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SADDAM'S GENERALS

Perspectives of the Iran-Iraq War

Kevin M. Woods, Williamson Murray, Elizabeth A. Nathan, Laila Sabara, Ana M. Venegas

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Foreword

Perhaps the only thing less insightful than the history of a war written solely by its winner is one written exclusively by nonparticipants. The complex mix of drivers, decisions, and perspectives that animate a war's senior leaders are often lost or obscured under the best of circumstances. This problem is exacerbated when examining a war between closed regimes such as occurred with Iran and Iraq in the 1980s. While the perspectives of former senior Iraqi leaders contained in this monograph are not without biases and should be judged in light of other sources, they offer an important glimpse into a previously closed world. The study of the Iran-Iraq War based on the perspective of senior Iraqi participants offers valuable historical insights and will serve as a useful resource for analysts and scholars seeking to understand distant conflicts.

This study was inspired by post–World War II efforts of U.S. Army historians and intelligence officers to gather and preserve insights and perspectives of the German General Staff. This is the second volume in a series of studies, sponsored by the National Intelligence Council, designed to cast light on issues involving Saddam's Iraq by interviewing former Iraqi officials. The first volume, *Saddam's War: An Iraqi Military Perspective of the Iran-Iraq War*, contained interviews with Lieutenant General Ra'ad Hamdani, a former Iraqi Republican Guard Corps commander. This second volume includes an additional interview with Hamdani, along with four additional senior officers who discuss issues including Iraqi naval operations, airpower, military intelligence, and capability development.

I am encouraged that these interviews, along with captured records from Saddam's regime in the Conflict Records Research Center, Institute for National Strategic Studies, at the National Defense University are beginning to break open the "black box" of Iraqi decisionmaking under Saddam. It is important that this material be made available in a way that can help inform a rising generation of policymakers, analysts, and scholars.

—Major General John R. Landry, USA (Ret.)
National Intelligence Officer for Military Issues
National Intelligence Council

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Introduction

The following is the second volume in the Project 1946 series. The project title refers to the efforts of a team of U.S. Army historians and intelligence officers who, in the wake of World War II sought to understand what had occurred on the "other side of the hill." Their partners in this effort were a select group of former German generals. Through the use of personal, organizational, and campaign histories, as well as the review of captured German records, these researchers forever changed the world's understanding of the war. In over a decade of work, the German program produced more than 500 monographs, covering an array of strategic, operational, and tactical issues. In 1961, a key participant in the program, former Colonel-General Franz Halder, was presented an award in the name of President Kennedy for "lasting contributions to the tactical and strategic thinking of the United States Armed Forces."[2] The program's diverse utility and lasting impact is evident in such projects as the acclaimed official histories of World War II (the Green Books), the development of early Cold War doctrines, and the regional studies that informed U.S. operations in the Balkans late into the 1990s.

Franz Halder (left) briefing General Brauchitsch on the Poland campaign in October 1939.[1]

Despite the generally positive legacy of the German example, the program affords some

[1] Franz Halder, former chief of the General Staff of the German Army led a series of research programs with his former colleagues in support of various US Army military history projects and foreign military studies programs in the decade following World War II. Image courtesy of the Deutsches Bundesarchiv, Bild 183-H27722.

[2] Cited in James A. Wood, "Captive Historians, Captivated Audience: The German Military History Program, 1945–1961," *The Journal of Military History* 69, no. 1 (2005), 124.

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important cautions that are applicable to Project 1946. The motivations of the individual participants ranged from noble to base. Some of the former German officers saw cooperating with the Americans as a way to bolster Germany's defense from the its historic and now growing menace to the east. Halder wrote as much to his American sponsor soon after accepting his task, "I have undertaken this task because I am of the opinion, that…we will be in a position to make an intellectual contribution to the defensive potential of the West."[3] Other officers sought to solidify the myth of the apolitical Wehrmacht or to draw a distinction between themselves and the crimes of the regime they served. In addition to deliberate bias, there are, no doubt, inadvertent gaps in the telling. On topics large and small, and as is the case with all memoirs, the participants in Project 1946 suffer to some degree from "selective memory syndrome."[4]

Despite these limitations, the value of this and related efforts should be judged on its ability to fill gaps in an otherwise limited collection of primary sources material on the Iran-Iraq War. With the conclusion of decades of mistrust and more than a dozen years of conflict between the United States and the Ba'ath regime in Iraq, a rare opportunity exists to develop a deeper understanding of recent military history from the point of view of former adversaries. If continued interest can be taken as a metric of value then this and related research efforts—such as the U.S. Joint Forces Command's Iraqi Perspectives Project (IPP) and the Department of Defense's Conflict Records Research Center (CRRC)—indicate healthy and continuing institutional desire to learn from history.[5]

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3 Cited in Ronald M. Smelser, Edward J. Davies, *The Myth of the Eastern Front: The Nazi-Soviet War in American Popular Culture* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 70.

4 Wood, "Captive Historians, Captivated Audiance: The German Military History Program, 1945–1961," 126. For additional information on the strengths and limitations of this approach, see Kevin Soutor, "To Stem the Red Tide: The German Report Series and Its Efforts on American Defense Doctrine," *The Journal of American Military History* 57, no. 4 (1993), 653–88; Wolfram Wette, *The Wehrmacht: History, Myth, Reality*, trans. Deborah Lucas Schneider (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006); Russel A. Hart, *Guderian: Panzer Pioneer or Myth Maker?*, ed. Dennis E. Showalter, Military Profiles (Washington: Potomac Books, Inc., 2006).

5 Related research includes Kevin M. Woods, Williamson Murray, Thomas Holaday, *Saddam's War: An Iraqi Perspective of the Iran-Iraq War*, McNair Paper 70 (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 2009); Kevin M. Woods, Michael Pease, Mark E. Stout, Williamson Murray, James G. Lacey, *The Iraqi Perspectives Report: Saddam's Senior Leadership on Operation Iraqi Freedom from the Official U.S. Joint Forces Command Report* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2006); Kevin M. Woods, James Lacey, Williamson Murray, "Saddam's Delusions: The View from the Inside," *Foreign Affairs* 85, no. 3 (2006); Kevin M. Woods, *The Mother of All Battles: Saddam Hussein's Strategic Plan for the Persian Gulf War*, Official U.S. Joint Forces Command Report (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2008); Kevin M. Woods, Mark E. Stout, "Saddam's Perceptions and Misperceptions: The Case of 'Desert Storm'," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 33, no. 1 (2010).

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Members of the Project 1946 research team interview former Iraqi Major General Aladdin Makki (center) about his experiences as an Iraqi Army Corps Chief of Staff, **Director of Developments, and Commandant of the Iraqi War College during the Iran-Iraq War (Cairo, Egypt, November 2009)**

The focus of the interviews in this Project 1946 monograph, as with the first, is the Iran-Iraq War (1980–88). This conflict is relevant more than 20 years after its conclusion for numerous reasons, but four are prominent.

First, given the totalitarian nature of both participants, available data on one of the bloodiest conventional wars of the 20th century remains limited and heavily biased. While primary sources from within Iran remain almost non-existent, the opportunity to fully develop the Iraqi point-of-view will go a long way to illuminating this blind spot.

Second, many of the factors that precipitated the war in 1980—longstanding border disputes, regional ambitions, local religious and ethnic strife, and geopolitical tensions—remain in various forms. Anyone remotely familiar with the history of the Middle East can hope, but not be assured, that tensions between neighboring states will not spark a future war. The political and military history of past wars, to paraphrase Mark Twain, may not repeat, but sometimes, they do rhyme.

Third, the Iran-Iraq War saw the development and extensive use of weapons of mass destruction in a regional war. Iraq's experience as a regional power that developed and deployed chemical weapons, improved delivery methods, and strove to develop a nuclear weapons program, may provide a richer source of insights into proliferation than the Cold War experience of the West.

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Finally, the context and character of warfare in this region have always been something of an enigma to outsiders. The debates in the West over changes in modern war, questions of whether there is such a thing as an Arab "way-of-war," understanding the modalities of warfare in this politically and physically challenging region will all benefit from an in-depth study of the Iraqi perspective.

With the assistance of General Ra'ad Hamdani (the subject of the first Project 1946 monograph), the project's researchers interviewed Iraqi veterans of that long and bloody campaign. Those interviewed offered perspectives ranging from general strategy, the Republican Guard, air force, navy, and intelligence, to operations and combat developments. In each case, the interviewees worked with the research team by providing background information on their particular experiences and, in several cases, detailed personal histories. Each officer brought his own perspective to the questions and issues raised by the research team. Some were more comfortable discussing controversial topics than others, but each added significantly to our general understanding and opened the door to new lines of inquiry.

* * * * *

This monograph is composed of two parts. First is an overview essay that summarizes the major insights derived from the totality of discussion contained in the second part. The second part contains five interviews conducted during a seven-day period in three countries. The interviews were conducted in both Arabic and English. The transcribed and translated recordings of the interviews, augmented by notes taken at the time and other correspondence with the interviewees, constitute the basis of this manuscript. In editing the text for clarity, the authors endeavored to retain the original meaning. The editing process necessarily took into account the difference between the spoken and written word, differences in technical military language, and issues of transliteration. Any errors introduced during this process are the responsibility of the authors and not of the participants in this project.

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Summary and Analysis

This monograph represents a continuation of a series of research efforts designed to extend the knowledge of the contemporary Middle East, military history, and Iraqi military effectiveness during the course of three major wars: the Iran-Iraq War, the First Gulf War, and Operation *Iraqi Freedom*.[6] This second volume is based on interviews with figures significant in the Iran-Iraq War, extensive examination and study of captured Iraqi records, and a review of secondary sources. The interviews presented here involve not only lengthy discussions with Lieutenant General Ra'ad Majid Rashid al-Hamdani, staff officer and battalion commander during the Iran-Iraq War, whom the Project 1946 research team had interviewed before, but similar types of discussions with a number of senior Iraqi military leaders who played key parts in the Iran-Iraq War. These were Major General Mizher Rashid al-Tarfa al-Ubaydi, a senior officer and section leader in Iraq's military intelligence service dealing with Iran during the conflict; Major General (ret) Aladdin Hussein Makki Khamas, corps chief of staff, division commander, and director of Iraq's Combat Development Directorate during the war; Lieutenant General Abid Mohammed al-Kabi, commander-in-chief of the Iraqi Navy from 1982 to 1988; and Major General 'Alwan Hassoun 'Alwan al-Abousi, a squadron and wing commander during the conflict.[7]

As a result of these interviews, the Project 1946 team deepened and extended its understanding of a number of aspects and incidents during the period. Among the insights gained were:

- the growth of Iraqi intelligence capabilities during the war's course,
- the growth of Saddam's perceptions on the nature of war and his broadening understanding of the naval and air wars,
- the development of Iraqi military doctrine,
- the lack of a clear strategic or operational vision among Iraq's leaders, military as well as civilian, at the beginning of the war, and

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6 Interviews done to support this monograph were conducted from November 4–14, 2009.

7 General Kabi served in the Iraqi Navy throughout his career, but that organization used army ranks for its officers.

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- the difficulties the Iraqis confronted in incorporating technology and modern conceptions of war into military organizations that did not possess a high level of education.

Background

During a 10-day period, the team from the Institute for Defense Analyses interviewed five senior Iraqi generals in three different locations: Amman, Dubai, and Cairo. All five subjects cooperated enthusiastically. They possessed detailed knowledge of military operations in different areas and of the changing nature of the battlefield as both sides adapted during the course of eight years of bloody war. To varying degrees, the generals possessed secular outlooks, reflecting their educational backgrounds. Perhaps most importantly, they were serious military professionals. They were also hostile to the Persians to varying degrees and regarded the Shi'a politicians currently in power in Baghdad as mere tools in Iranian hands.[8] Not surprisingly, given their attitudes toward the present government and Iran, they were pessimistic about Iraq's future under Shi'a leadership.[9]

For the most part, the interviews did not contradict currently held views on the course of the Iran-Iraq War. But they did considerably extend knowledge in a number of areas and provided new insights into the conduct and support of operations by the Iraqi high command. This was particularly true of the intelligence area, where research has thus far examined only scattered Iraqi estimates and perceptions of the Persian enemy. We also believe that the view of Saddam Hussein's personality–as well as of his leadership style and ability to adapt to the war's strategic, operational, and tactical conditions–will be more nuanced and realistic as a result of these interviews.

Throughout our discussions the generals agreed that Saddam had been a disaster for Iraq and its people. But at the same time, they painted a picture of a complex individual who often showed considerable insight into where the war was going and, at times, what needed to be done. Moreover, they agreed that there was a deep conflict within Saddam's psychological makeup between on one hand, his love for "Bedouin" commanders whose only qualifications were their courage, and on the other for technologically and tactically capable professional

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[8] One of the generals who was critical of Saddam and Ba'athist rule—particularly of its impact on the professionalism of the officer corps—nevertheless ascribed the March 1991 uprising against the regime as the result of Iranian agents subverting Iraq's Shi'a masses and not the result of a spontaneous rebellion against the regime's incompetence for having invaded Kuwait.

[9] General Tarfa, who is still closely following events in Iran, admitted that the present regime in Tehran is in serious trouble and could collapse. Nevertheless, he still insisted that without external intervention, the clerics in Iran would still control Iraq in the future.

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officers who understood the demands of modern war. As the war unfolded, Saddam increasingly came to rely on the latter for advice and responsibility for major operations, but he never entirely gave up on the former in terms of major military appointments.

In addition to the interviews, the Iraqi generals each provided short personal monographs, which, due to limited resources, are not included in this paper. These documents obviously contain information and, more importantly, insights into the nature of the Iraqi military and the conduct of military operations that can deepen knowledge and understanding of the conflict. Not surprisingly, the generals were not eager to talk about the use of chemical weapons by Iraq's military. General Abousi, for example, stated that he had no knowledge of the air force's use of such weapons. Due to the compartmentalization of such information within the military, it is possible, though unlikely, that some senior individuals did not know about the use of chemical weapons in other parts of Iraq. However, the Project 1946 research team has learned from captured Iraqi military records that the mass use of chemical weapons by Iraqi air units was ordered in response to the successful Iranian attack on the Fao Peninsula in February 1987. From other discussions with former members of the Ba'ath regime during the past 6 years, members of the Project 1946 team believe the lack of recall is likely more related to fear of legal or other jeopardy than to fading memories or a determination to hide details of established events. Outside of the issue of chemical weapons, those interviewed were generally willing to talk about their experiences in an open and engaged fashion. Perhaps what was most surprising was the virulence of their anti-Persian and anti-Shi'a feelings—one of the generals going so far as to suggest that he would rather have diplomatic relations with Israel than with the Persians.[10] He added that he would never go to Tehran given the killings for which their leadership was responsible during the post-2003 occupation.

Origins and Planning for War

Work done thus far by the Project 1946 research team suggests that Iraq wandered into the conflict with no clear set of strategic or operational objectives and with seriously flawed assumptions. This view rests on captured documents of the Iraqi military and government and transcripts of recorded conversations between Saddam and Iraq's military and civilian leaders in summer 1980.

In general, the interviews confirmed the supposition that Iranian actions, overt as well as covert, played a considerable role in goading Saddam into his decision to launch Iraq's

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[10] Not exactly Saddam's view of the world. The dictator had reissued a book written by his uncle entitled, *Three Whom God Should Not Have Created: Persians, Jews, and Flies.*

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military forces into Iran on September 22, 1980. Khomenini's covert campaign in April 1980 to undermine the Ba'athist regime in Iraq—to include the attempted assassination of Tariq Aziz, then-vice president, as well as other senior Iraqi officials—provided the foundation for Saddam's and his advisors' increasing anger. By summer 1980, relations between Baghdad and Tehran had disintegrated to the breaking point.

However, the generals indicated that what triggered the decision to go to war was the escalation of a series of border incidents. Specifically, the Iraqis regarded a major artillery bombardment on September 4, 1980, as the start of the war. What remains a puzzle is the rationale behind Iranian actions. Ironically, Khomeini's regime, during the year-and-a-half it was in power, had conducted a massive purge of the shah's military and thus was hardly in a position to provoke a major conflict.

There are a number of possible explanations for Iran's activities. Iran's misinterpretation of the correlation of military forces was a distinct possibility considering the ignorance of all things military among the ayatollahs. The belief that God would stand on the side of the true believers in a war against the godless Ba'athists is a second possibility. An assumption akin to that made by the Soviets before they invaded Finland in November 1939 (that the workers would immediately rally to their side) is a third possibility. Those around Khomeini believed the Shi'a of Iraq would rally to Shi'a Persia in any conflict. Finally, Khomeini and his followers could have believed, as was the case for leaders of the French Revolution in 1792, that an external conflict was the easiest road to solving their political difficulties at home. The Project team's best estimate is that all of these factors may have played a role.

What the interviewees did confirm was the general sloppiness of Iraq's preparations for war in the months immediately before hostilities began. In July 1980, senior Iraqi army leaders (corps and division commanders) met to discuss a potential war with Iran. Saddam did not attend, and there appears to have been no representation from the navy).[11] During an extended discussion, Saddam's representatives made clear that war with Iran could occur in the immediate future. Nevertheless, most senior officers took the warning as indicating that a conflict might occur within a two-year period, during which time they could prepare their forces. At the time, however, none of the interviewed generals believed war would occur within two months. Some senior officers simply refused to believe that Saddam would consider invading Iran, a country with almost three times the population and, despite the recent chaos, one possessing an American-equipped military.

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[11] There may have been no representative from the air force either, but the interviewees were uncertain as to that aspect of the meeting.

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The extent to which the decision for war surprised the Iraqi military is suggested by the fact that the navy's senior officers were not informed of the decision to invade until September 20, 2 days before the invasion. As a result, two major naval units—floating batteries comprised of modified landing craft equipped with artillery—remained in Basra where they were refitting and undergoing overhaul and maintenance. Thus, the outbreak of war trapped them above the Shatt al-Arab and they had to be transported over land to Umm Qasr. With regard to the air force, the plans for the air attack on September 22, which were supposed to replay the devastating Israeli attack on the Egyptian Air Force in June 1967, were not delivered to the attack squadrons until September 20, so there was no time for rehearsals. Even then, the plans described the upcoming operation as a training exercise. Most of the crews did not know they were embarking on active operations until a few hours before takeoff.

The failure to examine the strategic and operational implications of war with Iran was disastrous for Iraq's opening moves. This was true for all the services: the navy simply assumed a defensive posture, the air force launched uncoordinated and ineffective attacks, and the army advanced on a number of different axes, none of which were mutually supporting, with the apparent goal of simply taking possession of Iranian territory.[12] In other words, there was little tactical and no operational focus to the Iraqi military operations of September 22, 1980.

Perhaps the most serious weakness in the Iraqi invasion, however, was the fact that no strategic conception lay behind the campaign. The interviewees confirmed that Saddam held a number of differing, and in some cases conflicting, views throughout the immediate pre-war period as to what he hoped to achieve with the invasion. In the Project team's view, Saddam and his advisors believed that military operations might achieve a number of strategic goals. They might persuade the Iranians to stop supporting Shi'a revolutionaries in Iraq who were attempting to overthrow the Ba'athist regime and arrest their harassment of the border areas. They might allow Iraq to seize the oil-rich province of Arabistan with the support of local Arab tribes.[13] They might lead to the collapse of the already despised Khomeini regime. The thinking in Baghdad was that an Iranian defeat in the border areas would encourage the Iranian Army and people to revolt. Alternatively, such operations might draw forces away

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[12] Only the Austro-Hungarian Army's invasion of Russian-occupied Poland in August–September, 1914 appears to have been as poorly planned and executed.

[13] The chance to win the Arab tribes in southern Iran died a quick death when Major General al-Duri, one of Saddam's favorites and among the most incompetent of the Ba'ath generals according to the some of the interviewees, began executing local Arab tribesmen for their lack of enthusiasm for Ba'ath rule. Word of his actions spread throughout Arabistan and insured that the tribes became hostile to the occupying Iraqi forces.

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from Tehran and assist a counter-revolution brewing below the surface. Moreover, Saddam also saw the possibility of reversing the 1975 Algiers Accords between Iran and Iraq: although he negotiated it, he came to see the agreement as a "public loss of face" and one that did not match his new persona as the defender of the Arab nation.[14] Finally, Saddam and his advisors appeared to have believed that the quick and easy victory they expected would vault the dictator to a position as the great leader and unifier of the Arab nation.

Nevertheless, Saddam passed along no clear or consistent strategic vision, goals, or aims to his military leaders.[15] Neither did he attempt to connect the means at hand with the potential ends. According to General Hamdani, Saddam saw himself as reversing 1,400 years of history between Arabs and Persians while establishing Iraq as the premier Arab nation. But the Iraqi leadership never considered what means would be necessary and available to achieve such grandiose goals.

The lack of a strategic purpose translated into a lack of clarity for the upcoming campaign. There was an underlying assumption that the Iraqis, like the Israelis in 1967, would win a *Blitzkrieg* victory. But how military force was going to accomplish such a victory without clear operational or tactical goals was a mystery that Saddam and those surrounding him were incapable of examining. Instead, the Iraqi Army trundled into Iran with the hope that something might turn up. What turned up was completely unexpected: an extended war of attrition in which the existence of the Ba'athist regime was at stake. Adding to the difficulties that were to plague the Iraqis in their advance was the fact that they possessed no up-to-date maps and, in some cases, no maps at all of the territory through which their forces would advance.

Thus, 9 Iraqi divisions, as General Makki put it, drove down the 9 separate roads across the Iran–Iraq border. Without maps or information about the terrain through which they would advance, a number of formations got lost while others failed to reach their goals because of the difficulties they confronted crossing swampy areas.[16] Most of the invading

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14 Joanna Dodds, Benjamin Wilson, "The Iran-Iraq War: Will without Means," in *Conflict and Insurgency in the Contemporary Middle East*, ed. Barry Rubin, *Middle Eastern Military Studies* (London: Routledge, 2009), 48.

15 An examination of captured Iraqi records indicates that this was equally true in terms of the discussions among Saddam and his political inner circle. Examiniation of extensive recordings made between September 1980 and the days immediately before the invasion found that the participants were unable to agree on any coherent strategic aims. Instead, they discussed the possible strategic goals mentioned above throughout their conversations with no single one dominant. The participants, military as well as civilian, however, were enthusiastic about the end results of a war against the Iranians.

16 The Iraqi failures mirrored those of the Italian Army in its ill-fated invasion of Egypt in September 1940 when a number of units managed to get lost in the desert because their commanders had failed to pick up the necessary maps, while planning for the actual mission was non-existent. MacGregor Knox, *Mussolini Unleashed, Facist Italy's Last War* (Chambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 150–64.

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units eventually stopped because they had reached the end of their logistic tether; others stopped because they ran into Iranian resistance, as was the case at Khorramshahr. There, the attacking armored units, which possessed no infantry support for fighting in urban terrain, ran into fanatical Iranian militia. Eventually the infantry support arrived, but by then the Iranians had reinforced the city with substantial numbers of *Pasdaran* militia.[17] The result was a blood bath that wrecked several Iraqi units including the Iraqi 33rd Special Forces Brigade.[18]

Not surprisingly, there was no joint planning, much less coordination among the services. For example, although it provided some support by firing Katyusha rockets into the cities from landing craft, the navy participated little in the fighting around Khorramshahr and Abadan. Had there been coordination, the Iraqi navy might have helped bottle up Iranian torpedo boats and cut off Iranian resupply efforts for the besieged Iranian garrison at Abadan. Not surprisingly, close air support for ground forces was non-existent, while, as General Kabi, former commander of naval forces, suggested, there was a complete wall between the navy and the air force until 1982. Conversations with the generals involved in air and naval operations suggest there was no significant improvement in cooperation between the two services through the end of the war.[19]

Undergirding the faulty assumptions with which Iraqi leaders embarked on war was a general intelligence failure. The essential belief among regime leadership was that the Iranians and Khomeini would be pushovers in any major war.[20]

The overall result was that Iraqi forces came to rest after advancing for approximately two weeks. There were two disastrous results of this ill-conceived and ill-planned invasion.[21]

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17 The Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), also known as the *Pasdaran*, is one of Iran's two major irregular light infantry forces. Its structure parallels that of the regular armed forces and comprises ground, naval, and aviation forces. It was originally created to counter support for the shah at the time of the Revolution.

18 The latter never fully recovered during the course of the war. Simply put, their army could not spare outstanding officers and non-comissioned officers to rebuild the special forces given the heavy casualties the Iraqis suffered throughout the conflict.

19 In fact, General Abousi, the Iraqi Air Force general interviewed, seemed unaware of most naval activities in the Gulf despite the extensive role the Iraqi Air Force was to play in the tanker conflict, which began in earnest in February 1984. Saddam saw attacks on international shipping in the Gulf as a way to shift the war away from a battlefield stalemate and put economic pressure on the Iranian regime.

20 This is confirmed directly by an Iraqi military estimate from July 1980 as well as a number of other intelligence documents from that period. For a commentary on the July 1980 Iraqi intelligence estimate, see Kevin M. Woods, Mark E. Stout, "Research Note: New Sources for the Study of Iraqi Intelligence During the Saddam Era," *Intelligence and National Security* 25, no. 5 (2010).

21 One is reminded of the appallingly bad logistical and intelligence planning by the Wehrmacht's senior leadership in operation Barbarossa, the invasion of the Soviet Union, which led to military disaster in front of Moscow.

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First, the Iraqis failed to achieve defensible positions that might have improved their prospects for holding onto their territorial gains. The failure to block the passes out of the Zagros Mountains allowed the Iranians easy access to redeploy their ground forces from bases largely in the north and center of the country, to the plains of the south, where most of the fighting occurred. This simplest of mistakes underlines the baleful impact of Saddam's choices of military leaders based on their loyalty to his person and the Ba'ath Party rather than military experience and competence. In effect, they contributed little to the decision-making and planning processes during the pre-war period. Additionally, the decision to halt in front of Dezful rather than advance beyond that city meant that the key highway running from the Zagros Mountains and Tehran in the northeast to the east of Dezful and on to Ahvaz and the front by Khorramshahr allowed the Iranians to deploy and then support the southern front relatively easily throughout 1981 and 1982.[22]

Equally deleterious to Iraqi prospects for the next 18 months was the decision for divisions to defend where they had halted without regard for the defensibility of the terrain or the nature of the forces. In spite of Saddam's decision that Iraqi forces would advance no farther, there was no redeployment from an offensive to a defensive stance. There was no reorganization that could have placed armored units in the rear as a maneuver, counter-attack force with the infantry as a covering force. A possible explanation for the refusal to redeploy may have been Saddam's desire to hold onto every bit of territory his soldiers had captured in the first weeks of the conflict in order to gain a position of strength for a negotiated settlement. It never occurred to him that Iraqi forced might have reached their culmination point.

Furthermore, more than 9 attacking divisions were spread across the front in positions from which they were scarcely able to defend themselves, much less support other units, while there was no central reserve. Thus, the defensive positions the Iraqi defenders assumed made no sense either operationally or tactically.[23] Luckily for Saddam, the Iraqis did not pay too heavy a price in 1980 and early 1981, because as Iraqi intelligence estimates had correctly surmised, the Iranians were unprepared to effectively defend themselves—in the near term. However, by early 1982, that situation had changed as the Iranians got their act together. At

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22 As one authority has noted, amateurs talk about operations, experts talk about logistics.

23 In one case, General Makki indicated that in June 1982 he had visited an armor battalion of the 9th Division with 31 tanks emplaced on top of a hill with no infantry support. The brigade commander refused to change the deployment and, not surprisingly, Iranian infantry overran the position one night and destroyed the unit shortly after Makki had visited the position. The 9th Armored Division had a reputation as one of the worst divisions in the Iraqi Army.

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that point in the war, Iraqi incompetence almost led to the destruction of their army and the fall of the Ba'athist state.

At the heart of Iraq's difficulties lay the incompetence of its senior military leaders. In particular, General Shanshal, the army chief of staff from 1970 through the first defeats in 1981, proved incapable of making decisions.[24] This was the result of Shanshal's unwillingness to take responsibility for his actions, undoubtedly due to Saddam's penchant for punishing those who, in his view, had erred. Comfortable and knowledgeable of the political milieu within which Saddam's court acted, the army chief of staff provided a constant diet of information about the war agreeable to the dictator's instincts. As General Makki in his interview suggests, the framework of decision-making at the senior levels of the Iraqi military revolved more around the fear of what Saddam might do than what the Iranians might do.

Saddam's Education in War

Saddam was an intelligent individual, but as the interviewees suggested, he was deeply conflicted, a man whose education was almost entirely due to his own efforts.[25] As Generals Hamdani and Makki noted, Saddam remained a Bedouin in his heart. He also possessed a magnetic personality that dominated any group or meeting. But the generals interviewed also underlined the fear that all felt in his presence, especially given his capacity to make spur-of-the-moment decisions that could end an officer's career or his life. According to Hamdani:

> When he looked at you, he paid close attention. He looked you straight in the eye, as if to control you... Saddam had a number of personality traits. Sometimes he was intelligent, other times he could be as naïve as an illiterate farmer. One moment he would be extremely affectionate, the next moment he would be extremely hostile and cruel. Even Satan was better than Saddam at those times. One minute he could be overly generous, the next he could be extremely stingy. He had a great ability to listen, but then he would not allow you to say anything or he would refuse to listen to what you said. He was extremely courageous. He could take ideas from everyone and create a new idea. At a political level, he was an excellent tactical player; however, at the strategic level, 99 percent of his concepts were wrong.

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[24] In 1982, as the Iranian advance threatened to destroy the III Corps in the south, Shanshal refused to act, instead relying on his subordinates to make all the decisions.

[25] According to an official biographer, when Saddam was ten he had to leave home to seek a basic education in Tikrit. See Jerrold M. Post, Amatzia Baram, "Saddam Is Iraq: Iraq Is Saddam," in *Counterproliferation Papers Series* (USAF Counterproliferation Center, 2002), 2–3. Saddam's drive for self-education is also evident in a review of captured recordings from the period of the Iran-Iraq War where he spends a large amount of time quizzing his generals on the technical and doctrinal aspects of the war he started.

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Saddam was particularly unpredictable when he was angry. General Makki suggested that "Saddam would listen if you discussed an issue with him in a logical fashion. You just had to be careful [how you phrased the answer to his question]."

Saddam judged his military subordinates by two criteria. The first lay in his belief that Bedouin tribal courage and loyalty were the most important attributes of successful military leadership. That certainly was reflected in the nature and capability of the military leaders he had promoted to major field commanders before the war in 1979 and 1980. But Saddam was no fool. According to General Makki, he understood careful analytic arguments as long as they did not challenge his fundamental beliefs. The true military professionals were never Saddam's favorites, even when they were most important. Increasingly throughout the war, he understood that he needed them, and more often than not, he heeded their advice. To paraphrase George Patton, Saddam never understood the aphorism that the business of war is to not to die for your country, but to make the enemy die for his.

At the war's outset, Saddam was heavily influenced by Ba'ath ideology. Thus, he believed that any Ba'ath leader could, at the same time, be a competent military commander. Thus, his selection of senior commanders was influenced not only by their personas, but also by their positions within the party hierarchy. As the war continued, however, and the operational situation bordered on desperate, Saddam came more and more to rely on professionals. Nevertheless, the process was a lengthy one and moved in stages to the considerable cost of soldiers' lives.

Far earlier than his military advisors, Saddam understood that things were going badly in summer 1981. However, as General Makki emphasized, at that time, the dictator simply could not get intelligent or realistic analyses from his immediate subordinates, and it was almost impossible for subordinate commanders to voice their thoughts. Of course, this was the result of the nature of the regime Saddam had created, a regime that rested on fear and intimidation.[26] When front-line commanders or staff officers managed to get reasonable accounts of what was happening up the chain of command to Saddam, the military courtiers were outraged. In fact, in 1981, the army's commander-in-chief issued an order that subordinate commanders and staff officers must not speak in Saddam's presence, but always defer to their senior commanders.

General Kabi, the navy's commander from 1982 through 1987, attended somewhere between 50 and 60 meetings with Saddam, only two of which were one-on-one consultations. Some of these meetings were marathon sessions, lasting up to 12 hours. The general felt that

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[26] The similarities between Saddam and Stalin are striking; it is not surprising that Saddam chose the Soviet dictator as his model.

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by the middle of the war, Saddam was making a serious effort to inform himself about military matters in order to understand what was happening. However, Saddam was the only decision maker, with even his closest associates only executing his decisions.

The military disasters of 1981 and early 1982 forced Saddam to change his approach. After initially having a number of senior officers, including a corps commander, several division commanders, and numerous more junior officers executed, Saddam had to rely on more professional officers left after the purges. Nevertheless, this was a slow process and through the end of the war, Saddam at times relied on generals who were either sycophants or militarily inept. In this regard, by 1987, Saddam willingly tolerated the opinions and actions of his son-in-law Hussein Kamel, whom one of the generals interviewed described as a semi-literate.[27] The success of 1988 went to Saddam's head and perhaps helps to explain his hubris that led to the disastrous course he pursued in his confrontation with the United States in the Gulf War of 1991.

Interestingly, Saddam was more willing to tolerate professionals and their opinions in the navy and the air force. However, the interviewees agreed that when discussing military matters, everyone had to be careful not to overstep boundaries delineated by truths held by Saddam or to criticize Saddam's actions. At the end of the interview, General Makki indicated that Saddam was a mystery to him: not all evil, not all good, but in his character the bad had outweighed the good. More often than not, he followed his instincts more than his intellect. Saddam's character was fundamentally flawed in terms of a ruthless desire to dominate. In the end, his personality created disaster not only for him but for the Iraqi people. The general also noted that all Iraqis are tribal by their nature, meaning that their loyalties are first to family, then tribe.

The Adaptation of Iraqi Military Forces to the Reality of War

The adaptation of Iraqi military forces to the combat conditions they faced was considerable in almost every way during the course of the war. The most difficult problem they confronted was that in the midst of conflict, they had to expand their military forces by an order of magnitude. This involved not only the sheer challenge of expanding and handling far larger

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[27] Hussein Kamel's defection to Jordan in 1995 and his subsequent return to Iraq represent one of the more bizarre incidents in the history of Saddam's regime. The fact that Kamel accepted Saddam's promises of amnesty suggests a great deal about his intelligence. According to General Hamdani, Saddam was never the same after Kamel's defection, distrusting even his closest relatives. See also Kevin M. Woods, David D. Palkki, Mark E. Stout, Jessica M. Huckabey, Elizabeth A. Nathan, "A Survey of Saddam's Audio Files, 1978–2001: Toward an Understanding of Authoritative Regimes," (Alexandria: Institute for Defense Analyses, 2010).

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forces on the battlefield, but also the difficulty of incorporating new technologies and complex intelligence into tactical moves. The human material with which the Iraqis were working, in terms of educational background and technological sophistication, represented a considerable challenge as well. Perhaps the greatest challenge of all, however, had to do with educating Saddam. Only the bitter defeats of the first half of 1982 awoke the dictator to the reality that he and his regime were in mortal danger. Not surprisingly, Saddam's initial reaction was to shoot a number of senior officers. He spared one of his favorites, Major General Tala al-Duri, by removing him from command of the 9th Armored Division just three days before that division collapsed during Operation Ramadan in 1982; Saddam then ordered al-Duri's successor to be shot as a result of the division's defeat. Al-Duri went on to command the 12th Division, the 3rd Armored Division, and the III Corps without distinction. As the commander of the III Corps, his leadership in 1987 almost resulted in a disaster. He then took command of the V Corps during the Anfal campaign in 1988, which saw a war of extermination against the Kurds. He finally retired in 1991. In reference to al-Duri's effort to return to active duty in the late 1990s, Hamdani said "[al-Duri] had caused the death of a third of the Iraqi Army and now wanted to return to finish the job." After the war, he was assigned as the secretary of the general command, a job for the ineffectual and a position analogous to that held by Hitler's toady, Field Marshal Wilhelm Keitel, head of the Wehrmacht high command in Nazi Germany.

For the most part, Saddam paid serious attention to the professionals when rebuilding Iraqi ground and air forces in the last half of 1982. The effectiveness, or rather the lack of it, within modern Arab militaries has been the subject of some debate. Several scholars have noted that, in general, Arab militaries are ineffective for reasons including a lack of unit cohesion, poor generalship and tactical leadership, poor information management, limited technical skills, inconsistent or even non-existent logistics and maintenance, low morale, misguided or inadequate training, and even cowardice.[28] They ascribe most of these characteristics to economic, social, and cultural norms that hinder the development of a modern concept of military professionalism, which in turn negatively impacts effectiveness. However accurate these diagnoses may be, they do not fully capture the concept of military professionalism as understood by the officers interviewed for this work.

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[28] For an expanded review of Arab military ineffectiveness in general and during the Iran-Iraq War, see Norvell B. De Atkine, "Why Arabs Lose Wars," *Middle East Quarterly* 6, no. 4 (1999); Kenneth M. Pollack, *Arabs at War: Military Effectiveness, 1948-1991* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002), 1–13, 182–235.

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The generals interviewed distinguished between two kinds of officers: professional and political. The former are defined as, like most definitions of a professional, those for whom the work is a full-time occupation that has a unique body of knowledge associated with it, requires dedicated schools, and has objective standards of ethics and performance. In contrast, the latter exist merely within the military system without making waves, are often political appointments, and are promoted on the basis of loyalty and relationship rather than merit. The generals asserted that, although there were numerous good and professional officers within the Iraqi military, they functioned in a system dominated by political officers and stymied by political considerations. Despite the efforts of the professionals, as Hamdani and Makki emphasized, they were unable to change the system or limit the impact of the political generals.

By 1983–85, Iraq was performing considerably better on the battlefield. Improvements in military doctrine and training, as well as increased and superior access to the world's arms markets compared to Iran, factored into Iraqi adaptation to Iranian capabilities. Iraq was helped here by the continued efforts on the part of the ayatollahs in Tehran who, in their revolutionary zeal, were determined to thwart the development of serious professionalism within their own military. In addition, the ayatollahs were unwilling to acknowledge the superiority of the firepower and maneuverability of Iraqi forces outside the relatively narrow confines of the mountains and marshes. Both of these factors contributed to Iran's ultimate failure. In all the battles that mattered, its inferiority in military professionalism placed an intolerable burden on Iran's military forces. Without armor, Iranian infantry, motivated by religious fanaticism, had little chance of succeeding in the flat spaces surrounding Basra and the Mesopotamian River Valley.

At the war's outset, the Iraqi Army had no coherent doctrine. Although it had manuals—derived mainly from the World War II British Army doctrine—there was no coherent, systematic approach to either training or doctrine tailored to the Iraqi armed forces and national circumstances. That began to change in 1985, when General Makki assumed command of the Combat Development Directorate. (General Makki's testimony was largely confirmed by General Hamdani, the other ground force commander.) Beginning in 1982, the Iraqis held lessons-learned conferences after each major battle. The results made their way into tactical pamphlets produced by the Combat Development Directorate, and by 1984, Saddam agreed that no officer could be selected to brigade command who had not attended the staff college.

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The crucial change came in 1987, shortly before Iraq's successful defense of Basra. Here, Saddam played a part in pushing the ideas that were emerging from the Combat Development Directorate. According to General Makki, the main changes included:

> [A] return to the correct principles of war…namely, how to hold defensive positions. Second, we pulled a brigade out of the front line from each armored and mechanized division and half of the infantry divisions for training on defensive operations, while the rest of the forces held the front line. The Republican Guard provided a competent strategic reserve.

By 1987, the re-professionalization of the senior leadership had reached the point where troops could successfully defend Basra against a massive assault by the Iranians. Then, the following year, the army launched a series of devastating attacks that broke the back of Iranian resistance. Nevertheless, as Generals Hamdani and Makki stressed, the army still remained a third-world military organization, lacking the tactical, educational, and technological capabilities to stand up to the challenges Coalition forces would issue in 1991. Iraq succeeded in the Iran-Iraq War largely because Iran proved so unwilling to learn from the battlefield. That Saddam was incapable of seeing that reality would lead to the disasters of 1991 and 2003.

Interestingly, the Iraqi Navy and Air Force displayed the greatest ability to adapt during the conflict. In the former, Saddam's desire to widen the conflict in 1982 by attacking Iran's economic infrastructure allowed the navy to conduct an imaginative and effective war against the movement of freighters to Bandar-e Khomeini and the tanker traffic attempting to use Kharg Island. That effort involved using long-range radars operating from the tip of the Fao Peninsula, signals intelligence that provided the movement schedules for convoys, and, at times, aerial reconnaissance. During this campaign, the Iraqis managed to lose only two of the nine missile boats they possessed at the beginning of the war.[29] While these efforts were not able to shut down Iranian tanker traffic, they did put considerable economic pressure on Iran.

Of the three services, the Iraqi Air Force was the least prepared for war. During the first several months of the conflict, it suffered heavy losses to Iranian F–14s and anti-aircraft defenses. Secondary sources on the war claim the Iraqis were forced to deploy their aircraft to neighboring countries; General Abousi said that was not true. He said that in early 1981, Saddam ordered them to stop flying for 2 months because their losses had been so heavy. In the summer of 1981, the Iraqis began acquiring their first *Mirage* fighters from France and Mig–25s from the Soviet Union. Aircraft upgrades during the next 2 years allowed them to

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[29] Iraq managed to smuggle two new missile boats it purchased from the French through the Straits of Hormuz and up to Umm Qasr.

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gradually dominate the air. Despite help both from both Western governments and from black-market entities in smuggling replacement parts for its Western military equipment, Iran steadily lost the ability to maintain its irreplaceable U.S.-built aircraft and crews trained in the United States.

By the last years of the war, Iraq's adaptation meant it could mount sophisticated air operations far out into the Gulf against tanker traffic bearing Iranian oil. In one case, the air force launched 14 *Mirage* fighters to attack tankers in the Strait of Hormuz. Two provided electronic countermeasures cover during the first leg of the journey, six refueled the six that continued on the second leg, and three of those refueled the remaining three that would finally fire Exocet missiles at Iranian tankers. In another case, they apparently used a Chinese *Badger* bomber to carry a Silkworm missile to attack a tanker in that same area.

On the whole, Iraq displayed considerable adaptability during the conflict at the tactical and even operational levels of war. There were, admittedly, constraints on its abilities, the most important being the educational level of its soldiers. Given the nature of the regime, the most important adaptations had to take place in Saddam's mind; a process that was both slow and tortuous. On the other hand, like the British generals in 1914–17, the Iranians failed to adapt. Because of their penchant for making enemies, they were incapable of acquiring the heavy arms need to conduct the fire power- and maneuver-intensive warfare required for success in the flatlands of the Mesopotamian River Valley. An enormous distrust of the Shah's military led the ayatollahs to refuse to make use of whatever expertise remained in the aftermath of the purges they conducted before the war. Thus, while the *Pasdaran* with its fanaticism was able to break into Iraqi positions, its units could never exploit these successes. The illogical response of the ayatollahs, then, was to call for more fanaticism and more volunteers for martyrdom that would break the Iraqis. This was hardly a serious adaptation. Eventually, the butcher's bill broke the religious mania Khomeini had created, and in 1988, Iran's leadership accepted the UN cease-fire resolution, effectively ending the war where it had begun.

Technology, Intelligence, and the War

Technological adaptation occurred largely in response to the pressures of a conflict with no end in sight. At the start of the war, Iran possessed considerable superiority in air-to-air combat, but its inability to replace its losses, combined with Iraq's increasing sophistication, wore away Iran's advantages. The French *Mirage* fighters that appeared in 1981 soon gave the Iraqis a significant advantage; they represented a considerable upgrade in technological

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complexity. While Iraqi pilots found them significantly easier to fly than their Soviet equipment, they also found the *Mirage*'s electronics and navigational systems far more complex and difficult to master. In the ground fighting, the Iraqis felt their T–62s and T–72s were far superior to the M–60s and Chieftains the Iranians possessed. The weak training levels that were a mark of Iranian military forces early in the conflict only enhanced the Iraqi advantage on the ground. On the whole, it was not that the Iraqis enjoyed a technological advantage, but rather that they possessed the superior firepower along with maneuverability that allowed them to dominate their Iranian opponents on most battlefields.

When the war began, Iraq had virtually no military intelligence capabilities regarding Iran. In fact, the country immediately to east of Iraq was a *tabula rasa,* not only as far as Iraqi high command and Saddam were concerned, but to Iraq's General Military Intelligence Directorate as well. According to General Tarfa, in 1980 shortly before the outbreak of the war, those responsible for gathering and analyzing intelligence on Iran numbered three individuals—only one of whom had studied Farsi. (In contrast, the Israeli branch of Iraqi intelligence consisted of three separate staff sections and well over 20 analysts.) The Iraqis possessed few human intelligence sources inside of Iran, even in the border areas. Khomeini's rise to power only exacerbated the dearth of useful human intelligence during the early years of the war.[30]

By 1981, there were six officers studying the situation on the other side of the hill in a single section within the military intelligence branch in Baghdad. By 1986, the number had grown to 80 officers working for Iraqi military intelligence, and the section had become a directorate.[31] By the last year of the war, more than 2,500 individuals were producing intelligence on Iranian military forces and capabilities. They were divided into sections studying air, ground, and naval forces; vital targets; and political, economic, and social trends in Iran. That number included more than 1,500 officers and analysts assigned to intercepting, decoding, and analyzing Iranian message traffic.

Iraqi signals intelligence began to grow at the war's outset when the Iraqis intercepted Iranian strategic and tactical messages that had been sent in the clear (as had the Russian messages at the battle of Tannenburg in 1914). This contributed to several Iraqi successes in

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30 Those who fled from Iran during the pre-war period rarely possessed information that would be useful at the tactical level. The more influential and well-placed loyalists from the shah's regime seem to have played a role similar to that of Iraqi expatrioates in the United States immediately before the invasion of Iraq by U.S. forces in 2003 by encouraging intervention and downplaying the risks.

31 Tarfa claimed that by this point in the war, the Iraqis were using the radical leftist Iranian mujahideen, which had lost out in the 1979–82 struggles for power with the clerics, to gather intelligence about what was happening in Tehran and throughout the rest of the country.

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early battles of 1980, but when it was publically revealed by Saddam's press secretary, the Iranians immediately began to encrypt their messages. The Iranians utilized manual codes through 1982, but the Iraqis were already one step ahead, having obtained a C–52 enciphering machine from Iranian officers who had deserted from the 64th Division in northern Iraq.[32] Thus, Iraqi analysts continued to read Iran's message traffic.

In 1983, the Iranians started using T450 electronic enciphering machines obtained from the Swiss.[33] Almost immediately, the Iraqis bought the necessary computer equipment to intercept and decipher Iranian message traffic from a Japanese company, which provided the necessary training in Iraq and Japan for nearly 1,000 Iraqis. Iraqi intelligence also received considerable help from the KGB in breaking the Iranian codes. Interestingly, as with the German Enigma transmissions during World War II, much of Iraq's success breaking into Iranian message traffic from 1984 on was due to Iranian carelessness and lack of discipline when enciphering and transmitting its messages.[34]

One possible explanation for the successful 1986 Iranian offensive that lead to its capture of the Fao Peninsula lies in the fact that the attack was executed almost exclusively by the *Pasdaran*. The Iranian militia utilized virtually no radio communication for transmitting orders and plans for operations.[35] Thus, the Iraqis picked up only one radio transmission that seemed to indicate the possibility of a major operation in the area of the Fao Peninsula. At that time, the head of the military intelligence, General Mahmoud Shahin, was trying to please his superior, who did not believe the Iranians were interested in attacking Fao.[36] As a result, he refused to pass up the chain of command any of the tactical intelligence that indicated the Iranians were about to launch a major offensive.[37] There was very little signals intelligence on

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32 The C-52 enciphering machine was manufactured by Crypto AG, a Swiss corporation, beginning in 1952.

33 The T450 was the first widely available, fully electronic online text encryption device built in the early 1970s.

34 With regard to the Germans, see Gordon Welchman, *The Hut Six Story: Breaking the Enigma Codes* (London: M.M. Baldwin, 1997).

35 The *Pasdaran* transmitted its plans and orders by individual soldiers, messengers, and, on rare occasions, telephone land lines. Given the simplicity of their massed, human-wave attacks, the *Pasdaran* did not require extensive tactical planning. Although by 1984, they depended on the army for planning the logistics and support necessary to bring tens of thousands of their fanatical warriors to the front.

36 Saddam would fire General Mahmoud for the blunder in intelligence over the Iranian offensive; Mahmoud was sent back to the field army.

37 Generals Hamdani, Makki, and Tarfa all indicated in separate interviews that General Mahmound blocked from Saddam and the general staff the tactical intelligence about Iranian preparations for a major offensive. This failure is similar to the Allied (and particularly American) intelligence failure during the Battle of the Bulge, where tactical and logistical intelligence indicated the Germans were preparing to attack in the Ardennes, but there was no confirmation on the operational side of the ongoing, but highly classified code-

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what the Iranians were doing to prepare for the attack on the Fao Peninsula. Because, by this point in the conflict, Saddam relied heavily on decrypts to understand Iranian intentions, the experts in military intelligence were not able to pressure their chief to reverse his position.

Similar to Ultra and its "bodyguard of lies," the Iraqis protected their deciphering capabilities by establishing a closely segregated intelligence group that was forbidden to discuss what it was doing.[38] Saddam, for his part, found the intelligence extremely useful at the operational and strategic levels. Interestingly, besides Tarfa, only the naval commander, General Kabi, indicated an understanding of the existence of such a capability—a capability he used extensively when planning naval operations but was forbidden to discuss with his subordinates. On the other hand, General Abousi, who held senior positions in the air force during the last years of the war, indicated no knowledge of Iraqi code-breaking activities.

Iraqi code breaking played a major part in deception operations in 1988. The Iraqis monitored Iranian reactions to their military preparations and deception operations. With this knowledge Baghdad was able to fine tune its plans and effectively convince the Iranians that Iraqi forces were moving to defend Basra when, in fact, they were preparing to retake Fao. At the same time, the Iranians were running a deception designed to convince the Iraqis they were going to launch an attack on Basra, in order to protect operations to the north. Iraqi planners could not have asked for a better set of circumstances. With knowledge of the Iranians deception operation, Iraq had merely to make minor adjustments to their own operations to enhance Iranian misconceptions. The Fao offensive led to the first great Iraqi victory in 1988 and set in motion the series of victories that led to the collapse of the Iranian armed forces and the end of the conflict in July 1988.

The generals confirmed that the Iraqis had received considerable help from U.S. satellite imagery, particularly in the last years of the conflict. Nevertheless, its use was limited, particularly in tracking the movements of the *Pasdaran*, since the Iranian Revolutionary Guard needed only a light logistic infrastructure to support its movements. Not until 1985, did the logistical support provided by the Iranian Army to the *Pasdaran* reach a level at which satellite imagery helped the Iraqis divine the locations of major *Pasdaran* buildups. The Iraqis were highly suspicious of intelligence from the Americans after the revelations of the Iran-Contra affair. Not surprisingly, Generals Tarfa and Kabi argued that the decrypts of Iranian

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breaking being conducted by the allies. As a result, the Allied high command refused to believe what local, tactical intelligence was reporting.

[38] Ultra (indicating the highest possible classification) was the code name for the British intelligence responsible for decrypting intercepted German communications during the World War II.

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radio transmissions were more useful in tracking what their enemies were about than intelligence obtained from the Americans.

