplomats. In fact, his confrontation with the US was another fact in my estimation that now was the time to strike Iran. You two superpowers had "neutralized" yourselves with the US response to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Your Carter Doctrine "declaring US determination to defend the Gulf against Soviet encroachment,"²³ coupled with Secretary of Defense Harold Brown's recent posture statement that, "protection of the oil flow from the Middle East is clearly part of our vital interest," in defense of which "we'll take any action that's appropriate, including the use of military force"²⁴ gave me some assurance that neither of you would intervene. I certainly did not want to give the US ANY excuse for intervention. This was MY chance to show MY strength.

Wallace: So describe to me your plan.

²² Staudenmaier, 28.

²³ Pelletiere, p. 30

²⁴ Michael T. Klare, "The RDF: Newest 'Fire Brigade' for U.S. Intervention in the Third World," (U.S.

Saddam: Ah, it was genius. It would be a “coup de main!”²⁵ I did not need a large force. Six or 7 divisions could accomplish this. Besides, I still had to maintain several divisions in the north to keep control over the Kurds.²⁶ My general staff and closest advisors were concerned particularly about the cost of war, but even more in regard to casualties. I reassured them victory would be swift - we had the upper hand - and I was in no mood for prolonged conflict. I assured them we could minimize the loss of lives and our resource use. I knew I had to do this to obtain popular support for my plan. I did not seek a total war, but a limited one. I wanted to avenge the shame Iraq had incurred in accepting that illegitimate Algiers Agreement! I was going to regain full control over the Shatt al Arab, my only access to the Gulf.

Wallace: Operationally, though, things did not go as you planned. Khomeini responded much more powerfully than it appears you expected.

Saddam: My plan worked quite well. We protected the ancient invasion routes in the northern mountains, while simultaneously protecting the oil-rich area around Basra. I secured the mountainous areas where those bloody Kurds were. I knew they were always capable of causing trouble and I could not afford that in this case. And I even considered the contingency of a Syrian threat further north.²⁷ But, as I said earlier, I was constrained by the need to sustain popular support at home, so we had to pursue a “limited war” only. I knew it would be difficult to prosecute a limited war, that escalation is all too easy. I only wanted to ensure Khomeini understood that any expansionary plans he had were foolhardy and hopeless. I could not afford to kill him. I was worried about my Shia population’s reaction. I had no need for renewed political problems at home. I certainly didn’t want to create a flank to defend inside my own

Strategy in the Gulf: Intervention against Liberation, Belmont, MA: Aug, 1981): 99-100, 104.

²⁵ Pelletiere and Johnson, 27.

²⁶ Staudenmaier, 32.

borders! I instructed my staff to make certain that the conflict involved a small portion of Iraq's forces; that it would be conducted within definite boundaries. And be directed against military forces rather than civilian value."²⁸

Wallace: But there seems to have been some controversy over the capability of your general staff.

Saddam: Anyone would have been proud of my exceptional general staff! They were "shaped by the traditions of the Prussian military, which by war's end had developed the army into a first class fighting institution."²⁹ It was these fine generals who proposed our three military objectives: to secure reversal of the 1975 Shatt al-Arab boundary, to liberate Khuzistan for its vast oil resources and finally, to seize control of Arvand Rood. I concurred with these objectives, but of course emphasized that they needed to be pursued simultaneously. My staff had developed an excellent attack plan that entailed "destroying Iranian oil refineries, limiting civilian casualties, destroying Iran's Revolutionary Guard and maximizing the use of artillery."³⁰ And in the tradition of the great warrior/thinker Sun Tzu, we knew we had to surprise Khomeini's forces.

Wallace: But their execution of your/their plan did not succeed. Perhaps because of what is known as the fog and friction of war? "The difference between war on paper and on the battlefield?"³¹ Did you really understand what your "centers of gravity" were?

Saddam: So you think you can trick me? I am just a lawyer?³² I know Clausewitz's centers of gravity: the opponent's army, his capital, and if he had a strong protector, the army of his ally. I

²⁷ Staudenmaier, 34.

²⁸ Efraim Karsh, "Military Lessons Of The Iran-Iraq War"(Orbis, Spring 1989):209.

²⁹ Pelletiere and Johnson, iv.