Final Comments

To a considerable extent, the answers to the Project team's questions jibe with the documents and transcripts of Saddam's discussions we have examined so far.[39] When being questioned about past events in which one has participated, there is a natural human tendency to cover up one's responsibility, exaggerate one's role, or forget key events.[40] Undoubtedly, these tendencies were present to some degree in the interviews. Nevertheless, given the generals' experiences, their answers will help fill gaps in the general knowledge of the conflict and particularly in the decision-making process around Saddam.

Again, the generals were deeply suspicious of the Iranians. General Makki best expressed the commonly held view:

> The Iranians are good fighters; they are very stubborn, high achievers; not afraid of death; loyal to their leaders. [Nevertheless], they are human and have limits. Religion is not enough. [Military organizations] must [also] have good [technological capabilities] and logistics. By 1988 it was too late. They lost their nerve, their will to fight. Iranians are good at deceiving you, masterful at gaining time.

At times it took perceptive questioning to push the Iraqis to provide crucial information. It was not necessarily that they were holding back, but rather that both interviewers and interviewees were reconciling perceptions of past events through the questions and answer process. The story about Iraqi code breaking is instructive in this regard. It emerged only in discussions about other issues. Indeed, it was only when the Project team expressed surprise about the major increases in the number of those working in military intelligence by 1985 that General Tarfa volunteered that the expansion was largely due to the Iraqi decryption efforts. Similarly, it was only when we asked General Kabi about the nature of the specific intelligence in the northern Gulf that indicated when the Iranians were running convoys into Bandar-e Khomeini and Kharg Island that the general indicated that he (and he alone in the navy) had access to what the British called "very special" intelligence during World War II.

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[39] At present, Project team members Kevin Woods and Williamson Murray are working on a history of the Iran-Iraq War for the OSD-sponsored Conflict Records Research Center at National Defense University. That effort has involved intensive effort and research during portions of the past 2 years.

[40] Along these lines, General Abousi insisted that the Iraqi Air Force never dropped chemical weapons.

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The interviews contained in this document are not intended to provide a complete picture of the events of the Iran-Iraq War. They represent nothing more than the recollections of a group of veterans of that conflict recalling events, impressions, and lessons of battles almost 30 years later. However, the manuscripts in the Project 1946 effort and related publications bring a heretofore unheard perspective of one of the largest wars of the last century. Given the indeterminate nature of the war, the totalitarian character of the states that fought it, and the pace of strategic events in the Middle East after the war, it is not surprising that primary source materials or access to senior participants has been limited. The collapse of the Ba'ath regime in Baghdad, the capture of a significant number of Iraqi records from this period, and the willingness of such veterans to discuss their perspectives is providing a new and important opportunity to examine a war whose implications echo in the events of today.

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Historical Context and Timeline

The oral histories included in this monograph generally cover the period between 1980 and 1988. Given the limitations of time and the scale of the war under discussion, the number of major topics not discussed far exceeds those that are. This would only be a problem if this were an attempt to write a history of the Iran-Iraq War. As stated in the introduction, our purpose here is limited to examining a narrower set of topics through the perspectives of a group of senior Iraqi participants. A detailed knowledge of the major diplomatic and military events of that war is not necessary to appreciate the perspectives presented. The following summary and timeline of the war is provided as a general reference and is not drawn from our Iraqi subjects.[41]

As described in more detail in the narratives, the causes of the Iran-Iraq War are complex. The tensions between the peoples of modern Iraq and its larger neighbor are in some cases echoes of causes that date to the earliest points of recorded history. A complex mix of Cold War machinations, territorial disputes, ethnic and religious biases, economic and political completion, pride of place, and mutual megalomania are but a few of the more contemporary but hardly new causes. Most commentators will emphasize three general causes: building tensions and resentments over the "settlement" of the Shatt al-Arab border dispute, growing accusations of mutual meddling in each other's internal affairs, and political opportunism on the part of both Saddam Hussein and Ayatollah Khomeini.

The dramatic events of the Iranian Revolution in 1979 brought long-simmering issues back to full boil. Emboldened by the seemingly divine power of the political upheaval in Tehran, and with the explicit and implicit support of Iranian leadership, a revolutionary wind blew through Iraq's majority Shi'a population. Despite the Algiers Agreement (1975), Iran continued to assist Iraqi Kurds. On top of this, after the Revolution, the Ayatollah Khomeini began encouraging Shi'a discontent in Iraq in the hopes of spreading the revolution there.

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41 For a more detailed treatment of the Iran-Iraq War see Efraim Karsh, *The Iran-Iraq War, 1980-1988*, Essential Histories: War and Conflict in Modern Times (New York: Osprey Publishing, 2009); Dilip Hiro, *The Longest War: The Iran-Iraq Military Conflict* (London: Grafton, 1989); Edgar O'Ballance, *The Gulf War: Nineteen Eighty to Nineteen Eighty-Seven* (London: Brassey's Defense Publishers, 1988); and Anthony H. Cordesman, Abraham R. Wagner, *The Iran-Iraq War*, ed. Abraham R. Wagner, vol. II, The Lessons of Modern War (Boulder: Westview Press, 1990).

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Finally, intermittent military clashes along the Iran-Iraq border intensified between May and September 1980.

Below is a timeline of the key battles and events from the Iran-Iraq War including those mentioned during the interviews with Iraqi generals.

1980	**17 September** Iraq declares the 1975 Algiers Agreement null and void due to Iranian violation and claims full sovereignty over the Shatt al-Arab.
	22 September Initial Iraqi air strikes target ten airfields in a failed attempt to destroy the Iranian Air Force on the ground.
	23 September Iraqi ground forces invade Iran, advancing as far as Ahvaz and Susangard and offers Iran a ceasefire.
	5 October Iran rejects the offer of a ceasefire.
	22–24 October Iraq gains control of Abadan and Khorramshahr.
	7 December Saddam announces that Iraq will employ a defensive strategy in Iraqi-held Iranian territories.
	24 December Iraq begins air raids on Iranian oil terminals at Kharg Island.
1981	**7 June** Iraq's Osirak nuclear reactor is struck in Israeli air raid.
	28 June Iran rejects Ramadan ceasefire offered by Iraq.
	5 November Iran rejects Muharram ceasefire offered by Iraq.
1982	**12 April** Saddam offers to withdraw Iraqi troops from Iran in exchange for a guarantee that the conflict will end, which it does not receive.
	22 May Iran liberates Khorramshahr.
	10 June Iraq offers another ceasefire, which is rejected by Iran.
	13 July–2 August First Battle at Basra (Operation Ramadan): Failed Iranian offensives intended to capture Basra.
1983	**10–17 April** Operation Dawn: Iranian offensive near al-Amara.
	7 June Iraq offers a ceasefire, which Iran rejects.
	2 November Iraq warns merchant vessels to avoid the "war zone" in the northern Persian Gulf.
1984	**February** Tanker War: With the intention of shifting the war away from the battlefield stalemate, Saddam orders increased aerial bombing of Iranian commercial tankers in the Persian Gulf. His intention is to force Iran to close the Strait of Hormuz, resulting in foreign intervention on behalf of Iraq.
	7–22 February First "War of the Cities": Iraq targets 11 Iranian cities with ballistic missiles. Iran targets Iraqi cities in retaliation. Iraq fails to achieve its main objective of preventing an Iranian offensive.
	24 February–19 March Second Battle at Basra (Operation Khaibar): Iranian offensives intended to capture Basra. Iran fails to capture Basra but does capture Majnun Island.
1985	**28 January–early February** First Iraqi offensive since the opening of the war. Occurs along the central front, in the region of Qasr-e-Shirin.
	11–23 March Third Battle at Basra (Operation Badr): Failed Iranian offensives intended to capture Basra.
	22 March–8 April Second "War of the Cities."
	August–December Iraq launches approximately 60 air raids on Kharg Island.

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1986	**9–25 February** Operation Dawn 8: Iran captures Fao Peninsula.
	12 August Iraqi long-range air raid on Sirri Island.
	25 November Iraqi long-range air raid on Larak Island.
	24–26 December Fourth Battle at Basra[42] (Operation Karbala 4): Failed Iranian offensive intended to capture Basra.
1987	**9 January–25 February** Fifth Battle at Basra (Operation Karbala 5): Failed Iranian offensive intended to capture Basra.
	17–25 January Third "War of the Cities."
	February–April Fourth "War of the Cities."
	6–9 April Sixth Battle at Basra (Operation Karbala 8): Failed Iranian offensive intended to capture Basra.
	17 May USS Stark is struck by two Exocet missiles fired from an Iraqi aircraft.
	20 July UN Security Council passes Resolution 598 calls for a ceasefire between Iran and Iraq and the withdrawal of troops from foreign soil. Accepted by Iraq but rejected by Iran.
1988	**29 February–30 April** Fifth "War of the Cities."
	15–16 March Iraqi forces launch a chemical attack on the Kurdish stronghold of Halabja, killing thousands of civilians.
	18 April Iraq recaptures the Fao Peninsula.
	25 May Iraq recaptures Majnun Island.
	13–17 July Iraqi forces cross into Iran for the first time since 1982, then withdraw and offer a peace settlement to Iran.
	17 July Iran accepts UN Resolution 598.
	20 August Ceasefire goes into effect.

[42] Named the "Battle of the Great Day" by Saddam after hearing about the massive number of Iranian losses.

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Interview:
Lieutenant General Ra'ad Majid Rashid al-Hamdani

Conducted by Kevin M. Woods, Williamson Murray, and Elizabeth A. Nathan
6–7 November 2009 ▪ Amman, Jordan

*Former **Lieutenant General Ra'ad Majid Rashid al-Hamdani**[43] graduated with a BA in military science in 1970 from the Iraqi Military College in Baghdad. In 1980, he attended Bakr University for Higher Military Studies and received an MA in military science from the Iraqi Staff College and in 1992 he earned a PhD in military science from the Iraqi War College. General Hamdani served in various armor units and fought in the 1973 Arab-Israeli War as a platoon commander. He later served as an instructor at the Iraqi armor school (1977–79), and at the Iraqi tactical school (1980). During the Iran-Iraq War, he commanded and served as a staff officer in various armored and reconnaissance units. General Hamdani became a member of the Republican Guard in 1982, and served as a senior training officer in the organization between 1987 and 1989. After the Iran-Iraq War, he commanded the 17th Republican Guard Armored Brigade, 6th Armored Division (Regular Army), and Medina Munawara Division (Republican Guard) and was commander of the II Corps, Republican Guard, when the United States invaded Iraq in 2003.*

Section 1: Senior Leadership ▪ Foreign Assistance ▪ Officer Corps ▪ Saddam's Personality ▪ First Gulf War

Hamdani: I was involved in two wars against the United States. Before the wars I had a great respect for your nation; even after the wars, I maintain that respect. That was problematic for me because, as a soldier, I had respect for another country that was the enemy. Thus, I did not possess a spirit of hostility towards Americans. At the same time

[43] Referred to during the interview transcripts as Hamdani.

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I had a moral commitment to my country. This is a hard subject to discuss; few understand it except those who have experienced it.

Murray: General, when we met in Aqaba in 2007, we discussed Khuzestan and the Ba'athist commanders who carried out atrocities and executions, who by their actions removed any feeling of attraction for Iraq among the Arab tribes in the area. Could you explain, in terms of incidents or individuals, if this was a systemic problem during the war?

Hamdani: There were a number of incidents regarding this subject. In general, you, as historians, understand human nature and the nature of a third-world country. The problems started when Saddam Hussein came to power in 1979. He believed that the competence level, courage, and loyalty of the people were proportionate to their commitment to the Ba'ath Party. Since Saddam was not a military person, he did not believe in specialization. He believed as long as someone was a Ba'athist, he could be a military commander. Thus, he promoted a number of officers several ranks above the rank they deserved. He assigned them as division commanders to the 3rd, 6th, and 10th Armored Divisions; the 9th Division was not formed yet. Tala al-Duri would eventually form the 9th Division.

In the Iraqi Army, which had the same structure as the British Army, a person cannot become a division commander unless he has been a brigadier general; one has to work one's way up and have the requisite staff experience. Al-Duri had no military experience, but he was [rapidly] promoted from lieutenant colonel to brigadier general and became a division commander immediately. He had been a first lieutenant, but was pensioned off for political reasons in the early 1960s. When the Ba'ath Party came to power in 1968, its leaders recalled several political figures, including al-Duri. He was not educated. He had no good qualities except courage. But Saddam loved violence. He encouraged and created the environment for violent personalities to rise into the senior ranks of the army. The Iraqi Army has been modeled after the concept of knights, having morals and courage to sacrifice for others. It had a principle that commanders should protect the people under their command. However, al-Duri was a violent personality, who over-compensated for the military qualities he lacked. Thus, a new school of violence emerged within the army in the period before the Iran-Iraq War.

Murray: This is interesting, because the 9th Division was the division that did so badly in the fighting in the spring of 1981.

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Hamdani: Yes, in 1981 the 9th Division was dismantled.[44]

Murray: Because the 9th Division did so poorly in 1981, Saddam said, 'There will never be a 9th Division in the Iraqi Army again.' Was al-Duri the division commander who lost his Mercedes Benz when his headquarters were captured by the Iranians?

Hamdani: Yes, he was.

Murray: Saddam had hand-picked al-Duri for this command. What did Saddam Hussein do with him after this failure?

Hamdani: Since Saddam Hussein respected violent personalities, he did not prosecute al-Duri. The 9th Division was dismantled three days before its last mission. Al-Duri was moved from the 9th Division to the 12th Division. He was replaced in the 9th division by Kamal Latif. In the final three days, Latif assumed all of al-Duri's duties. Saddam knew about Tala al-Duri and of what he did, but he wanted to save him from the loss, so he replaced him with Latif and let Kamal Latif pay for the al-Duri's mistakes.

Murray: Did al-Duri remain in command of the 12th Division for long?

Hamdani: Al-Duri remained commander of the 12th Division for a considerable period of time, which resulted in heavy losses due to his ignorance as a commander.

Murray: The details of this story underscore what was wrong with the Iraqi Army in this early period of the war; a guy who is obviously a gross incompetent was kept in a position of command.

Hamdani: In December 1981, the Iraqi Army fought an infantry battle called 'Firing Post 1172.'[45] Al-Duri was in command of the 12th Division in this area. He refused to take reasonable advice. I participated in this battle as commander of a reconnaissance armored tank battalion. It was a mountainous area. I knew the details of the area and my troops had captured an Iranian reconnaissance team before the battle and interrogated them. I knew the Iranians were preparing to occupy this particular hill [location unclear]. Not only was al-Duri a violent person, but he knew everything and accepted no advice. Thus, he refused to listen to our warnings. He thought the enemy would never attack a

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[44] Other sources indicate that the division was actually dismantled in July 1982.

[45] In an unpublished manuscript, Hamdani describes Firing Post 1172 as a lightly held hilltop between the position of the 12th Armored and 7th infantry divisions in the central sector. The battle which occurred from 11-17 December was known to the Iraqis as the Battle of Western Qailan.

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hill that was 1,172 meters high. I have detailed descriptions of this battle in my book.[46] As a result of his stubbornness, our troops paid a heavy price—we fought for over a month, lost 1,867 soldiers, and had four times that number wounded. All of this was the result of al-Duri's stupidity.

Let's go back to your question about Khuzestan, now that you understand al-Duri's personality. He led the 9th Division toward the Ahvaz region during the invasion. The area was inhabited by Arab tribes, so the area was called Arabistan, the Khuzestan area of Iran.[47] During the Ottoman period, it had belonged to Iraq. The concept behind the advance was that Iraq could make easy gains here because its forces were liberating the Arabs living in the area. But these people actually considered themselves Iranians, so some fought against the invading Iraqi Army. Al-Duri created major political problems for the Iraqi military. During the battle, his troops captured 56 people from Arabistan. All were wielding weapons against us because they were Iranians defending Iran. In al-Duri's backward mind, only traitor Iraqis from Arabistan would carry weapons against other Iraqis. He considered this treason. So he executed them and was proud of his actions.

Murray: If you want to win people over, you don't start by executing large numbers of them. Please continue with the al-Duri story.

Hamdani: When he killed these people, he was proud of what he had done. He forgot the fact these people belonged to tribes, not just a region. There were preliminary indications that most of the people in the region were happy to be liberated from Iranian rule. However, with the tribes, when you kill one member, the entire tribe turns against you. Despite his knowledge of tribal behavior, he killed the 56 individuals. They were not Iraqi soldiers to be viewed as traitors. Moreover, he treated the tribes in the region badly. The entire region turned against him and, as a consequence, against Iraq. The strange part is that Saddam did not hold al-Duri liable for his actions. Instead, Saddam considered this an act of courage. Saddam's psychological makeup guided this action and cost us greatly. Moreover, we had many other violent commanders whom Saddam loved, but whom the Iraqi Army hated. They carried out executions of their own soldiers. When they suffered a defeat, they executed their own soldiers as punishment. Saddam considered this an act

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[46] In 2006, Hamdani published a memoir of his experience as an Iraqi soldier. Ra'ad Hamdani, *Before History Left Us* (Arab Scientific Publishers, 2006), (Arabic).

[47] *Arabistan* is a term applied to the Khuzestan province in Iran dating back to 639 CE when the area was conquered by Arabs. Although the increasingly Arabic population has enjoyed a semi-autonomous status throughout its history, it was brought firmly under central-Iranian control in the 1930s.

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of courage. Al-Duri was among the most murderous of these commanders. Other commanders of a similar ilk who emerged during the war included [Brigadier General] Hisham al-Fakhri; General Nizar al-Khazraji, who later became the chief of staff of the Iraqi Army and fled the country in the 1990s to join the opposition (he currently lives in United Arab Emirates); and [Brigadier General] Taha Shakarji. Men such as this received Saddam's acceptance, but were despised by the army.

Murray: What happened to al-Duri after this incident?

Hamdani: He was never held accountable for his actions. After commanding the 9th and then the 12th Divisions he was moved to the 3rd Armored Division. Saddam wanted to keep him in a command position because he was courageous, and he loved these kinds of commanders. In 1982, the 3rd Armored Division had just lost a major battle and the commander, a Kurd named Juwad Shitnah, was executed. Al-Duri was given command of the division right after the division lost the battle.

Woods: Tell us about Shitnah, and the 3rd Armored Division.

Hamdani: I worked with Shitnah on the Syrian front in 1973 and in the rebellion of Barzani and his Kurds in 1974–75.[48] Before that, we worked together in the 8th Brigade. He was also commander of the 12th Division before Tala al-Duri; I worked with him there too. Shitnah was courageous and experienced in counter-guerilla tactics. Because he was Kurdish and lived in a mountainous region, he understood the nature of the region and the Kurdish people. He knew how to give as well as follow advice. After the Muhamarra [Khorramshahr] battle at the Karun River, Shitnah was executed in 1982, along with Salah al-Qadhi, Commander of III Corps.[49] Shitnah was an excellent commander and the victim of poor strategic planning of the armed forces general command. Because he was a mechanized infantry officer and not an armored officer, he tried to fight a mobile battle against the Iranians. It was a good idea, but the number, size, and capabilities of the enemy far exceeded his ability to manage and control. Mobile battle rests on a number of components, including early warning and information gathered on the enemy by light reconnaissance troops. Shitnah's idea was to allow the enemy to cross the Karun River and create a screen by placing early warning troops [to his front]. Reconnaissance doctrine called for small units to monitor the enemy. They built fortified observation

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[48] These are references to the October 1973 Arab-Israeli War and the Kurdish Rebellion (1974–75) led, in part, by Mullah Mustafa Barzani.

[49] The battle of Muhamarra is best known as the battle of Khorramshahr (22 September–10 November 1980).

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positions. These were strong and well fortified. Even if the enemy were to cross, these positions would hold. What is more, when the enemy advanced, they were channeled between these fortified positions. Shitnah thought he could run a mobile battle, but that required a number of armored units, air support, and artillery support.

The 3rd Division was a good division; it was the 'mother' division for us. Shitnah thought the enemy was going to cross the river, but he did not think that the number of forces (army, *Pasdaran*,[50] and *Basij*[51]) would be ten times greater than his force.[52] The Iranians were nontraditional forces, but in great concentration, and their morale was high. They started their crossing in the dark and had planned well. Thus, the initial assault wave created numerous bridgeheads [along the banks of the Shatt al-Arab]. The proper response would have been to strike those bridgeheads immediately; this was the World War II approach. That was the disagreement between the General Field Marshals Gerd von Rundstedt and Erwin Rommel in 1944 at Normandy.[53] Shitnah ignored the precedent. He wanted to pull the enemy onto the battlefield and then destroy it. That was his plan. Due to the large number of attacking Iranian troops, the fortified points were too weak to stop them. Shitnah tried to concentrate against the main brigades, but it was not possible to slow the enemy, so these units started defending themselves instead of counterattacking. As a result of this mistake and poor planning, the Iranians destroyed the 3rd Division. It was not just the commander's mistake, but that of the corps command that had supported his idea.

Murray: At this point in the war the Iranians had begun using human wave assaults. Had the Iraqis not yet adapted to the extent to which Iranians were willing to sacrifice themselves?

Hamdani: Yes, the human wave attacks had begun. They were not military. Everything has a context, a procedure, but since these Iranian's were non-traditional troops, they kept advancing to the point that 15 or 20 of them would keep moving. Each phase of a

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50 The Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), also known as the *Pasdaran*, is one of Iran's two major irregular light infantry forces. Its structure parallels that of the regular armed forces and comprises ground, naval, and aviation forces. It was originally created to counter support for the shah at the time of the Revolution.

51 The *Nirou-ye Moqavemat-e Basij*—Mobilization Resistance Force—is Iran's other major irregular light infantry force comprising an all-volunteer paramilitary militia.

52 Exact figures for Iranian forces are difficult to obtain. Ken Pollack places 60,000 regular Iranian Army and more than 80,000 *Pasdaran* and *Basij* in the area of this battle. See Kenneth M. Pollack, *Arabs at War: Military Effectiveness, 1948-1991* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002), 196.

53 Rommel argued that the Allies must be stopped on the beaches at Normandy as they landed. Von Rundstedt supported holding the reserves back and preparing a massive counterattack.

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military operation is supposed to happen at a certain time (for fire support, etc.), but these Iranian's had neither phases nor organization. They did not care if they had fire support or anything; they had no concept of command and control, timing, etc. They just kept moving—they swarmed through our artillery zones, which wrecked our plans and calculations. As a result, Shitnah was held liable for not doing his duty and was executed along with the 12th [Armored Brigade] Commander, Colonel Masa abd-al-Jalil, and the III Corps Commander, General Salah al-Qadhi.

Woods: I am intrigued by the fact that you said that the enemy was ten times larger at this point on the battlefield than the Iraqis expected. Were the Iranians running deceptions, or was there not enough reconnaissance to understand what was happening on the Iranian side of the river?

Hamdani: It was not deception. Trains, buses, and other types of transport started flowing in carrying people from everywhere in Iran. They just started flowing in from villages and cities. It did not seem like a military concentration, which would have had equipment and all that. Due to the lack of a familiar context, air reconnaissance did not see anything, so I suppose in that way it was a kind of deception.

Murray: So Iraqi reconnaissance saw the activity, but they were incapable of recognizing it for what it was.

Hamdani: Yes, they only took into account the military forces. Our leaders thought they could control what they thought they saw, but they could not.

Murray: It appears that the Iranians could not exploit what was clearly the collapse and defeat of the 3rd Division due to a lack of command and control. Once the Iranians overwhelmed the Iraqi front line, it appears there was no direction to the advance—it was just a mass of humanity. Is that why the Iranians could not exploit their initial successes?

Hamdani: This was typical of Iranian forces: they could succeed, but they did not know how to exploit that success. They lacked a command and control system, as well as a combat logistics system. Each soldier carried his own water, bread, and ammunition, but no weight otherwise. They were civilians. They used North Korean doctrine and had North Korean experts throughout the war. It was the same thing when it came to crossing a bridge or a mine field. They simply charged ahead without regard for losses.

Woods: Did the Iraqi Army ever capture any North Koreans?

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Hamdani: No. We learned about the Koreans from interrogating prisoners.

Woods: You described how the defeated Iraqi commanders were executed after this battle. Can you tell us more about how this happened? Was there a trial? Did members of the regime intelligence service come down and take them away?

Hamdani: There was a field courts marshal in Basra in July 1982. It was not publicized. The minister of defense, his deputy, Izzat Ibrahim al-Duri, the political deputy for Saddam Hussein, party leaders, and several members of the general command of the armed forces were there. It was like Field Marshal Wilhelm Keitel with Hitler.[54] Most of those in the general command were Saddam's lackies. It was not a regular trial; it was tense with a lot of screaming, yelling, and hurling of insults. The defeat represented a great political shock. Since Khorramshahr had fallen, it meant that Basra could fall as well. The executions were a nervous reaction to what had happened. That is why these commanders were considered martyrs after time passed. The trial and executions did not help at the time, of course; the process repeated itself every time there was a failure, in spite of whatever success a commander might have achieved before. Nothing could save a commander from execution once he failed.

This was a serious issue and it had a great impact on the army. From this point on, commanders chose to avoid responsibility. For example, sending out reconnaissance patrols is a commander's responsibility. Only a commander could send a patrol at the battalion level. Because of this fear of responsibility, corps commanders would wait for approval before sending units on reconnaissance missions. This killed the creative spirit within the army's structure. I confronted this problem in my own unit when I was a commander. I wanted to assume responsibility. I discussed this issued twice with Saddam, several times with Qusay Hussein, and with the minister of defense and the army chief of staff; I argued that it was important to provide a commander a margin of error in case mistakes should happen. This particularly affected us in the last war of 2003. Commanders would wait for an order from higher up before executing any decision.

Murray: General, in times past, such trials were known as "drum head courts marshals." In light of our discussion it appears that there were two threads to Saddam's treatment of the

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[54] Hamdani is referring to German Field Marshal Wilhelm Keitel (1882–1946). Keitel led the German High Command of the Armed Forces throughout the war. He was considered a "political" and grossly incompetent general by his peers.

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officer corps. In 1982, Saddam began looking for more competent individuals to run things, while at the same time he was looking for more violent or courageous individuals.

Hamdani: This reflected his philosophy. He believed in violence.

Murray: Doesn't this seem a bit schizophrenic? On the one hand he liked the violent thuggish individuals. On the other hand there was a level of competence that he recognized in people. Was there a tension here?

Hamdani: I realized this and it created a problem for me with Saddam from 1990–2003 because I was a student of the knight school, which was a moral code of command.[55] That is what I learned from my first days in the army, and it is also in my personal nature. Saddam Hussein needed competence later on, so I was not executed. I was a soldier; he believed that I would not conspire against him because of my moral code, which argued that a soldier should have nothing to do with politics.

When it became apparent that coalition forces were going to attack us in 1990, I criticized the defense plan for Kuwait. I was referred to investigation by the military council and political council. They wanted to put me on trial, but Qusay was on my side. He spoke to his father on my behalf.[56] Qusay knew my nature and cleared me because he could see I had no political goals. The 1991 war continued, but I always looked over my shoulder, because I worried that Hussein Kamel or someone else might assassinate me.[57] On 24 February 1991, Iraq clashed with the American armored divisions. I was badly injured as a result of an air raid; I remained in the hospital for two months. After that, Saddam Hussein sent for me. He said, 'Unfortunately we did not follow your advice.' He did not say 'I', he just said 'we.' I agreed and explained to him the nature of the mistake. That incident is why Saddam appointed me to command the 6th Armored Division to defend Basra for eight months before returning to the Republican Guard.[58]

This conflict repeated itself in 1994 when I was commander of Medina Munawara Armored Division.[59] Saddam wanted to re-occupy Kuwait, and he did not allow any

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55 An honor code among certain Iraqi officers based loosely on the thirteenth century English code of chivalry.

56 Hamdani and Saddam's youngest son had a relationship dating back to when Qusay was assigned to Hamdani's battalion during the Iran-Iraq War for military training and the martial experience.

57 Hussein Kamel Hassan al-Majid, Saddam's son-in-law, eventually became one of his top advisors before defecting to Jordan in 1995.

58 This was considered a lateral move at best, but generally was seen as a demotion for an experienced Republican Guard officer.

59 Medina Munawara was a Republican Guard armored division.

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discussion or objection to the idea. He sent for me again. We had a long discussion, which lasted for approximately an hour-and-a-half on the night of 11 September 1994. There was a special confidence between the two of us. I explained to him calmly and quietly the real problem regarding the 1991 Gulf War and the mistakes that were made. I explained to him there is a difference between a tribal conflict and a civilized conflict. The standards for wills and wishes within a civil conflict are different from those of a tribal conflict. Saddam said, 'General Ra'ad Hamdani, the problem is that you are too limited to military academy standards, but education has two sides. You are heading towards the more dangerous side. At the technical level, I consider you the best commander in our army, but at the moral level and political level you are dangerous.'

Saddam was torn between two views of the world, two conflicts. He wanted complete loyalty to himself, which required violent, ignorant personalities. On the other hand, he needed competent leaders because of the size of his army and his goals. In the end, he admitted that holding a high rank within the Ba'ath Party did not necessarily make one a competent commander. Nevertheless, he only trusted his relatives, so he sent them to work with me. In a 2002 meeting, Saddam told me he was confused and surprised with regards to three of his relatives who worked with me. He said, 'I enrolled them in the academy then I sent them to learn from you. How come they have not reached the same level of competence you have?' I explained that the staff college could not turn a bad officer into a good one. The good officer exploits what you offer him to improve his education and knowledge. If the officer is good to start with, he will get better. I argued that spirit and morale are characteristics of military service. I also argued that military experience has three aspects: the material side, the intellectual side, and the spiritual side. When Saddam asked what I meant, I said, 'It is about ideology, spirit, and behavior. The military is different from other sciences which start from the general and become more specialized through experience.' For example, a doctor will study general medicine, and then specialize later. In the military, it is the other way around. You start off with a specialty, and then end up becoming more and more general. That is why they call the senior-most rank 'general,' because that rank is not specialized, it requires great knowledge and expertise. I noted the following example. The Battle of Montenotte in 1796 was between the French Army, led by Napoleon who was a brand new general, and the Austrian Army, led by General Beaulieu.[60] Napoleon was 26 years old; Beaulieu 62.

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[60] The Battle of Montenotte was fought during the first French Revolutionary Wars (1792–97) near the village of Cairo Montenotte in northwestern Italy; General Jean Pierre Beaulieu de Marconnay (1725–1819).

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Napoleon commanded a badly equipped army of the French Revolution; the Austrian Army was one of the strongest, most advanced army in Europe. Military analysts ask why Napoleon won. The answer had to do with the three requirements of military leadership: professional service, broad knowledge, and talent. General Beaulieu had 40 years of service, but no education or talent. On the other hand, Napoleon had no military experience, but he had broad knowledge and great talent. Military scholars attribute Napoleon's victories to these qualities. I noticed that Saddam paid great attention to this explanation. He thanked me saying, 'You really explained something to me that had completely slipped my mind.' I told him that the right way was to look for people with experience, broad knowledge, and talent.

Murray: After Tala al-Duri escaped from the disaster of the 9th Division and sat on the trial of his successor who had command for all of three days, did Saddam give him a new appointment?

Hamdani: Yes, he became the secretary of the general command. He became like Field Marshal Keitel with Hitler. We were extremely surprised when he was appointed to this position. For the army it was step backwards, because we had been trying to work toward competence.

Woods: What were the key responsibilities of the secretary of the general command? What were his day to day activities?

Hamdani: The general command was formed the night of the attack on Iran, 22 September 1980. It consisted of high ranking staff officers representing all branches of the armed forces with the responsibility to offer military to Saddam.

Murray: Did al-Duri remain in that position for the rest of the war, or did he move to a new position?

Hamdani: He remained [on active duty] until he was pensioned off after 1991.[61] Let me tell you a story about al-Duri. In the early 1990s, I took a vacation with my wife, while I was a division commander in the Republican Guard. I was in my civilian car on the expressway. A blue Mercedes was following me, with someone wearing blue inside. I tried to move to the right side so he could pass me, but he kept moving to my side. Then he passed me with his flashers on; he wanted me to stop so I stopped behind him. When he got out of the car,

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[61] According to other sources, al-Duri returned to command a force in the 1986 Fao battle, and then as earlier noted, he commanded the III and V Corp in the Kurdinsh area in 1987 and 1988.

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I saw that it was al-Duri. I got out of the car and shook hands with him. He said, 'I would like you to tell Saddam the next time you see him that it is wrong that such a important officer like myself has been pensioned off.' He considered himself to be a great commander. I told him that no one could raise the issue with Saddam. I got back in my car and drove off. My wife asked who that was. I wanted to tell her briefly who al-Duri was, so I told her that he had caused the death of a third of the Iraqi Army and now wanted to return to finish the job! Today, he is the military commander of the Ba'ath Party with Izzat al-Duri in Syria.[62] Two years ago Izzat issued an order for my execution along with ten other generals. I was at the top of the list of generals to be eliminated because I was not a representative of the Ba'ath ideology.

Woods: Moving from al-Duri to what many Iraqi officers have said was the opposite end of the professional spectrum, what can you tell us about Adnan Khairallah?

Hamdani: He was a great person as far as morals and principles. It is strange that many of his characteristics were the opposite of Saddam's.

Woods: In 1978, Khairallah was a colonel. When Saddam took power in July 1979, Khairallah was promoted to a full general. Was he viewed as a political general?

Hamdani: I regard him similarly to how many other officers view him. During the war, I came across Khairallah in many situations. Let us begin at the beginning of his career as a commander of a tank battalion, and then commander of the 10th Armored Brigade. He had noble characteristics: high morals, strong professionalism, and a military spirit. His soldiers and his officers loved him. He was a role model for other commanders. Although he was Saddam's brother-in-law and took advantage of his position to help many, he never took advantage of his relationship with Saddam in a way that compromised his moral principles. He respected the people above him and below him.

The problem arose when he was appointed to be minister of defense in 1977 with the rank of colonel. The situation was strange because the minister of defense is a political position. He could have been pensioned off with his colonel's rank and then appointed as minister of defense as a civilian. As the minister of defense with his colonel's rank, he

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[62] After the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime, Izzat al-Duri and numerous other senior Ba'ath officials fled to Syria. After Saddam's execution in 2006, it was reported that Izzat al-Duri was "elected" leader of Iraqi's exile Ba'ath Party.

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was the deputy commander of the armed forces with command over other generals including those with ranks much higher than colonel.[63]

The first incident happened when Khairallah visited the III Corps in Basra in 1977. When he paid this visit, the commander of the III Corps, Lieutenant General Adnan al-Shawi, was a three-star general. Al-Shawi was in a bit of a dilemma here. Normally an officer would go out to the aircraft and greet the high-ranking officials, such as the minister of defense, with a salute. Al-Shawi found it hard to salute a man with a lower rank. Since he was a good officer, respectful of military rank, he decided not to greet Khairallah outside, but instead to remain at his office. The new minister of defense arrived and was greeted by a staff officer. Khairallah asked, 'Where is the corps commander?' The staff officer replied, 'The commander is in his office, but is too embarrassed to come out to greet you.' So the minister of defense walked back to his aircraft and returned to Baghdad. He raised this issue with his political superiors. Bakr was the president then; Saddam was the vice president.[64] For Saddam, this incident was a direct challenge to the military chain-of-command. Bakr, who had been a general, understood that this was a difficult situation for the corps commander to handle. The decision was made to pension off Lieutenant General Adnan al-Shawi, because he had not greeted the minister of defense, while Khairallah was immediately promoted to four-star general.

Adnan Khairallah was loved by the Iraqi Army and was considered a safety valve of sorts. Most officers did not really care about his competence as a general officer—it was his personality they loved. In most armies the chief of staff of the army is the real person in charge. Because Shanshal, who was a four-star general, was the chief of staff of the army and a four-star general, he and the other senior generals did not really care that much when Khairallah was promoted.[65] They just wanted the minister of defense to

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[63] Khairallah was a Colonel when nominated to become the defense minister. In April 1978 he was promoted to General prior to assuming his post.

[64] General Ahmed Hassan Bakr was a member of the coup that overthrew the Iraqi monarchy in 1958. As the leader of the Ba'ath Party, he orchestrated the coup that overthrew Iraq's military leader, Abdul Karim Kasim, and assumed the positions of prime minister and vice president. In 1968, he again participated in a coup to oust the government of President Abdul Rahman Arif and assumed the position of president. He served as president until he stepped down from office in 1979, when he was succeeded by Saddam Hussein.

[65] General Abdel-Jabbar Khalil al-Shanshal was appointed chief of staff of the Iraqi Army in 1970. A position he held until 1984 when he became minister of state for military affairs and finally minister of defense during 1989–90.

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protect the army from Ba'ath politics. Because Khairallah was a soldier, he could understand the generals.

However, it became clear during the Iran-Iraq War that Adnan lacked the capacity for strategic thinking. The concepts at the division level are really important at the strategic level of command, but they were no substitute for a strategic vision. Adnan was the understanding type. He could listen to suggestions and consultations. In this regard, compared to Hussein Kamel, Adnan was a prince. He saved many commanders who had political problems with Saddam. Each command has both doves and hawks. Khairallah was a dove. With all his good characteristics, it is not surprising that everyone in the army loved and respected him. They felt he was a safety valve for the army and the only individual who could protect them from Saddam, because Saddam listened to Khairallah.

I remember talking with Qusay just after the 1991 war, I said, 'If your uncle Adnan Khairallah had been here, Kuwait would not have happened.' Although it was a harsh thing to say, Qusay nodded in agreement. Khairallah died on 5 May 1989. He was with his family on a trip to the northern Iraq. He left the family there and returned on a German aircraft. The plane crashed in a storm south of Arbil. They now call this area al-Adnanir. The army and the majority of the people were saddened when he died. There have been only two occasions when the Iraqi people have been deeply moved: when King Faisal died in April 1939; and when General Adnan Khairallah died in May 1989. There have been comparisons of these two beloved personalities.

Woods: In the West, there was suspicion that Saddam Hussein was involved in Adnan Khairallah's death.[66] Is there any truth in that, or is it just a rumor?

Hamdani: That was a rumor. Saddam truly loved Adnan Khairallah, which supports suspicions that Hussein Kamel was involved. Adnan was loved by Saddam, and Kamel wanted to control Saddam. According to Adnan Khairallah's doctor, Brigadier General Omar al-Kubaysi, a week to ten days before his death, Adnan was not feeling well and wanted to rest at home. General al-Kubaysi told me, 'I went to check on General Khairallah to make sure he was okay. I examined him while he was lying in a bed. I told

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66 Rumors of a conspiracy to murder Adanan Khairallah have been ascribed to Saddam's concern that his post-war popularity with officers might threaten Saddam's power. Alternatively, since Khairallah was the son of Khayrallah Tulfah, Saddam's surrogate father, he was seen as favored by Saddam. Some suggest that Adnan's death was a result of a jealous power struggle between Saddam's son-in-law Hussein Kamel and his son's Uday and Qusay for most favored status. See Sandra Mackey, *The Reckoning, Iraq, and the Legacy of Saddam Hussein* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2002), 322; Andrew Cockburn, Patrick Cockburn, "Out of the Ashes: The Resurrection of Saddam Hussein," (New York: Harper Perennial, 1999), 155–56.

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him, as a friend and a doctor, that in my opinion he was faking it, and there was nothing wrong with him. I thought he was acting like a soldier faking an injury so he could take some time off. Adnan answered back by pointing to a picture behind him of Saddam Hussein, with the head of Hussein Kamel behind him in the picture. Adnan said, "I am truly sick." I asked him the reason for his sickness; I asked, "Saddam?" He said, "No, it is the person behind Saddam." "Hussein Kamel?" Adnan replied, "This is your future minister." If this story is true, it proves that Hussein Kamel was behind Adnan's death.

Murray: Speaking of Hussein Kamel, why do you think he returned to Iraq after escaping to Jordon in 1995 and revealing all those secrets?

Hamdani: The same stupidity that made him flee to Jordan in the first place made him return to Iraq.

Woods: We have already spoken about some of the violent officers and professional officers. What other officers came out of the Iran-Iraq War and rose to became good professional senior officers? Was there tension between these two different types of officers after 1988?

Hamdani: The army had a number of first-class officers. However, the general context of politics did not give them any significant opportunities. The first-rate commanders included Generals Sultan Hashim and Ayad Fayid al-Rawi, a former commander of the Republican Guard, both of whom are presently imprisoned; General Ayad Khalil Zaki, who is currently in Oman; General Abd al-Qadir; General Salem al-Ali; General Kabi and General Abousi were first-rate commanders in the army The army represented an excellent school for leaders, just as the British Army is. Many of the division-level commanders were excellent people. In Iraq, it is the nature of the military command to submit to the political command. When I refer to these officers, I do not mean to suggest that they were perfect people. No one is perfect, but they were considered excellent commanders. There were other good commanders but they were not promoted beyond a certain point, such as General Hamid Fathi and General Tariq Tawfiq.

I was a student of great professors and generals. The first one I learned from was General Tariq Tawfiq. When I graduated from the academy in 1970, I was stationed near the Jordanian border. Tariq Tawfiq was the commander of the 8th Mechanized Brigade; it was the oldest and best mechanized brigade in the army. It was part of the 3rd Division, which at the time was considered the army's school house. He was my role model, because he was a first-rate academic and possessed a strong practical sense along with moral fiber. I recall once as a lieutenant I attended a meeting discussing foreign

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armies. There was a general feeling that the British Army was better than the US Army; however, General Tawfiq disagreed, 'No, this is not true.' Then he gave us an example. He had once attended a training course in the United States and was impressed by the discipline of American soldiers. Because most of us followed the British military method, we quietly called him 'General Tariq Tawfiq, The American.'

On another occasion General Tawfiq visited my unit, which was at the time assigned to a strategic location. He saw that I had military books relating to armored warfare, as well as the memoirs of Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery.[67] I had all the time tables, schedules for fighting, etc., because we were preparing to fight the Israelis. He asked me many questions, which I answered correctly in his estimation. He said, 'Lieutenant Ra'ad, if you continue to work this way, you will be a good commander one day,' but then he corrected my tactical deployment. He mentioned an Arabic proverb: 'If your enemy is an ant, don't sleep; be an ant like him.' I attribute any success I achieved to General Tawfiq.

Woods: What happened to General Tawfiq?

Hamdani: Because he was a good and competent commander, the Ba'athist command dismissed him. He was pensioned off in 1978, when he was the commander of the 3rd Armored Division. The army lost him because politics interfered with the military.

Murray: The Ba'ath Party removed many senior officers who had training and experience with foreign armies, whether British, American, or French. From 1970 on, the Ba'ath Party was no longer willing to send officers to Fort Leavenworth, or Camberley, for training at the staff college to broaden their experience.[68] Can you speak about why that decision was made and any difficulties that may have arisen due to this change?

Hamdani: There were two reasons: political and practical. In 1976, the political command wanted the Iraqi military to reject British military culture and move closer to Soviet military culture; military commanders disagreed. The problem for the military was that Saddam was strongly influenced by Soviet doctrine, which led to many of the changes instituted. Ba'athist ideology is an Arabic version of Marxist ideology. This is why Saddam thought that political leaders could run the military. Saddam's greatest mistake in the 2003 war was allowing political leaders to run the war. The idea of having

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67 Referring to Field Marshal Bernard Law Montgomery of Alamein, "The Memoirs of Field Marshal the Viscount Montgomery of Almein, K.G.," (New York: Collins, 1958).

68 Referring to the US Army Command and General Staff College at Fort Leavenworth and the UK Army Staff College at Camberley.

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political officers in our army was a Soviet phenomenon that Saddam introduced into the army. Saddam also wanted to replicate Soviet political guidance. These ideas all proved misguided and failed.[69]

The source of our education was primarily British, which did not inform us much about the American military. After the 1991 war we began to study American style joint operations, the size and strength of the American military, and its rules of engagement. We examined American military doctrine manuals closely. We noted the significant gaps in our doctrine, based as it was on the doctrine of the British and the Soviets. Unlike American weapons, which were hard to integrate into the Iraqi military because they required high levels of technical knowledge, Soviet weapons were more suitable for our use. This was because our soldiers had a low level of technical knowledge, on par with that of a Soviet peasant or worker. Despite this, Soviet ideology was hard to apply to our situation.

Section 2: Chemical Weapons ▪ Conditions and Events Leading to the Iran-Iraq War ▪ Military Training

Woods: Can you tell us something about the impact of your mixed doctrine against the American-trained and -equipped Iranian forces in the early phases of the Iran-Iraq War? Could you discuss the use of foreign equipment during the war as well?

Hamdani: During the Iran-Iraq War, the Iranians had far fewer American M-60 tanks than other types of tanks.[70] Their British Chieftain tanks were deployed at the divisional level.[71] They placed the M-60 tanks in battalions to support infantry divisions. They also had American M-113 armored personnel carriers and British Scorpion reconnaissance vehicles.[72] The armor of the Soviet tanks was superior to that of the tanks the Iranians possessed. We had experience fighting this equipment because our armor had fought the

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69 Hamdani did a series of interviews with Russia Television in 2007 and 2008 and discussed this subject in detail. See <www.youtube.com/watch?v=wPCDNkZVDAo&feature=related> and <www.youtube.com/watch?v=fcwkemQ3RZs> (accessed 25 March 2010).

70 The American M-60 series of tanks was a second-generation main battle tank, first introduced in the early 1960s. Sources vary, but in 1980, Iran possessed approximately 780 British Chieftain tanks and 460 M-60 tanks. Iran also possessed 400 older American-made M-47 and M-48 tanks.

71 The FV 4201Chieftain was the United Kingdom's main battle tank in the 1960s and 1970s. It was derived from the Centurion tank and designed with heavy armor for maximum protection of personnel.

72 The M-113 is an American-manufactured fully-tracked armored personnel carrier. They were first introduced in the 1960s. The FV101 Scorpion is a tracked British armored reconnaissance vehicle introduced in the early 1970s.

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Israelis on the Golan in 1973. Initially, Iranian tanks and armored vehicles could not hold up against us; their French and British tanks were soon destroyed. In one battle alone, my command seized five M-60 tanks and several M-113 armored personnel carriers. We had (Soviet-made) T-55 and T-62 tanks; one brigade had T-72 tanks.[73] We were victorious because Iraqi tanks were superior to theirs. On the other hand, at the beginning of the war, the Iranians had a superior air force. Our aviation only became superior to that of the Iranians later in the war. Iranian infantry was superior to ours throughout all phases of the conflict. The spirit of the Islamic Revolution dominated and influenced many Iranians. However, at the start of the war, the Iraqi military had an advantage over the Iranians because Khomeini and his ayatollahs had purged the officer corps. The Iranians had the same problem as Iraq: their political commanders ran the war.

Murray: One of the great mistakes Iraq made in 1991 was to underestimate how different US armor was with the Abrams tank compared to the M-60s they had encountered fighting the Iranians.[74]

Hamdani: In 1991, during a period of bombing that lasted 39 days, US aircraft destroyed most of our air defense system and much of our air force. The Apache helicopters, which carried 16 Hellfire missiles, emerged as one of the two biggest factors affecting our combat with Abrams tanks.[75] The other was the A-10 aircraft.[76] Only Apaches and A-10s could attack at night. These weapons had an eight kilometer range; whereas the longest range of our weapons was three kilometers. Our tanks were hit and destroyed in an amazing way. On the night of 24 February, I was injured as a result of an A-10 missile attack.

In 1994, on the night Saddam informed me that he wanted to invade Kuwait, I explained that the Abrams could hit five out of five targets while Iraqi tanks hit only one out of

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73 The T-55 tank was a Soviet-manufactured main battle tank, which entered service in the early 1960s. The T-62 was a Soviet-manufactured tank based on the T-55, which entered service in the mid-1960s. The T-72 was a soviet-manufactured main battle tank that entered service in the 1970s. It is distinguished from its export version by the designation M (T-72M).

74 The AGM-114 (Hellfire) missile is an American-manufactured air-to-ground missile primarily employed by attack helicopters against armored vehicle targets. The M-1 (Abrams) tank is the United States' main battle tank. The near-70 ton M-1 is protected by advanced armor and features an extremely accurate 120mm gun.

75 The AH-64 (Apache) is a four-blade, twin-engine attack helicopter. The AH-64 is designed to operate at night and carried a mix of anti-tank missiles (hellfire), rockets, and a 30mm cannon.

76 The A-10 (Thunderbolt II) is an American single-seat, twin-engine, jet aircraft, which entered service in the early 1970s. The A-10 is designed to provide close air support for ground forces by attacking tanks, armored vehicles, and other ground targets.

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five. The Abrams system is very advanced. As a division commander, I had no comparable system. The Abrams tank fights better at night than during the daytime because GPS could locate everything, while we were blind. The Apaches had an eight-kilometer range with fire and forget missiles. Then, there were also the F-16 and F-15 attack aircraft, satellites, etc.[77]

Woods: As you are aware, the most significant historical examples of the use of chemical weapons were in the trenches of World War I and on the battlefields of the Iran-Iraq War. How was the development of chemical weapons, the technology for their use, and doctrine introduced to the Iraqi Army?

Hamdani: Yes, as a military weapon, chemical weapons were first used during World War I; they played a major role in the Somme and Verdun battles of 1916. They were a solution designed to open a gap in the uninterrupted enemy trench lines.

In the beginning, Iraq only trained its troops in protection protocols against chemical weapons. This was in response to our conflict with the Israelis. We feared the Israelis might use chemical weapons against us. We had units called 'Units of Protection against Chemical Weapons.' Soldiers were equipped with a mask and some atropine shots. There was also Soviet technology and decontamination equipment. In 1984, I learned from friends that the Iraqi Army chemical corps had a highly secret project to produce chemical weapons. This was done in extreme secrecy.

In 1984, the Iranians had infantry superiority and utilized approaches like the water channels and lakes where we could not use our armor. The first use of chemical weapons came in the marshy area of Hawr al-Hawizeh. Our air force dropped chemical weapons in canisters; however, we did not know which agents were deployed and whether they were persistent or non-persistent.

We used to wonder whether using gas was effective. We asked the Iranian prisoners about the effectiveness of gas; most of their comments indicated it was not, because the weapons used were of the volatile type. Such use of chemical weapons was not practical, because it required information such as the speed of wind, etc. In 1986, the Iranians occupied the Fao area, which had a significant impact on us because it represented our only access point to the sea. Moreover, Fao was an extremely swampy area so that we

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[77] The Lockhead Martin F-16 Fighting Falcon is a multirole jet fighter originally designed as a lightweight, daytime fighter, first introduced in the late 1970s. The McDonnell Douglas (now Boeing) F-15 Eagle is a twin-engine, all-weather tactical fighter designed to gain and maintain air-superiority in aerial combat situations, first introduced in the mid-1970s.

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could not use our armor, which usually gave us superiority. We learned that some of our artillery had been modified to launch chemical weapons, in addition to air dropped canisters.

Murray: Our sources indicate that Baghdad's first reaction to the attack on Fao was not to move troops, because the military command believed that Basra was the main target. Do you think this was a major factor in the heavy use of chemicals during the battle and throughout the war?

Hamdani: A headquarters was established to rotate exhausted troops in and out of the battle. We had significant losses among our troops; there were major failures in the field. Victories were measured in meters; however, troops cannot use such standards in combat.