³⁰ Michael E. Dobe, "The Iran-Iraq War: Roots, Conduct and Prospects", (IR: US Diplomacy, Oct 1986):3.

³¹ Staudenmaier, 35.

had analyzed the strategies of the 1967 and 1973 Arab-Israeli wars. I knew Khomeini's centers of gravity were his Revolutionary Guard, the cream of his loyal army, his Air Force, his weakened economy, and of course, strategically, the will of his followers, the duped Iranian people.

Our surprise attack worked quite well. On the 22nd of September, a combined air ground operation commenced with six of my army divisions crossing the border into Iran attacking on three fronts. From our lessons learned in the Arab-Israeli war, air strikes were conducted simultaneously on ten Iranian airfields to destroy Iran's aircraft on the ground. Resistance was limited and consequently in the north, my mountain infantry division captured Qasr-e Shirin, and continued to the base of the Zargos Mountains, which were strategically important because the Baghdad-Tehran highway traversed them. Centrally, we captured Meharan, which was a key town on the major north-south road. My main effort was in the south where we rapidly crossed the Shatt al Arab waterway and advanced into Khuzestan. The attacks culminated with an advance of approximately 80 km. Although, I admit, we were ultimately repulsed in the battle for Dezful.

Wallace: But your initial air operations produced mixed results. I believe you were able to destroy airfield infrastructure to include runways and ammunition depots, but your attempt was less successful in destroying the Iranian Air Force on the ground. I'll give you some credit. The major oil facilities at Abadan and on Kharg Island were dealt a heavy blow. But, if I understand what actually happened, you did not successfully capture any of the cities you mentioned, and

³² Hiro, 29.

yet by the end of September you claimed you had achieved your territorial objectives? A little premature weren't you?³³

Saddam: I KNEW this, but I thought I would argue that I had won anyway, and perhaps Khomeini would have bit! Information was hard to come by. And, I did not want to conduct battles in the cities, as you recall, to keep casualties low.³⁴ I wanted to maintain some chance of mending Iranian-Iraqi relations in the future. Who knows I might become their leader! Perhaps, I was a bit too cautious. Maybe I should have pursued the attacks until we had fully captured, Khorramshar (which we eventually did take in October), Abadan, Ahwaz and Dezful. Then everything would have been over rapidly, just as I planned it. Had I known at this time that my own Shia population was sufficiently nationalistic not to turn against me, I would have struck harder and could have prevailed!

Wallace: Ah the fog and friction in war. And in addition, Khomeini countered with a strong air/land combined effort, resulting in a stalemate if I recall.³⁵ It seems you did not foresee this.

Saddam: It was not I, but my army. You know they were 85% Shia, and not fully trustworthy.³⁶ They were not listening to me. Command and Control has always been an issue in my army.³⁷ How much can you push an army such as I had. Trained in Soviet battlefield tactics, many of my younger officers were reluctant to take charge and show their initiative.³⁸

Wallace: Surely hindsight would tell you that your interference and authoritative nature actually negated the opportunity to terminate the conflict swiftly?

³³ Staudenmaier, 38.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid., 39.

³⁶ Pelletiere and Johnson, 28.

³⁷ Ibid., 30.

³⁸ Antal, 64.

Saddam: No! As I told you, it was my concern to minimize casualties that got in the way. It contributed to stifling the opportunities of my forces. I recognized the situation immediately and decided to regroup and take advantage of the coming winter. It gave me an opportunity to reinforce my front lines. We continued daily artillery duels while waiting for the winter to pass.³⁹

Wallace: But let's analyze the situation. You mentioned the famous German militarist, Carl Von Clausewitz. He would have advised you that reciprocal action by the enemy almost always dictates escalation in the conflict. Surely you saw that you had underestimated Iran army as an adversary.

Saddam: I recognized the war was escalating slightly beyond what I had envisioned, but that just meant I had to slightly redefine our strategy. As I told you, we were willing to sit out the winter rains. And as you no doubt know, when Khomeini foolishly attempted to attack on January 5, 1981, we seriously defeated his forces and destroyed nearly 100 of their tanks, while losing only 50 of ours.⁴⁰

Wallace: But your naval war was not a shining example either. Iran managed to maintain its naval blockade of you throughout the war.⁴¹ In fact, this blockade, accompanied by Iran's promise to keep the Straits of Hormuz open, denied you one important source of support in Oman.

Saddam: But this support was small peanuts. Perhaps you did not understand that most of the other Gulf States were supporting my territorial claims and helping to maintain my supply lines.

³⁹ Staudenmaier, 39.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 39.

⁴¹ Ibid., 41.

They even let me use their airfields to base my aircraft so Khomeini would have to think twice to attack them.⁴² More cleverly, I had even enticed the US to support me.⁴³

Wallace: But, as I understand it, your failure to knock out the Iranian air force on the first day of the war left your Gulf allies subject to Iran's attack if they continued to harbor your planes. I believe they eventually asked for you to return your planes to Iraq. There was also a request for the US to intervene by Saudi Arabia when it looked like Iran might attack other Gulf oil fields. In fact, Iran dangerously escalated the war in October 1981 when it attacked Kuwait's oil storage facility because of your use of your allies' airfields.

Saddam: Why are you concentrating so much on the first year of the war??? The war lasted eight years!

Wallace: So let's talk about 1982. Weren't you also surprised by Khomeini's "Operation Undeniable Victory" in March 1982. This massive counterattack destroyed three of your divisions forcing you to withdraw from Iran. The Iranian forces, "The Pasdaran" as they were called, though a product of the revolution and of course religious zealots, used successful tactics in battle. Their tactics reminded me of those of the American Civil War and World War I. Yet, their advance in wave after human wave obviously enabled them to obtain a decisive breakthrough, albeit with huge costs of human life. Surely their view of the war as a religious crusade, a cause worth dying for, must have surprised you as much as it did us in the West.⁴⁴

Saddam: Of course I saw this fanaticism, but for what it was. If I had any fault at all, which I doubt, it was that I accepted bad advice from my general staff. I knew that my army was unmistakably superior in technology, discipline, and modernization. We just had to use it more

⁴² Ibid., 42.

⁴³ Pelletiere and Johnson, 31.

⁴⁴ Staudenmaier, 38.

effectively. My general staff had just underestimated the power of Khomeini's army's resolve. So I pressed them to adopt a new strategy of "Static Defense." It was a remarkable strategy with several distinct advantages. "To begin with, it did not require great sacrifice from the Iraqi people, who were expected merely to hold the line against Iran's repeated invasion attempts."⁴⁵ The strategy also provided me more control over my questionably loyal army. It gave me the ability to keep a close watch on my military leadership.⁴⁶ And, a successful test of my new strategy was not far away. In July of 1982, Iran launched "Operation Ramadan" near the city of Basara. Under my new strategy, the Pasdaran and Basji (the Iranian volunteers) suffered extreme heavy casualties, and gained minimal ground against my dug-in static defense. I am particularly proud of this defensive effort since this battle became known as one of the largest land battles since World War II.

Wallace: But at this point in the war you have now accepted that did not work. And, I believe resources on both sides were becoming a significant issue. Your efforts to sustain large development programs at home and the war effort seemed to flag. Your oil revenues had fallen catastrophically by nearly \$20 billion since 1980 due to loss of Gulf loading terminals from your war and the steady decline in the price of oil.⁴⁷ Your pipeline to the Soviet Union for large quantities of arms and supplies, dried up after your initial invasion.

Saddam: Fortunately, they reexamined their policy in 1982 and, along with the French, continued providing me with technologically superior aircraft, missiles and tanks. With this

⁴⁵ Pelletiere and Johnson, 30.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 30.

⁴⁷ Robins, 52.

modern equipment the balance of power began to shift to my favor as Iran began to wage its war of attrition.⁴⁸

In late 1984, I made conflict resolution my number one priority. I had been meeting with US diplomats since 1983. In a calculated move, I gave them assurances I would abide by the original Algiers Agreement. As a result, Washington undertook to mount Operation Staunch, a scheme to shut off arms to Khomeini!⁴⁹ The US also began its lobbying in the United Nations for a negotiated settlement. I personally proposed a meeting with the Ayatollah Khomeini to attempt to resolve our differences. He declined my offer. Using airpower, I stepped up my attacks on Iranian shipping in what was to be called the “Tanker War.” These attacks paid off in the days ahead. It was clear that during their center of gravity identification, my staff had overlooked the targeting of Iranian tankers. This omission was significant because of how it played out in the international arena. The “Tanker War Strategy” I initiated in 1984 reached new heights in 1988, entering the history books as perhaps the prevalent action in bringing the war to a close. I had understood that “oil tankers were Iran’s Achilles’ heel.”⁵⁰ Oil exports provided 90 percent of Iran’s government budget. My attacks had so infuriated the Ayatollah that he countered by intercepting shipping bound for Iraqi ports, air attacks against Baghdad, and made the fateful mistake of bombing Kuwaiti tankers, bringing both super-powers into the conflict.⁵¹