The Iranians crossed from Iran into Hawr al-Ahwar, near Fao. There was an industrial project in Hawr al-Ahwar to produce salt from the clayish mud in the area that was saturated with sea water. It was done through a series of parallel channels. Although this area was not ideal for troop movement, the Iranians were able to remain there. Missiles fired and bombs dropped from aircraft sank deep in the mud unless they exploded in midair. Once, when I was doing reconnaissance in the area, I was caught in an Iranian artillery barrage. Three shells hit near me, 2-to-3 meters apart. I was covered in mud. But the rounds sank 3-to-4 meters deep into the mud before detonating. Our artillery and air force had to use air bursts. This limited their lethality because the special fuses required for air bursts were hard to obtain in sufficient numbers. The Iranians quickly created concrete fortifications to protect against the air bursts, while that caused us even larger losses. Approximately 53,000 Iraqis died in the fighting with 287,000 wounded over a two year period. Iran was able to replenish after similar losses, but we were not. The result was that we resorted to the use of chemical weapons after our heavy losses at Fao. Iranian losses were less than we had expected because the area was so soft and we did not possess air-burst chemical weapons. We resorted to bombing the orchards to the east; based on information gathered during the interrogation of Iranian prisoners, but our chemical weapons had only limited impact.

In 1987, the Iranians began using chemical weapons in a limited manner. On 17–18 April 1988, we launched a chemical attack to liberate Fao, but the wind shifted direction and affected our troops rather than the Iranians. We were forced to attack while wearing protective masks. The damage inflicted on us was greater than on them. Despite this, the

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attack was launched with a first-rate plan and preparations. The assault group possessed amphibious vehicles (like ducks) and a large mat to roll over the terrain, so trucks could drive over the swampy areas. Thousands of tons of gravel were poured into the marsh so tanks could operate without getting stuck. During the 1988 offensive at Fao, we lost only 1,086 Republican Guards.

We used chemicals in a limited manner to liberate Majnun Island and the marshes area later that year. We also used the airborne forces, pontoon, which carried tanks and vehicles, and helicopters which transported the infantry. Although we did not use chemical weapons in the other two battles, the Iranian forces collapsed.

In the north, the enemy's center of gravity was in Halabjah. Their forces held strong positions, and they did not expect us to attack. That is why the battle was successful. We used chemical weapons there in a limited fashion. We had the advantage of superior timing and location. The battle at Halabjah, which lies between the Hewraman Mountains and Buhayrat Darbandikhan Lake, occurred in March 1988.[78] This was a staging area because nobody lives there. Iran's 84th Infantry Division and their 55th Parachute [Brigade] had occupied Halabjah. They wanted to control the mountains because that would open up the region as far north as as-Sulaymaniyah, which is a barrier to the interior. The 84th Division occupied Halabjah and 55th Division reached the mountain. Intense battles took place between Iraqi and Iranian Special Forces. Our forces possessed seven artillery battalions with missile launchers. The Republican Guard launched 720 chemical missiles, while the rest of the artillery battalions launched between 150–200 artillery shells. The battle at Halabjah was the only truly effective chemical strike; the 84th division was exterminated. About 60 percent of the Iranian troops were affected and left the battle. We confirmed this by listening to wire-tapped conversations and radio message traffic. The Iranians responded by using chemical weapons themselves. The success of the special forces was the deciding factor that led to Iraq's victory in the battle. Although 180 Kurds were killed and maybe 360 injured, they were not the intended targets of the strike. In effect, they were collateral damage. There was an agreement whereby Jalal Talabani was supposed to evacuate the area of civilians; he provided a document or statement indicating that he had evacuated them from that area. It has been reported that 5,000 Kurds

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[78] The Hewraman is a mountainous region stretching from western Iran (Iranian Kurdistan), including the cities of Pawe and Meriwan, to northeastern Iraq (Iraqi Kurdistan), including the city of Halabjah.

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died because of the Iraqi chemical attacks. This is an exaggeration. The Kurdish leadership used the incident to attack us. This is the truth for those who want a truthful to history.[79]

Woods: Who had the authority to initiate the use of chemical weapons? Was it the local commander or the higher command in Baghdad?

Hamdani: The order to use chemical weapons came from someone between the corps commander and the chief of staff of the army with Saddam's full knowledge.

Woods: Given all their experiences using chemical weapons in the 1980s, how would you describe the attitude of Saddam and the senior generals toward chemical weapons in general? What did he take away from these experiences? What did do you think they learned?

Hamdani: When the battle began, Iran had the strategic advantage because Iran and Iraq both had deployed 60 percent of their armies in northern Iraq. The Iranians occupied Fao and many other points across the border. Nizar al-Khazraji executed several high-ranking army officers at the time, because they could not overcome the Iranian numerical advantage and hold onto as-Sulaymaniyah.[80]

Everyone fought hard because by this point in the war, any officer could be executed without a court marshal if they failed, but an execution could not take place unless Saddam authorized it. So when the 66th Special Forces Brigade returned from a mission with only 34 soldiers including 12 officers, the commander, Colonel Jafar Sadeq, snuck into Baghdad to beg for Saddam's mercy. He told Saddam, 'I'm at your mercy, please grant me immunity.' Nonetheless, Saddam ordered Sadeq executed along with the other officers. The executions took place during March/April 1988.

Executions only took place during the battle after a withdrawal. Before the executions were stopped, anyone who carried out an execution was promoted by Saddam. Because Saddam was a violent person, he resorted to violence in order to make defeat worse than

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79 The history of what occurred at Halabjah remains controversial both inside and outside of Iraq. While Hamdani was not directly involved in either operation, he presents here what is most likely the general view of his peers. For alternative views of these events, especially on the controversial issue of civilian casualties, see Joost R. Hilterman, *A Poisonous Affair: America, Iraq, and the Gassing of Halabja* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Stephen Pelletier, "A War Crime or an Act of War?," *New York Times*, 21 January 2003; Human Rights Watch Middle East, *Iraq's Crime of Genocide: The Anfal Campaign against the Kurds* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995); Jennifer Trahan, "A Critical Guide to the Iraqi High Tribunal's Anfal Judgement: Genocide against the Kurds," *Michigan Journal of International Law* 20, no. 2 (2009).

80 Nizar al-Kharzraji was the Iraqi Army chief of staff (1987–91). He defected in 1996 and became associated with various Iraqi ex-patriot movements through the fall of the regime.

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remaining in the field. This had a negative impact on the army's morale. The commander looses honor and dignity, and soldiers need to look up to their commander as a father. The executions caused them to regard their commanders with fear as though they were the enemy.

Murray: I have seen a speech by Saddam, in which he says: 'When soldiers no longer fight for the love of their leader, then they must fight by fear.'

Nathan: Was Colonel Jafar Sadeq superior officer [Kamel Sajid] held accountable for this failure?

Hamdani: No. Kamel Sajid was commander of the I Corps at the time and earlier had commanded an infantry division in the Republican Guard. He was also the corps commander responsible for the 66th Special Forces. He was not a competent commander because, although he was courageous and honest, he abdicated responsibility—he would dump responsibility on the shoulders of his subordinates. He eventually became deeply religious and spent the remainder of his life tormented by his sense of guilt. His performance in Khorramshahr in 1980 was competent and brave but the situation required more than that. Saddam admired Kamel Sajid, because he represented the ideal of physical fitness in the Special Forces. Sajid was honest, but he did not know how to handle problems. A commander's first task is to be responsible for his subordinate's mistakes. He became governor of al-Muthanna province in the south. He was a good, simple man; his weakness was that he did not want to take responsibility. He carried out the execution of Sayef Saud, but was not responsible for it. He was executed later because of his involvement in a conspiracy against the regime. It is a bloody history.

Woods: What were your impressions of the Popular Army? How were they used, and how did they work with the regular army?

Hamdani: When the Islamic Revolution flared up in Iran, one of its primary goals was to spread into Iraq because 1) Iraq had a secular regime [Ba'ath Party ideology is secular, not Islamic]; and 2) Iraq was an obstacle to Iran's goal to liberate Palestine. Khomeini thought a second victory could be achieved in Iraq.

Iranian intelligence began stirring up Iraqi Shi'a, which made up 60 percent of the population. Most Shi'a leaders were graduates of Iranian religious schools. Thus, Iraq confronted major aggression. In 1979 and 1980, religious groups started to organize and expand within Iraq and within the Iraqi armed forces. There were more than 1,000 border violations by Iranian forces into Iraq by land, air, and sea, while terrorism

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occurred throughout Iraq. There were also attacks at special occasions and celebrations. Khomeini called for the overthrow of Saddam's regime. There was general belief among Iraqi leaders that the situation would persist until overall security collapsed in Iraq, and then Khomeini's Revolutionary Army would launch an attack.

Consequently, the Iraqi government decided to launch a preemptive war. There was some international support for the war.[81] The assumption was that, if Iraqi troops could advance 15 to 20 kilometers inside Iran, the Revolutionary Army would have to advance from Tehran toward the border to confront us. This would provide secular counter-revolutionary groups in the capital a chance to seize control and establish a secular government.[82] We believed this would not take any more than four to six weeks. A gathering of senior officers discussed the decision to invade on 6 July 1980. Two members of the political command asked Saddam Hussein, 'The Iraqi Army has 37 brigades. If all of these brigades attack Iran where will we get our reserves? There is a major risk here. We will be taking a considerable chance.' Saddam did not want to admit that Iraq possessed insufficient forces or that such a move might represent a mistake so he responded, 'The unannounced reserves are the Iraqi people.' That is how the concept of the Popular Army began.

Woods: This is interesting because, of course, the Iraqi Ba'ath is a product of two revolutions: the 1963 revolution which ultimately failed and the 1968 revolution which succeeded. Why did Saddam Hussein believe that presenting the Iranians with an external threat would allow a secular counter-revolution to succeed? Did he not think this would be used as a way to unify the Iranian population around the revolution instead of driving them away from it?

Murray: I might add that that it seems the problem for a secularist like Saddam or even the communists in Iran was their inability to conceive of a revolution stemming from religion. That is the leftist tradition in the West. It is, of course, wrong; revolutions can come from any source.

Hamdani: Saddam was a national revolutionary. The Iranian revolution was a religious revolution. Religious philosophy appears to be the opposite of national philosophy. Religion does not recognize patriotism or nationalism.

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[81] An apparent reference to the ongoing crisis over US hostages held at the American embassy in Tehran.

[82] It is not clear which group or groups Hamdani is referring to here.

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The goals of the Islamic Revolution came at the expense of a national revolution. There were no principles to start with, there were only interests and the interests were in contradiction. For example, Chinese Marxist theory contradicts Soviet Marxist-Leninist theory. Such interests could take on a revolutionary framework or a secular framework. Saddam claimed to be a revolutionary. He thought that accomplishing Ba'ath goals in Iraq could be done only through his efforts. That posed a problem because the political approach cannot address all interests. Saddam wanted to control the Arab world, while Khomeini wanted to control the Islamic world. Iraq is a part of both. It was a conflict of basic interests. Most people are idiots on this subject; they just do not understand.

Murray: Saddam had one goal: drawing the revolutionaries out of Tehran; however, in reality, there were always multiple potential outcomes. Saddam seemed unclear about these possibilities: 1) Iraq could advance 20 kilometers into Iran and the troubles along the border would end, 2) Revolutionaries could leave Tehran and Khomeini's regime could fall, 3) Iraq could grab southwestern Iran and gain control over the Sha'at Al Arab and Iranian oil, 4) Iraq could seize control of Arabistan and rally the Arab world, 5) If Iraq were really successful, any of these would cause the whole Arab world to recognize Saddam as the leader. The problem with each of these assumptions is that they are all-or-none outcomes; there is no middle ground for compromise.

Hamdani: Of course, this was the philosophy of a dictatorship. Both Saddam and the ayatollah Khomeini were dictators with grand ambitions. I saw a story on Iraqi television about Saddam sometime in the 1980s. Friends of Saddam were gathered to recollect their childhoods in the early 1950s. One of Saddam's friends, perhaps Hekmat, told a story: 'One day you [Saddam] asked me, "What are your ambitions in the future?" I answered, "I want to become a teacher." I then asked Saddam Hussein the same question. Saddam looked up at the ceiling thinking, and then he replied, "I have great ambitions. I want to rule the Arab world and be like Salah ad-Din."'[83] To rule the Arab world had been Saddam's ambition since he was in eighth grade; he never gave up on that dream or working toward achieving it. Similar to Hitler, Saddam was willing to make mistakes to succeed. Dictators are of one type, whether the dictatorship is of a national or religious context. Two people with big dreams: Saddam and Khomeini.

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[83] Salah ad-Din Yusuf ibn Ayyub (b. 1137) was the Sultan of Egypt and Syria who united most of the Levant. He is best remembered for recapturing Jerusalem from the Crusaders (1187).

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Murray: Can you elaborate on the strategic planning between the July 1980 meeting and the invasion in September 1980?

Hamdani: The strategic plan for war was based on the assumption that Iraqi forces could achieve victory in four to six weeks, and military operations would not require real reserves. The plan was to send a light reconnaissance force out along the border to locate the enemy and determine targets. Infantry would advance and control the borders. We would control 5 kilometers on either side for a total of 10 kilometers. The armored forces would advance 10–20 kilometers into Iran, if the Iranians fought. Each of the major divisions had a city or area objective, which they were to control. Iranian troops would be forced to concentrate and engage in a battle. The counter-revolutionary forces would then rise up and seize control of Tehran and oust Khomeini's regime.

What would Iraq gain at that time? First, Saddam would achieve a military victory and be considered a great commander. Saddam had read that the greatest commanders in history were those who fought and achieved victory. Second, in the process of military victory, Iraq would regain those areas given up in the Algeria Accords in 1975, which had been lost in exchange for Iran's ceasing to support the Iraqi Kurds, specifically small areas along the disputed frontier, the oil fields in Abadan, and Shatt al-Arab.[84] The Algeria Accords had been hard on Iraqi sovereignty.

If victory were achieved, Iran would owe something to Iraq, where as in the past it had been the other way around. There is a history of discord between Iraq and Iran—people of the hill and people of the plains. Iraq has always been subject to raids and attacks from Iran because it was flat. The problem became worse with the discovery of oil.

Saddam thought he would achieve a great strategic, as well as political, victory, and would become leader of the Arab world. For this he engaged in a war for which he had not properly prepared. If the military academy and Iraqi staff college had developed the military plan, it would have been very different from the one he executed; he violated basic military principle during the invasion of Iran.

By 1982, the fighting had exhausted our troops. The Iranian population was three times the size of Iraq's; it was well-suited to wage a long war. The nature of a long war is

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[84] The Algiers Agreement of 1975 was supposed to settle the territorial dispute over control of the Shatt al-Arab and put an end to support for rebellious groups in each other's territories.

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described by Sun Tzu in The Art of War.[85] Saddam made a huge strategic mistake; he later realized he needed real reserves.

Woods: On the details of the military plan, from July 1980, when Iraqi military leaders were told to prepare for war against Iran sometime in the future, who was involved in military planning? Was it just Saddam, or were corps and division commanders involved? Did they have a chance to look at terrain, offer opinions, and make decisions?

Hamdani: General Shanshal was the chief of staff of the army. He and his planners adopted a political philosophy of war and turned it into a military concept. With regards to decision-making, the chain of command was as follows: Saddam to Adnan Khairallah to Shanshal to the planning and operations directorate. They called this process the 'Guidance for Political Planning of War.' The leader of the planning directorate was a three-star general, Abdul al-Asadi. He was a graduate of British schools, an excellent officer and commander. However, the process was contrary to traditional planning in the army. What we studied at the military academy and the staff college was completely different from this process.

Woods: When did the corps commanders become involved in the planning process?

Hamdani: On 6 July, there was a meeting attended by political commanders and the corps' ranking military commanders. The next day, 7 July, our commanders told us of the upcoming war with Iran. We were told that the war aimed at preventing an Iranian attack and an escalation of rebellious activities by the Shi'a in Iraq. Iraq's security was in extreme danger. It was such a threat that it required the country to launch a preventative attack.

Woods: What was the reaction of the senior officers when they were told on 6 July they would be attacking a country three times Iraq's size?

Hamdani: The corps and division commanders were convinced that war was inevitable, because Iran's continuous attacks were threatening Iraq's security, but they disagreed with the plan. For national considerations, not political, we were hoping that we could stop or deter this attack. These were our feelings.

Woods: Were there any other special preparations for this rather large operation?

Hamdani: The entire country started to get ready for the war.

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[85] Referring to the oft-quoted Sun Tzu statement, "There is no instance of a country having benefited from prolonged warfare."

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Murray: Were there any staff officers or commanders who verbalized their dismay over the plan?

Hamdani: The dissent did not last for long after the political decision had been made.

Murray: Once the decision was made, none of the military officers were going to tell Saddam that Iraq did not have the appropriate military means to execute his plan. Is that correct?

Hamdani: That issue was raised on 6 July. Saddam said, 'The announced and unannounced reserves are the people. It is not the responsibility of you, the officials.'

Murray: Were there any senior officers or planners who said that Iraq needs to do certain things beyond this plan to ensure military security?

Hamdani: Shanshal and the planning committee led by al-Asadi were in charge and took responsibility for political security. The training directorate from the minister of defense took the plan and assigned training tasks that all of the units worked on from July through September. We fulfilled all necessary quotas, equipment, and supply requests and started the final preparations for war.

Murray: The end result of this was that the army entered Iran and ended up in indefensible tactical positions with no possibility of coordination between the different units. They were just stuck out there in Iran.

Hamdani: You are correct. These initial indefensible positions extended the war. Only some of the armored troops achieved their objectives. For instance, Ahvaz is a big city and required an infantry corps to take it, but, we lacked sufficient infantry, so the armored troops simply moved into the desert area and the empty areas, but not into the city. The armored troops remained in front, but should have been in the rear, behind the infantry, which could infiltrate enemy lines at night. Our army was not sufficiently large to cover the vast 1,300 square kilometers of desert terrain near Ahvaz. I brought these issues to the attention of my immediate superiors.

At that time (in either October or November 1980), some academic faculty from Bakr University visited my unit to discuss this issue.[86] These were some of our best military professors; they supported my suggestions, my ideas. They pointed out, however, that the decision not to withdraw to better positions was a political not a military one. That is

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[86] The Bakr University is more formally known as Bakr University for Higher Military Studies, which is the Iraqi equivalent of the US National Defense University. It is comprised of four colleges: National Defense College, Iraqi War College, Iraqi Staff College, and Iraqi Command College.

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when the long war started. The Popular Army filled the gaps along the border so that the regular infantry troops could move up to the front.

Murray: At what point do you think Saddam realized that Iraq was in a long war? I have seen some indications that as early as November 1980 he recognized that the war was not going as planned. And yet, the real mobilization of Iraq does not occur until the summer of 1981.

Hamdani: For politics, it is the same problem as for drugs. The UN and the Islamic Conference made some attempts to broker a settlement. On 18 September, Iraq declared the war by ending the previous Iranian infiltration. On 22 September, we entered Iran in depth. Even though no one declared victory, as when Napoleon entered Moscow, Saddam was waiting for someone to declare victory, but no one from the counter-revolutionary groups made a move. On 4 October, we were told to destroy all barriers at the borders, the control posts, etc., because on 5 October Iraq would announce a unilateral ceasefire. The high command gave these orders because once the war ended they thought Iraq would establish new borders. Iran refused the ceasefire, and the president of Iran made a statement that this was Iraq's first step backwards. Iraq along with the United Nations and the Islamic Conference then created a 'Goodwill Committee.' [Julius Kambarage] Nyerere, president of Tanzania, was head of this committee.[87] Among those working on this committee was Yasser Arafat.

Woods: You have said that the army commanders knew the war was going to start. However, according to General Abousi, the air force was not aware the war was going to start until the day before the air strikes.[88]

Hamdani: I do not know what General Abousi said, but the air force and the navy commanders attended that meeting. It is possible their commanders did not notify their units or divisions the way the army did. All senior commanders were notified of the decision on 7 July and were told to submit a report evaluating the readiness of their units within 72 hours. If the tank battalion and all the other battalions were notified of the order, then all air force units must have been notified also. Nevertheless, Abousi is a better source regarding the air force than Iran.

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87 Julius Kambarage Nyerere (1922–99). Nyerere became president of Tanganyika (later Tanzania) in 1964. A position he held until 1985.

88 See interview with General Abousi, page 186 this monograph.

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Section 3: Personal Interactions with Saddam ▪ Senior Leadership

Woods: Tell us about Saddam in his role as the supreme commander in the 1980s. What was it like to meet with him? How about when he visited with troops in the field?

Hamdani: From 1980 to 1982, I was a battalion commander in the army. At the end of October 1982, I joined the Republican Guard and stayed with that force until 2003. During the first two years of the war, I met with Saddam three times, when he visited the front. After we lost the 2003 war, looters seized all of my property so many of my pictures of these events have disappeared. Every time Saddam visited someone or someplace, he would have pictures taken and give them away. Each person who was in a picture with Saddam received two copies. Unfortunately, that part of my history is lost.

My first meeting with Saddam during the war was in January 1981, but our first personal meeting was in 1971. There was an incident with a downed aircraft and a failed coup in Sudan. The aircraft carried an Iraqi Ba'athist group that had gone to the Sudan to support a coup, but the coup failed and the group had to return to Iraq.[89] On its way back to Iraq, the plane crashed. One of the victims was my uncle Farouk who was a friend of Saddam. On 23 July 1971, Saddam came to pay his condolences. I look very similar to my uncle. I was very far away, when Saddam first saw me. He asked me if I were Farouk's brother. I told him, 'No, he was my uncle.' Saddam then asked, "What do you do?" I told him that I was an officer in the army and on vacation. The next day Saddam sent one of his secretaries with an invitation to his palace.

I went to his palace on 27 July 1971. Saddam praised my uncle. He said my uncle was a major asset within the intelligence community. Saddam suggested I should move from the regular army to the intelligence career field. I apologized, telling him that I was a soldier and was not fit to be in intelligence. He was disappointed and annoyed. As I was leaving, the secretary collapsed in a chair and asked, 'What have you done?!' I did not see that there was a problem, because I did not know Saddam yet.

Saddam visited me in the field in January 1981. I explained the front line situation to him, and he was pleased because I had a thorough knowledge of our forces and those of the enemy. I had a reconnaissance symbol on my beret so Saddam asked about the

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89 Hamdani appears to indicate that the Iraqi intelligence officers were dispatched to support a counter-coup in Chad. On 19 July 1971, a communist-backed military group ousted President Gaafar Nimeiry. Nimeiry was restored to power on 22 July with the assistance of several Arab states including Egypt and Libya.

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insignia. I told him that this was the reconnaissance symbol and only the best components of the armored corps go into reconnaissance. The minister of defense, Adnan Khairallah told Saddam Hussein that I had been an instructor in the armored corps and now was here on the front.[90]

I next met with Saddam on the battlefield in February and March 1981. I was commanding forces in defense of the Mandali sector.[91] He had already visited the sector to the [direction is unclear], which had a higher position and whose sector commander was Kurdish. Saddam Hussein asked the Kurdish sector commander, 'If the position is hit, where will you go?' The commander replied, 'That is impossible. They could not do that. I would fight and the Iranians would never be able to occupy my sector.' Saddam then asked, 'Would you never even consider a retreat?' The commander replied, 'Not at all.' Saddam asked if he had prepared defensive positions to his rear. The Kurdish commander again replied, "No." Saddam then came to my position. I explained to him the different deployments: the front position, the main defensive line, and the rear positions. I told him, 'If the enemy attacks, and I cannot do anything, I will retreat to defensive positions locations in the rear. We will hold the enemy until reinforcements arrive.' Saddam did not appear happy or comfortable with my explanation. He seemed disappointed and left. Saddam told my commander that he (Saddam) did not think much of me and that he liked the Kurdish commander better. Ten days later, the battle flared, the Iranians over ran and occupied the sector to my right. I was forced to fight on my right flank. If it were not for the positions we had prepared to our rear, we would have been crushed as well. Saddam never again asked who would retreat or who would stand and lose.

My troops performed well, and Saddam said he wanted the best people who fought to join the Republican Guard. On 4 November 1982, I met with Saddam as a member of the Republican Guard and hoped that he would not remember the previous meeting. After that, I met him frequently.

Murray: How did Saddam deal with meetings? How did officers deal with him? Was there a sense of fear or intimidation in the meetings?

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[90] Hamdani was an instructor at the Iraqi Armor School 1977–78.

[91] Mandali is the northern end of the central Iraqi sector. The area is open and flat and was the scene of heavy fighting during the Iran-Iraq War.

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Hamdani: As a matter of fact, Saddam possessed a powerful and exceptional personality. He had charisma. When he looked at you, he paid close attention. He looked you straight in the eye, as if to control you. In general, he was an intelligent person and an amazingly thorough listener. Not knowing what was on his mind was scary. Moreover, the strength of his convictions could be scary; if he believed something was true, even if he were proved wrong, he believed it to be true.

On 17 January 1984, several commanders of the Republican Guard, including myself, met with Saddam: Adnan Khairallah, General Fathi [Amin], and a military counselor to Saddam. We were there to review Republican Guard capabilities. At the time, I was in charge of fielding the new T-72 tanks. Saddam changed the subject from readiness and started to talk about luck and coincidence in war. He asked if it were possible to make luck and coincidence a 'principle of war.' Most of the attendees nodded in agreement, suggesting that it was possible. I interrupted to say that it was impossible for luck and coincidence to become a principle of war. The way Saddam paid attention to me noticeably caught Khairallah's attention. Saddam asked, 'Why?' I immediately felt my blood pressure rise to 150 even though I knew I was right. I noticed Khairallah sink in his seat and Hussein Kamel adjust his position as he stood behind Khairallah; their body language to me said 'Be careful.' Saddam asked, 'Why not?' I told him principles tend to be sensible and have the power to remain steady and in place, while luck and coincidences were metaphysical concepts. If we think of luck and coincidence, we cannot differentiate between the two of them. I gave Saddam a number of examples. Saddam had a stern look on his face. I was saved when Saddam had to leave the room to take a phone call from King Fayd of Saudi Arabia. Khairallah asked, 'What were you doing?!' I said, 'Did I say something wrong?' Khairallah said, 'No, what you said was right, but this is not the way you talk to Saddam. You should have approached it in a more tactful fashion. It is hard for Saddam to accept what you argue.' I then realized that Saddam needed to be addressed in a special fashion.

The psychologist, Sigmund Freud says that a person can have more than one personality. In my analysis, Saddam had a number of personality traits. Sometimes he was intelligent, other times he could be as naïve as an illiterate farmer. One moment he would be extremely affectionate, the next moment he would be extremely hostile and cruel. Even Satan was better than Saddam at those times. One minute he could be overly generous, the next he could be extremely stingy. He had a great ability to listen, but then he would not allow you to say anything or he would refuse to listen to what you said. He

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was extremely courageous. He could take ideas from everyone and create a new idea. At a political level, he was an excellent tactical player; however, at the strategic level, 99 percent of his concepts were wrong. His problem was that he imposed tribal standards on the administration of a country.

On 11 September 1994, Saddam asked me what my problem was, and why I always seemed to oppose him. He said that he had no more patience with me. I could not say that my problem was him, so I told him, 'We have a civilization problem.' He asked what I meant. I told him Iraq's leaders were looking at war in terms of tribal philosophy. I said, 'War is larger in scope. The conflict is more than a tribal one; it is between civilizations.' I knew that he was convinced after the reasons I gave him. Saddam then sent me back to my division, saying he had another decision to make. I was later told that Saddam was considering sending me to prison, but he then changed his mind. This was rare. My colleagues told me I was lucky.

Woods: Is this when Qusay put in a good word for you?

Hamdani: As a matter of fact, Qusay saved me more than three times. The closest call was in November 1990 when I opposed the Iraqi plan to defend [Iraq's newly acquired stake in] Kuwait. My conclusion about US and coalition forces was right—anyone who read American military doctrine would know US intentions. I thought our plan was bad and that the Americans would enter Kuwait to defend it. It was as if I were speaking against Saddam. I was investigated; afterwards, the secret police wanted to put me on trial in Baghdad, but Qusay intervened. There were many charges against me. First, I had disagreed with President Saddam's recommendations. Second, I was affecting the morale of the army by saying we were going to lose the war. In total, there were seven charges against me.

Another incident came on 27 November 1995. I gave a lecture at a military conference that Saddam attended in which I criticized Iraq's military strategy in 1991. I recommended that we change our military doctrine before the impending war with the United States began. There were 200 high ranking officers in attendance. Saddam directly attacked me and my arguments; he commented, 'General Hamdani's problem is that he reads Western writings and listens to the American media. They have him brainwashed.' To the minister of defense and chief of staff of the army he commented, 'This is an order: I do not want any general to discuss our weaknesses. They may only mention the more optimistic aspects of our situation.' He said this firmly. The resulting order severely limited our ability to

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discuss basic military realities. Another conference presenter who was ready to state in his talk that the Iraqi Air Force had only limited capabilities by mid-1996 changed his topic to the Russian Air Force because of Saddam's order. This is when the lies began, which led us to disaster of 2003. Only General Jaysh al-Hadami, who is currently in prison, defended me at the conference. He was an excellent commander and had great ideas regarding the war against Iran. Qusay saved me from Saddam after the conference.

Murray: In terms of Saddam Hussein's inner circle, how important was his son-in-law, Hussein Kamel?

Hamdani: Hussein Kamel was one of the strangest phenomena in the history of Saddam's regime. He was a negative influence on Saddam throughout. He wanted to become the most important person after Saddam. Right before the war with Iran, the Yemeni President, Ali Abdullah Saleh, visited Iraq.[92] Saddam brought him to visit my armored brigade. There was a young man with Saddam and Saleh's group moving here and there, actively jumping left and right. I asked one of the Tikriti officers, 'Who is that person jumping around?' The officer replied, 'He is Saddam's relative. He has been promoted from a regular soldier to the rank of lieutenant.' By the time I joined the Republican Guard in 1982, Kamel had been promoted to captain, and then two ranks higher to lieutenant colonel. I was surprised by the speed of his promotions; it normally took eight years to be promoted from captain to lieutenant colonel, but it had only been two years. Hussein Kamel married Saddam's eldest daughter Raghad in 1983 and became the supervisor of the Republican Guard. We did not care for him. We called him Abu-Ali, which is a common nickname for anyone named Hussein. I don't understand how Saddam could have allowed his eldest daughter to marry someone like Hussein Kamel. Hussein's brother, Saddam Kamel, married Saddam's younger daughter, Rana. As Hussein Kamel became more important, he gained the freedom to do as he pleased without discipline. In 1986, Kamel was promoted to major general.

We were at a meeting to discuss the status of the battle to liberate Fao on 19 April 1988. Saddam, General al-Rawi, and General Khairallah sat around a long table at the Republican Guard headquarters. Hussein Kamel stood directly behind Saddam. After explaining the first stage of the battle, I showed Saddam the progress thus far. The Hammurabi Division was expected to carry out the next stage on the following day. Now

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92 Field Marshal Ali Abdullah Saleh (b. 1942) was president of the Yemen Arab Republic (1978–90). In 1990, he became the president of the Republic of Yemen.

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in the military, it is well known that if you want to speak to a senior officer, you must first receive permission. But there, in front of everyone, Hussein Kamel extended his hand in front of Saddam and said, 'No, let's advance to this position. We should move an infantry brigade now. Why should we wait until tomorrow?' It was not polite by any standard.

Woods: How did Saddam react?

Hamdani: Saddam looked at Hussein Kamel with affection, as if he did not find his actions disrespectful. General Khairallah interjected and commented, 'We should stick to the original plan designed by the Republican Guard, because it is better. Let them execute it as is.' The Republican Guard headquarters were in charge of planning and executing the offensive. We expected Saddam to support the original concept because the minister of defense also supported it. Saddam, with a smile on his face, replied, 'Follow the advice of Hussein Kamel.' This created a serious problem for our forces that night, because it is difficult to move an infantry brigade at night. I will never forget this event.

Saddam really loved Hussein Kamel. He appointed him to many political positions including five ministries. We knew he wasn't capable of managing those tasks because he had no education. His admiration for Hussein Kamel created Kamel's personality. Saddam accepted that. That is why Kamel's defection had such an impact on Saddam. From that day, Saddam turned into a completely different personality, one with no trust even in members of his family and tribe.

Woods: General, could you talk more about Saddam's reaction to Hussein Kamel's defection?

Hamdani: Around noon on the day that Hussein Kamel defected, I was at the Hammurabi Division's headquarters to see a new building.[93] An officer approached me with a troubled expression; other officers began asking what had happened. The officer reported that someone close to Saddam Hussein had just fled to Jordan. Meanwhile, I saw my escort coming. My escort told me, 'Sir, Mr. President [Saddam Hussein] wants to speak with you over the phone.' It was about 100 meters to the phone, and I walked fast. I took the phone, and the operator said, 'Here is Mr. President.' All I heard was screaming, cursing, and insults. I could not hang up. I just had to wait. Then Qusay came to the phone and in a hoarse voice said, 'If Hussein Kamel comes near you, he should be killed immediately.' I could hear Saddam Hussein in the background cursing and

[93] Hamdani was the division commander at the time.

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screaming: 'That dog! That villain!' It was horrible. Saddam told Qusay to tell me, 'Today, I only trust General Ra'ad Hamdani because he is not one of my relatives.' At that time, Saddam was convinced that all his relatives were conspiring against him. I could hear him asking Qusay who was loyal to Hussein Kamel. I knew that no one was loyal to Hussein Kamel; everyone hated him because of his personality. Saddam kept emphasizing to Qusay, 'Ask General Ra'ad Hamdani if there is anyone in the Republican Guard conspiring against us.' I told Qusay to tell him I did not think so. Saddam asked me to implement the emergency plan, to control all exit/entry points, and to shoot anyone who mentioned Hussein Kamel's name. This was a major shock to Saddam. After this incident, I was moved to the position of chief of staff of the Republican Guard in Tikrit.

Murray: Did Saddam have any sense as to why Hussein Kamel fled to Jordan?

Hamdani: I stayed away from the family problems and limited myself to the military issues. I isolated myself to within the military.

Murray: Could you speculate as to why you think Hussein Kamel fled to Jordan?[94] Were Qusay and Uday becoming more powerful?

Hamdani: I was not involved in the family conflict. I did hear that there was friction between Hussein family members because Saddam grew powerful at the expense of the other family members. Saddam's brothers were upset and jealous. There were also issues between Uday Hussein (Saddam's son) and Hussein Kamel. After Hussein Kamel's defection, Uday took on a greater leadership position. I do not know all the reasons. It is not logical whatsoever. People were convinced it was just a theatrical play. One of the Tikriti officers asked me, 'Do you believe all this?' I didn't know what else to do but to believe it. He took me for a walk by the garden and told me, 'This is just a play. It is a scheme by Saddam to create the political and economic sanctions on Iraq that will lead to political changes, so the sanctions will be removed. What do you think of this?' I replied, 'That is not logical either.'

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[94] Kamel told *Time* magazine in September 1995, "I was motivated by the interests of the country. I reached the point where I found [criticizing erroneous policies] to be futile. For the past 15 years Iraq has not stopped fighting. It has ended up accumulating debts that will require generations and generations to repay. There are too many executions in our society, too many arrests. Whatever the age of the critic—whether 80 or 15—many people are executed. For these reasons I left." Dean Fischer, "Inside Saddam's Brutal Regime," *Time Magazine*, 18 September 1995.

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Murray: It strikes me that this situation is similar to the American television show, *The Sopranos*, which is about the Mafia in New Jersey.

Hamdani: There is a similarity between the Godfather and gang members and the situation in Iraq under Saddam. Saddam actually killed his best friends while he was crying for them.

Before Hussein Kamel fled to Jordan, Saddam spent 90 percent of his time in Baghdad. Afterwards, he would spend 80 percent of his time traveling between three places in northern Iraq: the Fao Palace, Tikrit, and Tal Afar Lake. In early 1996, I became the chief of staff of the Republican Guard corps in Tikrit. My headquarters was between the Fao Palace and the palace on top of the mountain.[95] Due to my location, I received information regarding Saddam's movements in case of an emergency. Ministers would travel to one of these three locations to meet with Saddam, because he hardly ever went to Baghdad then. His caravan would include two cars: a British Range Rover and a Toyota Supra. Most of the time Saddam or his escort would drive the Range Rover and the Supra would follow. At other times Saddam would be in the Supra and the Range Rover would be behind. I used to wonder about his security procedures. Were enemies following him? American satellites function 24 hours per day and Saddam was often near the American air umbrella (the green line).[96] If the Americans received a signal indicating where Saddam was, it would have taken only a second to attack and kill him.

Saddam often requested that division commanders come to meet him. When I received these orders, I always thought something important was about to happen. The first time he sent for the commanders, when I was a corps commander, it was 1600 and we had to travel 100 kilometers. I thought he would ask for updates so I gathered the division commanders, while the intelligence officers brought their maps. I told the commanders, 'If he asks you this, you answer that.' I was prepared to execute a military mission. We gathered in a hall. Usually as we entered one of Saddam's palaces, we would salute and state our name and rank. I was astounded to find a friendly atmosphere with a number of men and women. It was a poetry reading; Saddam and others were reciting poetry. I thought, 'After this meeting, he will tell me about the mission.' Five hours later, dinner was served and everyone ate except for me and the other commanders because we were waiting for our orders. It was the same casual atmosphere when Saddam's guests returned

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95 The Fao Palace is in Baghdad. The mountain-top palace reference is unclear.

96 The "Green Line" was the de facto boundary between Iraq and the semi-autonomous Kurdish areas in the northern part of Iraq. After April 1991, members of the coalition established Operation NORTHERN WATCH north of the 36th parallel, which included an air-enforced no-fly zone.

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from dinner to recite more poetry. Everything ended at 2300, at which point everyone left along with Saddam. I was still waiting, so I asked the escort, 'Why did Mr. President sent for us?' He returned ten minutes later and told us, 'Do whatever you want. There are no orders.'

This happened again, but I was not surprised the second time, because I had noticed that Saddam had started to change. I believe that Saddam wanted to escape his shell because Hussein Kamel's fleeing was deeply painful. Based on these incidents Saddam's personal secretary became more important. Saddam had one personality before Hussein Kamel fled, and another completely different one afterwards.

Saddam blamed King Hussein of Jordan for Hussein Kamel's defection because he believed the King convinced Hussein Kamel to flee. One of Saddam's escorts told me of an incident that happened in a small meeting of Saddam with Ali Hassan al-Majid, Izzat al-Duri, and two others. Suddenly Saddam changed the subject and the atmosphere. He banged the table hard and said, 'I will never forget this of King Abdullah Hussein of Jordan!' Everyone was scared of his temper. When he banged the table, everybody left the room. His temper was dangerous. In a split second, he could jump from one temperament to another.

Woods: Did Saddam ever consider doing anything about King Hussein?

Hamdani: Saddam could do nothing because Jordan was Iraq's lifeline. The Jordanian border was the only side open without sanctions. He merely became indifferent after this incident. For instance, on 30 June 2002, he called us to the presidential palace near the airport. Shortly before Saddam walked in, Abid Hamid Mahmud, Saddam's personal secretary, told us that Saddam 'had a sore throat and was not feeling well, so don't say anything.' Saddam walked in and greeted everyone. Qusay said, 'Okay, we see you. Excuse us now.' Saddam said, 'No, sit down. I want to listen.' General Sayif al-Din al-Rawi, chief of staff of the Republican Guard, told Saddam about the distribution of his divisions. When it was my turn, I said, 'Sir, I am going to tell you something that requires great attention. I want to talk about the war with the United States, which will be a disastrous war for us.' He grabbed a cigar and said, 'Go ahead.' I spoke for 45 minutes. If I had said this back in 1995, I would have been beheaded. He was calm, quiet, and accepting so I told him that the United States had not achieved its goal during the 1991 war. After the events on 11 September 2001, another war with the United States was imminent. If Iraq could not avoid the war and stuck to its current military

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doctrine, it would lose the war to the Americans. I then spoke about our weaknesses. I said that I was the commander of an armored corps; however, the 1,098 tanks and vehicles would never see combat because we lacked sufficient air forces and air defenses. I explained to him the ways in which the US Army was superior to the Iraqi Army. I wanted to train my corps to fight as guerillas, but I could not because I lacked supporting infantry. I explained why we needed to change our military doctrine and procedures, and why I wanted to fight the war in this fashion. I gave him an example. The airport near where we were sitting might be the place where the Republican Guard might be defeated, because it was a strategic target for the Americans. Even if our troops did not make contact with the Americans, there could still be air strikes at this location. Saddam accepted what I said, even though it was difficult for him. He said that my arguments required attention, and he would submit what I recommended to the defense minister and chief of staff of the army. When compared to the person he had been in 1995, Saddam had become completely different.

Group pictures were the usual way meetings with Saddam ended. I always quietly stepped aside. Saddam told me to come closer. It was hard to believe that this was Saddam. He was starting to show physical weakness because he was diabetic. I noticed that his legs became thinner. With a smile on his face he asked, 'Ra'ad, did you want to scare me?' Although he said it with a smile, I could not breathe. I said, 'No sir. No one can scare you. I just wanted to give you my view of a possible war with the Americans.'

Murray: It is almost as if he knew he was going to lose, and there was nothing he could do about it.

Hamdani: No, this incident occurred on 30 July 2002. Saddam still excluded the idea that war was possible. However, by the time of the meeting on 1 January 2003, war with the United States was a foregone conclusion. He said, 'Let the inspectors look at what you have. We do not want a war with America, but if god wants this war, we will win.' That was completely illogical. Saddam probably noticed the perplexed expressions on the faces of me and my colleagues, so he told us how he came to this conclusion: 'The Soviet Union, which was a great power, could not defeat America. However Iraq, which is a smaller country and has been under sanctions for 13 years, achieved victory over America in 1991. This was a divine miracle. They will come to the edge of the desert and god willing, we will defeat them.' This was the moment Iraq lost the [2003] war.

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Section 4: Officer Corps ▪ Loss of Fao (1986) ▪ Recovery of Fao (1988) ▪ Intelligence Capabilities ▪ Fourth Battle of Basra (1986) ▪ Fifth Battle of Basra (1987)

Woods: Going back to our discussion of the Iran-Iraq War, General, can you tell us something about individual corps and division commanders during the operations on the Fao Peninsula, both the loss in 1986 and the recovery in 1988?

Hamdani: We lost Fao in February 1986 because of mistaken estimates by our intelligence. That is my belief, although I do not have solid proof. We received detailed information about the enemy's intentions and plans in 1985. The source of this information was either Saudi Arabia or Jordan, which did not have great intelligence capabilities like the Americans. Based on the information we received, we engaged in a very successful battle in 1985. In 1986, intelligence suggested that Iran would the attack the same way it had in 1985. We failed in 1986 because our intelligence sources told us Iran would attack the VI Corps sector in Majnun. The information was detailed. We had done field reconnaissance in the sectors of the VI and VII Corps and realized that the enemy was concentrating in VII Corps sector; troops in the front confirmed that the enemy was going to attack the VII Corps sector, but our intelligence insisted that the attack would take place on the VI Corps sector. The military command believed the intelligence report and said that the attack would take place on VI Corps sector. Lieutenant General Shawket, the commander of VII Corps, was given the order to assist General Sultan Hashim, the commander of the VI Corps. Shawket and Nu'aymi, commander of the III Corps at the beginning of the war, were both excellent commanders. On 9 February 1986, Iran launched a broad attack, starting with the Umm al-Rasas Island, Ma'amer region, and the port of Fao.[97] The 26th Infantry Division, led by Brigadier General Majid Abdul Hamid, was defending the area between Umm al-Rasas to the port at Fao. The 26th Division was a weak division, as was the 111th Brigade. When the attack began, the Iranians lowered boats in the channels using a crane. This was proof that the attack would take place in the VII Corps sector. The director of army intelligence, Brigadier General Mahmoudi Shahin, was not very intelligent; he thought Iraq would achieve victory again in 1986 because it had almost achieved victory in 1985. He relied on information provided by his intelligence sources without verifying them against field

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97 Umm al-Rasas is a small island in the Shatt al-Arab south of Basra, just to the west of Khorramshahr. Ma'amer region is an area just north of the town of Fao on the Fao Peninsula.

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information or reconnaissance. On 9 February 1986, the Iranians launched their attack along a broad front stretching from Umm al-Rasas in the north to Fao in the south. They quickly established bridge heads. Even three days after the enemy had established its bridge heads, our military intelligence still insisted the major attack would take place in the VI Corps sector. The same was true a week later. Moreover, during this period from 9 -12 February, the Republican Guard was moving by rail, air, and vehicles on the road to position itself for a counterattack against an Iranian attack north of Basra. Signals intelligence reported major Iranian successes in the VII Corps sector, and yet, military intelligence continued to insist that it was only a deception attack.

Woods: Did the Iranians run any kind of deception effort in front of the VI Corps?

Hamdani: They lightly fired on the VI Corp. It was evident that they just wanted to keep the troops deployed in that sector.

When our forces were finally deployed against the Iranians on the Fao Peninsula, the Republican Guard special forces entered the battle on the strategic road along the pipeline. As they approached the battle front they could monitor the battle on the radio and took note of its ferocity. The first brigades of the armor crossed the coastal road, while the special forces were fighting on the strategic road. The 10th Armored Brigade and the 2nd Armored Brigade were part of the Republican Guard. There was no bridge, so they were forced to use small floats to transport their tanks and personnel. As a result, the I Republican Guard Corps was late. On the night of the 13–14 February, the entire 26th Division collapsed. It was by sheer luck that the commander of the 26th Division was able to escape. He was renowned for his competence, but the situation was hopeless, and the Iranians had achieved a great victory. We learned on 14 February that more than one Iranian corps crossed onto the peninsula.

Woods: Were the Iranian troops engaged in the battle at Fao predominantly light infantry troops?[98]

Hamdani: The area was only suitable for infantry, so Iranian troops comprised an infantry division and a border corps. There were four brigades in the Republican Guard counterattack: three traditional (3rd Brigade, 2nd Armored Brigade and 10th Armored Brigade), and one border corps, as well as one armored reconnaissance battalion.

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[98] The Iranians employed two major irregular light infantry forces: the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps and the paramilitary *Basij*. Both were heavily employed in the Fao operations.

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Woods: Were the Iranian infantry well-supported by artillery and helicopters?

Hamdani: Yes, they were well-supported by artillery, helicopters, and their air force. They fired artillery from both sides of the Shatt al-Arab, which proved deadly.

Woods: Were the 3rd Brigade and the 2nd and 10th Armored Brigades out of a particular Republican Guard Division?

Hamdani: They were from the Republican Guard division led by Brigadier General Hussein al-Rashid.[99] The division did not yet have a name, because this was before the divisions received names. The Republican Guards were able to stop the enemy at the feed channel. They were heavily concentrated along the strategic road. The 6th and 2nd Divisions of the regular army tried to enter here, but met great resistance from the Iranians.

On 16 February, military intelligence was still insisting that the attack on the VII Corps was a deception. I was ordered to move the Republican Guard 2nd Armored Brigade out of the VII Corps sector to the VI Corps sector—called Razaid—to the south of Majnun fields, so that I could cross Shatt al-Arab. Those of us in the 2nd Brigade had hoped for a tank battle. But we faced only artillery as we approached the Iranian border; it was only at the border that we clashed with Iranian troops. I reported that we did not face significant enemy resistance in this sector. It was an economy of force operation.[100]

Woods: So by this point the 26th Division was destroyed. What happened to the other two Republican Guard units? How were they doing by 16 February?

Hamdani: The 6th and the 2nd were having a hard time because the tanks that moved along Shatt al-Arab were subject to firing from the front and from the other side of the Shatt al-Arab. These were heavily wooded areas with palm trees and so forth. The fighting was from one palm tree to another. The weather was not conducive to a counterattack. There was heavy rain, which made movement and supply difficult. The strategic access road was only 20 meters wide in this area. Along it one would find tanks, ambulances, and vehicles carrying rations, all concentrated in an area that was only 20 meters wide. Losses were double the normal for every artillery shell that hit road. The infantry were in mud up to their knees. The ambulances could hardly move. It took three hours to travel just 1 kilometer. It was really depressing to watch what was happening. When we headed away from there, we felt that we had left hell and were headed towards heaven. It

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99 Al-Rashid became chief of staff of the Iraqi Army in 1991.

100 This term is generally applied to operations that receive the minimum essential amount of combat power to allow concentrating the main effort elsewhere.

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was a tough battle. The most difficult part was knowing that the Iranians were going to attack, and not being able to do anything about it.

At the time, Lieutenant General Sa'ad Jabbouri was deputy chief of staff of the army. He was an excellent officer; he became the minister of defense in 1991. When he sent our forces in the wrong direction, he said this movement rested on the best of intelligence. Later we realized that this was not the main Iranian attack. It was confirmed on 17 February that the enemy's main effort was against the VII Corps. We reacted late and the Iranians were able to hold on to Fao.

There was a reconnaissance battalion at Ra's-e Bisra [the furthest tip of Fao] who were real heroes. I was listening on my wireless equipment as the battalion commander, fighting alongside his soldiers, requested support because they were running out of ammunition. They held out for three days. I listened until the commander was captured on 19 February. I never knew his name, because I was only receiving a wireless signal, but I sympathized with him and wished I could have done something.

This same scenario played out earlier in 1984 when the 1st Regiment of the 419th Brigade was pinned down in the Badrah region east of al-Kut. The regiment commander kept fighting. It is difficult to hear someone ask for help when there is nothing one can do.

The battle at Fao continued until the end of 1986. The entire army engaged in the battle, but sporadically, at one point or another. A group would take over a sector, be destroyed, and then be replaced. The battle see-sawed back and forth: our troops would advance and then the next time Iranian troops would advance. Gains were never more than 100 meters at a time. The battle was similar to the [World War I] Battles of Somme and Verdun in 1916.

Woods: After the Iranians established control at Fao, were there indications they would use it as a launching point for offensives into Umm Qasr or Basra? Or did they intend to just hold it?

Hamdani: The Iranians kept sending reinforcements and were able to maintain control of Fao. We tried to prevent them from moving against Basra. On 17 or 18 February, we captured the Iranian pilot of a downed F-5 aircraft. He told us that Fao was the main objective of the offensive. That's when the military intelligence and the military command were finally convinced Fao was Iran's main effort.

Woods: How did Saddam react to this intelligence failure?

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Hamdani: For unrelated reasons, Saddam had replaced Wafiq al-Samarra'i, the intelligence director, and Colonel Ayoub, the director of the Iran branch for intelligence, before the battle of Fao. Not long after the battle however, Saddam gave al-Samarra'i his position as intelligence director back.

At the end of 1985, there was a prisoner exchange between Iraq and Iran. Iraqi propaganda wanted to prove that Khomeini was using children in combat so Saddam met with 20 child prisoners of war in front of the media. A captured member of Iranian military was brought in to translate for Saddam. Only after the exchange of prisoners did Iraqi intelligence realize that the translator was an important member of Iranian intelligence. He had deceived our counter-intelligence by claiming to be a regular officer.

Wafiq allowed this POW intelligence officer to return to Iran with sick prisoners because he planned to use him as an agent. Wafiq al-Samarra'i let this POW know that Iraq had an important agent in Iran. Once back in Iran, the POW was supposed to collect information and provide it to that agent. Thus, this POW, who was, as I said, really a member of Iranian intelligence, returned home. After passing information that the Iranians wanted us to have, he exposed our agent, who was immediately executed. Saddam learned of this serious error and transferred al-Samarra'i from the Iran branch in the intelligence directorate to the VII Corps intelligence branch at Fao. Al-Samarra'i and Mahmoudi Shahin, the director of army intelligence, were replaced by Colonel Ayoub. When it was confirmed that Ayoub's intelligence on Fao had been wrong, Saddam Hussein replaced the intelligence director and reinstated Wafiq al-Samarra'i.

Woods: What was the primary source of the intelligence pertaining to Fao?

Hamdani: There were two. The first was an American source; this one was giving us good information. The other was our agent in Iran whom, as I just said, the Iranians executed.

Murray: In a previous conversation you told us how in early 1987 the Iranians launched a series of deception operations between Majnun and Basra. The corps commanders got into a competition regarding the numbers of recorded dead, prisoners taken, and weapons captured. You indicated that each one tried to top the other corps commander with inflated numbers. As a result, Iraqi intelligence and Saddam eventually concluded that the Iranians must be out of forces. Then, there was the massive Iranian attack on Basra, which almost broke through into the city. Who were the two corps commanders who inflated their numbers? Were they replaced? Who was responsible for the victory that held Basra?

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Hamdani: They were Tala al-Duri, commander of the III Corps, whom we have discussed earlier in this interview, and Ma'ahir Rashid, commander of the VII Corps. They were both friends of Saddam and two of the dumbest generals in the army. Rashid had assumed command of the VII Corps from Shawket and responsibility for Fao. He made a commitment to Saddam to liberate Fao. In order to honor this commitment, Saddam had Qusay marry Ma'ahir Rashid's daughter.

Woods: This seems like such a tribal act for such a high ranking officer in the Iraqi military.

Hamdani: This was indeed tribal in nature. When Rashid promised to liberate Fao, Saddam offered his own son to Rashid's daughter in thanks for the promise.

In December 1986, Iran launched a deception attack on the border between two corps. The attack lasted only for a day and both corps held without serious difficulties. Tala al-Duri and Ma'ahir immediately began exaggerating the losses the Iranians had supposedly suffered. Every few hours they would confirm more dead in order to impress Saddam. We had information confirming that the Iranians were going to attack Basra, but considering these false losses, it was reasonable to assume the Iranians would delay the attack on Basra for at least six months. Saddam titled the battle the 'Battle of the Great Day,' because of the large volume of alleged enemy losses. The troops were numb and relieved that the fighting was delayed for six months. Vacations were given while troops were withdrawn to the rear to reorganize and receive more training. There was a state of relaxation for everyone, commanders and soldiers alike.

Woods: The corps commanders may have been lying to Baghdad, but surely the front line troops and the forward brigade commanders knew they had not killed 7,000 Iranians. Someone must have known this was not true.

Hamdani: When you are really stressed and fear dying, it is easy to fool yourself.

Nathan: Were they more scared of Saddam's reaction than of the opposing troops?

Hamdani: Yes, in this way, they made Saddam happy.

On 6 January 1987, General Sa'ad al-Din, the chief of staff of the army, was replaced by General Nizar al-Khazraji. On the night of 9–10 January 1987, the enemy launched an attack on Basra, taking advantage of the 24 December 1986 deception attack. It had been just 16 days since the initial attack. Al-Duri was commander of the III Corps was in charge of defending Basra.

Woods: Did he perform well in the defense of Basra?

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Hamdani: Even if he had been a good commander, the Iranians would have achieved a modicum of success because they had great superiority. The 11th Infantry Division, led by Brigadier General Abd al-Wahed Shannan [ar-Ribat], deterred an attack in the Sharam Shek area along the Shatt al-Arab.[101] [Other units in the area included:] The 12th Division, led by Brigadier General Riyadh Taha; the 5th Mechanized Division, led by Brigadier General Hassan Yousef; the 8th Infantry Division was led by Brigadier General Abrahim Ismael; and the 3rd Armored Division, commanded by Brigadier General Hamid Salman, which was north of Basra. The commanders of all five of these divisions were excellent. However, our preliminary estimates put Iranian troop numbers at approximately 300,000 soldiers at the front. The Iranians announced that they had concentrated one million soldiers in the southern sector. The Iranian attack began on Umm al-Rasas Island, which Iraqi special forces defended. Eventually they were commanded by Brigadier General Barack Huntah. The attack was launched during the night of 9–10 January. The 8th Division to the east of Fish Lake collapsed. Their commander was wounded at his headquarters, the Bubiyan control post. The 11th Division, located in the orchard area, helped the 8th Division hold its ground. Unfortunately, the commander of the III Corps, al-Duri, moved the 12th Division one brigade at a time, instead of all at once. As a result, the 37th Armored Brigade was fully destroyed. Not a single soldier of the brigade survived, including the commander, Colonel al-Sheikhli. The III Corps was running the battle. Al-Duri did not wait for the enemy to be contained before pushing brigades forward one at a time. The 37th Brigade was destroyed, because it moved into the orchard area at night. Later I saw all of the tank tracks left in the ground by the 37th Brigade. There were bodies everywhere.

Between the time Fao fell and this battle, the Republican Guard had expanded from a division to a corps. The Medina Munawara Armored Division, the Baghdad Infantry Division, and the Special Forces Division became a corps. Major General Hussein al-Rashid, who later became [chief of the general staff] in 1991, was the commander of the Medina Munawara Division. Iranian troops crossed into Basra at the Khaled Bridge. They also occupied [unclear location name] in small groups. The Republican Guard counterattacks were able to confine the enemy near Fish Lake. However, the Iranians were able to reach and occupy Tahir.[102] The Republican Guard was able to recover some

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[101] The location of Sharam Shek is unclear.

[102] Tahir is a small town located eight miles to the east of An-Nasiriyah in Dih Qar province, just north of the Tigris River.

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ground. The 56th Brigade was destroyed in this battle, which lasted 24 hours. It was my responsibility to recover the sector north of Fish Lake. I carried out a counterattack on 18 January. The Republican Guard recovered two islands: Tuwili (a long island) and Shatt al-Ahlawat. The Medina Munawara Armored Division then advanced to the area around Jasim. The troops were so dense in such a small theater of operations that the concentration of fire was unbelievably thick.

Murray: Did the III Corps maintain control of the fighting throughout or did the Republican Guard take control at any point?

Hamdani: The III Corps was there, but the orders for the Republican Guard were sent by Saddam himself. The coordination was between Republican Guard and III Corps. This battle was called the 'Great Harvest' because there was such a harvest of dead for both sides.

Woods: The III Corps was running the defense. The Republican Guards arrived on 19 January to launch counterattacks. In terms of command and control, in this 30-kilometer–wide sector, you had III Corps units in the defense, Republican Guards units came in on the 19th as a counterattack force, but at any given time, was there a single operational commander?

Hamdani: The III Corps troops were considered defense troops. The Republican Guard was a force that would move against the enemy. Strategically, this plan was bad, and I told Saddam this on 11 September 1994.

The problem was one of action and reaction. The 11th Division and 86th Infantry Brigade would enter a battle one day and then retreat because the Iranians were stubborn and wanted to hold on to their gains near Basra. Basra was of great strategic and potential importance to both sides. As such, Iraq did not want the Iranians to occupy it. Ali Hassan al-Majid made a statement: 'These efforts of the Iranians represented steps toward occupying Basra and declaring the Shahid government there.'[103] This was a challenge for Saddam. I gave him my personal analysis: 'The enemy was superior to us with regards to infantry, while we were superior with regards to armor and air forces.' We had one armored corps. We could surround the enemy in the Khorramshahr and Shalamcheh areas back to the Karen River, which would isolate them. If we could

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[103] *Shahid* means martyr and is used here to refer to an Iranian style government.

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exploit this advantage, the Medina Munawara Armored Division, the 3rd Armored Division, and the 5th Mechanized Division could attack and destroy the enemy.

At this time, the opposing sides wanted to fight each other by holding the other side by the throat. A smart commander will exploit his own strength against his enemy's weaknesses. General Andre Beaufre, the French commander in charge of the 1956 campaign in Egypt [the Suez Crisis], once posited two requirements for achieving military success: 'First, achieve the superiority you really possess at the time and place of your choosing. Second, give yourself the freedom to act.'[104] In this situation, we were evenly matched, or perhaps the advantage was slightly in Iran's favor—we were tired and we did not have the freedom to act. Had we used the armored corps, where we had superiority in armor, and in terms of numbers and competence, when we had air power superiority, we would have achieved the freedom to act at the time and place of our choosing.

Murray: Did Saddam have any desire to learn from the Israelis?

Hamdani: Saddam did not like to hear that we learned from anyone whether they were Americans, Israelis, etc. For example, I always say that Iraqi soldiers learn 90 percent from their tribe. The American soldier is educated and civilized; he is better at looking for alternative solutions in a conflict than the Iraqi soldier.

Section 5: Expansion of Iraqi Military ▪ Military Training ▪ End of Iran-Iraq War

Murray: General James Mattis, USMC, your opponent and commander of the 1st Marine Division in the 2003 war has said, 'There are two ways to learn. You can learn from history or you can learn from filling body bags.' It appears that Saddam preferred the second method. Could you talk about the expansion of the Republican Guard from a division to a corps within a year? Where did the officers come from? How were they chosen? What kind of training did they receive? When did the leadership transition from Saddam's family (the Tikriti gang) to professional officers?

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[104] Hamdani appears to be quoting from one among General Andre Beaufre's books: *An Introduction to Strategy, with Particular Reference to Problems of Defense, Politics, Economics and Diplomacy in the Nuclear Age* (1963), *Deterrence and Strategy* (1966), or *Strategy of Action* (1967).

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Hamdani: The Republican Guard was created in February 1963 to replace the former Royal Guards. Between 1963 and 1982, its mission was to protect the president, the palaces, and the main governmental departments. By 1982, Saddam recognized the war with Iran would be a long, drawn out conflict. Adnan Khairallah feared that the war would require the army to expand horizontally at the expense of expanding capabilities vertically. Because Saddam valued General Khairallah's advice, he discussed how to maintain capabilities established before the war with high ranking government officials. It was suggested that the Republican Guard forces expand from a protection force to a combat force. The 2nd Brigade of the Republican Guard was formed at the beginning of 1982. Since it was an armored brigade they chose the best officers from all of the other divisions. I worked on this expansion along with other colleagues. There was a division of labor between the 1st and 2nd Brigades of the Republican Guard: the 1st Brigade, comprised of Saddam's relatives, was responsible for protecting the palace and vital zones; the 2nd Armored Brigade was a military unit comprised of soldiers who were not related to Saddam in any way. Interestingly, Saddam tried unsuccessfully to place his relatives in the 2nd Brigade as security officers. In 1983, the 10th Armored Brigade transitioned into the 2nd Armored Brigade of the Republican Guard. The 3rd Regiment of Special Forces expanded from a battalion-sized unit to a brigade in 1983 as well. On 7 April 1984, the first headquarters of a division of the Republican Guard was established. Before that, the Republican Guard brigades were directly controlled by Saddam. This division consisted of the following: 1st Brigade (mixed), 2nd Armored Brigade, 3rd Brigade Special Forces Republican Guard, 4th Infantry Brigade, 10th Armored Brigade and smaller Republican Guard units.

Woods: Did the 1st Brigade eventually become the Republican Guard (17th Brigade)?

Hamdani: Yes, you have a good memory. Saddam established a special forces brigade within the Republican Guard to protect him, while the other brigades transitioned to combat. After major losses to conventional army forces during 1986 and the need to call up reserves to hold the front, Saddam ordered the Republican Guard expanded from a division to corps to preserve a level of combat capability. The corps consisted of six divisions. Two were considered reserves. By 1990, the Republican Guard had the following divisions: Medina Munawara Armored Division, Hammurabi Armored Division, [Tawakalna Mechanized division], Baghdad Infantry Division, Adnan Infantry Division, Nebuchadnezzar Infantry Division, and the special forces division. The special forces division consisted of the 3rd Brigade, which had paratroopers and two special

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forces regiments, and the elite Special Mission Brigade, which had a navy regiment of frogmen. The 16th Brigade had two regular special forces regiments and a navy special forces regiment comprising frogmen.

Murray: Which of these divisions existed at the time of the great Iraqi offensives in 1988?

Hamdani: All of them: Medina Munawara, Hammurabi, Baghdad, Adnan, Nebuchadnezzar, and the 16th Brigade Special Forces.[105]

Murray: We have read that Saddam directed a military draft of university students. Where were these soldiers incorporated?

Hamdani: The university students joined the Republican Guard. They were mainly scientists. The Republican Guard was an independent army and needed skilled troops to maintain the quality levels of the pre-war army. It had helicopters, artillery, missiles, air defense, chemical protection, administrative, and maintenance repair units; it lacked only air and navy forces.

Woods: While in the midst of the battles in 1986, how did the Republican Guard bring the new recruits up to speed? Was it different than how the regular army trained?

Hamdani: The regular army was subject to Iranian artillery fire so training was slim, because it was in the front lines most of the time. The Republican Guard remained in the rear to receive training. Moreover, its units had just received new weapons. Its units were maintained at 100 percent, but the army was only maintained at 70 percent. By 2003, army levels had dropped to 60 percent. The lowest Republican Guard reached was 90 percent of its authorized strength.

Woods: How much training did young enlisted soldiers receive before being assigned to a regular army unit in 1986? Was this sufficient to provide basic skills?

Hamdani: We used the same calculation during the war as before the war. Basic infantry training required three months. Training at corps schools required four-to-six months. A soldier had three months of training within the division to which he was assigned during the war. One year later, he could be a fighter within a Republican Guard division after proving himself in combat.

The different divisions within the Republican Guard devoted varying amounts of time to training. I was a division commander for five years and never lowered my standards for

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[105] The Adnan Division was not created until 1989. Hamdani is likely referring to the brigades of the Tawakalna.

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training. The division was always at two levels. I refused to promote soldiers who had reached the first level to the second level unless they had completed the required training sessions. Any army training for combat progresses through three phases: first, preparation; second, education; and third, testing. If a soldier failed his tests, I would not move him to next phase but move him back to the educational phase.

I was originally an armor instructor. Each firing range test has nine drills, or exercises. In the first drill, the soldier fires on a fixed target from a stationary tank. In the second drill, he fires and then moves the tank. The drills became increasingly complicated. In the final drill, the soldier fires at moving targets from a moving tank. This was extremely difficult because our tanks did not have advanced technology. The gunner had to calculate the firing solution, while he was buttoned-up in the tank. After each battle, I ran a test to analyze performance. I looked for mistakes.

Getting people within a squadron or company to work together in harmony was a constant problem. Companies are the most important unit within an armored division, because they are the smallest combat unit. If the company is competent tactically, then the rest is command and control. I was a battalion-, then regimental-, and then a division commander. I was always the first one tested to encourage the rest of my unit. I would always salute someone who was competent. In this way, I forced myself to be competent.

While I was at the staff college from 1978 through 1980, I would leave at night to participate in training exercises with the 10th Armored Brigade that had just received T-72 tanks, because, as an armor officer, I wanted to stay current. By 1982 I was a lieutenant colonel and my unit received the newest model, the T-72M. Within six months, I boosted the combat capabilities, exploiting 90 percent of the designed capabilities of the tank, and launched multiple attacks. The T-72M had smoke generators. Because of the smoke, you could not measure losses, but I only lost one-to-three tanks per battle. I always stressed the importance of training. There was always a need for more training.

Woods: Early in the war Khomeini made an appeal to Shi'a Arabs to follow his lead. Clearly, it failed to work, as most of the soldiers in the army were Shi'a. Were there any significant problems in maintaining focus and morale among the enlisted troops?

Hamdani: Before the war, I was the staff intelligence officer with the 35th Armored Brigade. There was a rumor that security had arrested an officer and that he would be turned over to us because officers had to be arrested or detained by a military unit. It was confirmed

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that he belonged to the Dawa Party.[106] The Dawa organization supported the Iranian revolution. We looked on the matter as a political issue because there is no difference between a Shi'a, a Sunni, or an Arab for Iraqis, who are secular in outlook. Their numbers were small, and the highest ranking officer arrested was a captain. When the war started, there were small groups within the military working on behalf of the Dawa Party. However, 80 percent of the Iraqi people and the Iraqi military believed Iran was our enemy and that we must deter the Iranians.

The death, capture, or injury of a son to the enemy created major social problems for a family. Until 1982, we had no problem with morale within the army. However afterwards, the popular army was increasingly made up of average citizens who quit their jobs to fight on the front. The economy and the economic capacity of the Iraqi people were severely damaged due to losses in terms of casualties and death. Affected families blamed Saddam and his politics. By 1987, 40,000 Iraqis had been taken prisoner, 250,000 martyred, and 750,000 injured or handicapped, with a significant number missing who we could not verify as martyrs or prisoners. As a result, one million families had no one to support them or their provider could not work. Overall, the war weakened the Iraqi economy greatly. If we estimate that two million Iraqis suffered from the war directly and multiply that number by the size of the average Iraqi household (five), then ten million Iraqis suffered from the effects of the war. The Iraqi population was 18 million in 1980. Approximately two thirds of all Iraqis suffered because of the war. Iran's population is four times larger than Iraq's. Assuming they suffered similar numbers of captured, dead, and injured, their problem was one quarter the size of our problem.

Murray: However, the Iranians suffered much heavier casualties than the Iraqis.

Hamdani: True. However, when someone is hurt, they look for someone to blame. In general, the level of education of the Iraqi people is simple. Shi'a religious education instills in its members great loyalty to religious scholars, whereas Sunnis have no connection with scholars. Shi'a have religious institutions similar to Catholics. Khomeini is like the Catholic Pope to the Shi'a in Iran, similar to Ali al-Sistani's position in Iraq.[107] In Iran,

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[106] The Islamic Dawa Party was formed in 1957 as a religious Shi'a party whose goal was to create an Islamic Shi'a state in part or all of Iraq.

[107] Sistani is Iraq's Grand Ayatollah, chief religious figure for Iraqi Shi'a. Although Sistani shares a religious sect with Khomeini, his interpretation of the role of religion in government is markedly different from that in practice in Iran.

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the influence of religious institutions became political influence. Shi'a clergy would say that religion comes before the country. Although he was not sectarian, Saddam wanted to know whether you were with him or against him. He did not put religion before country. He once said, 'If my arm were against me, I would not hesitate to cut it off.'

Saddam's rise to power, his family's influence in government, and its many mistakes drained the high morale at the beginning of the war. Despite this, the number of soldiers who deserted to the Iranian side remained low, which proved there was a wealth of Iraqi patriotism. However, when sanctions were imposed after Iraq entered Kuwait, 90 percent of all Iraqis were affected and Saddam became incontestably a dictator. He relied on private security and executed anyone whom he suspected of disloyalty. The percentage of illiteracy within Iraq doubled. People naturally turn to religion when they are in distress. Sunni sheiks emerged to take advantage of despair among the orthodox Sunnis, whom we call Salafists. They strongly opposed Saddam. A large percentage of Iraqis did differentiate between losing Iraq and losing Saddam. An educated person should differentiate between the two.

Just two months before the United States invaded in 2003, I met with some of my friends and relatives. They would say, 'Just let America or Israel or anyone come and occupy Iraq; we need to get rid of Saddam Hussein.' I replied, 'If you hate Saddam, that is your right, but you have no right to dismiss your country. We must differentiate and separate Saddam as a bad ruler and our loyalty to our country. We will pay a high price if we don't see the difference.' Unfortunately, there were few who had the same opinion as I. You have seen what has happened over the last six years as a result.

Murray: From what you say, it appears that Saddam destroyed the sense of community and nationalism within Iraq during his 30-year reign.

Hamdani: At the beginning, Saddam had the chance to be the greatest of all Iraq's leader. Iraq was a modern state with modern systems. We had approximately half-a-million scientists and engineers who had studied across the globe. This was a high percentage for a third-world country. Iraq had a strong economy, an air force, and a navy. It possessed organized political parties with logical and reasonable ideologies. Saddam's great ambition and his violent personality destroyed all that was good in Iraq. It was not clear at the beginning; the mistakes accumulated over time. Saddam and the Ba'ath Party had what the psychologist Adler called an inferiority complex. Saddam had this complex toward the great powers. For example, when he first assumed power, he greeted the

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ambassadors of great states, such as France, the Soviet Union, and Britain, personally. When the ambassadors presented their papers, Saddam would tell them, 'You are a great power. You view us as a small power, but with our will we are bigger than you.' As an observer, I was embarrassed by what he said, and I was even sadder that my president had such psychological issues.

Woods: Could you discuss the end of the Iran-Iraq War, specifically the time period between late 1987 and July 1988? You had said earlier that the Iranians were physically in a good position in 1987. In retrospect, the Iraqis were weak by late 1987. Did the Iraqi military leadership understand that at the time?

Hamdani: Until the end of 1987, the Iranians were basically winning the war. Saddam rejected this assessment. The Arabs in the Gulf region were supporting Saddam with the hope that Iraq had the capability to defeat Iran. There was information suggesting that Iranian gains in the war were at the expense of the Iranian economy and the Iranian people. Iranian capabilities peaked in 1987. There had been a desire to liberate Fao since 1986. The majority of the Republican Guard had remained around Basra since then, waiting to seize the opportunity to recover Fao when and if Iran weakened. The Iranian strategic weight lay in the north. Logic would suggest that Iraqi strength should be in a position to oppose Iranian strength. However, Iraq made a courageous strategic decision. I do not know who made this decision, but it was fully supported by Saddam.

Moving the strategic weight from the north to the south required significant time. It is difficult to move a third-world army over a distance of nearly 1,000 kilometers. Based on satellite information, we trained the infantry on fields similar to Fao. The chance for which we had been waiting occurred in April 1988. Saddam made the decision to launch an attack to recover Fao. This decision was courageous, but it was the right decision because this situation would never have repeated itself. Lieutenant General Ayad Fayid al-Rawi led troops from the Republican Guard Army and the VII Corps.

Woods: Who were the military minds that Saddam Hussein listened to in late 1987?

Hamdani: I do not know.

Murray: Could you speak a little about al-Rawi?

Hamdani: Al-Rawi was originally an armor officer. He was courageous, an excellent field officer, and had the determination to reach his goals. He did not like to lose. However, he lacked education and strategic understanding. All his characteristics are excellent

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except for his lack of strategic understanding. Fortunately, field execution does not require strategic vision.

Woods: Was al-Rawi the overall commander of the 1988 Fao campaign?

Hamdani: Al-Rawi was in charge of coordinating the Republican Guard, which made up 60 percent of the attacking forces, with the VII Corps, which made up 40 percent of the forces. This was an opportunity for excellent first-class commander to carry out an important and strategic plan. Lieutenant General al-Rawi was a good, competent, and honest man. Therefore, he was suitable for this mission.

The attack was executed quickly and successfully. We estimated one week for each page of the campaign strategy, but it was all executed in one day. There were few enemy; reserve Iranian forces were also weak. The Pipes Bridge (a North Korean design), across the Shatt al-Arab was the only connection between the Iraqi and Iranian sides; the rest was isolated Iraqi lands.[108] The field preparations for the soft soil were excellent. Four artillery battalions supported the attack. Four artillery battalions multiplied by 18 artillery pieces created awesome firepower. This did not even include the missiles, the air force, or the naval ships that supported the attack.

Murray: How many divisions did the Iranians have?

Hamdani: The Iranians had one traditional regular division and one non-traditional *Pasdaran* division. Their other divisions were on the other side of the Shatt al-Arab. There were 70 Iranian observation posts that were 20–30 meters high. An Iraqi gun was assigned to fire on each post. The operation was a quick success despite the immense psychological barrier of knowing that 53,000 Iraqi soldiers had died at that location in the fighting in 1986. Iraqis are pessimists, but the psychological barrier was overcome by this sudden and complete success. Battles then followed at Shalamcheh, Majnun, and Khorramshahr. We advanced 70–100 kilometers into Iran and captured 20,000 Iranians. Iran collapsed after the third of the five battles. The final two battles drove the last nail into Iran's coffin.

Woods: What was the name of the battle when the Iraqi military knew that Iran was finished?

Hamdani: The first battle was at Fao and called the 'Battle of Blessed Ramadan' because it occurred on the first day of Ramadan. The battle at Shalamcheh, and east of Basra, was called 'Tawakalna the First,' which translated to 'We Rely on God.' The third battle was

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[108] According to Hamdani, engineers laid large steel culvert pipes in the bed of the canal or river. The pipes were stacked until they were just below the surface of the water and practically invisible from overhead detection. The whole structure was sturdy enough to support vehicle traffic.

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to liberate the Majnun Islands; this was the decisive battle. There was a lot of preparation and detail. 'Tawakalna the Third' happened in central Iraq where the Iranians had dug in east of al-Marah. 'Tawakalna the Fourth' occurred east of Khanaqin. There was an air drop of soldiers from the Republican Guard special forces at Alam Rad.[109] It required three trips with 100 helicopters each to transport the special forces. Each trip moved one regiment. The armored forces then met up with the Republican Guard. The Iranians collapsed. Their soldiers ran toward the Iraqi helicopters that had landed. The pilot would say, 'There is not enough room. I will return to transport more people.' The Iranians had lost the will to fight, while Iranian media announced Iraq would lose the war, because it was now fighting for America.

Murray: What if Khomeini had said, 'We are not quitting. We are going to continue to fight'?

Hamdani: Khomeini would have repeated the same mistakes as Saddam. Members of his command had begged Khomeini to stop and accept the loss. He said, 'I accept it, as if from a poison chalice.'

If Saddam had not entered Kuwait and taken on the United States in 1991, we would have respected him. It was like Khomeini and his poison chalice, but Saddam did not want to accept defeat. He was determined, which resulted in our long, slow collapse during the next 13 years from 1990 to 2003. The majority of Iraqi people curse Saddam's name and memory.

Woods: Were there any new military options in early 1988? Assume Iran still had military capabilities, were there any practical things Iraq could have done to change the static nature of the battles of 1987?

Hamdani: There was an option to move the entire Republican Guard and liberate the northern region. That was the opinion of the majority of generals. Moreover, agreements with both of the Kurdish leaders Barzani and Jalal Talabani were concluded.[110]

Woods: Was this an effort to threaten the regime in Tehran by pushing into Iranian Kurdistan?

Hamdani: That area is mountainous, and the Iranians had superior infantry compared to ours. Armor is significantly less effective in mountainous regions. This northern attack became a deception plan incorporated into the attack to recover Fao. We opened a fake headquarters and established a wireless communications station. The media took pictures

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[109] The location of Alam Rad is unclear.

[110] Referring to the leaders of the two main, but rival, Kurdish political parties.

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of the Republican Guard units in the north and the minister of defense visiting them. The Iranians really thought that we were going to attack in the north. There are others who said this was a political, regional, and international issue, and Iraq was making political concessions to Iran to end the war. One of Saddam's characteristics was determination. In this instance, determination about not accepting defeat was good.

Woods: In a war this large, foreign liaison officers like to visit the battlefield. For instance, after some of the early battles between the Iranian Chieftain tanks and the Iraqi T-62 tanks, the British were eager to see how their tanks worked. This was all in the context of the Cold War, NATO, and US-Soviet relations. Were there other examples of countries sending liaison officers to Iraq to observe and learn from the Iraqi experience?

Hamdani: We had many delegations after the war, the largest one was American. I do not have any information about delegations that visited during the war. The press reported comparisons between Russian and British weapons. British weapons were not very good. The 90th Iranian Armored Division had Chieftain tanks; they had a lot of problems and did not fight effectively. The 16th Iranian Armored Division, which was equipped with Chieftain tanks, lost a battle against the 10th Iraqi Armored Brigade with T-72 tanks. It is hard for an armored brigade to destroy a division in 12 hours but it happened; it was a disaster for the Iranians. Kuwait was another disaster. It is hard to compare the Kuwaitis with us, but the result was that the British weapons quickly lost the war. There was a problem with British manufacturing. An order was issued that every tank had to carry two types of ammunition: the first was effective against heavy armor and the second was used against infantry and light armor. We were ordered not to inflict heavy casualties when we entered Kuwait, so we armed our tanks with the less effective ammunition, so the Kuwaiti tanks would be knocked out when we fired on their tanks, but their soldiers would survive. When we fired upon them using this less effective ammunition, I realized that even this ammunition destroyed the Kuwaiti Chieftains.

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Interview:
Major General Mizher Rashid al-Tarfa al-Ubaydi

Conducted by Kevin M. Woods, Williamson Murray, and Elizabeth A. Nathan
9 November 2009 ▪ Dubai, United Arab Emirates

Former ***Major General Mizher Rashid al-Tarfa al-Ubaydi***[111] *graduated from the Iraqi Military College in Baghdad in 1975. Additionally, he received a diploma in psychology, a BA in Farsi, and an MA in history and civilization from the University of Baghdad. After joining the Iraqi Army, General Tarfa served as an intelligence officer and a military intelligence instructor. During the Iran-Iraq War, he served in the Iran section of the general command intelligence cell (1980–87). During the 1990s, General Tarfa also served as the Iran section deputy director in the General Military Intelligence Directorate (GMID).*[112] *Between 1998 and 2000, he was a shadow military attaché at the Iraqi Embassy in Tehran. General Tarfa was the southern sector intelligence system director when the United States invaded Iraq in 2003.*

Section 6: Personal Background ▪ Attitudes toward Iran ▪ Expansion of Iraqi Intelligence

Woods: Could you give us a description of your background, and how you became an intelligence officer?

Tarfa: I graduated from the Iraqi Military College on 6 January 1975. I served first as a platoon commander in an infantry division in northern Iraq. I was then promoted to

[111] Referred to during the interview transcripts as Tarfa.

[112] The GMID—*Da'irat al-Mukhabarat al-Amah* in Arabic—comprised three bureaus: the political bureau, the special bureau, and the administrative bureau. Within the political bureau was the secret service, which had numerous offices specializing in the collection of intelligence concerning a particular country or region. Sean Boyne, "Southwest Asia, inside Iraq's Security Network - Part Two," *Jane's Intelligence Review* 9, no. 8 (1997).

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company commander for three years. In 1977, I attended a six-month intelligence training session to learn the Persian language with ten other officers. I was the first in my class. An advanced six-month session, called the basic session, admitted only the first in each of the previous classes. Again I was also the first in my class. Then, I was assigned as a teacher of Persian for military intelligence in 1978, where I met Major al-Samarra'i.[113] He was the section officer for the Iran branch, which was the smallest unit within military intelligence. He told me 'In addition to teaching Persian, I also need you to work with me in the Iran branch.' The Israel branch was large; it had several sections. The fact that the Iran branch was so much smaller proves that we did not have aggressive intentions towards Iran at the time. Iraqi intelligence was focused primarily on Israel, particularly after we signed the 1975 Algeria agreement with the shah.

I have never stopped collecting information about Iran; that country has always been on my mind. I have followed up on everything having to do with Iran, big or small. After the formation of the new intelligence organization after the American occupation, its commander asked me for data on Iran because he had nothing.[114] I gave him all the information I had, but they had to take notes, because I did not have any documents; it was all in my head. I had interrogated approximately 38,000 Iranian prisoners during the war. I had worked with the Iran branch because of my language skills. I had helped the officers quickly decipher the Iranian codes. I was privy to things about which no one else has spoken. Some subjects are beyond the red line and it requires decades before anyone can talk about them. If the former regime was still in place, we would not be talking about it now, because this would be considered part of Iraq's national security. Now that everything is gone, and Iran has full knowledge of everything, I am willing to make this information available to others.

Murray: When did you, as an Iran expert, recognize that the new Khomeini regime was a change from the shah's regime? It appears that Saddam did not consider Iran a threat in 1979.

Tarfa: Initially Saddam was happy when the shah was ousted, because the shah was brought to power by the Americans and had tried to police the Gulf region. We thought

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[113] Samarra'i rose to become the head of military intelligence in 1991. After his defection in 1994, he was associated with various foreign intelligence services and Iraq expat groups throughout the remainder of the 1990s. After the fall of the regime, Samarra'i became the security advisor to Iraqi President Jalal Talabani.

[114] Referring to the Iraqi Ministry of Defense Directorate General for Intelligence and Security (DGIS), established after the 2003 invasion of Iraq.

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Khomeini would cooperate with us, since Iraq was an Islamic country and he had lived in Iraq for so many years.[115] We also thought the barriers between Iran and Iraq from the shah's time would dissipate. Within a few months of Khomeini's seizure of power everything turned upside down. Once we perceived Iran as a threat, we started gathering information. We began by looking for human sources, following up on the border region, paying attention to the Iranian press, listening to Iranian radio, and watching Iranian television. We started submitting reports to the high command that Iran had hostile intentions against Iraq. Everything that we expected and anticipated happened.

Woods: During the late shah's period and into the early revolutionary period, did Iraq have good intelligence sources in Iran?

Tarfa: No, we did not have good human sources in Iran because we respected and honored our agreement with the shah, but there were some Iranian Kurds in our territory who did volunteer information. Even during the revolution, working with dissident groups was difficult because they considered themselves to be nationalists and thus, were unwilling to cooperate.

Woods: Can you describe how Iraqi military intelligence changed organizationally during the eight years of the Iran-Iraq War?

Tarfa: At the beginning of the war, there were only three officers in the Iran section: I, still only a first lieutenant, Major al-Samarra'i, and Major Qasim Abd-al-Mun'im. Our maps of Iran were not up to date, and we could not decipher coded messages. After Khomeini came to power, we received only sparse information because he created a protective shell around Iran. We gathered information from the fleeing Iranian officers, but they passed information we already knew. A colonel in the Iranian police also provided us with information, but it was of little use. The Iranian Army was being dismantled, and most of its weapons had been stolen. In this chaos we thought Iran was incapable of attacking us.

Murray: What impact did the lack of good sources have on the decision to go to war in September 1980?

Tarfa: We did not want to go to war because we thought the Iranian Army was being reorganized and a *coup d'état* against the militants was imminent. Unfortunately, the

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[115] The shah expelled Khomeini from Iran in 1964 and exiled him to Turkey (1964–65) and Iraq (1965–78). Khomeini moved from Iraq to Paris for his final months of exile after then-vice president Saddam Hussein, under pressure from the shah and in accordance with the 1975 Shatt al-Arab treaty, asked Khomeini to leave Iraq.

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religious scholars and ayatollahs were able to gain full control Iran. They formed militias and executed people on the street. There was a state of panic and fear inside the ranks of the Iranian armed forces; they had no other choice but to align themselves with the regime. Higher ranking officers either fled or were killed. Those joining the regime were originally enlisted soldiers while others were civilians. Iran was plagued with ignorance then, as it is today. I was in Tehran after 1999 and saw how people acted. I expected them to revolt against Khomeini's regime and turn to the secular leaders. You can mark my words: the Islamic regime in Iran will be gone within the next few years. The reaction against the behavior of the ayatollahs has made the common people hate even Islam. The Islamic religion is not like this. At present, Islam is held hostage by extremist Sunni and the Shi'a groups, which has turned the public against the religion.

Woods: Could you speak specifically about changes in the Iraqi intelligence profession in the early years of the war? Could you describe the organizations that were built to deal with signals intelligence, image intelligence, etc.?

Tarfa: When the war started, we realized we needed to update our maps. At first, we relied on other countries. We requested maps from the military attachés in the Gulf region. We also started taking daily aerial photographs. We focused on signals interception to a greater extent during the initial period of fighting. The Iranians were sending messages in the clear. Unfortunately, one of Saddam's press attachés revealed we were listening to uncoded wireless messages, which created a problem for us.

Officers who were mathematically inclined and had already attended training on deciphering began preliminary operations with the help of myself and Farsi-speaking civilians. This organization was called the special intelligence group; it specialized in deciphering Iranian codes. I was divided between this group and al-Samarra'i's Iran section. In the early months of the war, we analyzed codes manually. We got a maximum of two to three hours of sleep per night. We could not leave even to see our families. It was like that for the first two to three years of the war. By the end of the war, the situation had gotten better, and we received four to five hours of sleep per night.

Murray: Were the extreme hours the result of too few Farsi speakers?

Tarfa: There were only three Farsi speakers in the entire Iraqi Army and within the intelligence apparatus. We had to interrogate prisoners, decipher codes, and listen to Iranian TV and radio.

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Woods: Do you remember the specific event when the journalist revealed that Iraq was listening to Iranian radio transmissions?

Tarfa: It was early in the war. Saddam had consulted with a Shi'a journalist from Najaf province. He was close to the president and worked in his office. He read my intelligence reports on the Iranians and tried to publish a story about the suffering of the Iranian soldiers based on signals intelligence. He did this with Saddam's knowledge. No one could do anything unless Saddam knew about it. We considered that story a major mistake. Saddam was arrogant; he wanted to parade Iranian losses inflicted by Iraqi forces for the entire world to see. However, the story created major problems for military intelligence, because almost immediately the Iranians began to send their radio transmissions in code. Saddam was ignorant about military intelligence matters.

Murray: Did Saddam's understanding of intelligence improve during the course of the war?

Tarfa: By 1985, Saddam began to understand how essential information security was. We used to mention in our reports specifically who or what our sources were. At one point, Saddam wrote a comment at the bottom of a report requesting that we not disclose our sources. He did not mean from himself *per se*, but rather the others in his office. Eventually he told us not to type the reports. He knew we could not type and that we had to give them to the commissioned officers to type. Saddam specified that intelligence reports had to be handwritten by the intelligence officer himself.

Woods: How did you handle open source information? Did you set up a separate organization for information gleaned from radio, TV, Friday prayers, public statements from Khomeini, etc.?

Tarfa: Arab Iranians from Ahvaz city started fleeing from Khorramshahr and Abadan in 1982. Kurds from the Democratic Kurdistan Party of Iran, especially the followers of 'Abd-al-Rahman Qasemlo, also started fleeing. They both started cooperating with us. Qasemlo was killed by Iranian intelligence in Europe, because he was cooperating with us.[116] With the help of some opposition members we even gained access to civilian and military Iranian aircraft (such as F-4s, F-5s, and Chinooks) that fled to us.[117]

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[116] Qasemlo (sometime transliterated Ghassemlou), the general-Secretary of the Kurdish Democratic Party (Iran), was murdered on 13 July 1989 in Vienna. He was in Vienna as part of a Kurdish negotiating team with the Iranian government. It is widely believed, but not proven, that Iranian intelligence was responsible for the crime.

[117] The McDonnell Douglas (now Boeing) F-4 Phantom II is a tandem two-seat, twin-engine, all-weather, long-range supersonic jet interceptor fighter/fighter-bomber first introduced in the early 1960s. The Northrop F-

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Murray: Did the Iranians try to mix double agents in with people fleeing from Arabistan?

Tarfa: Yes, but we knew they were double agents. We ourselves tried to run similar deception operations. We would give the right answers to some Iranian inquiries and then feed them misinformation.

Murray: General al-Samarra'i's organization had three people in 1980. How did the operation expand over time?

Tarfa: In 1981, there were six officers in the Iran section, which had five departments: ground forces; air forces; naval forces; a political, economic, and social department; and a topography and vital targets section. In 1986, the Iran section turned into a directorate with four sections, two platoons, one regiment of special forces (Unit 888), and one regiment for deep reconnaissance (Unit 999), which sent troops deep behind enemy lines. All attended Farsi language training and different tactical schools such as sabotage, parachuting, and underwater training. The Iran branch expanded from three officers in 1980 to 80 officers in 1986.

Woods: Can you speak about some of the different strategic civilian and military intelligence services responsible for national level intelligence at the time?

Tarfa: Iraq had the intelligence service, which was in charge of gathering information on foreigners located inside and outside of Iraq. It had nothing to do with the military intelligence directorate. The intelligence service also had sections that dealt with Iran, Israel, America, Arab countries, Asian countries, etc.

Woods: We always hear about the relationship between bureaucracies. What were relations like between the different intelligence agencies?

Tarfa: Military intelligence definitely competed with the intelligence service because 95 percent of the intelligence personnel were civilians. The intelligence service lacked the databases to analyze information and form conclusions, especially regarding military information. Saddam never relied on the information coming from the intelligence service. He would turn it over to us for analysis, which created sensitivities between us and the intelligence service. I worked in all three security systems: the intelligence service, military intelligence, and the special security apparatus. Our professionalism in

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5A/B Freedom Fighter and the F-5E/F Tiger II are members of a family of light supersonic fighter aircraft introduced in the 1960s. The Boeing CH-47 Chinook is a twin-engine, tandem rotor, heavy-lift helicopter designed for troop movement, artillery emplacement, and battlefield resupply. It was first introduced in the early 1960s and is still in production today.

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military intelligence was high. We considered ourselves a school of analytic science, not just with regards to Iraq, but also with intelligence issues at the regional level. Our capacity did not compare with that of the Americans; however, in terms of analysis and conclusions, we were much superior to the Iranians.

Woods: Were the civilian intelligence agencies as small as the military intelligence agency in 1980?

Tarfa: No, they were much bigger than us, but they did little that was useful.

Murray: Saddam once said he only wanted information from the military, and he would do the analysis.

Tarfa: I have never heard this. If this recording exists, he probably meant that he wanted military intelligence to do the analysis.

Murray: How long did it take General Samarra'i's intelligence group to earn Saddam's trust?

Tarfa: Saddam relied on our analysis from the war's beginning, but he was disappointed with us when Fao fell. However, it was not that we failed in our job. The problem resided with the director of military intelligence, General Mahmoudi Shahin, whom Saddam appointed to head the group. He was not an intelligence officer, but rather was an armor officer, who had commanded a tank division.

Woods: General Hamdani described a great transition in Iraq's military forces after Saddam became president in July 1979. He started appointing Ba'ath political officers to important government positions. How did this affect intelligence?

Tarfa: We did not have that problem in military intelligence. Throughout my military career, from first lieutenant to general, I was always a low ranking Ba'athist, but that did not matter. This was also true for General al-Samarra'i; he was never more than a low ranking Ba'athist. In military intelligence, we relied on highly professional officers; that is why we were successful.

Section 7: Loss of Fao (1986) ▪ General Military Intelligence Directorate ▪ Iranian Intelligence Capabilities ▪ Deception Operations

Woods: Could you describe the sources of information and the deception operations during the 1986 battle at Fao?

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Tarfa: The leaders in Baghdad thought Iran intended to attack the VI Corps sector in the Hawr al-Ahwar region; Fao was not initially considered an Iranian target. We concentrated Iraqi troops on the Fao Peninsula across from the Iranian troops in Hawr al-Ahwar. The Iranians believed Iraqi troops in the Fao region were weak, so they sent naval reconnaissance units to the area. We arrested one of the frogmen, who belonged to the Revolutionary Guards, one month before the Iranian offensive. I interrogated him. He told me that he was assessing the barrier system of the Iraqi forces. This was an indication the Iranians intended to attack the area. Air reconnaissance by MiG-25s also showed engineering efforts on the Iranian side of Shatt al-Arab across from Fao.[118] We noticed an increased number of guns, boats, and pontoons. That confirmed Iran's intentions. The VII Corps was responsible for defending Fao. The VI Corps, comprising the 15th and 26th Divisions, was to the north of Fao. We mentioned in our reports Iranian intentions regarding Fao. However, General Mahmoudi did not want that assessment submitted because the army chief of staff, General Abdul Dhannoun, did not agree with it. He said, 'You cannot pinpoint where the Iranians are going to attack. How am I going to maneuver the troops? You need not mention this much about intentions so I could use fewer troops.' Our intention was to protect Fao; we did not allow the army chief of staff to withdraw troops from Fao. On the other hand, we were supposed to support the troops there, which required him to bring troops from other sectors. When General Mahmoudi arrived in Fao, nothing was there. He visited the 26th Division; their sector appeared quiet. He did not see matters as we did. He thought he was smarter than we were. He even told the commander of the 26th Division that his officers could be given leave. We sensed danger in the area, but we were just low-ranking officers and could not do anything. I was a major then. The majority of the officers were either lieutenant colonels or colonels. This issue was related to Ba'ath Party politics: General Abdul Jawad Dhannoun was General Mahmoudi's superior within the Ba'ath Party. The party should not have interfered with military issues because it affected its professionalism.

Woods: Did General Shahin agree with your reports?

Tarfa: No, he did not. By the way, it was not my report. It was a report by all of us. I was just one of the authors.

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[118] The Mikoyan-Gurevich MiG-25 was a Soviet-designed high-supersonic interceptor and reconnaissance-bomber aircraft introduced in the early 1970s.

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Murray: Did you get the sense that that the leaders of the intelligence agencies were trying to keep their bosses happy by telling them what they wanted to hear?

Tarfa: Exactly. The same was true with regard to keeping Saddam happy. The officers would say everything is great; they would present hell as heaven to him. Saddam would be happy and laugh.

Woods: The degree to which foreign intelligence was used in 1986 was significant. Information was provided by the United States, France, and the Soviet Union. Was it used as part of this calculation?

Tarfa: Yes, American intelligence provided us with information before Fao. The Iraqi intelligence service brought a [US government representative], who provided satellite pictures, to meet us. General al-Samarra'i and I met with him twice. There was cooperation, but there was no direct coordination. We used to sit with him only to exchange information. As a matter of fact, when we looked at the pictures the [US government representative] gave us, it was only raw intelligence, while our information was much more detailed. French, Yugoslav, and Soviet intelligence agencies also cooperated with us. The KGB helped us decipher the Iranian codes. In return, we agreed to provide them with equipment related to the Iranian American-made F-4 aircraft. The American information supported our conclusions regarding Fao, but failed to convince the higher ups. Our information was complete to start with; any information we received from the [US government] was complementary. The problem was with the intelligence director.

Murray: After the battle at Fao, did Saddam remove those who were responsible for the intelligence failure?

Tarfa: Immediately. He moved General Mahmoudi to the II Corps. He reassigned General Sabar al-Duri as the director of military intelligence during the operation at Fao. He then became the commander of the 17th Armored Division, but never became a corps commander. General al-Duri later became director of the intelligence service. They move the director of Iran section, Colonel Ayoub, to another section. Colonel Wafir transferred from the VII Corps to the Iran section as director. I stayed with the Iran section throughout the entire period.

Murray: Did Saddam prefer to receive intelligence directly from the analysts rather than through bureaucratic channels?

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Tarfa: No, not from analysts directly. He used to get the final analysis from the intelligence group. Our section received considerable raw material on Iran from deciphered codes. I submitted daily reports to the director of the president's office of information coordination, Dr. Ekram Othmam, who then submitted the reports to the president. The reports contained the same information I sent to General al-Samarra'i, the director of the Iran section. The President would follow up on how the intelligence had been exploited. General al-Samarra'i used to blame me because he knew that I was the one sending this information to the president.

One day early in 1987 after the battle at Fao, an Iranian train was on its way from Tehran to Andimashq city in Yazfur carrying a division of *Pasdaran*, approximately 5,000 soldiers. I suggested to the president that we strike the train with the air force, since we knew the train carried a division intending to attack us and we had the train's timetable. The president asked the intelligence service to carry out this plan. General al-Samarra'i, in charge of Iran section, refused to implement the plan because it might disclose our source. The Iranians would know we could decipher their codes. General al-Samarra'i blamed me and spoke out against me because I had turned the president against him. I suggested that the air force strike the train station among other targets. This way we could prevent the Iranians from realizing we had broken their codes. The air force failed to carry out this plan, because the intelligence service failed to provide the exact time the train would leave the station. I believe the intelligence service did this intentionally to protect its source.

Woods: Did Saddam often search for good intelligence analysts within the intelligence apparatus to provide him his own private information, while allowing the system to produce its reports?

Tarfa: After this instance, he did not do it as often. However, I remained in contact with the president's office regarding the breaking of the Iranian codes. For a while I was no longer under the control of the intelligence service. I acted independently in terms of breaking the code.

Woods: After the loss of Fao, besides the leadership changes in the GMID, were there any other major changes? How did Iraqi intelligence perform during the 1987 Iranian offensives against Basra?

Tarfa: There were changes in the commands of the corps and divisions. During the counterattack, they relied on Republican Guard's command. There was a complete collapse of the command and control system in the Iranian military intelligence apparatus

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from Khomeini all the way down during the liberation of Fao. As a result, our troops crossed the border without encountering any Iranian resistance. Our job as intelligence officers during that phase of the operation was to continuously feed the frontline troops with information. The way intelligence officers look at matters is different from operational soldiers. That is why the president trusted us with setting up deception plans, as well as executing them.

Woods: Did the GMID change in any particular way when the Republican Guard expanded from a division to a corps? How did that affect intelligence?

Tarfa: The GMID expanded to approximately three directorates and eight sections. In 1986, we expanded from being a section to being a directorate. The Iran section became the 5th sub-directorate and was run by General al-Samarra'i. It focused on Iran and was in charge of the secret service, strategic information, tactical information, special operations, and deep reconnaissance. We had agents in every embassy including Afghanistan, Pakistan, Turkey, Moscow before the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the Gulf countries. We had sources and wiretap information reaching from the Gulf region and worked on improving our relations with Western intelligence organizations, such as those of the United States, Britain, France, Germany, the former Yugoslavia, Argentina, and Brazil. This was all part of our effort to end the war in 1988. The expansion began in 1986, following the Iranian seizure of Fao.

Woods: Describe the development of the deep reconnaissance units. How were they organized? Who did you recruit into them? What was involved in their training? Could you give me some examples of successful deep reconnaissance operations?

Tarfa: We formed two military units in 1985: the 888, special operations; and the 999, deep reconnaissance. In early 1986, we economized our efforts by rolling Unit 888 into Unit 999, the resulting unit was then in charge of both deep reconnaissance and special operations. The deep reconnaissance training was done by Egyptian Army officers, since they had gone through similar experiences during the war with Israel. Elite officers from special forces transferred to these units. The soldiers received all types of training: parachute, underwater training, sabotage, mine sweeping, bridge building, sabotage operations, and languages such as Farsi. This represented a high level of training and required a high level of fitness. Every week we made them march 100 kilometers, and eat gravel, snakes, and scorpions...anything to make them tougher. Approximately 400 soldiers joined. We carried out operations behind Iranian front lines to gather

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information regarding Iranian ranks, weapons, and the types of troops (e.g., whether they were Revolutionary Guard or regular forces). We carried out explosion operations in the Dehloran oilfields across from Maysan province.

Woods: I read that members from Unit 999 were actually in Tehran trying to assess the effectiveness of Iraqi missile attacks. Was that true?

Tarfa: This is not true. We were effective at gaining information. We had no need to send our officers to Tehran and risk their lives. We already had 10,000 *mujahidin* in Tehran. These Iranian opponents of the regime called their families and those helping them from Europe and the Gulf. Iranians were free to move to Europe and the Gulf region. For example, in September 1986, I went with General Wafiq al-Samarra'i to Ankara to recruit a senior Iranian air force commander. He was on vacation in Turkey with his family. We coordinated with him through the Iraqi military attaché in Ankara. We provided him with money, took pictures, did some recordings, and told him our future information needs on the Iranian Air Force. This is just one example of the fact that we had a little difficulty obtaining information. Thus, we had no need to risk sending highly trained officers to Tehran.

Woods: Was Iraq intelligence successful at working with other non-Persian groups in Iran, such as Baluchis?

Tarfa: Our military attachés in Afghanistan and Pakistan gathered information by contacting the Baluch, the drug dealers, the mafia, etc. Iranian Kurds, Persian Iranians, and Arabs from Ahvaz cooperated with us after 1985.

Woods: How effective or successful were Iranian intelligence operations against Iraq?

Tarfa: Iran used Hakim and the Dawa Party to carry out small terrorist operations in Baghdad by using bombs; they were not very effective.[119] They would occasionally coordinate with Iraqi deserters. The same thing happened to us; they would come to us. It was mutual. There was never a deep penetration.

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[119] Ayatollah Sayyed Muhammed Baqir al-Hakim was the founder and leader of the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI) in Iran, which ran operations against the Ba'athists. Saddam had most of the al-Hakim family that remained in Iraq killed. In 2003, Baqir was supposedly assassinated by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. He was replaced by his brother Abdul Aziz al-Hakim who became an important power-broker during the US occupation of Iraq. After Abdul Aziz's death in 2009, his son Ammar al-Hakim became SCIRI's new leader, and SCIRI was renamed Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI) to better fit the new politics of Iraq.

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Murray: How good were the Iranians at penetrating Iraqi intelligence? Did they break Iraqi codes? Were they good at interrogating Iraqi prisoners?