Wallace: But your “Static Defense” strategy really amounted to a longer war. And surely you knew that if Iran did not maintain this posture also, but decided to attack, that you risked a major defeat?

⁴⁸ Pelletiere and Johnson, 33.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 33.

⁵⁰ Christopher C. Joyner, “The Persian Gulf War: Lessons for Strategy, Law and Diplomacy (Greenwood Press, Westport Conn. 1990):1-73,111-118.

⁵¹ Ibid.

Saddam: I knew this and it is why I began my transition to a modified “Mobile Defense,” thus creating a new offensive spirit in my Army. Using new T-55 and T-62 tanks I was able to dig-in and use them as artillery pieces or maneuver to defend the ground of my choosing.⁵² I was maintaining the technology edge over Iran.

Wallace: But the Pasdaran achieved a major success with the capture of Al Faw in 1986. This must have been quite personally embarrassing for you, as it was watched closely by the world. And although you ordered its immediate recapture, I understand this failed, perhaps even further humiliating you? Were you searching for respectability in the region when your forces launched your failed attack on Mehran?

Saddam: These were not defeats! They were militarily insignificant, as pointed out by others.⁵³ I just needed more recruits. And perhaps a slight shift in our tactics. I called together my generals at our “Congress of the Baath.” My commanders wisely suggested that we call up college students as well this time in order to build up the Republican Guard. College students might well be enticed to join the Guard due to its mystique, and when well trained they could provide the extra power we needed.

Wallace: But this created a real challenge to your original plan did it not? Calling up more conscripts meant more lives at stake and highly productive ones at that, especially as we understand these men were to be used largely in the infantry. I understood your generals also persuaded you to accept their new battle strategy that left you pretty much an observer.⁵⁴

⁵² Pelletiere and Johnson, 38.

⁵³ Ibid., 35.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 37-38.

Perhaps you gave in because you were getting nervous about ending the war? And wasn't it about this time or a little later that the US provided TOW anti-tank missiles to Iran?⁵⁵

Saddam: Yes, Allah d--- them, those wretched Turncoats! I had built up a qualitative edge over Khomeini's forces and they thought they could reduce it.⁵⁶ But I showed them. In the battles over Kharbala, I wasted Khomeini's troops with my superior weapons and larger army. That ignorant Khomeini kept sending in his troops to die, even after I had clearly prevailed. As one of my general's said: We harvested them!⁵⁷ My army then went on the offensive and reclaimed Al Faw!

Wallace: As I understand it your generals came on the offensive warily. Wanting to wait for the Iranians to strike first, so as to best ensure Iraq's victory by being able to better control the outcome.

Saddam: Perhaps, but they cleverly knew that if the offensive failed, they could explain, "they were merely straightening out their lines."⁵⁸

During this period, my Air Force shone and began to shift the balance of power to my advantage. My renewed airpower changed the tempo and the strategy of the conflict. I used it offensively and extensively from 1986 until the war's end to destroy economic infrastructure, Iranian tankers, and population centers throughout Iran. There was no near term resolution to the conflict on the horizon, and Khomeini had to be stopped. My caution from the early years of the war was gone. Successfully targeting oil refineries, electric grids, sugar factories, concrete plants, and shipping, with the addition of French Mirage and Exocet missiles, we performed brilliantly in these latter years of the war. My most successful operation was when I used

⁵⁵ Robins, 52.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Pelletiere and Johnson, 40.

“Tupolev bombers escorted by MiG-25 and Mirage F-1 fighters wreaking destruction upon Tehran and at least eleven other highly-populous Iranian cities (including Tabriz, Urmia, Rasht, Baktehran, Hamadan, Isfahan, Dezful, Ahvaz, Kharg, Beshehr and Shiraz).⁵⁹ My strategic bombing was most certainly having a detrimental effect on Iranian morale.