Tarfa: Yes, they were good at interrogating prisoners. They pressured them with torture and then released them. They made them marry Iranian women and fight with the Badr Corps.

In terms of gathering information on our troops, the Iranians were not successful because they did not have air reconnaissance.

They were unable to break our codes, because we did not buy our coding machines; we manufactured them ourselves. We used telephone or wireless to pass along orders. The Iranians were unable to break our codes, so they did not know about our activities, such as our deception operations.

The Iranian Revolutionary Guard represented a major problem for us because they also did not use communications equipment. They used couriers instead. Thus, we had difficulty gathering information on them. However, we were eventually able to discover their activities and operations. We had full command of the Iranian armed forces, general command, and naval forces codes.

Our knowledge of Iranian codes benefitted us during the confrontation with the United States in 1991.[120] We lacked presence in the Gulf region, but we had broken Iranian naval codes. Thus, we were able to monitor American and coalition naval movements via Iranian radio traffic. We received deciphered reports regarding the movement of Iranian naval forces in response to the movement of American ships in the Gulf. We had no information except what we got through the Iranians. We collected all of our information through the Iranian naval codes. Thus, we were spying on the Iranians, who were spying on the Americans.

Woods: Can you give me some examples of deception operations? Can you describe for us a particular one? What were the principles you used?

Tarfa: The most important deception operation occurred during the liberation of Fao. We needed to send Iraqi forces closer to Fao, but did not want to alert the Iranians of our intention to attack their position on Fao. Before we sent Iraqi troops south, we made it appear as though we thought Iran intended to attack Basra from Fao. Therefore our troops appeared to be heading to the defense of Basra. So the Iranian's started running a

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[120] The United States as part of the United Nations coalition forces fought against Iraq (17 January 1991–28 February 1991) in the First Gulf War after Iraq invaded Kuwait on 2 August 1990.

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deception of their own, pretending to send troops to reinforce our 'belief' there really was going to be an attack on Basra. In the mean time, we sent Unit 999 behind Iranian front lines. They followed the movement of Iranian vehicles and equipment coming from Ahvaz toward Fao. The Iranians tried to deceive us by visibly sending personnel vehicles toward Fao; however, our Unit 999 soldiers could see through the open backs of the vehicles and reported them empty. Air reconnaissance showed troop movement, but we knew this was a deception. Thus, the Iranians saw our deception and then tried to trick us into believing further that they were about to attack from Fao by sending empty trucks. We set up a deception that triggered theirs and reinforced our original deception. We also sent the minister of defense, Adnan Kharaillah, to northern Iraq to visit troops and all the commanders. The commanders were in the south preparing their troops by the time his visit was aired on television.

When the Republican Guard attacked Fao, Iranian troops were caught totally by surprise. We appeared to be in a defensive posture, but we attacked them because they did not know our troop numbers or our intention to liberate Fao.

Section 8: Senior Leadership ▪ SIGINT ▪ Foreign Assistance ▪ Attitudes toward Iran

Woods: Could you help us understand and appreciate some of the senior members of the Iraqi intelligence service during this period? What kind of relationships did they have with the president? Who did well and who did not?

Tarfa: The best officer in military intelligence at the director level was General Sabar al-Duri. He was trusted by Saddam. That is why when the Iran-Iraq War ended he was appointed director of the intelligence service. Saddam appointed General al-Samarra'i as the director of military intelligence to honor him for his service during the war. Saddam did not like Wafiq al-Samarra'i but he liked Sabar al-Duri. Saddam did not like General Mahmoudi Shahin, the director before Sabar al-Duri.

Woods: What became of General Sabar al-Duri after he left the intelligence service?

Tarfa: General al-Duri became an American prisoner in Bucca. General al-Samarra'i is currently in London; he was considered one of the best officers within the Iraq intelligence apparatus, and I was his student. General al-Samarra'i worked in military intelligence throughout his entire career, from first lieutenant to general. He had a large

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database of information, and I inherited it from him. He always consulted me on things regarding Iran. I would send him reports on Iran every two or three days. I even sent reports on Iran to General Ra'ad Hamdani.

Al-Samarra'i was from Samarra, which is a city approximately 10 kilometers southeast of Tikrit. There is an historical animosity between the people of Samarra and Tikrit. There has always been a psychological barrier between them, because the people of Samarra believe they should rule Iraq. Al-Samarra'i thought he was smarter than the high command itself. This was commonly known because his telephone calls were monitored and widely reported. Saddam had him watched closely because he spoke with arrogance, as if he were a big deal, but had never received the chances he deserved. Wafiq al-Samarra'i remained the intelligence director for approximately two months. Suddenly in 1992, Saddam issued an order to pension him off. In 1994, he fled to the northern region and joined the opposition party because he felt he was about to be arrested. He returned after the American occupation to advise Jalal Talabani. Eventually, he resigned and fled to London because he thought the Iranians were attempting to assassinate him.

Woods: What was his relationship with Hussein Kamel? Was there competition?

Tarfa: No, there was no competition, because Hussein Kamel did not work in intelligence; he focused on military industrial relations. Not to mention the fact that no one would have dared compete with Hussein Kamel because of his position and relationship with Saddam.

Murray: General Hamdani felt that Hussein Kamel was the worst influence on Saddam. Do you agree?

Tarfa: This is true because Hussein Kamel was illiterate. He only finished primary school. He never finished middle school. Kamel resented army officers, who had graduated from the military academies, because he felt he did not belong. We felt the same towards him; we did not like him because he did not deserve the rank Saddam had given him. He had his position because he was the president's cousin and son-in-law. We avoided him.

Murray: General Hamdani suggested that Hussein Kamel held a psychological hold over the president. Is that reasonable?

Tarfa: Hussein Kamel pledged complete loyalty to Saddam and tried to leverage his relationship with Saddam. He wanted to be Saddam's safety valve, but in fact he was

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only a negative influence. I often wondered how Saddam, who thought in grand terms, could take the advice of someone who knew nothing about science or the humanities.

Murray: General Hamdani also suggested that Saddam was attracted to two different kinds of people: real professionals and violent people like Tala al-Duri or Hussein Kamel. Is that reasonable?

Tarfa: I agree with what General Ra'ad Hamdani said. Saddam achieved what he wanted through the professionals, but questioned where their loyalty lay: was it with him or with Iraq? He knew the loyalty of the violent people, like al-Duri and Hussein Kamel, was completely to him, while the loyalty of the professional was to our country and maybe to Saddam; the others were loyal to Saddam, but not to Iraq.

Woods: General, in both your writings and our discussion, you have indicated that SIGINT [signals intelligence] was one of Iraq's great advantages during the Iran-Iraq War. Is that a fair assessment?

Tarfa: We were the unknown element within the Iraqi military. We were equal to the entire Iraqi Army and the Republican Guard because of the work we did gathering SIGINT. Without our help, our troops would have fought blind. Instead they were in a boxing match where the Iranians were blindfolded and our forces were not. We created the advantage with respect to the Iranians; they were blind, but we were not.

Woods: Could you help me understand the quality of the intelligence at the tactical level, at the regional level, and the strategic command level? How confident were you that you could listen in on their conversations?

Tarfa: We listened to the general command of the Iranian armed forces and the operations commands from north to south, including the headquarters of al-Hamzah operations in the north and the headquarters of operations in the west. We listened to the headquarters in the south at the corps level or higher. We also listened to the Iranian naval command, which consisted of three navy support units, the headquarters of operations in the east in Sistan and Lojistan provinces, and along the Afghan border.

Woods: So you were able to intercept their radio communication and decrypt their codes throughout the war?

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Tarfa: We used the Crypto C54 machines for breaking the codes.[121] The Iranians had modified the machine, but we analyzed and broke the codes. This machine was used by the Iranian high command. We analyzed all coded messages sent by the Iranian high command that we intercepted in the air, 24 hours a day, for years. We destroyed thousands of pages every day because we did not have the time to read them all. We would look at them quickly to find the important ones and then destroy the rest. There was no way to read it all. Sometimes I would translate as many as 400 pages a day; the director of military intelligence used to say I wrote him a book every day.

Murray: When did you begin to break the Iranian codes?

Tarfa: We had three phases in code breaking. Between 1980 and 1982, we broke the message codes manually. By the end of 1981, we were using the Crypto C52 machine to analyze codes.[122] The secret services had captured a C52 from the 64th Iranian Division, with the aid of al-Qadhi.

Murray: Did al-Qadhi bring the machine to the Iraqis? Did he desert the Iranian 64th Division? How did he get the machine?

Tarfa: Al-Qadhi brought it in with the help of someone within the division in Sabadash, Iran. When he brought it to us, we knew the mechanics of the machine. We used it to decode brigade- and division-level communications until the Iranians replaced it with an electronic code machine. First, we broke that machine's transmissions by hand, then mechanically, and finally electronically. We advanced our intelligence capabilities in parallel with the Iranians efforts to improve their codes. The Iranians consistently failed to protect their sensitive information. The Iranian commander, al-Milali, who was a big gossip, created transparency within the command. We also took advantage of the Iranian press, which sometimes published crucial information. We analyzed the sermons of the senior mullahs on Friday nights in Iran and tried to read between the lines. We would compare the information in the newspapers, or the sermons with the information we already had before drawing conclusions. The sources of information were

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[121] Crypto AG is a Swiss company that has marketed an updated version of the German World War II-era cryptography machines to nearly 120 nations worldwide. Rumors that such devices had been compromised emerged in the early 1990s. Scott Shane, Tom Bowman, "No Such Agency - Part Four: Rigging the Machine," *Baltimore Sun*, 4 December 1995. The Hagelin C54, introduced in the mid-1950s, was a later version of the C52 cipher machine.

[122] The Hagelin C52 was an early 1950s Swiss-manufactured cipher machine based in part on a German World War II design.

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complementary; if there was information missing from one source, we could usually find it in another.

Murray: How did you break the electronic cipher machines, the Crypto T450, when they started using them?[123] Did the Iranians use what the British used during World War II, called cribs?

Tarfa: The same was true for us. Iran would use one key for several messages. We took advantage of this deadly mistake. It led us to conclude that they were not competent. We used a key for only one message.

Murray: Why didn't the Iraqis make the same kinds of mistakes? What did the Iraqis do differently from the Iranians?

Tarfa: The Iraqis were more disciplined than the Iranians. We protected the secrecy of our information better. One day General al-Samarra'i heard an officer say the word 'code.' He asked the officer what information he was talking about. Al-Samarra'i told the officer that this time he would not be punished, but next time he would have his tongue cut off. The letter 'g' is the first letter of the word for 'code' in Arabic; al-Samarra'i eliminated the letter from our vocabulary. One officer said, 'What if someone's name starts with the letter "g," like Gamil?' The general said, 'Call him Kamel.' That is how seriously he was about information security.

Woods: How well did Saddam understand all that military intelligence had done, while you were doing it?

Tarfa: If the Iranians had known we were breaking their codes, they would have changed their systems. Therefore, Saddam did not honor us with medals during the war in the way he honored others. He waited until after the war so people would not wonder why we were being honored and given medals. [Saddam understood the value of what we had done.] That is why our project was called the Mohammed Project. If it were not for our work, the Iranians would have reached Baghdad. That is how important our work was.

Murray: This discussion helps to explain why Iran, with its many advantages, was rarely able to take advantage of its strengths.

Woods: The codes you were able to break were predominantly those of the Iranian conventional forces, but you said you had problems with their other forces.

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[123] The Crypto T450 was an early 1970s-era, fully electronic, online text encryption device manufactured by the Swiss company Crypto AG.

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Tarfa: That is because the codes were only used by the conventional forces. The other forces did not use codes. When the *Pasdaran* joined the regular forces in the field, the regular army provided their logistics to the front without any encrypted message traffic. Because of this we knew the new units must be either *Pasdaran* or *Basij*, which was a second, less well-equipped militia. Because they did not have defensive units at the front, troops were brought in two days before the attack. Air photography would show unusual movements, holes for new defense locations, or tents in the rear areas. We would tell our troops to look for red, green, or yellow flags. We knew that anyone wearing a green headband was a Revolutionary Guard. After the attack, we could verify the identity of the troops once we had prisoners.

Murray: It seems as if by 1986 Saddam had grown dependent on signals intelligence. However, at Fao there was no signals intelligence. A similar thing happened at the 'Battle of the Bulge' in December 1944. The tactical intelligence said that the Germans were coming through the Ardennes, but there was no signals intelligence because the Germans sent no messages.

Tarfa: We sent official intelligence reports based on decodes regarding enemy intentions that did not include Fao. Therefore, the Iraqi high command did not think Iran would attack Fao. When we finally incorporated intelligence that suggested Fao was part of Iran's plan, General Mahmoudi Shahin rejected the finding. We tried to go around the intelligence directorate so that Saddam would read the report. We created an intelligence status report, separate from the official intelligence report. However, Saddam's command and army command failed to read the intelligence status report; they focused on the official intelligence report. We added the finding regarding Fao to the official intelligence report to avoid being blamed for missing it, but our superiors disregarded the intelligence. We received daily tactical intelligence reports from the 26th and 15th Divisions. They mentioned increasing numbers of boats and pontoons on the other side the Shatt al-Arab. I underlined these reports in red because I considered them important. When General Wafiq al-Samarra'i returned to head military intelligence, he asked, 'You underlined this. Why didn't they work this lead accordingly?' With the Iranian prisoner (the frogman), we had confirmed Iranian intentions. The problem was that we did not receive sufficient information through code breaking, so no one believed our intelligence. The only SIGINT we received said that troops would relocate from the north of Khorramshahr at night.

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Murray: If there had been five or six messages, would it have been easier to overturn the disbelief of your superiors? The great irony here is that the lack of professionalism within the *Pasdaran* made for a difficult intelligence problem.

Tarfa: We had an intelligence problem with the Revolutionary Guard.

Woods: Were you able to successfully tap land lines?

Tarfa: Yes, there was a project called al-Faruq. We sent a deep reconnaissance unit between the Iranian units, where there were some field telephones. Cables cannot be listened to in the air because they are not wireless, but we could monitor cables from a short distance – using our magnetized equipment. We listened to calls between Iranian troops through wiretaps; we only gathered tactical information that way, but it was still useful.

Woods: Were you able to tap into the command-level communications?

Tarfa: As you know, Khomeini did not use telephones, but we monitored the communications between the Iranian ministry of foreign affairs and the Iranian embassies around the world, because they were using the same machine as the military. We would intercept the information from the Iranian embassies in Turkey, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and any instructions from the ministry of foreign affairs to the embassies. We sent this information to the intelligence service to be analyzed. For example, when the Taliban had control in Mazar-e-Sharif, [in 1998] we had this information. We even followed up on Iranian operations beyond Iran. We exposed Iranian sources in Iraq through the embassy. Iran continued to use the T450 at least until the Americans occupied Iraq in 2003.

Woods: Did Iran know that their T450 has been compromised?

Tarfa: Yes, because many of the Iraqi Shi'as who worked with us at the time are now working with the current Iranian government.

Murray: We now know every major power involved in World War II was reading some, if not all, of the major codes of both their enemies and their allies. The Swiss T450 machine was from that era. It is a bit shocking that Iran continued using this machine into 2003.

Tarfa: Iran periodically updated the T450 machine. Every time they updated it, we would have problems for a several weeks, but then we would crack the code again. It still needs human thinking and analysis, which is more important than raw information. For me, knowledge is more important than information. Today, information is everywhere and easy to obtain because of the Internet. The Iranian regime cannot block the

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dissemination of information regarding what is happening in Iran today because of the Internet.

Woods: Is there anything else about Iraqi intelligence operations during the war we should include, but have not yet discussed?

Tarfa: No one could have imagined three people doing all of this work at the beginning of the war. No one could have imagined 10,000 Iranian messages being intercepted, from which we would analyze 400–500 and destroy the rest due to lack of time. Intelligence work is complementary. It includes the engineers in charge of wires, the technical people who intercept the information, the officers in charge of mathematics behind code breaking, the translators, and the analysts. It was a big job. We had lots of people working with us. When the Iranian enemy initially attacked, the intelligence officers in charge were happy because they had been proven correct. This happened three times, but each time it was at the expense of tens of thousands of dead and wounded Iraqis. I had many problems with Wafiq al-Samarra'i, who was my teacher and my friend. I believed we should try to abort enemy attacks in Iran before they crossed our borders and attacked us. We often specified the time of an attack. Had we used the air force and artillery against enemy concentrations, we could have aborted most of the Iranian attacks. This is my belief. I would have considered this a success from an intelligence standpoint. It is not success merely to predict a given attack and watch it unfold as predicted. Everyone was waiting for Saddam to say, 'Good for you. You did a good job. You were truthful.' I was disappointed and frustrated by such an attitude. That is why I provided information directly to Saddam, so that he could take preventative measures immediately. It is a problem when someone is selfish and wants others to tell him he is competent and knowledgeable at the expense of Iraqi lives. I was not the only one who was frustrated—there were others who helped produce the intelligence who were also frustrated. We hoped our efforts to produce this intelligence would be used to strike the enemy.

Murray: By 1987, how many people were working in this intelligence effort: intercepting, deciphering, translating, analyzing?

Tarfa: There were more than 2,500 people. Project 858, called al-Hadi, was established by a Japanese company.[124] It had the equipment to intercept anything in the air. We sent more

[124] The al-Hadi Project (Project 858) was the Iraqi intelligence organization responsible for collecting, translating, and unscrambling SIGINT and electronic intelligence, then disseminating information to relevant intelligence agencies. Boyne, "Southwest Asia, inside Iraq's Security Network - Part Two."

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than 1,500 people to Japan to learn how to use this equipment. We had translators for different languages throughout the world. Our only problem was with the Farsi language, because we did not know whom we could trust. There were many Farsi speakers, but it was always a question of trust. I was the one whom the command trusted the most.

Woods: Who was supporting Iran during the Iran-Iraq War?

Tarfa: North Korea, China, Libya, El Salvador, and Syria.

Murray: How much aid was Assad giving to the Iranians?

Tarfa: Assad had a personal grudge with Saddam over a personal issue. He wanted to retaliate against Saddam, so he helped the Iranians. The rest of the world, including the United States and the Soviets, was helping Iraq, which proves that we were right.

Woods: Did the Soviets provide satellite imagery or other intelligence?

Tarfa: No. The Americans provided us with more imagery than the Soviets. The Soviets helped us by providing code-breaking experts in return for an Iranian F-4 aircraft that had crash-landed and was only slightly damaged. We needed their help to solve some technical problems.

Woods: What was your reaction to the news that the United States had sold missiles to Iran in order to get its hostages released?

Tarfa: We realize that the US Government placed its interests before its principles. The Iranian threat was great in the area. US interests required that it reinstate relations with the current Iranian regime at the expense of its allies. We do not deserve what happened to us in Iraq. The Iranians should have suffered this tragedy because they were more of a threat to the region that Saddam. Saddam's biggest mistake was invading Kuwait—he had no ambitions in other countries—whereas Iran desired the entire Middle East region for itself. If you ask me today whether I prefer relations with an Islamic Iran or Israel, I would choose Israel, because I do not believe Israel has ambitions outside its own borders. There is no Israeli threat in the Middle East. The threat comes from Iran. I tell my friends, who were commanders in the army, that, if matters required us now to go to Tel Aviv, we should go to Tel Aviv, but I am not waiting to go to Tehran and shake hands with the Iranians after watching all the killing they committed in our country. My

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two brothers-in-law were killed by the Mahdi Army.[125] Five of my cousins were also killed by the militias. Israel did not enter Iraq or attack any of my family. More than 1,000,000 Iraqis have been killed by the Iranians since 1980. The rest were killed by Americans.

Woods: At the beginning of our discussion, you mentioned that you did not believe Iran would last five more years. How do you expect it to fall apart? What do you expect to happen next?

Tarfa: An estimated five years is too generous. If the world imposed on Iran the same sanctions it previously imposed on Iraq, the Iranian people would kill anyone wearing a turban, [the conservative clergy]. Life would stop completely in Iran. This is why I say five years is too much. I give them one year.

Murray: What type of regime do you see replacing it? Would it be secular?

Tarfa: It would be more liberal and more secular than the shah's regime. I know the Iranian people. I lived there three years, have many Iranian friends, and read around 30–40 pages daily on Iran in Farsi. Mark my words, if there were sanctions, the present regime would collapse, without the use of missiles and without aircraft.

Woods: Given what you have said, if that were true, it must be good news long-term for Iraq, because those Iraqis that feel loyalty to Iran would have no regime to which to turn.

Tarfa: For a snake, its strength is in its head. Once you cut off its head, it will be dead. If just a tail remained in Iraq or Yemen, or if the current Iranian regime collapsed, then Hezbollah in Lebanon would end. Al-Maliki pretends to support America, but in fact he supports Iran. Talabani told General Wafiq al-Samarra'i that Qasim Sulemani, the commander of the Revolutionary Guard, wanted al-Maliki out. The others replied, 'Al-Maliki is a good man and we need him.' This happened six months ago. If Qasim wants al-Maliki, then al-Maliki must work in support of Iran.

Murray: What would happen to al-Maliki's support if the Iranian regime collapsed?

Tarfa: If the Iranian regime ended, all of the regional problems would be solved. The Taliban is supported by Iran. Al-Qaeda is currently in Iran. Many of Usama bin Laden's followers are in Iran.

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[125] The Madhi Army is a paramilitary force established by the Shi'a cleric Muqtada al-Sadr after the US invasion of Iraq in 2003.

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Woods: Who are the true nationalist leaders in Iraq now?

Tarfa: The Iraqi Army that fought Iran, whether they are Shi'a, Sunni, Christian, Turkish, etc. These are the ones capable of preserving nationalism, as well as American and Western interests in Iraq. The stronger and more liberal Iraq is, the more it will be favored by the region, America, and its allies. The weaker Iraq is the more Sunni and Shi'a extremists will expand.

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Interview:
Major General (ret) Aladdin Hussein Makki Khamas

Conducted by Kevin Woods, Williamson Murray and Elizabeth Nathan
11 November 2009 ▪ Cairo, Egypt

Major General (ret) Aladdin Hussein Makki Khamas[126] *graduated from the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst in 1957. Subsequently, he received an MA in military science from the Iraqi Staff College at Bakr University in 1966, a law degree from al-Mustansiriyah University in 1973, and an MA in international law from the University of Baghdad in 1981. General Makki joined the Iraqi Army in 1958 and rose through the ranks. His foreign military training includes courses at the British School of Infantry, the British Armor School, and the US Army's Armor Center. General Makki was named Commandant of the Iraqi Armor School in 1970. Subsequently, he taught at and was vice president of Bakr University for Higher Military Studies. During the Iran-Iraq War, General Makki served as chief of staff of the III Corps (1981–84) and then deputy and finally director of the ministry of defense's directorate of combat development (1984–88). In 1988, he became the president of the Bakr University for Higher Military Studies and retired from the Iraqi Army in 1989.*

Section 9: Personal Background ▪ Saddam's Personality ▪ Senior Leadership ▪ Events Leading to Iran-Iraq War ▪ Preparations for Iran-Iraq War

Woods: Could you please start by providing us with your background?

Makki: I was trained in the West, but spent my career in the Iraqi military. I was not a Ba'athist. I don't believe in mixing politics with the military. My father was minister of defense during the old regime, the monarchy, and before that he was chief of staff of the

[126] Referred to during the transcripts as Makki.

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army. I entered the military voluntarily, for love of the military life and my country. When I started, Iraq was a small flower opening up. We had good relations with everyone.

I am a pilot, not by profession but by hobby, from the time I was small. My father did not want me to become a pilot. He said I would kill myself. I said I wanted to be a doctor, but he said no because he said I was a donkey. So I said I would go into the military. He said, 'Well done, my son!' In the military, I was always the first in my class.

Murray: Thucydides said that war brings out the worst in people; civil wars are the worst of all kinds of war. General Hamdani described Saddam as a Bedouin with no vision of the future or understanding of the world. Can you speak to these points?

Makki: Saddam was a Bedouin until his death. He governed with a Bedouin mentality. He would willingly kill his brother or his son, if he thought that action would further his career or position. He was clever, but not polished. Saddam even suspected those who liked him. We in Iraq were unfortunate to have him and the revolutions that followed the overthrow of the monarchy. Maybe our history made us like this, or maybe God meant us to be like this, but we did not deserve this fate. The common Iraqi may deserve such a fate, but not educated Iraqis. We are intelligent people; we are doctors, engineers, etc., and we are now all over the world. My grandson is in the United States, living in Pittsburgh. He plans to return to Egypt to continue his education. My youngest son is a plastic surgeon and is emigrating to Canada. Saddam drove the educated people out of Iraq. They deserved a better fate.

The Shi'a clergy are the worst. Their turbans block their thinking. I am a Sunni, but General Kabi is Shi'a. The Shi'a clergy are extremists. We say Islam is a middle path; it takes the easy, logical, human way. Terrorism is against our nature. We have tolerated other religions since the time of the Prophet Mohammed. For example, the Prophet married a Christian.

Woods: General, in our discussion today there are three general themes we are interested in:

First, we would like you to describe the high-level discussions and plans relating to the war with Iran. But more specifically, we would like to understand the dynamics of decision-making in the run-up to and the early part of the war.

Second, we would like to hear about your time as chief of staff of III Corps. Please help us understand the nature of the long war, and the transition from a short war to a long war.

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Third, we are interested in your time as the director of combat development. We would like to better understand how an Arab military, under the immense pressures of war, adapted to difficult circumstances. As you know, there are few examples of Arab armies adapting to the extent, speed, or scale that Iraq's Army managed in the mid-1980s.

And of course we are interested in any other insights into the Iraq-Iraq War that you feel might be important.

Murray: So, let us begin with a discussion of the dynamics of decision-making in the early part of the war, including the run-up to the war and the decisions leading to war. At times, Saddam understood the value of professionals and experts. Can you describe some of his senior military advisors and their roles?

Makki: I am the eldest general you will interview; the other generals were lower-ranking than I, except for Lieutenant General Shanshal. General Shanshal had the worst effect on Iraq's Army. His mentality was that of a 1940s officer. He was a good staff officer and instructor, but a bad commander. He refused to accept any responsibility.

Later, when Lieutenant General Adnan Khairallah (who was my student in the staff college and the defense minister), would ask Shanshal for advice, Shanshal's replies made no sense. In his capacity as chief of staff, he refused all responsibility for any of his decisions. He formed committees to study problems and accepted their decisions. Saddam loved him because he never said no. Saddam kept him as chief of staff for a long time—from 1969 to 1982. After that he became minister of state for military affairs for a period of time. He then became minister of defense after Adnan's death.

Here is a typical story about Shanshal during his time as chief of staff. He was an old man, and we looked up to him as a father. He was a good man, but when he was angry he could become nasty. At the battle east of Basra, the III Corps commander was General Salah al-Qadhi. As a younger officer he had helped make the revolution of 1968 possible.[127] Not surprisingly, he became a high ranking member of the Ba'athist Party. Although he was a young man, he was promoted rapidly to corps command in time for this battle. When things did not go well, he was executed. Saddam did not hesitate to cut off his head. This story is but one of the tragedies that happened to the army. How is it that a lieutenant could be promoted to general and commander of a division? First, they

[127] The revolution of 1968, incited by corruption within Abdul Salam Arif's regime, Kurdish disturbances in the north, Iraq's failure to support Arab countries during the 1967 Six-Day War, and Arif's subservience to Gamal Nasser, resulted in the overthrow of the government by the Iraqi Army. Al-Qadhi's role in the revolution was not clear. Makki noted that he was an officer in the tank regiment guarding the palace.

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made him divisional commander and then III Corps commander; he was responsible for the defense of Basra. He achieved his position because of his role in the 1968 Ba'ath Revolution and the fact that he was a good Ba'athist, not because of his ability.

I was then deputy president for Bakr Military University, but like all soldiers I wanted to participate in the war. We were all zealous; we admired Saddam and we wanted to go to the front. My superiors sent me as an attached staff officer.

When the Iranians launched major attacks in May/June 1982, the III Corps was unprepared, so a decision was made to withdraw. Before the decision to withdraw, the Iranians attacked the corps' southern sector. This left two divisions, the 5th Mechanized and 6th Armored, defending the corps' northern sector, but not under any pressure. These two divisions remained in the north away from the fighting. The right decision at the time would have been to use these divisions to attack and outflank the enemy attacking our forces in the south, thus catching them in the rear. If the III Corps had done that, the Iranian attack would have failed. Because of the rigid, old-school thinking that dominated the army at the time, no one believed such an offensive would work except for me and my colleague Mekkeh Mudad. General Shanshal was visiting the corps headquarters and he was surrounded by members of the military bureau of the Ba'ath Party. General al-Qadhi, the corps commander, looked upon General Shanshal as his father. General al-Qadhi asked him, 'What do you suggest I do with these two divisions? Shall I pull them back or attack with them?' General Shanshal replied, 'I don't know. You are the corps commander; you decide. I don't know.' My heart sank. A corps commander asking his superior what to do and this was the response! Poor General al-Qadhi knew they wanted him to withdraw. He asked, 'If I withdraw these divisions, where would I withdraw them to—the border line between Iraq and Iran, or behind it?' Shanshal again refused to make a decision: 'You will withdraw them to the place that provides security for the forces.' This was neither a command nor guidance. He refused to take responsibility for any decisions. That was Shanshal.

Woods: Why do you think he avoided responsibility?

Makki: Shanshal was a logistician; he was not a leader. He was a good officer and knew what to do. He just did not want to take responsibility. Unfortunately, people thought he was brilliant officer. He was a good man, but that does not mean he was a smart officer. He was the author of a 'school of thought' within the Iraqi military that refused to take responsibility.

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Murray: So Saddam was executing corps and division commanders. If the signal from the president was that you would be executed for a wrong decision, the solution was to make no decision.

Makki: We became more afraid of the commanders than the enemy.

Woods: Did you and your peers discuss the impact of Shanshal's approach?

Makki: We discussed it among ourselves, at least among those who had been educated in the West like myself.

Woods: So you knew things were going to get worse?

Makki: We knew it was going to get worse. This practice of committee-based decisions caused us to lose the Fao Peninsula in 1986. Everyone, especially Major General al-Khazraji, told the leadership the enemy would attack at Fao rather than Basra or al-Amara. The problem was that committees took too long to make decisions; we had lost Fao by the time it decided to act.

Woods: Could you discuss the people involved and the decision-making processes?

Makki: In 1980, the Iraqi Army had been fighting a counter-insurgency against the Kurds in the north for nearly 20 years. It is mountainous country. The army had, little by little, transitioned from fighting a traditional (conventional) war to fighting an insurgency: light armament, bunkers, patrols, etc. Discipline had deteriorated, because the soldiers remained in the same place. General al-Khazraji told me that in July 1980, two months before the war, the ministry of defense had held a conference. It asked the corps and division commanders to attend, including General al-Khazraji, who commanded the 7th Mountain Division at the time. Saddam was not at the meeting, but the minister of defense, General Adnan Khairallah, General Shanshal, and the deputy chief of staff for operations, Lieutenant General Jabar Asadi were in attendance. A question was raised at that conference about the army's preparedness for war. Everyone was thinking about Iran, its post-1979 threat, and defending against the Iranians. Everyone was anxious about the possibility of war. General al-Khazraji argued that the political situation made him think we would go to war, but that we would require two years to prepare and train. One year would be required to bring the troops up to the standards demanded of conventional war. A year would be needed to reorganize the army and raise the standards of discipline. In year two, we could focus on training, resupplying, and armaments. The attendees said he should not have said this. Afterwards, his superiors

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ordered him to return to his command and begin training. No one mentioned we were going to war with Iran right away. Later, General al-Khazraji told me he heard the war had begun on the radio.

Murray: At this point it seems there were two factors influencing military thought in the Iraqi Army. First, Saddam promoted junior officers to corps commander positions. Second, Iraq stopped sending officers to be trained in other countries in 1968 because the Ba'ath Party did not want officers exposed to different ideas and methods. Can you speak about these two propositions?

Makki: We must distinguish between Bakr's era and Saddam's era. Bakr was an experienced general. He was calmer than Saddam. During his era, we did not feel the pressure of politics and ideology as strongly as we did under Saddam. Admittedly, both placed party loyalists in key positions and purged the army, but Bakr did not do it to the extreme that Saddam did. Bakr did not make junior officers into corps commanders, because he knew what command required. Saddam was never an officer, so he did not understand the needs of the military. I should also say that this was al-Khazraji's opinion.

I was a brigadier general when the Iran-Iraq War broke out. Those of us outside of the command never thought there would be a war. Lecturers from the intelligence service or the political bureau spoke about the Iranian revolution and Iran at Bakr Military University and the war colleges. We thought such lectures merely represented general information sessions.

Immediately before the war, the Iranians began seriously provoking Iraq. Saddam and the shah had signed the Algiers Accord in 1975. That treaty had turned over half of the Shatt al-Arab waterway to Iran, and the other half to Iraq. Saddam accepted this, despite the loss of territory, so that Iran would stop aiding the Kurds in the north. The Kurdish revolution subsequently collapsed. However, the Iranians never adhered to the agreement. After the Iranian revolution, the Iranians started firing artillery along the border. At the time, I was the general staff intelligence officer [G2] in the 6th Armored Division, stationed in Ba'quba, which was responsible for the defense of the middle sector of the Iraqi-Iranian border. I was also acting as the personnel/administrative officer for the general staff [G1] because we did not have one. Iranians were actually bombarding the area in the months immediately before the conflict. In 1968–69, there had also been clashes in this area. In 1979–80, these clashes intensified. People along the border started to evacuate the region. My driver lived near the border and he moved his

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family, because they were being bombarded by Iranian artillery. Iran was provoking Iraq.

Woods: Why did the Iranian regime become increasingly provocative immediately after the revolution? Do you think Khomeini's regime was pushing the idea of an external threat to strengthen itself, or was unable to control the militias?

Makki: First, the 1979 Iranian revolution was an ideological, Shi'a Islamic revolution. The Shi'a regime under Khomeini believed in the *wilayat al-faqi,* 'the rule of the top clergy'. Both Khomeini and Saddam thought in absolutes. Second, the Iranians announced publicly they wanted to export the revolution. With reason, Saddam was worried they were trying to export it across the border into Iraq. There are many Shi'as in Iraq. Khomeini believed he could convert the Iraqi Shi'as to his way of thinking. However, Iraqi Shi'as did not believe in the rule of the clergy. We did not yet have this schism between Sunnis and Shi'as. Once the Iranian regime started down this path, what else could the Iraqi regime do?

Murray: But why would Iran provoke a conventional military response? To me, this is confusing.

Makki: Iraq felt threatened, as if someone had entered the room with a contagious deadly disease. This was not the first time Iran had threatened us. It had threatened Iraq during my childhood. My father commanded the 3rd Division against the shah's army. I had the same feeling [of existential threat] both times. Iran and Iraq have never had good relations. We fear Iran will one day overthrow us, so we take precautions. We believe they will not rest until they occupy Iraq.

There were clashes along the border because the villages were intermingled. Shepherds went back and forth across the border. It is a border area between two backward countries. Both sides only understand the language of force. To further aggravate matters, the border is not well-delineated. The local Iranian commanders would sometimes conduct these artillery strikes on their own, if they felt they had the advantage and would be supported by Tehran. Perhaps they received instructions from the Iranian government. This provocation scared the Iraqi regime, then led by Saddam and his arrogant, self-confident supporters.

Murray: Now [in 2009] the Iranian regime seems threatened by the modernization of its own people.

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Makki: That is how your democratic, educated mind sees things in Iran. It is through this door that one can destabilize Iran. But for Iraq, Iran was always an external threat. This is why we were uneasy. The Iranian regime believed they needed to crush anyone who threatened its rule.

Murray: There is an interesting parallel here. During World War II, Hitler did not have to tell people what to do. They had their own understanding of what he wanted and acted on it. Do you think a similar thing was going on with these border commanders? Were they reacting to rhetoric from Tehran?

Makki: Local commanders would not do such things completely on their own. They need orders handed down through the chain of command.

Murray: The shah's army was fleeing and the chain of command was breaking down. The local commanders were not getting any direction except from the rhetoric. Is it possible they were acting in line with what they thought Khomeini wanted?

Makki: As early as 4 September, the Iranians showed signs of going to war. They closed the border and airspace; they indicated they were going to invade Iraq. The rhetoric got stronger. They were clearly looking for signs of war. Thus, we had to make a pre-emptive attack. According to international law, the bombardment of Iraqi villages by Iran, the closing of the border, and the blocking of Iraq's access to the sea by closing the Shatt al-Arab were acts of war. From a military point of view, the threat was real so we launched pre-emptive air strikes. The air strikes were a failure. On the second day, Iranian aircraft bombarded us. I do not know why the Iraqi Air Force did not practice. Many bad things happened in the army, but it was not always because of Saddam. Who was the air force commander? He was a good attack pilot, but he was also Saddam's political appointee. This is how the war started and why the war did not finish in a two-week blitzkrieg.

Woods: In 1981, you moved on from the university to chief of staff of III Corps.

Makki: Yes, as a professional officer I wanted to participate in the war, as everyone did. Morale was high. Everybody supported Saddam because we were supporting Iraq. We supported him as an idea, not as a person. In a crisis, people rally around their commander. At the time, everyone supported Saddam and thought of him as a national hero. I was eager to go to the front and participate. Although I was an intellectual within the army, I did not want to remain at bureau staff position. I wanted to gain experience like General Dwight Eisenhower did in his time. He was on the army staff in early 1942 and wanted to participate directly in the fighting, but his superiors did not want him

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assigned to the field, because he had never led a company in combat. So how was he to lead armies? As a result, they doubted his ability to lead an army. I have always had this example in my mind, and so I wanted to go and participate in the war. Before becoming chief of staff, I was attached to the III Corps headquarters to gain experience. I was a distinguished armor corps officer and had commanded the armor school. But they wanted me to go to the III Corps and gain experience.

Murray: What was your view of the defeats of 1981 and early 1982 in terms of the Iranian offensives launched against the Iraqi Army that drove its forces out of the territories Iraq had seized?

Makki: Our commanders were not versed in the use of armor in a war. The people who led the armor units were either infantry officers or old school British-style armor officers. The British use armor in cooperation with the infantry. British tanks move slowly; top speed of the British Centurion was only 22 miles per hour.[128] The modern employment of armor utilizes its speed, firepower, and shock effect. The Iraqi Army did not embrace this approach until late in the war. We placed the mechanized and tank divisions in static defensive positions, which is not how one should utilize armor units. That is why Iraq failed to hold onto its objectives early in the war. Moreover, the Iraqi Army was a small force of 12 divisions, whereas the front was enormous.

Section 10: Battle of Allahu Akbar Hill ▪ First Battle of Basra (1982) ▪ Battle at al-Amara ▪ Second Battle of Basra (1984) ▪ Battles at Abadan and Ahvaz (1980) ▪ Battle at Susangard (1980)

Woods: You mentioned earlier that the operational experience of this group of seven officers was based on fighting Kurds in the mountains. They were used to small-scale operations that utilized natural defenses. This battle configuration should have been a natural, given that experience.

Makki: When we began fighting a conventional war with the Iranians, all of our mistakes coalesced to produce this failure. I applied many times for a post on the front. I even offered to take a regiment. The response of my superiors was that I had not yet

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[128] The Centurion was the primary British main battle tank of the post-World War II era and has spawned several derivatives that are still in service.

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commanded a regiment or a even battalion even though I was a brigadier general. I asked to be made a brigade commander. I thought, 'I'll do anything, just give me a command.' Many people did not want me to be a commander because I speak my mind. Sometimes I speak, and I do not care what the results are. I know better than them. If I had been a Ba'athist, who knows, I might have been chief of staff, but Saddam would probably have executed me for speaking my mind.

As I said, before becoming chief of staff of the III Corps in 1981, I was attached to the III Corps headquarters. The III Corps had suffered a major defeat. I went to reconnoiter the corps' area of responsibility. I saw a lot of bad things and found a lot of gaps and deficiencies, which I reported to the corps commander who had been my instructor at the staff college. For example, a tank battalion of the 26th Brigade in the al-Mansor Tank Regiment of the 9th Armored Division, tasked with defending Allahu Akbar Hill, had no infantry support.[129] This was because after we advanced 40 or 50 kilometers into Iran, we had halted our attack. Instead of regrouping and redeploying into a defensive posture, we were told to defend the spot where we had stopped even though there were gaps between the units. My report stated that our defense was weak because we were not in a defensive posture. We should regroup and reorganize. I stated that we should close the gaps between our forces, emplace mine fields, and bring up reserves. The corps commander did not agree. He and his chief replied, 'Why should we relinquish ground that we have gained through blood?' I replied, 'Sir, you taught me the principle of defense and how to deploy in the staff college. Why don't you agree?' He then said, 'Not only do I not agree, the chief of staff does not agree, and Saddam does not agree.' The Iranians attacked the battalion at night. We did not have night vision goggles, so they could not see a thing. They killed everyone: only nine Iraqis survived.[130]

Murray: Your corps commander was really saying that Saddam and the army chief of staff did not agree. You are looking up rather than down.

Makki: You are right, but if the army chief of staff had agreed with me, he could have convinced Saddam. One time when we were discussing desertions to the Iranian side because our morale was low, General al-Nu'aimi, the III Corps commander, told General Shanshal that we should re-group our forces, relinquish indefensible positions, and raise morale. Shanshal replied, "I will not tell him. *You* tell him, *you* are the corps

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[129] Allahu Akbar Hill run norteast toward Khafajiyeh/Susangard.

[130] This was at the beginning of the summer in 1981, before the Battle at Bostan.

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commander." The chief of staff of the army did not want to tell the supreme commander that troop morale was low. How could a corps commander convince Saddam to regroup? One learned not to say anything about such matters.

Woods: What was the response to the destruction of the tank battalion defending Allahu Akbar Hill?

Makki: The battalion was destroyed immediately in front of the headquarters in al-Amara. Only nine survived. As an officer attached to corps headquarters, I was sent to assess the situation. I found nine dirty soldiers with long beards and unpolished shoes. As an officer, I know that soldiers looking like that have received no visits from their superior officers. Morale was obviously rock bottom. The soldiers told me that they had been defending the hill with no infantry support when Iranian infantry burst on them throwing hand grenades; they had not seen any officers. I understood the situation because Tala al-Duri never bothered to leave his division headquarters.

Saddam visited the hill with the staff from his high command. They sat in the middle of the area and ate lunch with the corps commander and army chief of staff. I was anxious to make myself known to Saddam because he did not know me. When he asked what had happened, the commanders told him the story without any of the details regarding why it had happened (for example, the bad tactics and low morale). I felt compelled to speak because you have to tell the commander-in-chief the whole truth. I considered Saddam like a god, and one should not lie to God, right? I raised my hand, introduced myself, and asked permission to tell him what I had seen. I told him the tank regiment was alone on a hill. I added that every soldier knows that tanks cannot defend without infantry. I told him that I had met with the nine survivors and deduced that they had wretched morale. There was silence; nobody spoke.

Saddam returned to Bagdad. The corps commander lectured me for speaking the truth. I told him he had taught me everything I knew, when we were at staff college and that I did not understand why he was angry. He left, and I returned to the corps headquarters. General Na'ima al-Mihyawi, the chief of staff of the corps as well as the commander of the staff college, was a friend of mine. He told me the commander-in-chief was also angry with me. Saddam had said, 'This officer speaks about our forces and that Iranian infantry had overwhelmed our tanks.' I was sad, because I wanted Saddam to be happy with me. I had done nothing except speak the truth, which can hurt, but is essential.

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I told the political officer responsible for the III Corps, who later became deputy minister of the interior, 'You are my friend and you were at the meeting. Please tell me why Saddam is cross with me. Why doesn't he like me?' He replied, 'Saddam Hussein never said this about you. I was with him. Just wait and you will see what happens.' The next day, I was in the corps headquarters, when Saddam returned to meet with staff officers. I was not allowed in the meeting because I talked. I waited in the corridor. When Saddam came out, he put his arm around my shoulder, walked me down the hallway, shook my hand, and walked away. Afterwards an order was issued that only the commander can respond to questions posed by the commander-in-chief. Staff officers were not allowed to participate in discussions. This is why people had not told Saddam the truth at the beginning of the war. One reason why Saddam was considered a tyrant was because he refused to hear the truth.

Woods: Were the division, brigade, and corps commanders afraid this would reflect poorly on their performance? From your story it appears that Saddam appreciated knowing about weak performance and poor deployments.

Makki: They were all ignorant political officers. His clique was not made up of professional officers. This type of circle of [yes men] supporters exists in every dictatorship.

Woods: Do you have any other illustrations of Saddam's interactions with his military?

Makki: I have one other incident that is worth mentioning to illustrate how he was and how he changed later. After the battle at Allahu Akbar Hill, but before the 1982 battle of Basra, there was a major battle near al-Amara where three Iraqi divisions were routed: the 1st Mechanized Division and the 9th and 10th Armored Divisions of the [III] Corps. The 1st Mechanized Division still consisted of only infantry. They were defending the area of Bostan in the front of al-Amara near the al-Shib pass. There is a small river called the Busatin River that ran into the Hawizeh Marsh. The Iranians routed the Iraqi divisions and took many prisoners. All the generals went south to al-Amara. Saddam was left alone in Baghdad with the chief of staff in charge of the presidential palace [Tariq Aziz]. Saddam was rarely alone, so he asked Tariq to bring him some first-class officers to discuss the situation at the front, which appeared to be deteriorating. This chief of staff had been my student at the staff college, so he asked me to come, as well as General Na'ima, commander of the staff college, and the deputy chief of staff for training. At the time, I was the deputy commander of Bakr University.

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I arrived late. Saddam sat at the head of a table with the others beside him. His face was tense and turning yellow, which it did when he was angry. I saluted and introduced myself. He told me to sit down. Tea was brought, but I wondered how I could drink, when I was worried about my safety. When Saddam was angry, he was completely unpredictable. He asked me, 'Do you know what happened?' I replied that I did not. I knew something was wrong, but not exactly what it was. General Na'ima briefed me using a situation map on the wall. 'The enemy came from here and attacked from this area. All of our forces have had to withdraw. We have taken a defensive position here.' He directed his hand to the Iraqi border. Saddam asked me what I thought. I replied, 'I do not know what to say but I will bring my expertise to fulfill your orders as best I can in accordance with your decisions.' Saddam asked if I had any other ideas. I asked him, 'Sir, do you want to maintain your defenses on the border or defend the border? Defenses on the border are one thing; defending the border is another thing. If you want to defend the border, then you should not stay in this location. You should move our forces forward to just inside Iranian territory.' Saddam opened his eyes and ears, and told me to continue. I discussed the principles of defense, and how forces should be deployed. 'What about in front of the position?' he asked. I replied, 'Sir, the main defensive position should be in this area approximately 10 kilometers inside Iran. A security area, where the screening and reconnaissance forces operate, should be placed in front of this defensive area. When the enemy comes, these forces will make the enemy deploy in order to gather information.' Saddam ordered his subordinates to do what I suggested and take up defensive positions 20 kilometers inside Iran. He had changed his orders without becoming angry. General Khairallah was near the catastrophe. No one had told him either. People were either afraid or did not understand the situation. Either way, they failed to tell Saddam. He would listen when he was provided good advice. General al-Khazraji made him change his mind many times. This incident underlined for me that Saddam would listen if you discussed an issue with him in a logical fashion. You just had to be careful.

Woods: This seems to be another example of you providing professional military expertise to the senior decision maker. How did Saddam's senior staff officers react to the change when they returned from the front?

Makki: They were pleased because it was the right thing to do.

Woods: There are several instances of Saddam's being told things he did not want to hear, but listening, if they made sense.

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Makki: Saddam may have been arrogant; he may have been strong-willed, but he was not a fool. Maybe he was a fool politically, such as when he invaded Kuwait, but when one talked to him in this way, at least one was doing one's duty. If he did not act on your advice, then the matter was his responsibility. So when I became chief of staff to the III Corps, the new corps commander asked me to come to his room. He said, 'General Makki, you are a good staff officer and I need a good chief of staff.' This was right after the loss of Khorramshahr.

As you know we lost Khorramshahr in June of 1982. The old commander of III Corps had been executed, while his chief of staff had been relieved. Poor General Salah al-Qadhi had been executed. The results would have been the same at Khorramshahr for any other commander. Nobody could have done anything in that situation because the deployment was bad, and the forces were ill-trained.

General Sa'adi became the new commander of the III Corps. He had been looking for a chief of staff, and he knew me well because I had been his teacher in the staff college. During the Kuwait crisis he became minister of defense. At present, he is in a prison, the poor man. He is a good and honest man; he was clever and courageous. *Wallahi*, I feel sorry for him. Even when he bought a box of tissue, he paid for it out of his own pocket. He never put his hand out for anything from the state. He is clever and courageous. Anyway, General Sa'adi became corps commander and told me he was looking for a chief of staff. However, before he told me he was looking for a chief of staff, General Na'ima became commander of the I Corps in the north and requested me also. Sa'adi asked with whom I preferred to work. I told him, 'As long as you ask for me, I will accept the position. You are harder than Na'ima, but I know you and you are more competent. I will accept your position because you are right.' I started my duties as chief of staff the next day, because I was already there. The battle of Basra was brewing. The situation was tense. We did a reconnaissance of the front and reorganized and redeployed the defense. The 10th Armored Brigade arrived as a reserve. After my appointment, I employed all the military staff techniques that I had taught once upon a time. The first thing I did was a plan of maneuver, which I learned in France (*projet de manoeuvre*).[131] I asked the G2 for intelligence. Then, I wrote the plan of maneuver with my own hand, because I knew my staff did not know how to write such a plan. I gave a series of lectures because my staff officers were not war college graduates. I gave the plan of maneuver to the corps commander, who approved it. The next day I explained it to the divisional commanders

[131] A plan of maneuver is another term for an operations plan.

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and the staff officers. Thus, we were prepared for defensive operations against an Iranian attack.

That evening I received intelligence that the enemy was moving his forces and that they had started arriving at the front. Izzat al-Duri visited the corps headquarters to raise our morale. General Sa'adi ordered me to come to his office, where al-Duri asked me what we should do. I replied, 'We have to move the 10th Armored Brigade across the Shatt al-Arab into Iran immediately, because once the situation develops we will not have time.' Once the 10th Armored Brigade crossed on the second day, the Iranian assault started. There was a major battle, and there was a great amount of dust. The first attack was near Fish Lake. They used thousands of people in a way that we had never seen before: waves of civilians with light personal armor, wearing skirts and *dishdashara*. They had been told by their clergy that *Najaf* or *Karbala* was there. Karbala is a sacred place to the Shi'a. If you die after seeing *Karbala*, you will go to heaven. I wonder why Khomeini did not come to see *Karbala* with them. The attack stopped at Fish Lake, because we moved the 10th Armored Brigade into the area. This battle continued from 14 to 31 July. The Iranians repeated this tactic in five battles. This was the first battle of Basra.

Murray: What is your estimate of the Iranian losses?

Makki: I do not know. Their losses were immense. They kept launching the same attack five straight times: go in with human waves and get killed. One could see corpses strewn all over the battlefield between the tanks. When the Iranians reached the banks of Fish Lake, it was muddy, and their Chieftain tanks got stuck in the mud. The Iranians either died or deserted their tanks. I think thousands of them died.

Woods: On the eve of battle, in your meeting with Izzat al-Duri, how good did you think your intelligence was about what the Iranians were about to do and how they were going to do it?

Makki: It was accurate. Our intelligence provided us with the times of attack and the enemy's approach.

Murray: Was intelligence good in both a strategic and tactical sense?

Makki: I am speaking in a tactical sense about the intelligence.

Murray: In a strategic sense, you knew that the main Iranian effort was coming.

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Makki: Yes, it was obvious and right in front of us. We did not need any special information to warn us. The Iranian attack came immediately after Khorramshahr; it was only logical for them to attack us east of Basra.

Murray: Did they do any deception operations or employ operational security?

Makki: The Iranians had announced they were going to attack and occupy Basra and push on to Karbala. After the attack they became slightly better about operational security. The battle of Sharq Basra was over by the end of July. We reorganized and cleared the battlefield of dead and wounded. We collected abandoned Iranian tanks and equipment and sent the booty on to Baghdad in convoys so everyone could see the spoils of war. There was a great exhibition in Baghdad of the tanks captured by III Corps. Morale rose. The sector remained quiet for two years until the second battle of Basra, just north of Majnun Island, at the beginning of 1984. At the time, the Iranian plan was ingenious.

Woods: Do you think the ingenious battle plan for the second battle of Basra was based in part on lessons learned from the first battle?

Makki: Maybe. They took us by surprise. The Iranians employed a massive deception plan. We all thought they would attack either the Shatt al-Arab, the Fao Peninsula, the III Corps position, or al-Amara. We never thought they would cross the Hawizeh Marsh; it seemed impassible, because it was 40 kilometers wide.

Murray: What unit took the brunt of the Iranians attack during the 1984 Majnun attack?[132]

Makki: The Iranians attacked the area between III and IV Corps—which was a clever tactic—to attack the boundary line between the two corps. Neither corps thought it was responsible for the area. Beside, the Iranians had attacked from a location that no one considered possible, because we knew they did not have bridges or amphibious equipment. I was chief of staff, and it never crossed my mind that they would cross in that area.

Woods: You probably had it mapped as 'no-go' terrain.

Makki: Quite right. We positioned a minimum number of the second-rate troops from the Popular Army there. We thought the Iranians might send reconnaissance patrols at night and that troops in the area would be able to handle it.

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[132] Majnun Island (which comprises two islands) is located in the middle of the Hawizeh Marsh. The oil field in the south is 13 kilometers long and 10 kilometers narrowing to 7 kilometers wide (180 square kilometers). The northern field is 6 by 8 kilometers (53 square kilometers).

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Murray: The advantage Iraq had in the long-term was that any major offensive across this terrain might succeed initially, but could not be supported logistically in the long term. Does this come down to amateurs who failed to think of the logistical implications?

Makki: True. That was the nature of the area: they could cross and attack, but could not exploit any advantage they gained. I do not know if they were amateurs, but their objectives were greater than their resources.

Murray: This attack also occurred in a time of year when you were not expecting it due to the weather, is that correct?

Makki: The marsh was flooded with high water. We would see strips of foam floating on the marsh in the morning. When joined together, these strips of foam created a bridge, about 30 kilometers long. It was an ingenious plan. They brought infantry across the bridge. The Iranians appeared behind us on the road connecting al-Qurnah and al-Amara. The next day they appeared in al-Qurnah on the northwest side of the border.

It was an ingenious plan. They crossed Hawizeh Marsh, appeared in al-Qurnah, and cut the road between Basra and al-Amara. The waves of the attack consisted of large numbers of *Pasdaran* and *Basij* infantry. The Iranians reached Majnun Island. After the second battle of Basra, this area was reinforced and transformed it into a command called 'The East of Dijla Command,' which evolved into a divisional command.[133]

Murray: Majnun Island had rich oil deposits, correct?

Makki: The whole area is floating on oil. Majnun Island has some of the richest oil fields in the area. The Iranians had now seized it. They also reached al-Qurnah. The new commander of the III Corps, Lieutenant General Ma'ahir Adbul Rashid, was busy fighting the battle.[134] His new chief of staff, Major General Fawzi Hamid al-Ali, was in the advance headquarters.[135] I was in the main headquarters near the Shatt al-Arab. The political officer responsible for the southern area, Abdul Ghani Abdul Raful, called and asked me what to do now that the enemy had arrived in al-Qurnah. He wanted military

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[133] The East of Dijla (Tigris) Operatiosl Command [later designated at the VIth Corps] was formed after the second battle of Basra and had command and control over the divisions deployed in the region west of Hawizeh Marsh, east of the Tigris, and between al-Amara and al-Qurnah. Responsibility for this area was not well-defined initially because it fell between the III Corps in Basra and the IV Corps in al-Amara.

[134] Makki added as an aside that "Rashid was from Tikrit and related to Saddam. His daughter later married Uday. He was considered a good commander but was a very nasty person. He cursed everyone."

[135] Makki added that after the war, Al-Ali, a Shi'a, defected to India, when sent there for a course on national defense.

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help, and I told him I would act, but I could not reach any of the seven officers. We had a reconnaissance regiment as a reserve and the 6th Armored Division had a mechanized battalion in reserve. I ordered the corps headquarters' G2 to lead them to al-Qurnah and contain the enemy in that area until morning. The reconnaissance regiment, the mechanized battalion, and the corps G2 arrived and stopped the enemy's advance. In the morning, I ordered army aviation, the 2nd Wing, which served the III and IV Corps, to prepare helicopters and fixed wing aircraft to provide air support. The situation stabilized and the corps commander thanked me, but sent me back to Baghdad a few days later because I talked too much.

During battle it was the habit for the commanders and staff officers not to share situational information immediately. When the general commanding was asked for a situation report, he would not tell the truth if news were bad. The 6th Armored Division was defending south of Majnun. I told general command that the situation was stable. The next morning Saddam gave me a car, because he was pleased with my report. If the situation were bad, I was not supposed to tell general command. Unfortunately, the situation deteriorated over night. I reported the situation. The divisional commander asked me what to do because his tanks were surrounded on Majnun, and he could not pull them out. I briefed the corps commander, and he said the division should pull out of Majnun and get on dry land. I told the commander of the division to pull back to dry land. I told him to destroy any tanks stuck in the marsh. Saddam was angry that the news went from good to bad. The corps commander would have kept this information until the battle was over. He was not mad at me, but he asked me politely to return to Baghdad. This is all I know about the second battle of Basra. The Iranians crossed, did everything they could, but they lost the battle. Everything was restored to its original state. In 1988, all the Iranians who remained in Majnun were killed in the second battle for control of the island.

Woods: General, you mentioned during the break that you wanted to give us some additional context to the initial campaign of 1980.

Makki: Before I speak about the start of hostilities on 22 September 1980, we should look at the battleground, or theater of operations. In terms of geography, Iraq lies on a plain and Iran consists of mountains. To reach Iraq, Iranians have to travel through certain mountain passes: Bytaq Pass near Qasr-e-Shirin and Dezful in the southern sector. When I was at military college, we studied how best to defend Iraq against aggression from the Soviet Union based on the Baghdad Pact plans signed in 1956 between Iraq, Iran,

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Pakistan, [Turkey], and the United Kingdom. The pact represented a contingency plan in the event that Soviet forces came through Iran to attack Iraq's oilfields. It assumed the Soviets would pass through the Bytaq and Dezful Passes. The plan called for closing these two passes to prevent hostile forces entering Iraq from the east. This plan should have helped inform our plans, when the Iraqi Army attacked Iran.

Every campaign should have clear political objectives, upon which clear strategic concepts, strategic, operational, and tactical planning rest. This is a well-known military principle.

The attack into Iran should have been a short one, like a blitzkrieg, because Iraq did not have the resources for a long campaign. We knew that we were not prepared to fight a long war, and that Iran had a greater capacity in terms of human resources, wealth, and land mass. Logically, if Iraq fought a war against Iran it needed to be short, such as when Israel fought the Six-Day War.[136] Judging from the pre-emptive air strike and attack, this was the intention of Iraq's command.

We had 9 divisions to cover the 9 roads that connect Iraq and Iran.[137] Only one division advanced along each road. There was no main axis of advance and no secondary axis of advance. Although the literature on the war suggests the main axis was in the south and the secondary axis was in the center, this was broadly defined. In fact, we were weak everywhere.

Murray: Are you saying the Iraqi Army wandered into Iran without focus?

Makki: Quite right. The objectives of the attack were not what they should have been. Taking the Bytaq Pass in the Zagros should have been one of the main objectives. The area command should have received an airborne brigade to capture the pass. The 4th [Infantry], 6th, and 12th Armored Divisions should have been tasked with reinforcing the paratroopers to hold the pass. Had we closed the Bytaq Pass, the other battles in the Serbil Zehab Plain would not have happened. The Iranians could not have done anything if we could have controlled this terrain.

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[136] After numerous border clashes, Israel fought the Six-Day War (5–10 June 1967) with neighboring states Egypt, Jordan, and Syria. At its conclusion, Israel gained control of the Sinai Peninsula, the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and the Golan Heights.

[137] According to Makki, Iraq had 10 divisions plus two so-called combat force commands (large brigades with staff and supporting commands of a division) on the eve of war. These two combat commands were converted to divisions (the 11th Infantry and 12th Armored) sometime during the invasion. In total, 9 Iraqi divisions participated in the invasion of Iran while 3 remained in Iraq as a strategic reserve.

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Woods: If Iraq had held Bytaq Pass, Iran would not have been able to move reinforcements out of Iranian Kurdistan, move logistics out of Tehran, or evacuate their casualties.

Murray: They would have had to go 700 miles around.

Makki: Yes, especially when you take into account that after the Iranian revolution, the Iranian Army was in shambles. There was nothing left of it. Such a maneuver could not have happened because the organizational and logistical support would not have been there.

Between the center and southern sectors lies Dezful Pass, where transport and oil pipelines from Hawaz converge. Dezful should also have represented a major objective. Only one armored division was allotted to the attack on Dezful, even though the 3rd Armored and 9th Armored and 5th Mechanized Divisions were all in the neighboring area. Iraq could have secured Dezful, if the army command had allotted those divisions to that objective. But as I said, these divisions were divided up, one on each road. There was one division for each road in the upper part of the southern sector.

The main objective in the southern sector should have been to take the city of Ahvaz. We should have assigned the 5th Mechanized, the 3rd Armored, and the 9th Armored Divisions to take Ahvaz. If we'd taken that town, the whole surrounding area would have fallen to us. Instead, the high command assigned 3rd Armored Division, a single division, to take Khorramshahr. Moreover, it was a bad decision to task an armored division to take a port city. With an infantry division we could have seized the port easily, and the whole area would have fallen by itself. But who thinks this way strategically? This type of planning requires a competent strategic thinker and, in Iraq, a brave soldier. General al-Khazraji could have done this type of thinking; he would have ended the war early.

Murray: To accomplish this, wouldn't Shanshal have had to make a decision?

Makki: He did not even have to make a decision; he had only to make a suggestion. He did not make the suggestion because, if he had been wrong, he would have been blamed. Thus, the strategic plan was weak. Between 22 and 28 September 1980, we advanced into Iran. In the south, Ahvaz, approximately 80 kilometers inside the Iranian border, was our deepest penetration. The 5th Mechanized Division reached the outskirts of Ahvaz but was not sufficiently strong to occupy the town. The people of Ahvaz did not welcome the Iraqi forces because they were waiting to see who would win the war. The 5th Mechanized Division waited for reinforcements before attacking. Those never arrived. While the 5th Mechanized Division waited for reinforcements, the Iranians built dams and flooded the

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area between it and Ahvaz. In the southern sector, the 3rd Armored Division received the order to occupy Khorramshahr. Its troops got bogged down after they started advancing, so they requested infantry reinforcements. The 33rd Special Forces Brigade arrived to support them. They fought there for a month but only managed to take half the city. They could not [completely] occupy the far side of Khorramshahr near the Karun River.

Attempting to take Abadan, along the Shatt al-Arab, from behind was another mistake. After partially taking Khorramshahr, the 3rd Armored Division was ordered to take Abadan. The 23rd Infantry Brigade was ordered to cross the Karun River and take Abadan from the rear. The original plan called for the 7th Infantry Division, commanded by General al-Khazraji, to take Abadan from the north. He left the middle sector and started training his soldiers to cross the river. After a month they were needed again in the middle sector near Diyala and as-Sa'Diyah. The high command forgot the operation to cross the Karun River.

Woods: The 7th Infantry Division was probably the right force to plan and conduct the river crossing.

Makki: The 23rd Brigade was given the 3rd Armored Division after the 7th Infantry Division was pulled back to the middle sector. The 7th Division should have crossed under the general command's direction, but it was under the control of the corps commander. When it pulled back, the task was left to the corps commander, who supported the operation halfheartedly. The 23rd Brigade crossed the muddy area easily, but could not continue, so it had to be pulled back. The Abadan Peninsula was occupied by the 6th Armored Brigade.

Think about this. We occupied part of the Abadan Peninsula, which was surrounded by an embankment, with an armored brigade. Three armored regiments and one mechanized battalion besieged Abadan by fire. The road to Abadan was impassable and the Iranians could not fire on it. The 6th Armored Brigade remained in Abadan for more than a year. Luckily, we were able to pull its troops back when the Iranians launched their major offensive in 1982.

Woods: Please continue the narrative of the battles at Abadan and Ahvaz.

Makki: The Iraqi Army had to stop fighting after six days because it ran out of supplies. The Iraqi high command and Saddam believed Iran would negotiate when the fighting stopped; however, Iran refused Iraq's request for negotiations. Iraq then had to go on the defensive, because our resources were depleted along the 400–600km front. We only had 11 divisions, and we also needed to consider internal security as well as the Kurds in the

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north. In fact, we were fighting two wars: one against the Kurds and the other against Iran. It was a peculiar situation. So the Iraqi offensive stopped 40 kilometers inside the Iranian border, and we went over to the defensive. The winter, which is the rainy season, arrived and the muddy ground made it difficult to move for tanks, armored cars, and other heavy vehicles.

Murray: In early January, in these rainy conditions, the Iranians launched a major offensive for political reasons. We know that Bani al-Sadr was hoping for a military victory so that he could gain traction against the religious fanatics. Can you speak about that offensive?

Makki: The Susangard offensive was a great victory for our forces. The 92nd Iranian Armored Division with American M-60A1 and British Chieftain tanks attacked. Bani al-Sadr had confidence in the traditional Iranian Armed Forces. They attacked the northern sector where Iraq's 9th Armored Division held the line near Susangard. The Iranians attacked the center of the 9th Armored Division's line. The center brigade pulled back, while its flanking brigades maintained their position. It became a killing zone, or a bulge inside that position. When the Iranians advanced, the brigades on the left and right side closed in on them. At this time, the 10th Iraqi Armored Brigade, commanded by Colonel Mahmoud Shukr Shahin, was in the sector near Maysan. They had T-72 tanks and redeployed rapidly. It was a battle of maneuver. The 10th Armored Brigade was under the control of the corps commander, General Isma'il Taya [Dhiyab al-Nu'aimi].

Woods: I want to make sure I understand. There were three brigades of the 9th Armored Division on the line. The Iranian 92nd attacked the center, which pulled back. Where did the 10th Armored Brigade enter the battle?

Makki: When the Iranians pushed into this bulge, the 10th Armored Brigade attacked the right rear flank of the Iranians. The enemy was moving on their tracks without transporters and attacked on the move. The Iranians had no flank protection; their tanks were inside the killing zone. The T-62s [tanks] were highly effective. The attacking force moved swiftly; the tanks fired on the move using the tank's accurate stabilizers and range-finders, and the brigade was well-trained.

Murray: It sounds like Colonel Shukashaheen was an effective brigade commander. In 1986 he refused to pass along the information that the Iranians might attack Fao up to Saddam Hussein. Can you comment on that?

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Makki: He was a good division commander, but he had no intelligence background. He could not do the job of the director of intelligence. He refused to pass along the information in order to please the new chief of staff.

Let's get back to the battle at Susangard. Some of the Iranians deserted their tanks while their engines were still running. We put the tanks we captured in an exhibition area in Baghdad. Our armor sabot round pierced a Chieftain on one side and the round went through the front armor and came out the backside.

At this time the British approached us to sell us tanks. Salah Askar, director of armor, told me that when the British called and offered to sell him Chieftains he had remarked, 'We don't want your stupid tanks!'

Section 11: Adaptation in Iraqi Military ▪ Combat Development Directorate ▪ Military Training

Woods: In 1984, you were transferred back to Baghdad. Adaptation and change in any military organization is difficult, especially in the midst of a fight for survival. Within the political and strategic context of Iraq, how and why did the Iraqi Army decided to change, what were its priorities, and how did you bring together the physical and intellectual capabilities to enhance adaption? What is your perspective on the army's combat developments from 1984 onward?

Makki: I will answer this not only as the director of the Combat Development Directorate (CDD), which was similar to your Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC), but also as an officer who served as a chief of staff to a corps. The CDD had many sections: one for education and military magazines, another for field manuals and pamphlets, another for translations, and another for doctrine development. They put me in this directorate because I had been a successful chief of staff, and in this new position I would pose no threat. Moreover, it had become apparent that Iraq was involved in a long war that would require all its resources.

Woods: Did this directorate [CDD] exist before the Iran-Iraq War?

Makki: Yes. But after me, they were never able to find another director for the CDD. They brought in four or five different officers who could not handle the job, so it was rolled into the directorate of training. I was responsible for military doctrine. When I came to the directorate, it was chaos. I found formal military manuals from Russia, America, and Egypt. There were contradictions among them. The officers in the CDD could not

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reconcile the differences. The first thing I did was publish a manual describing our military doctrine. All other manuals were then written in harmony with this main pamphlet. I collected concepts from many armies, but we learned toward following American doctrine because we found it to be logical, detailed, and easy to apply.

Murray: Were you aware of the major doctrinal arguments going on in the United States?

Makki: Yes, we were. In 1985 or 1986, I published a manual called *Application of Force* and gave it the number 'one' because the army's manuals were numbered officially. They were all signed by the chief of staff himself. It was not a small manual, because the army's leaders wanted to put everything into it.

Murray: We have a recording of Saddam in 1985 saying that military doctrine is important, and that he wanted to read every doctrinal manual that was going to be published.

Makki: He had good intentions regarding military doctrine. He spoke well of it. I sent every pamphlet, magazine, and publication to all of the commanders, from Saddam himself to the lowest rank. Before I became Director of CDD, Saddam came to the staff college to listen to a military lecture about doctrine. He also spoke at that lecture regarding his thoughts about military doctrine. At the time, there were two schools of thought regarding military doctrine: Eastern (Soviet) and Western. The Eastern school argued that military doctrine was equivalent to strategy in that it should affect the entire state. The Western school of thought argued that doctrine is not equal to strategy. I myself supported the latter approach over the argument that military doctrine should encompass the whole state. Officers who studied in Egypt leaned towards the Eastern school of military doctrine, because Egypt had adopted Soviet doctrine. I adopted the other one because it was more logical.

Murray: So it goes back to your schooling.

Makki: Saddam did not interfere much. While I was director of CDD, I wanted to publish a strategic digest, similar to *Military Review*. We also translated articles from foreign military magazines. As I indicated, Shanshal followed the Eastern school of thought about strategy. Most of our high-ranking officers did not know about strategy at that time, because the war college and staff college had not focused on that subject. I wanted to educate higher ranking officers on strategy. I arranged to publish a strategic magazine. For the first issue, I wrote an article on politics and the army: why the armed forces in the West are not allowed to mix in politics, as opposed to why armed forces in totalitarian regimes, communist regimes, and one-party states end up interfering in

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politics. After I published the article, Saddam read it, was impressed, and sent me a Mercedes. I earned this because I had written something.

Murray: I would have thought that Saddam would have been furious at such an article.

Makki: It explained why our army had become involved in politics from the earliest days. In principle, the army is an arm of the government. In a liberal democracy, the government is a political apparatus with a political ideology and theory which it applies. One day the leading principle is Republican, the next day it is Democratic. For such a government, the army must be transparent. A red government creates a red army; a green government creates a green army. The army is prohibited from having its own color. That is why the army is prohibited from participating in party politics in a liberal democracy. Totalitarian regimes, or regimes governed by one party do not allow other parties to control for leadership of the state. Their ideology influences anything. Thus, there appears to be little harm in covering the army in the color of the government. It will not change anything. The leaders may change, but the ideology will remain the same, so the army can have political officers and political organization.

Woods: Was the reason Saddam liked the article because it gave a theoretical basis to what he was doing?

Makki: Yes. I wanted to understand it, so I had to analyze it, and now I understand the reason. In the Eastern bloc, the minister of defense wears a military uniform, while in a Western democracy he is a civilian. He represents the idea that the armed forces should be under civilian, not military, control. It is dangerous for military forces to be under the direction of the military, because the military always thinks militarily. A military dictator is dangerous, because he will use the military easily, unlike civilians. Those of us within the military are not prepared to govern. Officers by their nature are not politicians. If I wanted to be a politician, I should leave the army. This is an important concept for a growing nation to understand. People must be educated to know this. I knew this reality because I studied.

Woods: So one of your innovations in your position at the CDD was to stimulate the army's intellectual side. You initiated this strategic magazine and these conversations. What else did you do?

Makki: After the publication of this pamphlet, I began organizing Iraqi military thought and strategy into categories. I emphasized the operational level of war as part of the curriculum. Before my time in office, the army did not recognize the operational level of

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war. Similar to the British, we recognized only the strategic and tactical levels. I published a manual that argued that the military engaged on four levels: strategic, operational, tactical, and logistic. Because it was clear, the new concept was adopted by the Iraqi military. I also wrote a history of the Iraqi Armed Forces.

Woods: I have seen an incomplete copy.

Makki: It is not yet complete. It has seven volumes. Book one is an introduction. Books two, three, and four are about the ground forces. Then, there are two books about the history of air forces and one book about the history of the navies. It would have been 30 volumes if I had possessed the time to finish. I published those seven volumes before leaving the CDD. It is unlikely that anyone else will write any more volumes in the series.

We also encouraged a return to foreign military education. The Iraqi military sent a number of officers abroad to India, America, Russia, etc., to take courses on operational level of military thought. We imported Russian and Egyptian books on the topic. Unofficially, we read histories on German operations during World War II. However, the most important books were American and British. The British had adopted the operational level. The Germans had used the term 'operational level' during World War II. It consisted of the operational cycle, fire and movement, and the task of the corps commander to concentrate fire, support, and logistics. This is how we were educated before we started teaching at the war college.

Murray: Do you think the study of operational art had an impact on the 1987 and 1988 successes?

Makki: Of course; there is no doubt. General al-Khazraji used the concept of the operational and strategic levels successfully. The efforts of each branch of the armed forces were successfully applied at the end of the war. However, the air force planned for itself, the navy planned for itself, and the army planned for itself. There was no joint planning.

Woods: Who do you think was your greatest adherent of the concept of operational art during the 1987 and 1988 campaigns? Who took it to heart the most?

Makki: General al-Khazraji. He is a first-rate commander. He was brave, intelligent, independent, and he knew what to do. I wish the Americans were on good terms with him, because someone like him could lead Iraq into the future. Of course, I like General Hamdani as well. I did not know him during the war, but I know him now and have read

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his book. He is a professional officer and has great combat experience. He refused to be a Ba'athist.

Woods: General Hamdani speaks highly of you. He refers to you as his real mentor, when it comes to thinking about the profession of arms. When I met him in 2003, he mentioned you as the individual who first made him think about his profession seriously.

Makki: I am glad to have disciples like Hamdani. Unfortunately, we are out of the military and no longer leading our armed forces. You know the Iraqi chief of staff; what kind of military man he is. He left the Iraqi Army either as a lieutenant or a captain and spent his time with the Peshmerga.[138] Now he is chief of staff. The rest of the Iraqi military leaders are like him. Please bring this to the attention of your people in Washington, who care about American interests in Iraq, unless it is in America's best interest for the Middle East to be Iran's Middle East. If you lose Iraq, you will lose the whole Middle East to Iran. We know that the American occupation will eventually end, but we are afraid of an Iranian occupation. Since the beginning of the war, people would urge me to take a stand against the American occupation; however, I replied, 'Let the Americans be. If we are intelligent, we can be their friends and benefit from them. Be afraid of the Iranians. If they come, they will stay for a long time, and perhaps even change our religion.' You came and that is what happened. Iraq is now a failed state with enormous corruption throughout the government. In six years, the United States with all its money has not been able to restore electricity to Iraq. In two months, without outside help, Saddam restored electricity to Iraq in 1991. This is why people are looking back to Saddam. I am sorry to say this.

Murray: Who picked you for the position of director of the Combat Development Directorate?

Makki: I was a logical choice, because my seniors in the military did not want to give me an operational command. They thought I was too dangerous, or did not understand operations.

They were my students, but they would not give me an operational command. They did not want to kick me out of the military, but they also did not want to promote me. They wanted to keep me here in education. They thought I was an academic, and all I could do was study. When the war ended, they made me president of Bakr University and kicked me out of the army. The victorious army now had good officers like al-Khazraji and

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[138] Referring to General Babaker Shawket B. Zebari, chief of staff, Iraqi Joint Forces. He left the Iraq Army after three years to fight with the Kurds in their rebellion against Iraqi control in the mid-1970s and eventually rose to a senior position in the Kurdish Democratic Party.

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Hamdani. They did not need people like me. I was 52 years old and had never made it to the rank of lieutenant general, as I should have. That affected my morale, my pay, and my pension. Who picked me? Saddam picked me to be the president of Bakr University. They brought him three names, and he picked me.

Woods: In the four years you were at the CDD, can you describe how you interacted with senior military leaders? Did you meet with them? Was there any real discussion at the higher levels?

Makki: I was on good terms with senior leaders as most had been my students. I could visit them easily. They liked me, and we exchanged ideas. Beginning in 1986, the director of training or I would visit the scenes of recent battles to assess what had occurred. The army chief of staff always asked for our battle reports. I had no trouble at all with the senior leader. My publications were being read by everybody. In 1987, I was directly tasked by Saddam to put together a manual regarding defense against the Hellfire missiles fired from [American] Apache helicopters.

In early 1986, the late Adnan Khairallah was considering Iraq's future if Israel acquired the Apache helicopter. He said to me, 'The Apache fires 32 "fire-and-forget" Hellfire rockets. These rockets have a 6-kilometer range. If one helicopter targets an armored regiment while outside our anti-aircraft defense range, one salvo could take out a whole regiment. What can we do about it?' I started to think about this issue. One day in late 1986 or early 1987, in a meeting of the general command, Saddam asked me how we could counter the Hellfire if Israel acquired them. He said, 'We do not have a weapon to counter them. Go write me a manual.' I established a joint committee from departments dealing with arms, anti-aircraft weapons, engineering, electronic warfare, and tanks. I asked each one question. I used their answers to form a concept, which I explained in the manual. This is a good pamphlet. I expected Saddam to be pleased and give me another car, but he never did. The chief of staff presiding at the meeting gave me an Iraqi 9mm pistol called a Tariq.

Woods: I have not seen your pamphlet.

Makki: It is called How to Confront the Apache Model Helicopters.

Murray: After the battles in 1987 and 1988, the army produced doctrinal lessons-learned. When did they begin making these lessons-learned assessments?

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Makki: After each major battle, there was a lessons-learned conference to analyze what happened. This process started at the beginning of the war, but became more important after 1982.

Woods: So you and the director of training would go into the battlefield, conduct interviews, look at the terrain, and then host the conference?

Makki: Right. We also asked for a staff officer from each division and corps to write an analysis after each battle. The lessons-learned were deduced from the reports at the conference. Some lessons-learned were incorporated into a training pamphlet, while others were sent directly to industry to improve the effectiveness of weapons.

Woods: Were all of the senior command on board with the process of reading analysis and operations research?

Makki: They did not understand it at the beginning of the conflict. By the second half of the war, no one could become a brigade commander without passing the staff college and war college exams. This new requirement took effect in 1984. You had to study operational research, management, etc., in order to pass the examination. That is how a new generation of commanders was created.

Woods: So it took a few years, but had it started to pay off by 1986?

Makki: It needed time. General al-Khazraji was a rare mix: He was a good Ba'athist, but also a good, brave, professional officer who was not afraid of consequences, even though he did not graduate from the war college. In 1983, he wrote a paper entitled *How to Regain the Initiative and Finish the War Against Iran*, which he sent to Saddam, but Tala al-Duri, the secretary of the high command, read it superficially and then took it to Saddam, who also read it superficially. Saddam still was not well educated in military practices in 1983. Because al-Duri did not support the report, it was returned to al-Khazraji and had no impact. He was told it was a good strategic analysis, but nothing could be done, because the enemy had the advantage. General al-Khazraji was a divisional commander then and became a corps commander only later. He was busy fighting Kurds and Iranians, and he did not have time to write. He was a speaker, not a writer, so he asked for my help. I met with him and recorded what he said on the topic.

When al-Khazraji became chief of staff in 1987, he asked Saddam, 'Sir, do remember when I wrote the paper on regaining the initiative in 1983? We have to finish the war now because Iraq is on the brink of collapse. We have used up all our resources and our

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people—some of whom have been in the army for ten years. We cannot stand this war for even one more year. We must regain the initiative and finish the conflict.' Saddam did not remember the paper, so al-Khazraji provided another copy and said, 'Please read this paper again.' Saddam read the paper again and began discussing the ideas with him. Of course, the situation was different in 1987 than in 1983 in terms of equipment and army size on our side and the Iranian side. Saddam asked al-Khazraji to rewrite the paper according to the new correlation of forces, which he did. After reading the paper, Saddam held a conference in 1987. Unfortunately, I was not there.

The new study's main points were that the Iraqi Army must return to the correct principles of war and must apply what the manuals say about fighting—namely, how to hold defensive positions. At that time, our defensive positions were manned based on old methods of fighting: a high embankment representing the front line, with a static and linear defense comprising a company, with a battalion or brigade slightly to the rear. There was no depth or distance between the soldiers and other positions. When the Iranians attacked, they hit the brigade headquarters in the first assault. This prevented Iraqi infantry from defending optimally, because the company or battalion commanders could not issue orders.

Murray: So you moved to the German-style defense in depth?

Makki: First, we had to return to the principles of defense in order to minimize the number of forces holding defensive positions as well as strengthen our defense. Second, we pulled a brigade out of the front line from each armored and mechanized division and half of the infantry divisions for training on defensive operations, while the rest of the forces held the front line. The Republican Guard provided a competent strategic reserve in case anything happened.

Within six months the retrained troops were back in the front and had significantly improved their tactical ability. Their equipment was better, their training better, their battlefield effectiveness better. As a result, morale improved, and our soldiers became better troops. When they returned to the front, the other half pulled off the front lines for training on offensive operations. Not all the brigade commanders agreed to this, but commanders who did not agree with the approach found themselves replaced. General Jamal (the III Corps Commander) was replaced with General Salah Abboud. General Isma'il Tail al-Raimi, the commander of the I Special Corps, which consisted of all recalled retired officers and NCOs [non-commissioned officers], was replaced by

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General Sa'ad Jabbouri, who later became minister of defense. General Shawket Ahmed Atta of the II Corps was also replaced.

Murray: Saddam seems to have identified those who were not paying attention to the new training approach; he was discovering precisely those generals who would not pay attention to the new doctrinal methods of doing business. They had to go. How did Saddam ensure that the replacements would adopt to the doctrinal changes? Were they good divisional commanders?

Makki: He knew them. He submitted their names. He replaced them, not only because they were unwilling to be retrained, but also because they did not adopt this doctrine. He knew he could not win the war with these people. That is why he brought in al-Khazraji. Before this, al-Khazraji had achieved many considerable victories in his various commands. He had proven himself.

Murray: Were any divisional commanders replaced?

Makki: No divisional commanders were changed. Most were good at the time. The corps commanders were replaced, because they were responsible for training. Divisional commanders were replaced during training, if they were incapable of changing. The corps commanders were the important ones.

Seventy-five brigades organized into fifteen divisions and three corps were involved in the Anfal operation against the Kurdish insurgency in the mountains.[139] There were 200 battalions of Kurdish volunteers. The air force and the army aviation worked on 95 routes of operation in the mountains at the same time. Each battalion force had three parts: the main direction, right wing, and left wing. Headquarters coordinated the movement of 400,000 troops with 2000 tanks, the air force, and army aviation. It was a very good army. If the Americans in Tora Bora had done the same, they would have crushed the insurgents and killed bin Laden. The Taliban is like the Kurds. You cannot fight insurgency with technology: you need men. If you sent a large army into Afghanistan for one year, you would crush all the insurgents.

Woods: A question in most Western histories of this war revolves around when and why Saddam allowed the Iraqi Army to professionalize? The general narrative says that after

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[139] According to some sources, the Anfal operation, in which chemical weapons were employed against Kurdish insurgents in Iraqi Kurdistan, resulted in the destruction of more than 4,000 villages and the genocide of the resident Kurdish population. HRW, "Genocide in Iraq–the Anfal Campaign against the Kurds," Human Rights Watch, http://www.hrw.org/reports/1993/iraqanfal/.

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the problems of experienced between 1982 and 1983, Iraq's professional generals asked Saddam to allow them to take charge. By 1984, Saddam supported the operational approach of the professional generals. Is this how it was perceived within the Iraqi military?

Makki: Do you really believe anyone would go to Saddam and say, 'We're going to lose unless we do this?' This view is wrong. As the war progressed, Saddam began to take the lead personally. He was also receiving a considerable military education. He started to understand more and more.

Woods: As General Mattis would say, Saddam was filling body bags during those first few years, and with every bag he filled, he got a little smarter.[140]

Makki: Yes he did learn. In 1984, his military education was not what it was when the war started in 1980. Moreover, the corps commanders in 1984 were better than those in 1980. The corps commanders still lacked initiative and authority to do what they needed to do, but they were more experienced. General Abdul Jawad Dhannoun replaced General Shanshal as army chief of staff in late 1982 or early 1983.[141] Before that he had been the director of intelligence. In this work, he was successful. He impressed Saddam, but he was a young officer. He graduated from the staff college as a captain and was promoted to battalion commander of the 5th Infantry Brigade. He led the 5th Infantry Brigade during the 1973 War in the Golan Heights.[142] He occupied Mt. Hermon with his 5th Infantry Brigade, though the Israelis eventually won the area back. After that, he became commander of the 4th Infantry Division. When the [Iran-Iraq] War broke out, he became director of intelligence. He was successful in all these posts, so he became army chief of staff. But Abdul Jawad Dhannoun was of the Shanshal school; he was always forming committees, late in making decisions, and a classic infantry officer. He was a good man and a friend of mine. However, he was willing to take responsibility to a greater extent than Shanshal.

Dhannoun was army chief of staff until early 1987 or late 1986. After the catastrophe of Fao in 1986, he was not replaced immediately, but eventually by General Saladin Aziz.

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[140] General James N. Mattis, USMC, commander of 1st Marine Division, email to a professor at the National Defense University, early 2003. Permission for use granted by General Mattis.

[141] Other sources indicate Dhannoun became chief of the general staff in early 1984.

[142] Also known as the Yom Kippur War, the Ramadan War, and the October War, the 1973 War in the Golan Heights began when Egypt and Syria entered Israeli-held Sinai Peninsula and Golan Heights, originally acquired during the Six-Day War, on 6 October.

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Aziz was an officer from the old Iraqi Royal Army. He studied in the United States. He is considered an intellectual, a clever and able administrator, but was an untried commander. In the Royal Army, he was military secretary for the Baghdad Pact. He was also an instructor in the staff college, but before that, I do not know. He is an old man. When he retired, he was a division commander. Afterwards, he became director of Iraqi naval ports in Basra, as a civilian.

Woods: What had General Jawad Dhannoun done to be fired?

Makki: Dhannoun was sacked during the battles of Jasim River, near Basra. Saddam had asked Dhannoun why Iraq was losing the fighting along the Jasim River. Dhannoun had replied something along the lines of, 'How can I work when you are changing people without telling me?' Saddam did not like the answer and replaced him. Changing the army chief of staff was not easy. Saddam looked right, left, and then asked Shanshal whom he should pick. He wanted a good officer, who knew the right procedures of the army and was intelligent. Shanshal said that he should make Aziz the army chief of staff. Aziz got the call.

Woods: How old was Aziz at the time?

Makki: I do not know. He was told, 'You are now army chief of staff.' He did not have any military clothes. He went to Baghdad, and they promoted him from major general to four-star general and sent him to the front immediately. He asked for help from people he knew, like me. I was in the CDD at the time. Aziz sent for me and the directors of training and transport. He asked us for a situation report. We told him that the situation was delicate. The war was grinding to a standstill. They were bringing brigades from the north, which had only done patrol work and counterinsurgency in the mountains for the last several years to fight in the south. Before reaching the front line, entire brigades would disappear because of the mortar fire and machine gun fire. We lost a lot of soldiers in these battles.

Woods: So General Aziz was showing up in the midst of this. How long had Aziz been retired when he was named army chief of staff?

Makki: Aziz had been retired since 1978 or 1979. He was trying to figure out what he could do to turn things around. We suggested that he train reinforcements for at least one week, examine the army's weaponry to ensure they were not rusting. Thus, we started to train the brigades and reinforcements to the southern sector for one week: Day 1 was inspection of arms, Day 2 was checking equipment, Day 3 was training on offense and

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attack, Day 4 was live fire; and on Day 5, we sent them into battle. This was how it was until the great battle ground itself to a halt.

Basra was about to be lost when Aziz arrived. Aziz was placed on the retirement list about three months after the battle. The deputy chief of staff for operations, Sabit Sultan, was demoted to his old rank of brigadier general and made a brigade commander. Can you imagine such management of armed forces?

Murray: Saddam was obviously annoyed.

Makki: And this man was his relative.

Murray: After the Jasim battles, the retirement of Aziz, and the demotion of Sultan, Saddam turned to al-Khazraji. How did Saddam know al-Khazraji was any good?

Makki: He knew him.

Murray: What was al-Khazraji doing at the time?

Makki: He had commanded the I Corps twice in the north. Saddam knew al-Khazraji well, because he was a good Ba'athist, and because he had annoyed Saddam in the past. One time, al-Khazraji kicked the political officer out of a meeting, because he had spoken while al-Khazraji was issuing orders. Al-Khazraji had exploded and told him, 'When I talk, you must stop and listen.' Then he told his political officer to get out. This action represented an insult to the party. The officer wanted al-Khazraji to be demoted or retired. Saddam had considered it, but had stopped short. Instead, Saddam transferred him to the CDD about a month or two after I arrived. He regained command of I Corps later.

He then became chief of staff. His appointment represented a major change. To ensure that training was according to his orders, he sent staff officers from general headquarters to each corps headquarters. Training began with discipline and drills, followed by weapons training, maneuver training, attack training, and defense training. Competitions were held between the units. Al-Khazraji would judge the competitions and award prizes. Training in the army started to improve little by little. Training for re-taking Fao Peninsula began in earnest at this point. We created training grounds with the same physical features as Fao, so the forces would be familiar with the terrain before operations began.

Murray: The Iranians had suffered such huge casualties in those 1987 battles that they were incapable of taking the offensive for the rest of 1987. That, of course, helped.

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Makki: Yes, they had huge numbers of casualties. But the Iranians had the advantage in terms of population size. We could not afford to lose any more Iraqis.

Murray: By 1988, Iran had lost so many people that morale was dropping. Neither country could afford to suffer a great defeat by 1988.

Makki: No, I do not think this is comparable because Iraq suffered a massive defeat in 1991, and yet Saddam's regime did not collapse.

Murray: Well, the Shi'a revolt came pretty close.

Makki: Whatever. This was not a revolution. The Iranian *Basij* came into Iraq, but only a few Iraqi Shi'as revolted. That is why the Americans were wise to allow our gunships to crush that revolution at the time.

Section 12: Chemical Weapons ▪ NCO Corps ▪ Iranian Operations and Tactics ▪ Saddam's Personality

Woods: I want to talk about the use of chemicals during the war. What was your understanding regarding the logic, timing, and placement in the deployment of chemical weapons? What do you think the lessons were for the professional Iraqi military about their use in deployment? What is your perspective?

Makki: I do not know if you will believe me or not, but I do not know anything about the use of chemical weapons during the war. We did not use them in my sector, the southern sector. I have never seen chemical weapons used in front of me or read an order deploying their use. They may have been employed in the northern sector, where I did not work. You can ask General Abousi, because the air force might have used them. I do not believe the use of chemical weapons is humane. They are prohibited by international law. I have a degree in international law and know it is against international law to use chemical weapons. I have no firsthand experience, but I know that the Iranians also used them.

Murray: We have captured documents that describe the limited use of chemical weapons in 1983 and 1984. The first major use was the counter-attack at Fao in February 1986. The weapons turned out to be pretty ineffective because the ground was muddy. The chemical shells and bombs basically buried themselves.

Makki: Any bomb would sink in the mud, which would render its burst ineffective.

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Murray: This would suggest that the use of chemical weapons was an issue Saddam considered strictly "need-to-know". It is interesting that chemical weapons did not impact army's doctrinal writings and combat development.

Makki: We did not include best practices regarding chemical weapons in our pamphlets, because that information was restricted. Our pamphlets were for the entire army. I remember no pamphlets about chemical weapons. Perhaps the chemical directorate wrote one, but I do not know.

Woods: We were told that the Iraqi military, organized more along Eastern European principles, did not depend heavily on its NCOs. It was more dependent on junior officers for tactical operations. The Iraqi Army was officer-led and officer-driven. Is that characterization true, is that changing, or did it change?

Makki: That characterization is true. We relied more heavily on officers than on NCOs. There are reasons for this. The Iraqi Royal Army started in 1921. It was well-organized and modeled after the British Army. The NCOs were capable and trustworthy; the officers were well-trained. The army began losing its NCO corps, little by little after the Revolution of 1958. The mettle of the Iraqi soldier deteriorated over time. When the army started to expand in the early 1980s, the importance of NCOs diminished and more emphasis was placed on the officer corps. Second, the moral fiber and level of education of the average Iraqi was not high. This is where the NCO corps came from. We could not trust them—not all of them, but most of them. As a result, the position of the NCO lost, little by little, its significance. Third, officers are better educated and more highly motivated. We had a saying: 'If you want something not to be achieved, give it to an NCO.' The status of NCOs was low, and they were not as highly regarded as they should have been. This was a bad thing of the Iraqi Army. Of course, we wanted to raise standards and have educated NCOs. The Non-Commissioned Officer School in Mosul existed even before the war, but it was not enough. We accepted educated people after completing primary school, but before they went to high school. Because we relied so heavily on our officers, our losses were much higher than any other army in the world.

Woods: Did the relatively low level of education among the NCOs act a limiting factor in the execution of maneuver warfare?

Makki: Yes. Because the truth is that the citizenry of a nation has to have a higher level of education in order to create a modern army, because a modern army is a scientific army. This was a problem for Iraq.

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Murray: Given the high losses within the officer corps, would an individual who turned out to be a good NCO be promoted to officer—what we call a battlefield commission?

Makki: Yes, because we needed them.

Woods: As the III Corps chief of staff and director of CDD, while studying the Iranian Army at the university, what did you learn about them? How did they develop during this period? What do you think they learned from this war? If you were an Iranian general sitting now in Tehran, what lessons did you take away from this period?

Makki: Let us first state the Iranian personality. The Iranians are persistent, stubborn people, a factor that makes them good fighters. They are obedient to their superiors. When they have good leaders, they can achieve great things. They are not afraid of death. Look at the human sacrifice they made over the course of the war. No army can achieve anything if its soldiers are disobedient or afraid of death. But they are also humans and have limits. When they came to their limit in 1988, they knew it and stopped fighting.

The Iranian leaders at present understand that religious zeal is not enough. They must have competent science, knowledge, planning, and logistics. In 1988, it was too late. They had lost so many lives, not just resources, that they lost their nerve. Our rockets hit their cities and our air superiority was demonstrated through the bombing campaigns as well. This combined with their massive casualties to destroy their will to fight.

Iranians are good at deceiving you and masterful at gaining time. If they want to do something, they will keep doing it unless you show them the 'red eye.'[143] They will only stop if you are serious with them. Iraq proposed six ceasefires before Iran would agree to one.

Woods: Do any operations stand out in your mind that demonstrated the unique capabilities Iran had? You said they used Styrofoam infantry bridges, for example. Are there other examples?

Makki: Another example is the taking of the Fao Peninsula. The route of the 1st Division in late 1981 was well planned.

Murray: They never solved the problem of how to exploit a tactical victory. The Iraqi Army understood that much better.

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[143] This term comes from an Arabic phrase that translates as you give the red eye to "people who don't do what they are told except the hard way."

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Makki: Not at that time. We only learned to exploit tactical victories in 1987.

Murray: The January 1981 victory over the 92nd Iranian Armored Division presented the Iraqi Army with a significant opportunity for exploitation. It could have taken Dezful, but the Iraqi forces remained on the defensive after destroying the Iranian attack.

Makki: No sir, I disagree. We did repel the Iranian attack, but an offensive required more forces. The Iraqi Army's expansion did not start until late 1981. At the beginning of the war, we had only 11 or 12 divisions; by the end of the war, we had 57 divisions. At the time of that battle, the Iraqi forces were still small in number. We were happy to repel that attack, but we did not have sufficient forces to pursue. Maybe we could have pushed the Iranians back a few kilometers, but no more than that. We needed logistics, artillery, and air support to proceed. We were not prepared to occupy a city and run its civilian government. A military cannot take a city or country without a government to run what it captures.

Murray: Saddam seemed unwilling to take any sort of insult. He had sent high emissaries to Khomeini before the war to request a reasonable agreement, only to be rejected with exquisite rudeness. Was there an element of revenge in Saddam's tactics?

Makki: This is a complex issue and was the result of the historical elements I have already talked about. Saddam was a mystery, but he was not all evil. I did not like him, but there were many good things about him. Unfortunately, the bad outweighed the good.

Nathan: Why did Saddam react positively to you? Was it your delivery, or because you were junior, or was it just luck that several times you could get through to him?

Makki: He responded positively because I spoke logically and I did not contradict him. I gave him logic and suggestions. I did not care whether he acted on my suggestions or not. Moreover, I was not tackling what he regarded as a vital issue. I was clarifying things that he was probably thinking over. I have the nature of an instructor. Sometimes I can convince people; sometimes I cannot. I am still trying to convince my wife to agree with what I say.

Woods: Are there any incidents or events—specifically from your time as chief of staff of the corps—that stand out in your mind and that would provide insight into the operating environment in the early 1980s?

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Makki: One time when I was chief of staff in the Basra area, Saddam called while General Sa'adi, the corps commander, was celebrating the Ramadan Eid with the troops.[144] Saddam knew I was not the commander and asked where General Sa'adi was. I replied that the general was celebrating Eid with the troops. I then took the initiative and asked Saddam how he was. To speak to Saddam was important because at that time, we all still loved him. Everybody thought he was a hero. Little by little, as he treated people harshly and began executing them, the truth revealed itself.

Murray: Except for those who stayed in his court.

Makki: Saddam gave gifts of land, houses, orchards, and citations for bravery. After being awarded three citations, you became a 'friend of Saddam Hussein.' This tradition was modeled after Napoleon's 'friends of Napoleon.' I had no citations so I never became a 'friend of Saddam Hussein.' Being a 'friend of Saddam' could help your child get into medical school or add points to your entrance scores if it was too low. This is how he looked after his people and friends.

Murray: It is much like a tribal chieftain.

Makki: Every Iraqi and every Arab thinks in terms of the tribe, because it is their heritage. If you want to understand Iraq, it is important to understand the nation's social heritage and what moves people. Iraqis are simple people. They can be moved by small things. The feeling of loyalty and friendship is one. If I feel you are my friend, I will sacrifice myself for you. If you lose my confidence, that feeling is lost. All Iraqis are tribal men; it was not just Saddam who thought this way. Americans do not understand this. They think that if we kiss you, that we like you. It is not true.

Woods: General Hamdani said Americans walk into the future looking forward. As a result, they always forget what just happened. Iraqis walk into the future backwards; they never forget what happened in the past.

Makki: We have to refine the facts of history. We have to understand why it happened like that. This is part of our genetic makeup. I become nervous easily because it is in my genes. With education, with age, one can mold this bad characteristic.

Most Iraqi religious people like to live in peace. They look to the West more than the East for guidance, especially people my age. We see what the West and America

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[144] Eid al-Fitr is a three-day celebration that marks the end of Ramadan.

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accomplished versus what happened to Russia under the communist regime. Americans could win Iraqis over easily. They are like children.

Murray: In one of the post-war FBI interviews of Saddam, he commented that he was going to be rescued and 'give me eight years I will make Iraq a paradise.'

Makki: He was dreaming.

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Interview:
Lieutenant General Abid Mohammed al-Kabi[145]

Conducted by Kevin M. Woods, Williamson Murray, and Elizabeth A. Nathan
12 November 2009 ▪ Cairo, Egypt

*Former **Lieutenant General Abid Mohammed al-Kabi**[146] graduated from the Iraqi Military College in Baghdad in 1962. He joined the Iraqi Navy in 1964 and rose through the ranks. His foreign military training includes an underwater weapons course in Egypt in 1968 and a defense service staff college course in India in 1972. In 1978, he was promoted to director of naval training. In 1980, he was named director of naval operations and became commander-in-chief of the Iraqi Navy in 1982, serving until 1987. General Kabi was appointed the general secretary of the ministry of defense in 1987 and served in numerous high-level advisory positions within the ministry through 2003.*

Section 13: Personal Background ▪ History of Iraqi Navy ▪ Expansion of Naval Involvement in Iran-Iraq War ▪ Preparation for Iran-Iraq War ▪ Foreign Technology

Woods: General, I understand you are currently working with the Iraqi Government. Can you tell us about the nature of your work?

Kabi: I am consulting on issues dealing with the borders between Iran and Kuwait and water-way access rights. Iraq has complicated problems with both Iran and Kuwait on this issue.

Woods: What is the issue with Kuwait? Is it Iraq's access to channels at Bubiyan Island?

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[145] Iraqi Navy Lieutenant General is equivalent to US Navy Vice Admiral (O-9).

[146] Referred to during the interview transcripts as Kabi.

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Kabi: Most countries with limited water access have to use common exits without claiming them as their own because everyone uses them. There is no need to control each other's space. Maybe the Kuwaitis have an excuse. Normally, there is trust between the two countries, but for obvious reasons this is not necessarily true in this case.

Woods: We are looking at a strategic and operational history of the Iran-Iraq War. We are not particularly interested in the technical aspects of naval warfare in the Gulf, but rather the operational scheme, the Iraqi Navy's ability to understand the battlespace, the decision-making processes from target selection to interaction with senior Iraqi ministers, how you cooperated with your air force and army, and your impressions of Iranian naval capabilities—what they did right and what they did wrong during the course of the war. They had some interesting innovations and tried some interesting things, such as support of the 1988 Fao campaign. We are interested in the economic aspects of the conflict, or what became known in the West as the Tanker War.[147] There was a strategic logic to the Tanker War that I do not think is very well understood.

As you know, if history becomes just a recitation of facts, it becomes dry and boring. So we are interested in your view of some of the personalities. We want to understand how senior naval commanders interacted with the government in Baghdad, as well as with each other. I would like to know a bit about your peers. Who were the dynamic commanders, and the commanders who were not so competent?

Admittedly, we are asking you questions from our perspective as American historians. As such our questions will likely fall short because we do not have the understanding that you have as a participant. So we will ask you to help us by tell us what is missing from our line of questioning.