Wallace: But why then was it necessary to initiate chemical weapons attacks in 1984, 1985 and in 1988? It appears that these had little influence on the Iranians except perhaps in 1988.⁶⁰

Saddam: I used them only at critical moments when there was no other option and only in defense of Iraqi soil.⁶¹ I did not use them as one might a Weapon of Mass Destruction.⁶²

Consider what Khomeini’s Pasdaran were doing at this time. The Iranian command again resorted to the human-wave tactic. As a journalist from East Europe claimed at the time, Khomeini sent in “tens of thousands of children, roped together in groups of about twenty to prevent the faint-hearted from deserting, making such an attack.”⁶³ With the situation for Iran getting more desperate, even I was horrified by the magnitude of the casualty numbers, which now exceeded 250,000 on both sides. But Iran continued its “War of Attrition.” Repetitive attacks against Basra led to high Iranian casualties and limited success. They should have known I would not let Basra fall. It was time for a cease-fire. The UNSC was pressing us for one. I was ready and, in fact, accepted the Security Council resolution on a ceasefire on July 22, 1987.⁶⁴ Yet nothing seemed to move Khomeini to the negotiating table. I knew I had to strike further terror into the Iranian forces and the people of Iran to get Khomeini to change his mind. I had to use chemical weapons to impact the Iranian morale. In fact, I used a little psychology

⁵⁸ Ibid., 41.

⁵⁹ Dobe, 2.

⁶⁰ G.M. Burck, Chemical Weapons Proliferation (Greenwood Press 1991)

⁶¹ Karsh, 219.

⁶² Pelletiere and Johnson, 45.

also, because I never dissuaded them from thinking that my new SCUD missiles might be tipped with chemical payloads.⁶⁵

Wallace: In the end, this limited war of yours was the longest and bloodiest conflict since World War II, lasting almost eight years. As one analyst put it, “[it] was fought with the weapons of the 1980's, the tactics of World War II, and the passions of the Crusades.”⁶⁶ The negotiated United Nations cease-fire left both you and Iran in your original status before the war. Security Council Resolution 598 did call for a mandatory arms embargo on Iran with the goal of preventing further aggression. How can you say you won?

Saddam: With the will of Allah, we were victorious! I had further consolidated my power in Iraq. My Shia population stood with me in the final analysis. I now had the fourth largest military in the world.⁶⁷ Some have even said Iraq emerged from the war as “a superpower in the Persian Gulf.”⁶⁸ In any event, Iraq gained prominence in the Arab Community just as I wished. And Khomeini’s power base was ruined.

Wallace: But admit it, you had to accept many important lessons as a result of this bloody conflict. First, prosecuting a limited war is dangerous and difficult. It can rapidly escalate just because of the other side’s response to you. Second, one must truly understand one’s adversary before determining the kind of conflict you intend to engage in. Third, applying the principles of war as written, accurately determining centers of gravity, and ensuring one’s military objectives

⁶³ Joyner.

⁶⁴ Robins, 52.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Joyner.

⁶⁷ Pelletiere and Johnson, 46.

⁶⁸ Ibid., v.

can achieve one's political objectives is not straightforward. No country has ever benefited from a protracted war.⁶⁹

Saddam: Preach what you will, I won the war. At some cost of course. I suppose ideally, and “despite our victory, if you ask me now if we should have gone to war, I would say: It would have been better if we had not gone to war, but we had no choice.”⁷⁰

Wallace: That was end of our interview. I would like to end with a few additional thoughts. Saddam Hussein's eight-year war with Iran contributed only to heightening tensions in the Middle East. I think most analysts would agree, that Iraq probably did win the war, but at a very high cost. Iraq ended up under the old Algiers Agreement arrangement again with Iran. It lost the trust of many of its neighbors through pursuit of this war. There were 1,000,000 casualties. The war crossed an important threshold in chemical weapons use, leaving open whether these might more easily be used again. And, Iraq was left with a massive war debt it cannot manage, and a million-man army it cannot afford.

⁶⁹ Sun Tzu, The Art of War (Oxford University Press, 1963): 41.

⁷⁰ Karsh and Rausti, 149.