Kabi: I would like to go through the draft manuscript I forwarded to you in the order of the chapters. If you still have questions after I present the paper, we can discuss them then.[148] The general outline covers the economic, strategic, and political importance of the Persian Gulf; the operational theater and strategic targets; the nature of both Iraqi and Iranian naval forces; a comparison of Iraqi naval armaments versus Iranian naval armaments when the war started; Iraqi naval strategy; battles along Shatt al-Arab; the attacks on shipping routes in the northern Persian Gulf; attacks on Kharg Island, oil

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[147] The Tanker War began when Iraq attacked Iranian tankers and oil terminals at Kharg island in 1984.

[148] Unpublished manuscript by General Abid Mohammed al-Kabi, "An Iraqi Naval Perspective on the Iran-Iraq War."

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tankers, and the oil fields in the Gulf; and finally, the future rebuilding of the Iraqi Navy. Generally speaking, I am ready to discuss the importance of the seas and oceans, from an economic, political, and strategic point of view.

Murray: Can you give us some sense of the development of the Iraqi Navy? In terms of British influence and the monarchy, there was not much of an Iraqi Navy. When did Iraq begin to pay more attention to the fact that it had clear strategic interests in transportation by sea through the Gulf?

Kabi: Iraq started paying attention its navy during Abd al-Karim Qasim's regime, sometime after 1958. He signed a contract with the Soviet Union for 12 torpedo boats and three anti-sub ships. After the Ba'athists came to power in 1968, Iraq signed another contract with the Soviet Union for 12 missile boats that were approximately 41 meters long, armed with four ship-to-ship Styx missiles, and two aft 30-mm guns.[149]

Murray: Where did the first naval officers come from?

Kabi: The first navy officers came from the army's artillery section.

Woods: I understand that early training was provided by Egyptian naval officers?

Kabi: Yes, but the commanders of the missile boats and their crews were sent to Russia for training. When the war started, the Iraqi Navy had 12 missile boats, one Super-Frelon helicopter squadron with each helicopter armed with two [Exocet] MM-40 missiles, two Silkworm coastal missile batteries, six patrol boats, five minesweepers, four landing ships, one 130mm artillery gun regiment, and one marine brigade.[150] In the mid-1980s, we created another marine brigade as well as logistics support facilities. In 1980, there were approximately 20,000 people in the navy.

Woods: Looking back, how would you assess the quality and training of the navy before the war?

Kabi: Normally, we did numerous exercises at sea. The missile boats crews were skilled.

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[149] Referring to the purchase of eight Soviet OSA-Class fast-attack patrol boats. The P-15 Termit (SS-N-2 Styx) is a Soviet-designed ship-launched anti-ship missile introduced in the early 1960s.

[150] The Exocet is a French-manufactured anti-ship missile that can be launched from surface vessels, submarines, helicopters, and fixed-wing aircraft. They were first introduced in the late 1970s. The SA 321H Super-Frelon is a French-manufactured, three-engine, heavy transport helicopter. Iraq took delivery of 16 Exocet missile-capable Frelons in 1977. The HY-2 Haiying (CSS-C-2 Silkworm) is the Chinese version of the Soviet-manufactured P-15 Termit (SS-N-2 Styx) anti-ship missile adapted for coastal defense.

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Woods: Were the Soviets still providing the majority of technical and logistical support for the boats at this time?

Kabi: Yes, but they stopped when the war began.

Murray: In September 1980, when military operations began, it appeared that Iraq's military planning was somewhat inadequate. Was any real attention given to the use of the navy in terms of early operations?

Kabi: At the beginning of the war, high command considered the navy to be the weakest link in the armed forces. Most early missions assigned to the navy were defensive in nature.

Woods: The Iraqi Navy appeared to be involved in the defense of installations, the surveillance of enemy naval activity, and the prevention of enemy landings on Iraqi shores.

Kabi: That was all the navy did. We were restricted to simple tasks. However, during the war, operations developed in line with needs. The high command did not expect the navy to take such an active role in the war.

Woods: Well, they were all army officers, so they probably had no concept of naval operations.

Kabi: There was a lack of understanding concerning naval affairs within the high command. I am speaking in particular about the general chief of staff and his assistants. They had no idea, and they had no desire to learn.

Woods: But Iraq did not have a large naval culture, as you said?

Kabi: Iraqis have no naval culture.

Murray: Given that senior military leaders had no sense of the navy and did not want to learn about it, could the same have been said about Saddam?

Kabi: Saddam was clever. He became interested in the navy after he saw what the navy was doing. I was among the leaders in the high command of the general armed forces. Saddam eventually discovered what the navy could do. The navy was self-contained; it was almost a separate military off by itself. Nobody interfered in its affairs. The navy solved its own problems, planned its own operations, and implemented them on its own.

Woods: From early 1979 until the war broke out in 1980, did this period of Iranian provocation include provocations at sea? Were the Iranian's being aggressive towards the Iraqi Navy?

Kabi: There were clashes on the land border. At sea there was tension, but no firing.

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Woods: We talked to Generals Hamdani, Tarfa, and Makki about war planning during the summer of 1980. They referred to a meeting in July 1980 that discussed the possibility of a war with Iran. As they described it, all the services were represented. Was the navy represented?

Kabi: I was the director of naval training when the war commenced. A few months later I became the director of naval operations. There were studies about the possibilities of war between Iran and Iraq when I was a commander. I took part in them at that time. The session that you refer to was conducted in the planning directorate of the ministry of defense. There were many officers from all three services who participated in the discussion.

Woods: I am trying to understand the period just before the war started and the kind of planning that went on. Do you recall talking to your peers? Was it specific, or because the navy was independent, was it still up to the navy to think about what it would mean if Iraq went to war with Iran?

Kabi: As far as the navy was concerned, there was no serious planning before the war.

Murray: In terms of long-term planning and studying the potential implications of a long conflict, our impression of the Iraqi Army was that the situation was similar.

Kabi: Even in the army, I found there was no great standard of planning. For example, there were no maps available when the land forces began the invasion Iran.

Woods: As a naval officer during the period immediately before the war, can you recall thinking about the potential of a war with Iran? What were your top concerns? What were the things you worried about in terms of the Iraqi Navy and the potential of a clash with Iran?

Kabi: I was the commander of the training directorate. We were most afraid of their combatant missile boats; they had 6 with a contract with the French to buy 12 more. Their boats were armed with the American Harpoon missile.[151] The Harpoon missile has a significantly longer range than our Styx missiles.[152] Later in the war, we expanded the range of our [Styx] missiles to approximately 54 kilometers by increasing the fuel in their tanks.

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[151] The AGM-84 (Harpoon) is an American-manufactured, all-weather, over-the-horizon anti-ship missile that entered service in the late 1970s.

[152] The Harpoon missile had a range of approximately 90 kilometers, whereas the Styx missile had a range of approximately 40 kilometers.

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Woods: What types of modifications did you make to your Soviet missiles?

Kabi: Radar detection is limited by the height of the target, the size of the target, and overall distance between targeting system and target. Between March and September, the range will be doubled in the Gulf. I do not know what phenomenon governs that specification. The curvature of the ground in the Gulf is less than in other places, which also expands radar range.

Murray: You said the Iraqi missile boats trained to a high degree. Were the Iranian missile boats training as well during this period? Or were they experiencing a similar degeneration and collapse that the Iranian Army experienced due to Khomeini?

Kabi: The Iranian Navy did not suffer from the revolution. The regime purged the leading generals from the army, but most of the naval officers remained.

Murray: Were they training in a fashion similar to your efforts in the period before the war?

Kabi: Yes, of course. We did many exercises during this period.

Woods: How about cooperation with the other Gulf States? Were you training in cooperation with Kuwait or any other countries during this period?

Kabi: Not at all. No one helped us.

Woods: Why do you suppose there was no cooperation during this period?

Kabi: The Kuwaitis did not want to interfere or involve themselves with Iran. They were afraid of Iran. They thought that Iran could overrun Iraq easily.

Woods: If you want to continue on with your monograph we'll use that as the outline, as you suggested.

Kabi: Here is a comparison of forces, from an armament point of view. The range of the Harpoon missile was approximately 90 kilometers, whereas the range of P-15 (SS-N-2 Styx), our Russian missile, was approximately 40 kilometers.

Murray: Were the electronics on the Russian missile inferior to the electronics on the Harpoon?

Kabi: Our missiles were inferior in range and technology, but the Soviet warhead was larger than those on the Harpoons. The ranges of the missiles were different. The guns onboard the ships were also different. The maximum caliber of the guns on Iraq's missile boats was 30mm, whereas the enemy boats had a 76mm aft gun, and 40mm rear gun. So from a gun

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point of view, our boats were inferior to those in the Iranian Navy. Iran also had a significant number of patrol ships and P-3C Orion surveillance aircraft.[153]

Woods: What equipment did the Iraqi Navy use for surveillance? How did you extend your eyes out beyond?

Kabi: At the beginning of the war, we had problems with surveillance in the Gulf, because we did not have any plans in place related to that task, and the Iraqi Air Force had no experience flying over water. Of course I am speaking about the beginning of the war. Later on, the air force flew deeper and deeper out into the Gulf.

Murray: Was there any cooperation between the navy and the air force in 1980?

Kabi: No, never.

Murray: Did that develop over the course of the war?

Kabi: In November 1980, there was a major battle between the Iraqi and Iranian navies. Our air force failed to provide air cover for our ships. As a result, our naval ships became targets for the Iranian Air Force.

Murray: Was the air force supposed to provide air cover?

Kabi: No, but they did begin providing air cover in late 1982.

Woods: Why did this change in 1982? Who was responsible for making the air force do combined operations with the navy?

Kabi: The needs of the navy drove the change to greater cooperation. The navy requested air cover at all armed forces council meetings. We said that this situation could not continue, that we must find a solution, otherwise we could not continue to operate.

Woods: Was there an advocate outside the navy in Baghdad?

Kabi: Saddam's general commander of the armed forces told us to sit together and find a solution. We were located close to the coast, not in the deep sea, within the area of the two oil terminals.[154] Under these circumstances, we were obliged to operate only at night, to avoid air attacks. Even our helicopters were not trained for operations over the sea. They had no IFF (identification friend-or foe) equipment. They had no way of differentiating between Iranian ships and ours. This was a dangerous situation. Thus,

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[153] The Lockheed P-3 Orion is a four-engine turboprop anti-submarine and maritime surveillance aircraft introduced in the 1960s.

[154] Oil terminals refer to the location where crude oil is delivered by pipeline or tanker before being refined.

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sometimes our aircraft hit our own merchant ships. Moreover, there was no coordination between the navy and the port administration at the beginning of the war.

Murray: When did the navy start acquiring French-built Exocet missiles for its helicopters?

Kabi: In the late 1970s, perhaps 1978. France supplied them during the war.

Murray: But without air cover, you did not want to fly your helicopters in the daytime, and at nighttime they were dangerous to everybody, including your own ships.

Kabi: Occasionally we had to sink a boat in order to supply the [oil pipeline] terminals. We placed one battalion of marines armed with 57mm guns and small caliber machine guns on each terminal. Their task was to protect the terminal from Iranian attack. Khor al-Amaya was situated 20 miles offshore.[155] The other terminal was 25 nautical miles offshore. They are shown on Chart 1,235 of my paper. The Shatt al-Arab was controlled by both sides, so we could not move through that waterway. The Iranian missile boats came out of the ports of Bandar-e Khomeini and Bandar-e Mashahar. They were new, well-equipped, and close to the front. The Iranians relied on them. We reduced the flow of the convoys moving through those ports by using helicopters, missile regiments, and Styx (SS-N-2) missiles, which have a 100-kilometer range. The latter could cover all this area.

Woods: The Iraqi Navy placed a Silkworm missile battery on the tip of Fao Peninsula. When did you start using them?

Kabi: We started using the Silkworm in 1983.

Murray: What kind of intelligence did you have?

Kabi: We relied on three long-range detection radar stations, which could reach out more than 100 kilometers. In 1985, we put a radar station on one of the terminals. Starting in 1983, we added a radar station with Silkworm missiles. We had another in Umm Qasr so we could monitor the entire northern portion of the Gulf.

Woods: Covering the northern part of the Gulf was only one of your three defensive missions. Operating within 100 kilometers of Fao allowed you to do that, but did not help you do anything farther down in the Gulf.

Kabi: We launched an operation to Bushehr with missile boats. We sank approximately 20 tankers, using the helicopter, mostly after 1983.

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[155] Khor al-Amaya is an Iraqi offshore oil terminal built and cargo transfer port on a man-made "island" supported by pilings, located 20 miles south-southwest from the entrance to the Shatt al-Arab in the northern Persian Gulf.

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Murray: Was it in 1983 that the navy began to get a more aggressive mission, in addition to the initial three [defensive missions] you were given?

Kabi: It was unclear what the navy's task was when the war began. The high command had no idea what capabilities the navy possessed. So, the navy's assigned mission remained limited to a defensive one. During the war, we added two missile ships, nine artillery patrol boats, and the Silkworm missile system to the navy.

Murray: Where did the missile boats come from?

Kabi: The missile boats came from the Soviet Union in approximately 1984. They arrived in the Gulf near Kuwait by way of Syria. We also bought three surveillance radars from China during the war and acoustic mines from Italy.

Murray: So by 1983 or 1984, the navy's vision began to expand. Did you feel that Saddam was driving that expansion?

Kabi: Saddam did not realize he should pay attention to the sea front because Iran had major interests in the sea, in particular Kharg Island, where its oil pipeline terminates. The Iranians export 82 percent of their oil through Kharg. In 1983, I think, Saddam began paying attention. He realized that the oil terminals in the sea around Kharg Island should be attacked as a major goal. Eventually, Iraq's leaders found they must pay attention to the war at sea. It was for this reason that Saddam supported the navy during this period.

Section 14: Defensive Naval Operations (1980–82) ▪ Offensive Naval Operations (1982–86) ▪ Naval Operations after the Loss of Fao (1986–88) ▪ Intelligence Capabilities and Bombing of USS *Stark*

Woods: General, could you continue speaking about operational strategy during the war?

Kabi: As I mentioned before, the navy was given three missions: protecting the oil installations located on or near Fao, Umm Qasr, Mina al-Bakr, and the Khor al-Amaya terminals; surveillance of the Iranian Navy's operations in the northern portion of the Gulf; and preventing an Iranian landing on the Iraqi coast.

Murray: How aggressive were the Iranians who attacked the [oil pipeline] terminals and your positions on Fao?

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Kabi: They launched two operations. The first occurred at the beginning of the conflict—in November or December 1980. They landed on the terminal by helicopter and attempted limited, ineffectual sabotage. The second occurred in 1984. I was commander-in-chief of the navy and in Baghdad at the time. The chief of staff of the navy told me there had been an attack on one of the terminals around 0200. I drove through the night and reached the headquarters in the sector at 0830. The officers there told me that the Iranians had already captured the terminal.

There were several stages in each of the naval missions. The first, from 22 September 1980 through 21 November 1982, was a defensive stage. The navy surveyed the northern Gulf area, prevented the Iranians from attacking our territorial waters or landing on the Iraqi shore, provided protection to the Mina al-Bakr and the Khor al-Amaya terminal, provided fire support to ground forces in the Basra-Abadan sector, and attacked ships from the Iranian fleet cruising in the Khawr Musa channel, which leads to the ports of Khorramshahr and Khomeini.[156]

Murray: Before we get to the second stage, could you describe the navy's involvement in the siege at Abadan? We know Iraqi land forces had cut off the Iranian garrison in Abadan from the land routes, and the Iranians had to supply their troops by sea.

Kabi: We stationed two landing ships in the port at Basra. Each ship had two Katyusha rocket launchers mounted on it to support army troops on land.[157] They bombarded targets that could not be reached by the army's artillery.

Woods: When did you modify the landing craft with Katyusha rocket launchers—before or after the war started?

Kabi: We adapted the ships at the beginning of the war, when Iraqi forces invaded Khorramshahr. The army asked us to provide artillery support. We said it was possible, but could use the ships only at night.

The second stage, from 21 November 1982 through 8 February 1986, represented an offensive stage. We attacked the Iranian ships near Kharg, Bushehr, and the southern part of Kharg, using our missile boats and Katyusha rocket launchers.

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[156] Mina al-Bakr is an Iraqi offshore oil terminal in the northern Persian Gulf. Khawr Musa is a channel that connects the Iranian port of Bandar-e Khomeini to the northern Persian Gulf.

[157] The Katyusha multiple rocket launchers are Soviet-manufactured, simple truck-mounted rails (the BM-31 being the most common configuration) designed to launch a high volume of 82mm rockets (there are also 132mm and 300mm versions) in a short period of time. Variations of this system first entered service during World War II.

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Woods: So by 1983, Saddam had realized he would need to conduct an economic war against Iran. He turned to his navy to start attacking Kharg and the northern Gulf area economic zone. Can you explain how you developed your targeting method, what the information was, how crews were briefed, and whether they knew the nature of the targets they were going after? Were the targets specific? If I were a helicopter pilot taking off from Umm Qasr to look for targets at Kharg, would I have been briefed to look for a specific target, or would I have been told to go to the area south of Kharg and attack any naval target?

Kabi: We began offensive operations, when I became commander of the navy. For the first operation, I decided to attack ships in the Bushehr area. We sent three attack boats to troll for targets between the Persian Gulf base and the Khawr Abdullah channel. Then, they changed course towards Iran. The operation lasted 20 hours, and the missile boats launched six missiles and sank five ships. We knew we had to develop our offensive naval operations.

Murray: Was the initiative directed by Saddam?

Kabi: This was my initiative; it was not directed by Saddam. I went to the armed forces headquarters to discuss it with the general staff. They indicated they could not authorize such an operation. A few minutes later, Saddam arrived and asked me if I had anything for him. I told him my intentions to launch an attack on ships anchoring south of Bushehr. He asked me to explain the operation, so I laid the map out in front of him. He asked me a question, which is important because it is proof he was clever, 'Are you sure you will find ships in the area, when you get there? If there is any anchorage in this sector, you definitely will find ships there, and you can attack.' I told him that I was sure this was an anchorage and that we would find ships. Saddam approved the plan, but it had been completely initiated by me and my staff.

Woods: There was a degree of risk: you had never run offensive operations across the Gulf. This was a new operation for your crews.

Kabi: Yes. Let me give you an example. On the first mission, the missile boat, which was commanded by the man who currently commands the Iraqi Navy, broke down approximately nine miles from one of the Iranian oil fields.[158] We considered two different courses of action to help him: we could tow the boat back, or we could send spare parts to the boat by helicopter. In the end, he used pipes from a fire extinguisher to replace the fuel

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[158] The head of the Iraqi Navy at the time of this interview was Rear Admiral Muhammad Jawad.

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lines and used a hand pump to fill the main tanks of the engine. The main pumping system had failed and was not sending fuel to the engine. After repairing the boat, Ali turned back and two other two boats carried out the mission. They fired six missiles and sank five ships.

Woods: There were commercial activities in this area. Which ships were targeted?

Kabi: We targeted one Indian tanker, two Greek merchant ships, one Iranian merchant ship, and an Iranian yacht.

Woods: From what range were the missiles fired? You said you had modified them.

Kabi: We fired from a distance of 35 kilometers. We gradually increased the size of our operations. We attacked all the oil fields in the Bushehr area. During this second stage of our mission, the navy completed 178 attack operations and sank 102 tankers and 145 merchant ships.

Woods: What was Saddam's reaction?

Kabi: He decorated me.

Woods: You had shown the value of the navy, and he wanted more.

Murray: Why do you think you were appointed the head of the navy?

Kabi: I was introduced to Saddam by the previous navy commander, Aladdin Hammad al-Janabi. He had served most of his career in the army, but was assigned to the navy in 1979. During the discussion, al-Janabi told Saddam that I had potential; that is when I got my post. I was commanding a brigade at that time, but I wanted to be director of operations. Al-Janabi made me director of training. About two or three months after the war started, he made me director of operations. After that, al-Janabi introduced me to Saddam, and we discussed theories about the usefulness of passive and active floating mines. I had no idea I would become a commander, but I became commander two or three weeks later.

Woods: Tell me more about the shipping attacks during the period from 1982 to 1986.

Kabi: We attacked the east and west jetties on Kharg by helicopters four times. We succeeded in cutting the flow of convoys through the Khomeini and Mashahr ports to the northern portions of the Gulf.

Woods: When do you think your operations began to succeed in preventing significant tanker and merchant shipping in the northern part of the Gulf?

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Kabi: All of these operations started in 1983. In 1984, the movement of ships in the area began to slow and by the end of the year, they had stopped completely. We had hit 58 tankers in Kharg Island area alone.

Woods: Some of the histories we have read of this period expend much effort trying to understand if there had been a strategy to hit tankers from certain countries more than other countries. In other words, part of the strategy would be, if we attack Indian tankers supporting Iran, we can influence Indian political support for operations against Iraq. Was there any specific kind of guidance that led you to think about targets?

Kabi: Although we could detect a ship or tanker by radar, we could not determine its port of origin. Because we relied on radar, its mere presence in the northern Gulf made it a target. We attacked everything that our radars detected.

Between March and September, we had a station, which could detect any movement within 30 miles and as far south as Bushehr and Kharg. We could detect ships once they were five-to-six miles outside of the harbor. So we made what we call a 'casual plan' where we projected the future point of the target. We originally had our helicopters at al-Sha'iba Air Base.[159] We built an air base in Umm Qasr, which placed the helicopters 15 minutes closer to their targets. Typical flight plans were approximately 1.5 hours to target areas. By the time the helicopter was within range, we would have pinpointed the target, and the pilot would fire. In one month, we sank 20 tankers, all in night operations. We relied on the helicopters.

Woods: Were there any particular problems for your crew flying that far out over open water at night?

Kabi: It was a naval helicopter, so it was provided with sea-going instrumentation and had a good range. It was well-equipped with navigational devices, and as I told you, we trained them for this type of flying. Eventually the pilots were tasked with attacking ships (in the northern gulf) and laying mines.

Woods: You laid mines from helicopters?

Kabi: We replaced the helicopter's missile equipment with a rail system and loaded the mines inside the helicopter. We initially used old-fashioned Russian contact mines.

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[159] Al-Sha'iba Air Base is located 11 miles southwest of Basra.

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At this same time the missile boats received a new mission: attacking the tankers that gathered the oil produced at each oil field. Because we relied on the helicopters to attack ships in the open sea, we tasked the missile boats with attacking the oil fields.

We attacked the Soroosh oil field three times, Bushehr four times, and the Bahregan Sar oil field twice.[160] We laid approximately 400 mines during the war: 130 mines around Kharg, 195 mines in the oil field areas, and 60 in the Strait of Hormuz. We also sank several of their ships during clashes with the Iranian fleet.

Woods: What were Iraqi Navy losses like during this period?

Kabi: The navy lost two missile boats during the first battle at the terminals in November 1980 before I became the navy's commander.

Woods: How were they lost?

Kabi: They were sunk by the Iranian Air Force. Iran also lost two boats. When the operations began, an officer and 12 soldiers defended each terminal. The Iranians arrived by helicopter and fired on the terminal. After they captured the terminal, an Iranian missile boat was sent alongside the terminal to recover the Iraqis, who had been captured. One of our missile boats sank the Iranian missile boat with our POWs onboard. Another Iranian missile boat was sent in support of that first boat, and we sunk that as well. After that, they depended only on their air force to attack our boats. Because we had no air cover, despite requesting air support from our air force, the Iranians sank two of our missile boats. In total, we lost only four missile boats during the entire war.

Murray: Were the other two boats lost in deep operations?

Kabi: One night in 1983 or 1984, we sent a missile boat out after detecting a target. We told it not to exceed the range of the terminals so we could launch our helicopters. The missile boat did exceed the limits of the terminals. After it sank the ship, it was sunk by an Iranian missile boat. This was the only ship we lost as a result of an attack by an Iranian missile boat.

Back to the original question—the third stage of the war began after the invasion of Fao in 1986. The navy became critical, because after the Iranians invaded the Fao Peninsula, our route to the sea became constrained. We had no choice, we had to go.

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[160] The Soroosh oil field is located west-southwest of Kharg Island. Bushehr is a major port town in the northern Gulf associated with oil exports and Kharg Island. Bahregan Sar oil field is located in the northern Gulf.

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Woods: Were the alternative channels non-navigable?

Kabi: It was not very navigable, and it belonged to Kuwait. Kuwait would not let us use this channel. The Iranians protected the channel with small boats armed with heavy machine guns and anti-tank armament. They made two or three lines to prevent our boats from passing. Before we could even attempt our missions, we had to fight our way into the Gulf.

Woods: These are like army 'screen lines.' You had to fight through them to get out of Umm Qasr before you could go on your operations.

Kabi: It was difficult to do. Moreover, during this period, the enemy attacked and seized the northern terminal of Khor al-Amaya. We still held the southern terminal. Nevertheless, the Iranians held the northern terminal for only 48 hours before we were able to recapture it.

Woods: The Iranian screen lines were comprised of small boats or skiffs armed with RPGs [rocket-propelled grenades] and machine guns. Correct? Did you develop any particular tactics to break through?

Kabi: We just fought our way out. We had no choice but to go through.

Woods: Before the loss of Fao in 1986, can you describe any naval commando operations or marine operations along the coast aimed at disrupting Iranian radar and patrols?

Kabi: During this period, we depended mostly on helicopters and Silkworm missiles. They could cover the entire area.

Woods: Did you send naval infantry or naval frogmen along the northern Iranian coast?

Kabi: No.

Woods: Did the Iranians attempt to do naval raids, even commando raids, on Umm Qasr?

Kabi: No, never. During the Fao invasion, Iranian warship casualties included one frigate, four corvettes, one logistics support ship, fifteen small minesweeper and patrol boats, six hovercrafts, and several small logistics support ships.

Murray: You not only lost your Silkworm base, but you also lost the radars located on the peninsula.

Kabi: We were able to withdraw the Silkworm post to Umm Qasr. It still covered part of the original area, though the range was reduced.

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Woods: From the description of some of the army commanders, the Fao campaign caught the high command by surprise. How did you anticipate it, and how did you get the Silkworms out?

Kabi: Each month we did training exercises as if the enemy were invading the peninsula. Our troops and specialists were well-trained.

Woods: In other words, they had a well-rehearsed evacuation plan.

Kabi: I told the commander, 'In the event that the enemy attacks, you should withdraw your equipment. If it becomes clear that the operation was not against your area, consider your efforts practice.'

Woods: That advice clearly paid off.

Kabi: We did not lose any Silkworm equipment except for the cables; they were underground so they were difficult to remove. Of course, we had spare cables in the magazines.

Murray: In terms of your attacks on Kharg and the Iranian shipping to the south, it is clear the air force was now beginning to cooperate.

Kabi: During this period, Iraq had received Mirage F-1 aircraft, which carried Exocet missiles.[161] They participated in attacking tankers, but depended on our detection systems. When we detected a target, we developed the attack plan, which estimated the future position of the ship. Then the Mirage F-1 would attack it at its estimated position.

Woods: So you used the same procedure as the 'casual plan' you mentioned earlier: long-range radar detected movement of ships out of Kharg; you informed the Mirage F-1s where to find the ship; and the Mirage then showed up, turned on its radar, saw the target, launched the Exocet, and flew home.

Kabi: Same philosophy.

Woods: So in this phase, the Mirage F-1 pilots launched on naval targets based on what the navy passed along to their airfield before launch. In this case was the navy in command of the Mirage F-1 strikes over the Gulf, or were you just passing targeting information?

Kabi: We were only passing targeting information. But if you were to ask me whether this approach was correct, I would tell you it was faulty. The aircraft should have been under

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[161] The Dassault Mirage F-1 is a French-built single-seat air-superiority supersonic fighter and attack aircraft introduced in the early 1970s.

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the navy's command. The navy knew how to use the aircraft and how to conduct an operation in the Gulf.

Murray: Did you coordinate with the commander of the air force in discussing procedures?

Kabi: Sometimes. For example, during the missile boat operations conducted against Kharg in 1984, we coordinated with the air force for air cover at certain times and the air force provided the cover. This was in 1984.

Woods: Was it possible that your intelligence was good enough to decide which country owned which ship and that you were targeting specific countries to influence their support of Iran?

Kabi: We could not.

Woods: The way you're describing it, I agree: nighttime operations that fire on a radar picture, which itself is a vague target, make it impossible to discern the nationality of a ship.

Kabi: The radar picture does not show which country owns the ship. You just detect a tanker or ship.

Murray: This explains why the USS *Stark* was hit.[162] Basically, the plane was flying and fired at the first ship that appeared on its radar and then headed home.

Kabi: It was in the wrong area at the wrong time. The air force could not identify a ship's country of origin. The pilot saw a ship and attacked. We launched missiles against Iranian oil fields: 15 against Narouz, 16 against Ardashiya, 12 against Soroosh, 8 against Bahregan Sar, 2 against the western jetty of Kharg, and 4 against the eastern jetty of Kharg.

Woods: Could you describe the Iranian reaction to Iraq's missile boat raids and more specifically the air attacks on shipping during the defensive stage, the offensive stage, and the loss of Fao? You said they tried to bottle you up in Umm Qasr.

Kabi: They tried to bottle us up during the third stage. After we started the offensive stage, they began to withdraw their fleet to Bandar-e Abbas, and tried to interfere with ships passing through the Strait of Hormuz. They depended on their F-4s and F-14s because

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[162] The USS *Stark* was struck with an Exocet missile in the Persian Gulf on 17 May 1987, when it was accidentally targeted by an Iraqi aircraft. For more particular information regarding the *Stark* incident, see the Abousi interview pages 203–04 of this manuscript.

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they could fly over open sea.[163] They continued sending merchant ships carrying munitions, armaments, etc., to this area and we continued sinking most of them.

Woods: For all practical purposes, you controlled the northern Gulf by late 1984, correct? Iran was able to get small things into Bandar-e Khomeini, but with your continuous pressure, it was never going to be anything large.

Kabi: Yes.

Woods: At what point did you start coordinating with Kuwait, United Arab Emirates, and others with economic interests, who were supporting Iraq in the war? You did not want to hit Gulf State tankers while they were loaning money to Iraq and supporting Iraq's cause—especially Kuwait. Was there any coordination at this point to de-conflict between the navies?

Kabi: Most of our attacks occurred at least 12 miles outside of territorial waters.

Murray: Were the tankers coming to Kuwait inside their territorial waters?

Kabi: We normally watched this area, but we did not interfere in activities. If we launched any operation, it was normally outside of territorial waters.

Woods: I just want to confirm that that the Iraqi Navy effectively controlled south of Bandar-e Abbas.

Kabi: This is the operational area.

Woods: You avoided commercial shipping lanes heading toward Gulf States. You focused your attacks on Iranians shipping lanes.

Kabi: Exactly. We defined the operational area in such a sketch. We announced the operations area. In any case, what we learned from this war was that for Iraq to succeed, it could not rely on war inside the Gulf. It must have naval power outside of the Gulf. It needs facilities outside of the Gulf.

Woods: Like where?

Kabi: The political leadership tried to establish bases in Arab nations, such as Somalia, Yemen, and Djibouti.

Woods: When did this concept begin to emerge? Was it actively pursued by Iraq's diplomats?

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[163] The Grumman F-14 Tomcat is a supersonic, twin-engine, two-seat, variable-sweep wing fighter aircraft introduced in the mid-1970s.

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Kabi: The leadership was thinking about this during the war. We were unsuccessful because, as you know, most of these countries are under the influence of European countries. For example, Djibouti refused because the French refused to agree. The same was true of Somalia.

Woods: Getting bases outside of the Gulf would have allowed Iraq to pressure Iran in the south, correct? Once you controlled the northern area, Iran switched its shipment of oil to Bandar-e Abbas. You were looking for a way to continue the economic war further south.

Kabi: During the final stage of the war, we started to use Silkworm missiles on board airplanes and to attack the whole area of the Gulf.

Woods: Silkworms are heavy missiles. What kind of airplane were they launched from?

Kabi: Russian transport aircraft refitted to launch missiles. At the beginning of 1988, there was a major battle here when Iraqi aircraft attacked Iranian tankers and facilities in this area. The missile is 6 meters long and can be launched from 60 to 70 kilometers away from its target.

Woods: I have read that at least on one occasion, Iraqi aircraft had to divert to the Gulf States for fuel or damage.

Kabi: Sometimes, but seldom.

Woods: Had you been successful in getting an Iraqi naval installation in Djibouti, Somalia, Oman, or Yemen, how do you think that would have changed things?

Kabi: We could have controlled all the traffic coming and going from Europe to Iran. This would have put pressure on Iran to make peace. That is why Iraq contracted Italy to supply *Lupo* class frigates.[164]

Woods: Could you expand on the lessons learned from the Iran-Iraq War in terms of the future of the Iraqi Navy?

Kabi: Based on our deductions, the lessons we learned during the ground war, the naval war, and the construction of the fleet, it becomes clear how to rebuild the Iraqi fleet and what types of operations are required. To achieve Iraq's interests in any future war, the navy must operate outside the Gulf. Oil will remain a strategic commodity, which Iran will depend on to support its war machine. Iran will search for an alternative solution outside of the Gulf, in the Oman Gulf. Even if Iran were to establish links outside of the Gulf to

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[164] The *Lupo* class of Italian-manufactured frigates are designed to conduct anti-surfice warfare operations.

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export oil, its main installations—I mean oil fields and so on—are still vulnerable to attack.

Woods: This is because the primary oil fields are in the northern Gulf, so even if the Iranians operate outside of the Gulf, they will still need to get oil out of the north.

Kabi: Yes, to achieve a strategic naval victory, Iraq must depend on facilities inside the Gulf to maintain fast and powerful capabilities—missile boats, corvettes, helicopters, slip boats, and patrol craft like the Italian *Sparviero*.[165] The *Sparviero* can reach speeds of more than 100 kpm. It has a Boeing gas turbine, two automatic missiles, and one 76mm gun. It is a hydrofoil. Outside the Gulf, the navy would need big ships, such as frigates, ships with helicopters for reconnaissance, and long-range guidance systems for missiles.

Murray: One thing that was noted from reviewing naval operations during the war is that the possession of Bubiyan was crucial for any sort of expansion of Iraq's naval capabilities into the Gulf.

Kabi: Bubiyan was one of the goals to which the leadership gave great attention. Unfortunately, Kuwait was unwilling to provide us access to the island.

Murray: There are many reasons and explanations for why Saddam invaded Kuwait. Was Bubiyan an important consideration?

Kabi: No, the main reason was the oil. Bubiyan was not one of the reasons for the [Persian Gulf] war. After the Iran-Iraq War, Iraq had severe economic problems. Oil prices were low, somewhere between $7 and $10 per barrel. Oil prices kept dropping. This was the main reason for the war.

Section 15: Shatt al-Arab ▪ Attacks on Iranian Oil Terminals ▪ Loss of Fao (1986) ▪ Bombing of USS *Stark* ▪ Recovery of Fao (1988)

Woods: Let us continue with the broader outline.

Kabi: In the paper I sent you, I discussed the operations conducted along the Shatt al-Arab. As you know, there was a 1975 agreement between the shah and Saddam, regarding that

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[165] The *Sparviero* class of guided-missile patrol boats is an Italian-manufactured hydrofoil capable of 46 knots, originally in service in Italy and Japan.

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region. Beginning on 4 September 1980, Iran initiated aggression activities against Iraq, particularly along that border.

Although we started the war after Khomeini's revolution, you should realize that Iran imposed the war on Iraq if you understand the reasons leading to the war. The Iranians attacked Iraq's border ports, particularly in the middle regions near Khanaqin. On 4 September 1980, they launched operations aimed at handicapping navigation on Shatt al-Arab, forced merchant ships to fly the Iranian flag, and attacked all ships going to Iraq. On 14 September 1980, three ships were hit by Iranian boats on the Shatt al-Arab.

Woods: What naval capabilities did the Iraqi Navy have to patrol, control, or support commercial shipping on the Shatt al-Arab?

Kabi: We had a coastal unit south of Fao, which consisted of six Yugoslavian boats. They participated in operations conducted in the southern part of Shatt al-Arab.

Woods: Did they have any direct actions with the Iranians?

Kabi: One was sunk by Iranian artillery. I recommended to the navy's commander at the time that we withdraw the remaining five ships to Umm Qasr. We talked about the battles taking place in the southern part of Shatt al-Arab and concluded that Iran's intention was to control the Shatt al-Arab even with the signing of the agreement between the shah and Saddam.

Woods: Was there coordination between the navy and the port directorate?

Kabi: The port directorate commander was General Salim Hussein. He was retired at the time, but still thought of himself as a general. Thus, he refused to coordinate with the navy. Many incidents occurred because he did not withdraw the ships from the terminals.

Woods: What port was he in charge of?

Kabi: He was commander of the Basra area. The Iraqi Navy gave an alarm, which allowed the Iranians to withdraw its warships, escort ships, minesweepers, and hovercrafts from Khorramshahr and Abadan.

Woods: Did they withdraw them after 22 September?

Kabi: They withdrew them a few days before the war began. However, that withdrawal created a need for Iraq to find an alternative route to the Gulf. Umm Qasr is approximately 20–30 kilometers south of the port of Basra and leads directly into Khawr Abdullah. If we could have dredged a channel between Basra and Umm Qasr, we would not have been subject to

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Iranian attacks along the Shatt al-Arab. That would have attenuated a lot of problems. Moreover, we could have used the water for cultivation because it was fresh water.

Woods: Was this an idea to provide Iraq an alternative to the Shatt al-Arab in the postwar period in case Iran and Iraq were to dispute the Shatt al-Arab again? If you think about the amount of investment, this would have been a worthwhile project, because it would have removed much of the tension between the two nations.

Kabi: As I told you, we had two landing ships, three anti-submarine ships, and missile boats. We transferred the anti-submarine ships and the missile boats over land in huge trucks to Umm Qasr at the beginning of the war in 1980. The landing craft were too large to move.

Woods: Could the ships have been moved out of Basra earlier?

Kabi: The navy was not given warning that war was imminent. Our ships were still at Basra for maintenance and docking.

Woods: So because of the coordination we talked about earlier, you did not know the war was coming, and you certainly did not know that war was coming on the 22 September. Your ships were still in maintenance dry-dock in Basra and now were trapped.

Murray: The air force was informed, because the war began with a major air force attack, but they were only given three or four days notice, so their planning was pretty minimal. Are you saying that the navy was not informed at all?

Kabi: The air force and the land forces were informed.

Murray: This story reflects the history of Iraq's military, which had been almost exclusively land-centered in its strategic focus, even though the lifeblood of Iraq's economy flows out by sea.

Kabi: You are right. In my manuscript I have provided a description of the battles at the terminals. Diert terminal, also called Khor al-Amaya terminal because it is near Khor al-Amaya, is situated 15 nautical miles, approximately 30 kilometers, from Ra's-e Bisra, which means 'Head of the Duck.' It is the furthest tip of the Fao Peninsula. It was established in 1959; the first tanker came alongside on 28 April 1962. It consists of five platforms and, at the center, a five-story building, which houses the main generator and facilities required to pump the oil. It also has a helicopter platform. Pipes transferred the oil from the terminals to the tankers offshore.

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Woods: Is this the terminal that the Iranian commandos attacked and captured your security platoon, and where you then sank the patrol boat as they were leaving?

Kabi: Yes. That was Bakr Terminal—it was constructed after exploration of the Ramallah oil fields. It could accommodate a 350-ton tanker. It could export 50,000,000 tons of oil per year.

Woods: Were those two platforms able to export oil, with the exception of the time the Iranians seized one temporarily?

Kabi: We were never able to export any oil from those terminals during the war. All oil had to go out through Turkey.

Murray: What was the date they were shut down?

Kabi: We shut them down at the war's beginning. There were no more tankers after 20 September 1980. The terminal is one kilometer long and has four platforms, connected by bridges that allowed the workers to move between them.

Woods: Could we shift to describing a few particular events that other generals have described as significant military operations, such as the loss of Fao in 1986? Can you describe the navy's role, if any, in the battles in 1986 that led up to the Fao defeat, your efforts in trying to anticipate or warn the command of potential Iranian operations at Fao, and your impressions of what happened during the campaign? I am interested in your thoughts on the impact of Fao on Saddam, military planning, and operations before and after Fao, not just from a navy point of view, but as a senior officer in the government.

Kabi: I held a discussion with General Sa'adi, commander of the III Corps, located in the south. By the time the invasion took place, General Shawket had replaced Sa'adi as commander of the III Corps.[166] He maintained that the positions were strong and could not be taken. I was surprised that the Iranians did not cross the Shatt al-Arab right from the beginning. When the war started, the navy had only a single brigade to defend this 200 kilometer front from Fao to Basra.

Woods: So while 11 Iraqi Army divisions were crossing into Iran, you are suggesting that there was only one naval brigade between the Iranians and control of the peninsula. They could have come in behind you, but they failed to take advantage of the situation.

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[166] Other sources indicate that the commander of the III Corps at the time was Maher 'Abd al-Rahid who replaced Sa'adi in early 1984.

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Kabi: They were bargaining with us: 'If you leave my lands alone, then I will leave your lands alone.'

Woods: Fao was a back door the Iranians failed to open?

Kabi: Yes, I will return to my discussion with the corps commander. I told him, 'Suppose the width of the river in any area is normally between one meter and three kilometers. We can say in any assessment that it is 500 meters. If a small boat can reach a speed of approximately 20 knots, then it could cross in 30 to 50 seconds.' I told him the Iranians could cross this vast frontage at night. With 20 soldiers per boat, a single brigade made up of two battalions would need only 50 boats. I warned him that we could not sink more than ten of these boats. He did not agree with my opinion. He thought it was impossible for the enemy to cross the Shatt al-Arab. This was in 1985.

Woods: Why did he think it was impossible?

Kabi: He thought he had sufficiently strong defenses.

Woods: You recommended these changes in late 1985. Obviously nothing happened. What role did the navy play, either in active fighting or information gathering, during the Iranian offensive?

Kabi: The western road remained clear for a period of time, and we could go back and forth easily. There was no problem. We withdrew the Silkworms when the attack started; they reached Umm Qasr intact.

A few days after the invasion, the navy, which had freedom of movement, destroyed all the ships along the Bahmanshir River in order to help the army. The Iranians sent many small boats to the area. We had two kinds of Russian mines: KB contact mines, which are huge; and Yum floating contact mines, which weigh approximately 350 kilograms.[167] We laid approximately 150 mines in this area to prevent the enemy from using this passage.

Woods: So the Iranians were using the Bahmanshir River to move supplies to Fao?

Kabi: Yes, they were using the Bahmanshir River and the Khawr Musa channel. They moved supplies and logistical support through those waterways. Another important fact was that the Iranians tried to build a bridge between the tip of Abadan Island and the tip of the

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[167] The KB contact mine is most likely the Iraqi-manufactured LUGM-145 moored contact mine containing 506 pounds of TNT. The Yum floating contact mine is most likely the Soviet-manufactured MyaM (Yam) mine introduced in the early 1950s. It was a small ellipsoidal contact mine containing 44 pounds of TNT.

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Fao Peninsula. We sent two missile boats there and replaced them regularly. They permanently disrupted the Iranian efforts to build the bridge.

Woods: You stationed two missile boats in front of the mouth of the Shatt al-Arab?

Kabi: Each one has four missiles. We could see the efforts to build a floating pontoon bridge by radar. We destroyed the bridge as soon as they finished building it.

Woods: So this was a continuous operation? How long did it last?

Kabi: This continued for seven days.

Murray: Finally, the Iranians gave up?

Kabi: Yes. Because of this operation, they relied on dam bridges instead of pontoon bridges. They sank pontoons and then built a fixed bridge on them.

Woods: They filled the channel? What happened to the water? Did this cause a flood?

Kabi: They left gaps in between the bridges so the water could get through. When the army attacked and retook Fao in 1988, its troops attacked this bridge.

Woods: The description I had heard is that the Iranians took large sewer pipes and laid them side by side so that water could go through the pipes, while they could drive across the top of the pipes to cross the channel. That was a pretty smart solution to filling in the channel.

Kabi: The bridge was destroyed by the air force during the attack on Fao.

Woods: Did the navy use its rocket boats to provide fire support for the campaign?

Kabi: No, but we provided fire support during the first stages of the attack. When the enemy invaded the area, there was no artillery on the peninsula, so the landing ships armed with Katyusha rockets provided support.

Woods: Was the naval brigade you described as controlling this long front under the command of the navy or was it attached to VII Corps?

Kabi: It was attached to the VII Corps.

Woods: The loss of Fao had a major impact on the navy. The Iranians could now control your access to the channel.

Kabi: The width there is about seven kilometers.

Murray: Each sortie from Umm Qasr had to fight its way through a line of small boats with RPGs and anti-tank missiles to get out.

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Kabi: Yes, we had to fight our way out the channel.

Woods: And then fight your way back in. That is dangerous.

Murray: Were you laying mines even after the battle at Fao was over?

Kabi: Yes. We then laid mines by helicopter.

Woods: Could you give us the context, some of the details of the event, and what happened inside Iraq after the *Stark* incident? From your impression, the *Stark* was probably on the boundary line of the forbidden zone. I have read some accounts that suggest that there was a commercial vessel near the *Stark*.

Kabi: I have no idea where the *Stark* was exactly, but the pilot was aiming for it.

Woods: Was it targeted because it showed up on radar, or specifically because of which vessel it was?

Kabi: We thought this was a vessel going to Iran.

Woods: Do you remember anything about the pilot? Was he a particularly qualified or experienced crew member?

Kabi: I do not trust Iraqi pilots over open sea. Even if he were a qualified and experienced pilot, one could not rely on his ability to differentiate between friend or foe.

Woods: What was the reaction at headquarters when it was learned that an Iraqi aircraft had hit the *Stark*?

Kabi: The navy had no reaction; it was the air force's problem. I heard about it from a broadcast. I immediately said it was the pilot's fault.

Woods: Did you have any expectation of what might happen afterward?

Kabi: No.

Woods: How do you think Saddam or the senior command reacted?

Kabi: They tried to find a solution through diplomacy. This is really all that happened.

Nathan: Were there any changes in the way you did targeting after the *Stark* incident?

Kabi: No, because we stuck to our operational area.

Woods: Did the regime itself or the air force think about targeting differently? Were they more cautious?

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Kabi: The method of targeting stayed the same; there were no major changes.

Woods: It probably flows from the nature of the mission. You had decided how to conduct these operations earlier in the war, and they had been successful to that point. Given your objective of disrupting Iranian shipping, you were being successful, so why change tactics.

Kabi: Of course.

Woods: Can you tell me about the planning for the operation to recover Fao in 1988? To what extent was the navy involved in planning to re-capture the peninsula?

Kabi: The navy was not given a major role in the operation. It depended on the landing forces. We only had two marine brigades at the time. The 440th and the 441st Marine Brigades led the attack under the command of the Republican Guard, because the marines knew the area better than the Republican Guard. General Abboud Kombar, my coastal defense assistant, and General Muayid Abdul Gharfour, commanded these brigades.[168]

Murray: General Hamdani did not mention that the marine brigades were in the lead.

Kabi: General Aladdin Makki was here yesterday. I showed him my paper and asked his opinion. Later he told me that he did not know of most of the things in it. He told me, 'I had no idea about this operation.' We attacked along Shatt al-Arab from two directions. One was from the front and the other was from the southern part of Umm Qasr. Here we launched approximately 200 frogmen from Umm Qasr. They swam up the Shatt al-Arab and attacked enemy fortifications from the rear. This provided an excellent diversion when the army attacked the fortification from the front. General Ma'ahir led one attack while the Republican Guard led from the other direction.

Section 16: Intelligence Capabilities ▪ Development of Navy and Naval Operations ▪ Significance of Iranian Operations ▪ Saddam and Senior Leadership

Woods: Historically, communications in naval warfare are incredibly important. For example, deciphering German communications was a major factor in the Allied success during the 'Battle of the Atlantic' in the 1940s. To what extent did you have the capability to decipher Iranian communications?

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[168] General Abboud Kombar is currently in command of the Baghdad Operations Center charged with military security inside the capital city.

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Kabi: Yes, we had listening equipment (signals intelligence) during the war.

Woods: Was that a capability resident in the navy?

Kabi: It was in the navy. Sometimes we received information from the army and the military intelligence command.

Murray: Did this involve breaking Iranian codes?

Kabi: Yes.

Murray: Do you think this code breaking was helpful in terms of identifying Iranian ship movements for air attacks?

Kabi: Yes, particularly in the Strait of Hormuz. When we felt there were abnormal communications occurring in that area, our analysis suggested there was a convoy in the area.

Woods: To what extent did the navy take advantage of non-Iraqi tactical advisors from other countries? To what extent are you aware that the Iranians took advantage of advisors from other countries?

Kabi: No advice was given to the navy during the war. Frankly speaking, I have no idea about the Iranians.

Woods: There are rumors of Iranians getting naval advice from North Koreans. I do not know if you came across that from intelligence or captured equipment. This has been written about in journals and magazines since then.

Kabi: I have no idea.

Murray: We have identified what we call 'analysis of traffic' which simply translated means that more radio traffic means a convoy, while less radio traffic means no convoy. Did you have direction finding stations to identify that?

Kabi: The radar would give you direction and distance. It gives you practically all of the information that you need.

Murray: So you could identify where a convoy was and where it was moving via the radio traffic?

Kabi: That was one of the indications. Although the detection improved between March and September, the opposite is true the rest of the time. One time as I sat in the headquarters, I thought Iran might have a convoy that moment in this area, because visibility was

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practically nil. I thought they would use such weather conditions to send a convoy. I ordered a helicopter to do an armed reconnaissance run. I prepared two more planes. I told the first plane, 'Go here to this area. If you find a convoy, fire on it. Let us know if there was a convoy.' As each plane left, we loaded another plane to replace the first. We destroyed approximately six ships. I did this operation without any intelligence. I did not know what was going on at armed forces headquarters. Saddam asked what intelligence the navy had to cause us to send out plane after plane. We told him that we did not have any intelligence. So he ordered a MiG-25-R to photograph the area. The photos revealed six ships burning or set on fire in the area. Saddam sent for me the next day and decorated me.

Woods: General Makki told us yesterday that he did something and Saddam gave him a Mercedes.

Kabi: Saddam gave me four Mercedes. I sold them and built a house in al-Mansour.[169]

Woods: What about naval operations from 1980 to 1988—do you think they are not well understood and should be emphasized in an English-language history of the war, from the military side, or from the professional naval officer side? What is important that we have not already talked about for professional naval officers to study and better understand?

Kabi: The most important thing I want to emphasize is the development of the navy over time, starting from a simple defensive role to an expanded offensive role. Morale rose to high levels during that time. I estimate that the Iranians lost more than $10 billion from our efforts.

Murray: At the beginning of the war the Iranians had a clear naval superiority, but they lost it because their leadership never paid attention to the Gulf until too late. Can you comment in terms of comparing the Iranian and Iraqi leaders?

Kabi: The Iranians paid attention to both the naval and the land front. They had major interests in the Gulf. For example, Kharg Island exports 82 percent of their oil.

Woods: Since the navy was so small and relatively undeveloped in 1980, do you think it developed a naval warfighting doctrine based on this experience—certain concepts that young naval officers should be taught?

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[169] Al-Mansour is an administrative district in central Baghdad known for upscale homes.

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Kabi: I cannot tell you because I am not sure what the situation in the navy is right now. No one understands the current commander of the navy's ideas. He has difficulties expressing himself and has problems with the minister of defense. But as you can see, there are many lessons that one could learn from the war that could be useful for those who intend to rebuild the navy.

Murray: In thinking about what the Iranians were doing in 1986 at Fao the general explanation is that the Fao offensive was aimed at opening the door to Basra. It strikes me that the real reason for the offensive could have been cut off the Iraqi Navy in Umm Qasr and prevent further damaging operations.

Kabi: The aim of the Iranian operation was just a demonstration. The area around Fao is not important except to the navy.

Murray: If it was more than a demonstration, its aim was to prevent the Iraqi Navy from doing the damage it was doing.

Kabi: That was one of its major goals.

Murray: Nobody has mentioned that to us, nor have I read it. The Fao campaign is described in terms of a land battle entirely. The land is all swamp and bad terrain with no strategic value except for cutting the Iraqi Navy off.

Kabi: The other goal was to make the Persian Gulf countries afraid of Iran.

Murray: But in terms of straight military operational impact, the damage you were doing to the Iranian economy from bases here had reached a significant level. Umm Qasr could have been seen as a major objective, not just as an objective en route to control of Basra.

Woods: When the Iranians occupied Fao, what kind of systems did they emplace here to affect the shipping channel?

Kabi: Conventional artillery, small boats with RPGs, and machine guns.

Woods: How densely did the Iranians populate the area with weapons systems? How many boats would you have had to pass to get out of the channel?

Kabi: I have a point that is even more important than what you are mentioning. After the Iranians invaded Fao, they tried to advance to Umm Qasr. As you know, there were no troops in this area when the Iranians came except the 26th Division headquarters here. There was a mix of troops with enough to form one brigade, no more. In the event that the Iranians succeeded in reaching this point, they would have been on the east bank. I formed

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a group that consisted of two battalions from the naval forces, commanded by General Abboud and supported by landing ships with Katyusha launchers. He was the assistant commander of coastal defenses. He stopped the enemy 30 kilometers away from the base. If the enemy had reached there, they could have destroyed the naval base. This was 9 February.

Murray: The offensive began on 8 February. The next day the navy set up a blocking position on the western road out of the Fao Peninsula?

Kabi: People should ask why the enemy stopped and failed to advance farther up through this area to Umm Qasr and Basra.

Murray: By this time, the 26th Division was smashed.

Woods: You said the 26th Division headquarters was forward on the Fao. You said they had a small brigade. The unit you put together, the two battalions, what were they made of? How many rocket boats?

Kabi: They were marines. Two landing ships took part and provided fire support to this group. You asked me why we did not launch the full brigade or the two brigades into this battle. The general of the armed forces sent the two brigades except for one battalion up to the III Corps front.

Woods: So in one way the Iranian deception to make the Iraqi Army defend north of Basra was effective, because it removed the two brigades of infantry meant to defend that coastal road out of the Fao Peninsula.

Murray: It was shortsighted of ground commanders; given the damage you were doing to the Iranian economy, to shift those two brigades from the peninsula.

Kabi: They were thinking that there was no threat to this area.

Woods: Do you remember anything about the particular types of operations done along that road? Did the two battalions fit into a static line? What kind of fight did they encounter when they got there?

Kabi: They established fortifications along the coast. We deployed the Silkworm launchers. We established defensive barriers along the roads. A barrier was established here either by the army or the navy for some other purpose. They used it as a fortification to prevent the enemy from advancing.

Woods: Were you able to get air support from the air force for your defense?

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Kabi: After the invasion of course, there were a lot of sorties attacking this area. Saddam visited the front a week after the invasion and said we had to stop all operations in the area.

Woods: For the defense along this coastal road, were you able to get any air force support, or were you limited to your rocket boats and the infantry?

Kabi: They launched ground attacks during the invasion and it continued even after the operation ended, until Saddam said to stop.

Murray: Your details make the motivation behind the Fao battle clearer. The Iranians had a different major reason for doing the operation; it was not just about getting to Basra. This is not the easy route to Basra.

Kabi: The road was narrow and not even paved. The route is long, approximately 50 kilometers. It was not easy for them to get to Basra by this route.

Woods: Are there other things we have not discussed that you think we ought to know?

Kabi: We did not discuss the operations in detail, but you will find everything in detail in my manuscript.

Murray: Did Saddam know how important this defensive position was?

Kabi: I told him, and he appreciated it.

Nathan: Did you feel as if you had more autonomy than the ground commanders did in terms of your relationship with Saddam and the rest of the high command in Baghdad?

Kabi: As I was a member of the general counsel of the armed forces, I attended approximately 50–60 meetings with Saddam, some of which would last more than 12 hours. They would start at 1800 and finish at sunrise. Three of the meetings had only two generals in attendance.

Woods: What was your impression of Saddam as a leader, when briefed by officers on these issues?

Kabi: You cannot say he was a military man, but he tried to learn. He was always asking questions.

Woods: I imagine there was a major difference between Saddam when it came to naval warfare from 1980 to 1988? Given these meetings with you and his reputation for learning from his generals and senior commanders, do you think he was a competent military leader in terms of understanding naval issues by 1988?

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Kabi: Yes.

Murray: But Iraq paid a heavy price for the fact that he was an amateur at the beginning.

Kabi: From a political point of view, I agree with you. Saddam should have tried to avoid this war because it led to the destruction of Iraq. I cannot deny that Saddam was a dictator. Iraq's fate was the consequence of his dictatorship, just like Hitler's and Mussolini's impact on their countries. He was the only decision-maker. There were only three men with whom Saddam discussed the attack on Kuwait: himself, Chemical Ali, and Hussein Kamel.[170] The rest of his advisors had no idea about the attack.

[170] Chemical Ali (Ali Hassan abd al-Majid al-Tikriti) was tried and found guilty of crimes against humanity for his involvement in the use of chemical weapons against Kurdish insurgents and civilians in Iraqi Kurdistan.

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Interview:
Major General 'Alwan Hassoun 'Alwan al-Abousi

Conducted by Kevin M. Woods, Williamson Murray, and Elizabeth A. Nathan
13 November 2009 ▪ Cairo, Egypt

Former ***Major General 'Alwan Hassoun 'Alwan al-Abousi***[171] *joined the Iraqi Air Force in 1963 and rose through the ranks. He graduated with a BA in science aviation from the Egyptian Air Force Academy in 1966. Subsequently, he received an MA in military science from the Iraqi Staff College at Bakr University. His foreign military training includes training in Egypt, India, Russia, France, and Greece. During the Iran-Iraq War, he served as commander of multiple squadrons, groups, and air bases. Late in the war, he became the director and deputy commander of air force training. In the early 1990s, General Abousi became the dean of the national defense for higher political and military studies, and later the commander of air force administration.*

Section 17: Personal Background ▪ State of Iraqi Air Force Readiness ▪ Initial Air Strikes (Fall 1980) ▪ Planning and Training ▪ Foreign Technology ▪ Saddam's Personality ▪ Intelligence and the Bombing of Osirak Reactor

Woods: Could you give a brief description of your position within the Iraqi military during the war?

Abousi: Let me start with my time as a squadron commander. I flew a ground attack aircraft between 1975 and 1978; I was a wing commander of Sukhoi-22s in Kirkuk between 1978 and 1981; I was a base commander in Kirkuk between 1981 and 1982.[172] Between 1982

[171] Referred to during the interview transcripts as Abousi.

[172] The Sukhoi Su-22 was a Soviet-designed tandem two-seat cockpit combat-trainer, export version of the Su17UM attack aircraft.

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and 1983, I was a student at the staff college on al-Sha'iba Air Base in Basra.[173] Between 1983 and 1984, I remained in Basra. Between 1985 and 1988, I was base commander in Habaniya.[174] Then, I became Air Training Director until six months after the war ended, at which point I was replaced by someone from Tikrit and reassigned to Bakr University.

I have flown 22 different aircraft as a fighter pilot. As a base commander, I was told not to fly, because they did not want to lose a senior officer. I stopped flying in 1984. However, I started flying again in secret. One time I lost five pilots in the 109th squadron. I was sad for their loss and told the surviving pilots, 'I will fly with you.' I did not tell the air force's high command. Instead of honoring me and giving me a medal, when they found out, the air force leaders punished me.

Murray: What airplane did you fly?

Abousi: I flew everything as a fighter: MiG-15s, MiG-17s, MiG-21s, MiG-23s, MiG-29s, Sukhoi-7s, Sukhoi-22s, Sukhoi-25s, Tu-16s, Tu-22s, Mirages, and Jaguars.[175]

Murray: Which was your favorite?

Abousi: The Mirage was my favorite aircraft to fly because it was so responsive. I still suffer from flying the Soviet aircraft: my body and my bones still hurt. The seats were hard, so we all had hemorrhoids. Moreover, it was so hot in the cockpit that we had to take salt capsules to prevent dehydration.

Murray: Were you able to continue flying?

Abousi: Yes, I continued until I became a major general. I was exceeding the age limit; I should have stopped flying at the age of 40 because of medical issues.

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[173] Al-Sha'iba Air Base is located 19 kilometers southwest of Basra.

[174] Habinaya Air Base is located in central Iraq, approximately 80 kilometers west of Baghdad, just south of the town of al-Habbaniyah. It was built by the British in the 1930s and occupied by them until 1958. It functions as one of the main military facilities in western Iraq.

[175] The Mikoyan-Gurevich MiG-15 was a Soviet-designed swept-wing jet fighter introduced in the late 1940s. The Mikoyan-Gurevich MiG-17 was a Soviet-designed high-subsonic performance jet fighter introduced in the early 1950s. The Mikoyan-Gurevich MiG-21 was a Soviet-designed supersonic jet fighter introduced in the late 1950s. The Mikoyan-Gurevich MiG-23 was a Soviet-designed swept-wing fighter aircraft introduced in the early 1970s. The Mikoyan-Gurevich MiG-29 was a Soviet-designed jet fighter introduced in the early 1980s to counter the American F-15 Eagle and the F-16 Fighting Falcon. The Sukhoi Su-7 was a Soviet-designed swept-wing, turbojet-powered fighter bomber introduced in the late 1950s. The Sukhoi Su-25 was a Soviet-designed single-seat, twin-engine jet aircraft introduced in the early 1980s to provide close air support to ground forces. The Tupolev Tu-16 is a Soviet-manufactured medium-range bomber that entered service in the mid-1950s. The Tupolev Tu-22 is a Soviet-manufactured supersonic bomber and reconnaissance aircraft that entered service in the mid-1960s. The SEPECAT Jaguar is an Anglo-French manufactured ground-attack jet aircraft that entered service in the early 1970s.

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Murray: How many hours of flying time did you have?

Abousi: Approximately 3,000 hours as a fighter pilot.

Murray: Was the Iraqi military running a full staff college course during the war?

Abousi: Yes, they ran courses continuously.

Woods: How long were you at the National Defense College [at Bakr University]?

Abousi: I was at the National Defense College for three years between 1989 and1993. I was a student while I finished a course during the first year and then became the dean.

Murray: So you watched the 1991 war from the sidelines?

Abousi: No. The army, the minister of defense, Shanshal, and al-Khazraji do not know this. Only General Ra'ad Hamdani knows what I am about to tell you. The air force was only given 24 hours notice before the start of the invasion of Kuwait. The pilots were asleep on the ground. At 0400, they were ordered, 'This is the route; fly to Kuwait.' There were a lot of accidents. We lost approximately 20 aircraft, as a result of pilots flying into high-tension wires because they had not taken the QFE.[176] Altimeters were not set for Kuwait. It was tragic, but no one could say anything.

Woods: You were at the university until 1993, and then you became the administrative commander for the air force?

Abousi: Yes, I was administrative commander for air force management from 1993 to 1994. I transferred, because Uday had asked to be a student at the national defense college. Once he joined the college, he wanted to be the dean of faculty and eventually the president of the university. Because I was dean, I could not talk to him. I received the air force appointment through a connection. So I re-joined the air force and worked as an administrative assistant.

Woods: Did Uday ever finish the course?

Abousi: Uday finished three courses in one year—defense, staff, and national defense—without attending a seminar or class. He kept giving orders and changing curriculum, which I could not stand.

Woods: Then, you went back to training?

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[176] QFE refers to atmospheric pressure and altimeter settings.

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Abousi: I returned to the same place as the assistant to the director of training for the air force. I noticed that air force training efficiency was low in 1991. Moreover, aircraft were no longer well maintained.

Murray: Aircraft were not operationally ready?

Abousi: I wrote a report detailing the air force's below-average performance. As a result, Iraqi aircraft were not used for combat operations. The best aircraft had been flown to Iran during the Gulf War.[177]

Woods: Could you describe for us what you thought the conditions of the air force were before the Iran-Iraq War; its role in the Iraqi military; and Saddam's attitude towards the air force? We learned from talking to army officers that their focus was on Israel, not on Iran. Was the situation the same for the air force?

Abousi: The air force was not at all prepared for the war with Iran. We did not even think we were going to fight the Iranians. In the period just prior to the war, immediately after Khomeini came to power, the Iranians started provoking Iraq. If we look at the air force in general, its capabilities were at least half those of the Iranian Air Force. We evaluated our air force in comparison to the Iranian Air Force: a correlation of forces. There were some mistakes in the original study, but I have corrected them in the new one.

Murray: What was your impression in 1980 of US technology versus Russian technology in terms of aircraft?

Abousi: US aircraft were better than the Russian Sukhois and other Russian aircraft. When a direct comparison was done between the Mirage and the Sukhoi, we found that flying a Sukhoi for one sortie was equivalent to flying three Mirage sorties because the Sukhoi was so hard on your body. We trained our pilots to be strong and fit, like athletes. If you were weak, you would not last long because the stick hurts.[178]

Murray: This explains why Israelis flying Mirages and other French aircraft in 1967 were able to fly four or five sorties in a day. Western critics of the September 1980 Iraqi strike cite a lack of training and maintenance that limited the Iraqi air force to one sortie per day. In fact, what you're saying is that it was the difficulty of flying the Sukhoi that limited you to one sortie per day.

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[177] For greater detail on the evacuation of the Iraqi Air Force to Iran see Kevin M. Woods, *The Mother of All Battles: Saddam Hussein's Strategic Plan for the Persian Gulf War*, Official US Joint Forces Command Report (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2008), 192–93, 94, 280.

[178] Referring to the aircraft control stick.

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Abousi: The equipment was hard on the pilot, like other World War II aircraft. When we flew against the Iranians at the beginning of the war, we suffered from these problems. For example, the maps we used for our sorties were necessarily large. But the cockpits of Soviet fighters were small and space was limited, which made flying and navigating at 10-to-15 meters above the ground extremely difficult. Before the war, we needed to establish a balance between the Iraqi and Iranian air forces, so we increased the tactical training our pilots received. We did this in extreme secrecy. Mohammed Jissam al-Jibouri was named the commander of the air force just before the start of the hostilities; he was an excellent commander. Within the air force there were jokes made about the fact that they were bringing a new commander who would train the air force in a new way. None of pilots or the staff realized that this was in preparation for war with Iran.

Woods: When did al-Jibouri become the air force chief? What was he specifically working on to change and why? What was motivating him?

Abousi: Al-Jibouri became air force chief in 1979. He was a British Hunter pilot and trained in America. In addition, he was aggressive, courageous, and dedicated to the air force. He attended training exercises regularly. On one occasion, he attended a training exercise brief at Hurriya Air Base and got personally involved.[179] He had lots of sessions with the pilots. He had a good relationship with the airmen.

Murray: In 1980, Saddam brought in a series of incompetent Ba'athist officers to lead the army. Did Saddam do the same thing with the air force?

Abousi: Not at all. The air force was mainly led by competent officers. Incompetent officers were not allowed to join the air force. Besides, General Adnan Khairallah was in control of the air force. We used to say that if Adnan had still been alive, Iraq would never have invaded Kuwait. Saddam listened to Adnan, but not to anyone else. When Adnan was killed, the army died too.

Woods: In 1979, what was Saddam's attitude toward the air force? Did he view it as a strong element of the Iraqi military?

Abousi: Saddam had no knowledge of or experience with air matters. It was Adnan Khairallah who came to the air force, flew our aircraft, and had a great relationship with everyone.

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[179] Hurriya Air Base is located on the western edge of Kirkut. It is Iraq's major northern air force base and home of the northern air defense sector command.

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Woods: Was General Khairallah your patron?

Abousi: He was a good person and a friend. When I was commander of air force training, he told me, 'We want to do such and such a thing. Can you please help me?' I would execute his request because of the relationship. He wanted to build up the air force. Our loss was enormous when he died. The army was also killed. The people who led the army, like Ali Hassan al-Majid and Hussein Kamel, knew nothing about the military, because they were just politicians. They interfered in the army. Then Saddam Hussein started to interfere.

Murray: Is it true that in 1980 Saddam said that any good Ba'athist could be a good soldier, but he understood that a good Ba'athist could not necessarily become a good pilot?

Abousi: I have never heard of this. He used to say that good soldiers were good Ba'athists, even if they were not Ba'athists.

Murray: Saddam's attitude in 1980 was that people like Tala al-Duri could be good division commanders, because they were good Ba'athists.

Abousi: Tala al-Duri just talked; he never had any impact or influence on the army the way Nizar al-Khazraji did.

Woods: Could you tell us the story of the initial air strikes in 1980? We have your write-up, but I am fascinated by the planning. As you describe it, the initial mission was planned and then delivered to the pilots as a training mission, but in fact turned out to be the plans for war.

Abousi: Like I said, we intensified training in order to enhance the capabilities of the air force to counter-balance the Iranian Air Force. As a wing commander, I could not tell whether it was possible or not to carry out the strike and achieve success. Therefore, maybe 48 hours before the operation, I told my pilots that what turned out to be an attack on Iran was a training mission that this was a part of an intense training program that we had been on for months.

Woods: Forty-eight hours before the start of the war did you know this was a combat mission or did you still think it was a training mission?

Abousi: As a formation commander, I actually did not know. I thought to myself this might be real. But when nobody told us to stop, I knew it was the beginning of war. I was on the runway with some other pilots. We usually ran taxi exercises—turn on power, roll to

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a speed of 150, shut off engine, reduce RPMs, taxi back, and park. Nobody told us to stop and return to our parking spot, and the aircraft were soon airborne. We were at war.

Murray: Most Western accounts say that Iranian aircraft were parked in the open. Your earlier written account indicates that they were under shelters.

Abousi: I flew several sorties on 22 and 23 September. When we arrived over the Iranian bases, I was looking for aircraft on the ground but could not find anything. Shahrokhi Air Base is large with three runways and many shelters, but there were no aircraft![180]

Woods: Who did the detailed planning—flight plans, location of refueling, communication plan—for the mission?

Abousi: Headquarters planned everything, but we suggested changes to parts of it, because their plan would expose our aircraft to Iranian defenses. The original flight plan took the planes over a large town with a lot of people and army personnel who could report our air raid. We recommended a change that diverted the flight path.

Murray: Were any changes made between the time you received the plan on 21 September and the morning of the mission on 22 September?

Abousi: We learned of the plan on the 20 September. An officer named Haldoun was the base commander.

Woods: As a wing commander, were you made aware of the training plan on 20 September?

Abousi: The plan for the air force was sent to us on 20 September. They told us to choose the pilots, but not tell them anything because the mission only involved training.

Woods: But you recommended changes to the plan not to fly over Iranian cities? Did they implement your changes to the plan?

Abousi: I made my suggestion to a base commander. He sent someone to Baghdad to notify the command of the changes. They approved it. The major difficulty we encountered was that the bomb load of the aircraft was small—only 1,000 kilograms (approximately 2,500 pounds). This limited amount could not cover the entire target, so our results were not sufficient to prevent the Iranians from striking back. On the first afternoon after our strike, the Iranians attacked al-Sha'iba Air Base and al-Kut. However, they could not fly missions after our second strike. Their engineering efforts were excellent. For instance, they were already repairing the runway by the time our second strike began. The Iranians

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[180] The Shahrokhi Air Base is located just outside of the Iranian city of Hamsadan.

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had completed repairing the runway by the time we launched our second strike on the second day. They had a lot of aircraft prepped and ready for missions. I even hit one aircraft myself on the runway.

Murray: Did Iran attack with F-4s?

Abousi: Iran attacked with F-4s and F-5s. The F-4s carried a two-and-a-half-ton payload. Even the F-5s could carry more [ordnance] than the Sukhois. Iran has plans to develop its own version of the F-5. They say they can build this aircraft, but it is an Iranian-modified American-developed aircraft. We do not believe anything Iran says.

Woods: Did the tactical training that General al-Jibouri began in 1979 include precision strikes against enemy airfields as a specific target? Did your crews practice hitting airfields?

Abousi: Yes, we were trained in striking runways, because our aircraft did not have electronic equipment that could detect or deal with missiles. Our mission success relied on visually identifying the target: a shelter, a runway, a taxiway, a tarmac. On the other hand, the Mirages had an electronic targeting system, but we did not yet have them in the squadrons. In the Sukhoi, the pilot flies the aircraft; in the Mirage, it is the other way around. The pilot has nothing to do; it is all programmed and easy. We believed even the Americans could not have executed the strikes the Mirages carried out.

Murray: One of our sources suggests that part of the Iraqi difficulties in the early days was that Saddam was afraid of the air force participating in a coup, so he limited the low-level training of Iraqi aircraft. You seem to be suggesting the opposite.

Abousi: At the beginning of 1979, when Saddam came to power, General Khairallah was Saddam's advisor, and Saddam was not afraid of the air force. By the end of the war in 1989, Adnan Khairallah was dead and Saddam feared the air force. For example, when Saddam attended an air force show, he was very careful about the pilots who carried out the demonstration flying. The drop tanks were removed from the aircraft to prevent the pilots from dropping them as a bomb.

Woods: By 1988, the Mirages were carrying heavy drop tanks on them. In September 1980, did you have any special munitions for cratering runways, or were they just heavy iron bombs?

Abousi: We used drag bombing, especially for runways. They were not rocket bombs. They were regular bombs—called the Shah 500. However, the Iranians were good at repairing runways. It was harder for us to repair runway damage greater than 30 meters across.

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The American-made M84 could create craters greater than 50 meters wide by 10 meters deep.[181] We had difficulty repairing the runways quickly enough for aircraft to take off the next morning. The cement would not have set by that time.

Woods: Can you describe the morning of 23 September, when the Iranians struck your bases?

Abousi: The Iranians struck Baghdad and many other targets on 23 September. I was at Hurriya Air Base in Kirkuk, but it was not struck that morning. Most bases were not struck on 23 September; Iran targeted industrial installations. We expected the air force headquarters in Baghdad to be struck, but by mistake the Iranian bombs hit another location—a grain silo or a non-vital target.

Woods: Did their target selection seem random or did the Iranians have a plan?

Abousi: They had a plan. When we captured prisoners on the 23 September, they had plans to strike all the Iraqi bases, but our strikes had surprised them and prevented their attack. If it had not been for this surprise, they would have destroyed Iraq's air force.

Murray: It strikes me that the Iranian strikes focused on Iraqi's command and control system?

Abousi: If you mean the headquarters, then yes.

Murray: Were any of the squadron and wing headquarters struck as well?

Abousi: They intended to strike the command, but missed their targets and accidentally hit other areas—mostly the Muthana Zayuna [district in Baghdad], where the officers lived.[182]

Murray: In 1991, the United States struck the same targets as the Iranians with precision weapons. Do you think the Iranians were following American doctrine in their target selection?

Abousi: The American strikes in 1991 were accurate and had a major effect on us. We were surprised that Saddam Hussein had not learned any lessons from the Iranian strikes [of the 1980s] by 2003. He refused to accept our warnings; he called us cowards.

Murray: Our sense is that the Saddam in 1980 was different from the Saddam of 2000.

Abousi: In 1980, he was more reasonable; he listened to us when we met with him. Later he acted on his own. In 1996, we did a study assessing approaches to counter the US Air Force. General Ra'ad Hamdani was present when we presented our arguments. We

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[181] The Mark 84 is a general purpose, free-fall, 2,000-pound bomb capable of creating a crater 50 feet wide and 36 feet deep.

[182] Muthana Zayuna is located in west central Baghdad on the east side of the Tigris River, south of Sadr city.

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indicated that that the Iraqi Air Force could not face the US Air Force and win. The ratio [of combat power] between the Americans and Iraqis was approximately 1:50. Traditionally, you should not fight an adversary with a ratio of more than one or two times greater than your own strength.[183] Saddam said, 'No. Change the study results. Do not rely on these numbers; rely on courage,' and he drew an X on every page. Saddam would often say, 'One Iraqi soldier is equal to ten Americans.'

Woods: Could you describe the air-to-air operations during the initial Iraqi airstrikes on 22 September? Not so much the maneuvers, but rather compare the level of pilot training and technology between the two air forces.

Abousi: Many air clashes happened in the war's opening days. The skill level between the Iraqi and Iranian pilots was almost equal. The Iranians downed a small number of our aircraft over our territory; however, most of our downed aircraft resulted from their air defense operations and Hawk missiles. The Iranians are weak when it came to air-to-air combat.

Woods: Why do you think that was?

Abousi: The Iranian F-4 and F-5 aircraft clashed with our aircraft over our territory. They would intercept our aircraft; we tried to evade them. On 23 September, some F-5 aircraft were chasing several of our fighters. We dropped down to 10 meters above the ground; we flew close to the hills, climbed the hills, and then came down on the other side. They would just ignore our strike formations, because they could not hit us. However, they were able to down some of our bombers, the Tu-22s, so we stopped flying them into Iran after 23 September.

Murray: How effective were the F-14s with the Phoenix missiles and Sidewinders?[184]

Abousi: They are excellent aircraft, but the pilots were not very good and the maintenance was poor in the earlier days of the war. The situation changed after we received the Mirage, at which point the Iranian Air Force became much weaker than ours.

Woods: In American doctrine, before you do low-level strikes on an enemy airfield, you need to establish some degree of control over the airspace. In the initial plans of 22 September, did the strikes include air superiority aircraft to hold off Iranian fighters?

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[183] An historic, but generally anecdotal military rule of thumb that attacking forces should be (minimally) 3:1 to (optimally) 5:1 greater than their adversary's forces to increase their chances of success.

[184] The AIM-9 Sidewinder is an American-manufactured heat-seeking, short-range, air-to-air missile carried on many fighter aircraft and certain gunship helicopters. They were introduced in the mid-1950s.

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Abousi: We had to achieve an element of surprise to guarantee the success of our strikes. We did not have any intelligence. We did not know anything about the Iranian air bases. We merely identified the location of Iranian air bases on a map. Fortunately, they were where we expected. Moreover, we did not know anything about the Iranian air defense system. If it were not for the courage of the pilots and the training they had received, the strikes would not have been successful. Formation commanders who had experience led the wings. We had experience from the northern war with the *Peshmerga* in 1974–75 and with Israel in 1967 and 1973.[185] On the morning of the strikes, one of my pilots, Sa'ad Khamas, was crying. When I asked him why, he said, 'Because you will not let me fly.' I told him he was a novice and to wait.

Murray: In the fall of 1980, Saddam supposedly dispersed the air force to the airfields of Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Abu Dhabi in the United Arab Emirates.

Abousi: No, that is not correct. Bandar-e Abbas Airport in Iran was far away. The 36th Squadron was supposed to fly Tu-22s out of Oman, but the runway there was too short. Because the Tu-22 requires a runway at least three kilometers long, we flew from Habaniya. We struck the Tehran Airport and nearby oil installations. This was two or three days before the start of the war. It was not supposed to be war, but a cooperation and partnership building exercise between the Iraqi Air Force and Omani Air Force.

Woods: In a book published in the United States, there was a discussion that after the Iranian counterstrikes in the fall of 1980, some Iraqi aircraft were dispersed to Jordan and Saudi Arabia in order to preserve the Iraqi Air Force.

Abousi: Not at all.

Woods: They all stayed in Iraq?

Abousi: A MiG-25 did make an emergency landing in the Emirates, a Mirage landed in Saudi Arabia, and Super-Frelon helicopters landed many times in Kuwait, but our aircraft were never dispersed to other countries.

Woods: After the initial strike, the air force knew Iraq was at war. Was there mobilization planning?

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[185] Though unsuccessful in quelling the insurgency, during the conflict with the Peshmerga (1974–75), 80 percent of Iraqi forces saw action. Iraqi troops also saw action when Iraq sent troops in support of Egypt and Syria to fight in the Six-Day War (1967) and the Yom Kippur War (1973).

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Abousi: The air force started to improve its level of performance throughout the first half of 1980. The close-air-support (CAS) was the main mission for the air force. Close air support, interdiction, reconnaissance, air defense also became missions of the air force. At the beginning, the army had many requests for CAS and as a result, we lost a number of our aircraft, because the level of training in the Iraqi air defenses was bad. They shot down 16 of our own aircraft. More often than not, they failed to recognize our aircraft.

Murray: Clearly Saddam must have been upset by the relative ease with which the Iranians were able to slip F-5s and F-4s into Iraq and attack targets, but the Israeli raid at Osirak in 1981 must have pointed out to him the inadequacies of the air defense system.[186] We have recordings in which Saddam is furious at the Israeli success.

Abousi: The air defense fighters were not very good, but it was also good timing on the part of the Israelis. The Iraqi pilots were tired late in the afternoon, so they were allowed to sleep in the evenings. The Israelis took advantage of this. The strike took place at approximately 1900, just as our fighters were coming back from patrol missions. They had no threat, and the Israeli aircraft carried out their strike on the reactor. Saddam was extremely upset with the air force; the air defense commanders were blamed for their negligence. After that, Saddam asked for security measures to be increased around the reactor. For instance, the defenders of the reactor attached balloons on 300 meter long cables around the reactor. High tension wires were placed around the balloons to knock any attacking aircraft down. However, it was not an effective security measure. An aircraft with a long range weapon could still target the reactor.

Woods: Who took the blame?

Abousi: The air defense deputy director of operations, Shakir Mahmoud, was the officer who took the blame for this failure.

Murray: We understand that the other weakness in the defense of the Osirak Reactor was that the ground air defense missile commander and his crew were on a supper break. This suggests outstanding intelligence by the Israelis.

Abousi: The Israelis are known for their good intelligence. All of these weaknesses were taken into account in their plan.

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[186] After Iran's pre-emptive strike on the Osirak nuclear reactor located in the al-Tuwaitha Nuclear Research Center (18 kilometers southeast of Baghdad) in September 1980 failed to forestall Iraq's ability to develop nuclear weapons, Israel bombed the nuclear reactor in June 1981. Abousi speculates that Israel's intelligence capabilities must have been highly sophisticated because the attack occurred at the plant's most vulnerable time, when a personnel shift was taking place.

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Woods: It represents the kind of intelligence you needed on the 22 September.

Abousi: The intelligence we had on Iran was extremely weak. That is why we relied on the courage of our pilots. The Iranian air defenses were strong. Each air base was like a ball of fire. We would lose one or two of our aircraft on every mission.

Woods: Can you describe the air support the Iraqi Air Force provided to the army? How did it coordinate that support? How effective was it? You have said already that the coordination for air defense was weak, but how did you receive your missions and coordinate the targets?

Abousi: The air force command comprised of officers from the air bases who used to be wing commanders or base commanders. We thought the close support missions were not that important. Artillery could be used, for instance. We assigned these missions to army aviation (helicopters).The requests or orders came from corps or division commanders, who were not well-informed regarding the problems and the limitations of the air force. One day in early 1981, Saddam realized that our air losses were disproportionately higher than those of the Iranians. He stopped flights for approximately a month so the air force could reorganize. From then on, all requests for air cover went through air force command directly to the armed forces general command. The general command and the air force commander then made the final decision on targets. Moreover, between late 1980 to mid-1981, the Soviets stopped supplying us. Beginning in July 1981, the French started supplying Iraq with French aircraft.

Murray: So, from September 1980 to July 1981 the Soviets provided no supplies for your aircraft?

Abousi: They provided no support. But after that, the Soviets supplied us with MiG-25s, and we had the Mirage. I believe the first MiG-25 squadron was formed in August. The Mirage squadron was formed in late 1981. The latter were Western aircraft, while our doctrine was Eastern. The Western aircraft required equipment that we did not have.

Murray: They also required more training for pilots and more maintenance.

Abousi: Western aircraft require more sophisticated maintenance and a cleaner storage space without dust, which we did not have. Soviet aircraft could survive the conditions inherent on our bases. Therefore, it took time to prepare the Mirage squadrons. The pilots attended three-to-four–month training courses in France starting in early 1981.

Murray: Did the pilots have a difficult time adjusting to the new aircraft?

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Abousi: Western aircraft are easier to fly. We flew the Mirage in 1975. We climbed into them and could fly immediately. Compared to Soviet aircraft, they were easy to fly. On the other hand, the equipment was more difficult: the targeting and navigation systems took time to master.

Murray: During the 1980 strikes, were all of the Iranian bases targeted in that first strike?

Abousi: Approximately. We hit most of the bases within range, which were the air bases, which would provide air support to Iranian troops.

Murray: Was more attention given to air bases housing particular Iranian aircraft, such as the F-14 bases?

Abousi: We did not target the base with F-14s, because they were too far south and beyond the range of our aircraft.

Woods: How did intelligence support to the change over the war's course?

Abousi: We used the MiG-25 and the Mirage for photoreconnaissance missions over Iran.

Woods: So the air force generated its own intelligence by doing the reconnaissance operations to support strikes?

Abousi: Of course—we're talking about imagery intelligence and not signals intelligence.

Woods: I would like to know about both.

Abousi: Signals is more related to political issues. Imagery intelligence focuses more on the information that will affect one's job within the military.

Woods: Were you able to monitor Iranian air defense traffic or flights en route by radar and signals after 1980?

Abousi: Of course. After 1982, the air force was transformed by the introduction of Mirages, MiG-25s, Sukhoi-25s, Chinese B-6Ds aircraft, and Silkworm anti-ship missiles.[187]

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[187] The B-6D aircraft is a Chinese-manufactured version of the Soviet Tu-16 bomber. The B-6D is a medium-range, subsonic bomber modified to carry anti-ship missiles.

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Section 18: Long-range Strikes ▪ Military Cooperation ▪ Foreign Technology ▪ Chemical Weapons ▪ Intelligence

Murray: In terms of the aggressive campaign of long-range raids carried out against Iranian tanker and transport traffic around Kharg Island and in the north of the Gulf, how much cooperation was there between the air force and the navy?

Abousi: Iraq wanted to put an end to the war as early as 28 September 1980. Saddam gave a speech that night. We were ordered to stop all combat flights for three days. Iran took advantage of this period and bombed all our bases. Saddam waited approximately 24 hours; then we resumed military operations. When Saddam realized that Iran had refused to end the war, we focused on paralyzing the Iranian economy. Our most important targets were the oil reserves and refineries. We controlled the air and sea. We targeted aircraft carrying supplies and ammunition from Israel to Iran. We defined a zone in the Persian Gulf area, where we targeted every Iranian ship. The navy's capabilities were limited, so it made a lot of demands on the air force. When we could not keep up with their demands, they accused us of refusing fulfill the mission. General al-Kabi, when he was navy force commander, he and I had a feud, because he continued the same demands as the navy forces.

Woods: This is a little like the story you told us about cooperation with the Iraqi Army.

Abousi: We stopped filling the requests, because they were always telling the high command they had such great capabilities. They always said they had the same capability as the air force as far as aircraft and could meet the demand. After that, we started planning for the navy. The navy would alert us when an Iranian ship was approaching the range of our aircraft. Iraqi intelligence intercepted the message traffic of international companies and knew ship movements as tankers approached. Gulf countries also helped us regarding ships along the Iranian coast. In the latter half of the war, the Americans also started helping us. We used to inform them when we were launching strikes in the Gulf, especially after the *Stark* was hit.[188] They started being more careful and reporting their position and coordinating with us to prevent a repeat of *that* incident.

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[188] According to most public accounts, the *Stark* was hit by an Exocet fired from an Iraqi F-1 Mirage. The fact that Iraq had secretly modified a small transport aircraft, the French Falcon-50, to serve in an anti-shipping role was no doubt a state secret and may explain why the pilot was never made available for interview to the US Government team investigating the USS *Stark* incident. See also Frank Francona, *Ally to Adversary: An Eyewitness Account of Iraq's Fall from Grace* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1999), 35.

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Woods: Prior to this, had the Iraqi Air Force ever considered anti-shipping missions? Had it practiced, or thought about attacking ships in the Gulf?

Abousi: No, we had no training for this, so we began with significant losses.

Woods: What did your pilots think when you gave them their first missions?

Abousi: The missions were difficult because we were flying Soviet aircraft. The C5K Rocket was not effective against ships.[189] After we acquired the Exocet missile, the situation improved. We used to provide the pilots briefings in the middle of the night; they would fly to operate out of Kuwait and return to base in the morning. Then, the Iranians started using reflectors that countered the Exocet guidance system. They could not shoot the Exocets down directly, but did direct a few missiles off their targets by chaff. In the end, I do not think the Iranian economy was affected by the air force's targeting of their shipping. The ships were not really targeted by the Exocet, although those handling the Exocet missiles had good, detailed preparations. The Iranians had anti-Exocet reflectors. They would not shoot the missiles down directly.

Murray: They were using chaff dispensers like the British did in the Falklands.

Woods: And they put reflectors on boats to give the Exocets mixed signals.

Abousi: Those near the ports and along the Iranian coast. The Mirage could go much farther. We would locate and intercept ships at great distances. The only air defense the ships had were F-14s. This affected air force operations.

Woods: Especially in the Strait of Hormuz.

Abousi: Exactly. F-14s were there in the Bushehr area [in Iran] because of the reactor. At the beginning of war, there were no F-14s in the Bushehr area; they were protecting Tehran. The anti-ship issue was such a complicated issue. We lost a lot of pilots, as I recall approximately ten, in the Gulf.

Murray: Were you losing pilots to F-14s carrying Phoenix or Sidewinder missiles?

Abousi: We were losing pilots to Phoenix missiles, which had a range of approximately 70 kilometers, but their radar can reach out nearly 200 kilometers. Our radar had a range of about 200 kilometers. The Mirage carried C-530 air-to-air missiles and could target F-14s at a range of approximately 40 kilometers.[190]

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[189] The C5K is a versatile Soviet-designed 57mm air-to-ground rocket.

[190] The C-530 (Mantra) is a French-manufactured medium- to short-range air-to-air missile.

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Woods: How many F-14s did you shoot down with the Mirages (using C-530s)?

Abousi: Approximately two F-14 aircraft and maybe twenty-one Sukhois.

Woods: Did you ever lose any Mirages?

Abousi: We lost one Super Etendard.[191] The pilot turned back when visibility got bad and crashed into the water; he died. We also lost one Mirage at sea, but the American fleet saved the pilot and returned him to his Iraqi base.

Woods: I am intrigued by the long-range strike missions down to the Strait of Hormuz with the B-6D and the Silkworms. Could you describe these missions?

Abousi: These missions started at the end of 1986; the strike aircraft flew out of Habaniya Air Base. Each plane left Habaniya with a Silkworm under each wing. The pilot would head towards the Gulf near the Kuwaiti-Arab coast line. American ships would occasionally give us the location of Iranian ships. When planning missions, we took into account how slow our planes were. It would often take one-and-a-half or two hours to reach the attack area and strike the ship. After reaching the Gulf, the pilot would fly to Lavan, Sirri, or Larak Islands, by way of Bubiyan Island and Qatar. The Silkworm was bigger and less accurate than the Exocet. After they reached the area, the pilots would climb to 1,000 meters when they reached their target. At 100 kilometers, the pilots locked onto the target and began their attack run. A strong wind could shift the rocket off course, so the pilot waited until he was within 70 kilometers before firing his missile. We also attacked Larak Island with Mirages. These missions required two difficult midair refuelings.

Woods: Had the Iraq Air Force ever practiced air-to-air refueling before the war?

Abousi: No, not at all. There are two types of Mirage. The Mirage AQ5 carried the Exocet.[192] The targeting system in the cockpit is designed specifically for the Exocet. The cockpit for the ground attack and refueling version is the Mirage AQ6; it is general purpose aircraft.[193] But we eventually developed and deployed the Sukhoi-22 to conduct air-

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[191] The Super Etendard is a French-manufactured attack aircraft designed to operate from ground or carrier bases. The French loaned Iraq five Exocet missile-capable Super Etendards in 1983.

[192] The Mirage AQ5 was a single-seat, anti-shipping version of the basic French-designed Mirage F-1 aircraft built for Iraq.

[193] The Mirage AQ6 was a single-seat, anti-shipping version of the basic French-designed Mirage F-1 aircraft built for Iraq with in-flight refueling probes.

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refueling, though we did not use it after the war. We also learned to modify the Ilyushin-76 transport aircraft as a refueling aircraft for the Sukhoi-22.[194]

Murray: When did you begin doing air-to-air refueling of Mirage aircraft?

Abousi: From 1985–86 onwards.

Woods: During the missions to attack Larak Island, were the Mirages refueled off Saudi Arabia and then Qatar, before the strike?

Abousi: They were refueled twice. Fourteen aircraft were involved in the operation: two were electronic aircraft; six were the second-leg aircraft; the remaining six were the refueling aircraft, and they returned to al-Sha'iba Airport afterwards. Somewhere off the coast of Qatar, three of the attacking aircraft were then refueled; the refueling aircraft returned to Saudi Arabia, while the other three aircraft attacked their targets.

Woods: How often did Iraq use air-to-air refueling during the course of operations?

Abousi: There were a hundred missions. There were many missions like this one. All of the difficult refueling missions occurred near the end of the war.

Murray: How often were these kind of long-distance raids with Mirages done?

Abousi: Only once, approximately one month before the end of the war. It required numerous aircraft and complex planning. All of these strikes required training over Lake Habaniya. We rehearsed out in the western desert.

Murray: These kinds of raids were obviously designed to increase the pressure on the Iranians.

Abousi: Of course. They were intended to pressure Iran to end the war. Iran occupied much of our territory late in the war. If we had not pressured them, they would have occupied Kirkuk.

Woods: Can you tell us about chemical weapons and the Iraqi air force?

Abousi: No one in the air force ever used chemical weapons. Some people have said so, but that is not correct.[195]

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[194] The Ilyushin Il-76 (Candid) is a Soviet-designed multi-purpose, four-engine strategic airlifter introduced in the mid-1970s. Originally designed as a commercial freighter, military versions include use as an airborne refueling tanker.

[195] Although General Abousi was adamant that he had no knowledge of Iraq's use of chemical weapons, the Project 1946 research team has reviewed captured Iraqi documents that clearly indicate Iraqi Air Force participation in chemical weapons attacks during the Iran-Iraq War. It is possible, although improbable, that

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Woods: Well, in fact there is quite a lot of evidence that says the charge that Iraq used chemical weapons was true. I can accept that you may have had no knowledge of it, but we know the Iraqi Air Force had the capability.

Abousi: The artillery may have used chemical weapons, but I was in charge of the three main bases, and we never used chemical weapons. We did use napalm. We dropped it from Ilyushin aircraft making low-speed passes over a target. For an occupied country such as Iraq, you have to take extreme measures. Iran used to push hundreds of thousands of people to the front. They used human wave attacks. They did not care if their soldiers got killed or not.

Woods: The Ilyushin-76 napalm mission is an interesting use of transport aircraft.

Abousi: We used napalm in Khorramshahr and Penjwin. The entire strip between Penjwin to Halabjah was occupied by Iranians and Peshmerga.

Woods: How big were the napalm containers?

Abousi: The barrels held about 200L. We mixed the napalm material and attached a fuse to the capsule. When the barrels were dropped, the fuse would go off spreading napalm everywhere.

Woods: What did the Ilyushin pilots think about becoming bomber pilots?

Abousi: They were like many other soldiers; they followed their orders.

Woods: What altitude did they drop the napalm from?

Abousi: Approximately 6,000 meters.

Murray: I want to get back to the intelligence, particularly in 1982 and 1983. General Kabi suggested that long-range naval radars from Fao were crucial to providing information for air and naval strikes. I am interested particularly in cooperation between the navy and air force. Was this naval radar information from Fao passed to you when convoys were moving north to Bandar-e Abbas? According to the naval commander, the radars at Fao could reach all the way to Kharg Island.

Abousi: Kharg is between 280 and 300 kilometers from Fao. Are you talking about the ground radar?

Murray: Yes, long-range ground radar.

General Abousi had no knowledge of the use of chemical weapons in other parts of Iraq due to the compartmentalization of such information within the Iraqi military.

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Abousi: I do not know exactly. We had no cooperation in this regard. The navy asked the air force to run constant sea patrols in order to provide them with information on shipping in the Gulf. If they had such radar, why would they need aircraft to carry out reconnaissance missions?

Section 19: Attitudes toward the Air Force ▪ Air Defense Systems ▪ Bombing of USS *Stark*

Woods: Can you describe events as they unfolded after 1982? What was the opinion of Iraqi senior leadership, including Saddam and the general command, with regard to the air force? How did it change?

Abousi: Saddam and the command realized that the air force was achieving major successes. Unlike the ground forces and the naval forces, we did not get any rest; we flew constantly. Saddam changed his perception of the air force to be in line with the opinion of the minister of defense, Adnan Khairallah. Adnan interacted with us directly. He occasionally flew reconnaissance missions with us in the Sukhoi. Aadil Suleman was a pilot who worked with General Khairallah at the headquarters. He was the best pilot in the world. One day on our way to France, he asked the French to let him dogfight with their best fighter pilots. He shot him down three times in simulated dogfights. The French then removed their pilot from squadron operations, because he was unfit. Suleman was always with General Khairallah. He always trusted him when they went out. Three of Khairallah's sons were Mirage pilots. The oldest was killed in a plane crash.

Woods: How about the Iraqi air defenses? What was their reputation over time, after 1982?

Abousi: Air defense depends on three things: fighter aircraft, ground-to-air rockets, and anti-aircraft artillery, in that order. Air defenses improved in a number of ways during the war. The only thing we lacked was a long-range detection capability. We were forced to maintain and man observation posts. These posts possessed early warning equipment, such as radar.

Woods: How many layers of observation did the air defense maintain?

Abousi: Generally two, but some areas had no detection. An important target would have a small mobile radar that could detect targets up to 50 kilometers away. We only had seven squadron fighters at the war's beginning; they flew MiG-21s and MiG-23s. The

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air force had formed the Mirage and MiG-25 squadrons by the end of 1981. This gave our air defense a longer reach. This really helped to improve our air defenses. The organic field air defense inside the divisions and corps had limited weapons and SA-6s.[196] But at all times the main regional air defense system was superior and controlled the field air defense. However, there was chaos at the beginning of the war; the regional air defense was forced outside Iranian territory. When we improved command and control, the air defense situation also improved.

Murray: What were your impressions of Saddam as a leader when you interacted with him during the war?

Abousi: During the war, Saddam really loved and adored the air force. He awarded me three Mercedes for my work as a base commander. I was photographed with Saddam in 1993, right after the American retaliatory air strike on Baghdad; the US Force fired 40 cruise missiles at the Iraqi intelligence headquarters after the assassination attempt on President Bush. So they gathered all the commanders together and took pictures.

Woods: Can you describe your meetings with Saddam during the war?

Abousi: He loved the air force so much. He advocated 50 percent of the defense budget for the air force; the rest was split between the army and the navy.

Murray: How receptive was Saddam to new ideas during this period?

Abousi: Saddam had no military ideas of his own. He learned much of what he knew from Adnan Khairallah. Saddam was interested in how an aircraft flew, but felt as though the air force did not accept him. Saddam would ask sadly, 'If they can accept Adnan, why can't they accept me?'

Woods: There is considerable interest in the *Stark* incident. Describe, in your own words, how that took place and what happened after the *Stark* was hit. Can you tell us anything about the personalities and reactions of the leaders and the pilot?

Abousi: I was the commander of Habaniya Air Base at the time of the incident. The aircraft that carried out that mission was not from our base; it was originally an Iranian aircraft that had been modified after the pilot had fled in it from Iran. It was a French-built Falcon 50 and

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[196] The 2K12 "Kub" (SA-6) was a Soviet-designed mobile surface-to-air missile for low-to-medium level air defense systems designed to protect ground forces.

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could carry two Exocets.[197] It was flown out of al-Kut Air Base, where the Mirage squadron was based.[198] The *Stark* was in the wrong place at the wrong time. We defined an exclusion zone where no ships were permitted. We announced to the world media about this exclusion zone; however, the *Stark* entered this zone. The pilots were monitoring the area; they saw a target and fired. This was before American forces began coordinating with us.

Woods: Was the Falcon 50 flying a normal raid by itself?

Abousi: We only had one of these aircraft. It made many trips. We modified this aircraft, so it could reach Larak Island without requiring refueling by the Mirages.

Woods: When did you first hear that Iraqi forces had hit an American ship?

Abousi: I do not recall the date when I first heard that.

Woods: I am trying to see if there was a major reaction in Iraq to this event, or if it was just an accident of war that happens?

Abousi: It was a mistake. After the incident, the Americans spoke with Saddam and the military command and reviewed our plans regarding the zone and the pilot's report. Saddam apologized to President Ronald Reagan and honored the families of those who were injured. The Americans understood that it was a mistake. A considerable amount of money was given to the families of sailors who had died, I believe.

Woods: One of the intriguing things about this incident is that the American delegation asked to see the pilot but was never allowed to talk to him.

Abousi: They were afraid for the pilot. Frankly, I do not know the pilot, because he was not a Mirage pilot; he was a transport pilot.

Woods: I am also interested in the long-range strikes against infrastructure targets in Tehran. Tehran is such a large city. How were those planned, and how did you get better targeting information?

Abousi: Every command had a complete map of Iran with the targets. When we learned about a target in a given area, we would first identify it on a map, then brief the pilot and give him a full picture.

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[197] The Dassault Falcon 50 is a French-manufactured, tri-engine, long-range corporate jet that entered service in the late 1970s.

[198] The al-Kut Air Base is also known as the Abu Obaida Air Base. It is located 140 miles south of Baghdad and 20 miles southeast of al-Kut.

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Woods: So planning was done at the squadron level?

Abousi: Yes. We used to have an operations room at the base where briefings would take place. Each squadron had an operations room, as well. The tactical issues would be dealt with in the squadron operations room. The result of this planning process was accuracy. After the attack run, the MiG-25 would take post-strike photos of the target. The Mirage also has a camera that turned along with the aircraft, zoomed in, and took detailed, accurate pictures. This was for battle damage assessment.

Murray: After firing Scud missiles, would the MiG-25s do reconnaissance to assess damage?[199]

Abousi: No. We did not do reconnaissance on damage from Scuds because they were not accurate. We did not attack important targets with Scud missiles.

Section 20: Senior Leadership ▪ Foreign Assistance ▪ Iraqi F-1s Shot Down by Saudi F-15s during First Gulf War ▪ Evacuation of Iraqi Fighters to Iran during First Gulf War ▪ War of the Cities

Woods: Could you describe for us the senior Iraqi leadership? You mentioned General Mohammed Jissam al-Jibouri in the beginning. Could you describe him, his personal attributes through the war, what happened to him and other senior air force personalities of significance?

Abousi: Our most influential person was Adnan Khairallah, when he was the minister of defense and the secretary of the military office. He and Mohammed Abdullah Shehwani, the director of intelligence, were both pilots. General Khairallah spoke with the formation commander before the first strike and helped the pilots with salaries, housing, etc. He would pay for medical treatment outside the country. We loved Adnan Khairallah.

The other influential person was Mohammed Jissam al-Jibouri. He was a wonderful commander of the air force. He was commander-in-chief of the air force from 1979 through to the beginning of 1984. In 1984, Saddam appointed him to the military

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[199] Scud missiles refer to a class of Soviet-developed surface-to-surface missiles. Iraq obtained a large quantity of SS-1C Scud-B (R-17) missiles from the Soviet Union and later modified them with a smaller warhead for a longer range (known as the Al Hussein).

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industrialization commission (MIC).[200] Saddam told him, 'You need to make military industrializations as good as the air force.'

Woods: Who replaced al-Jibouri as commander-in-chief of the air force?

Abousi: Hamid Shaban Rashid al-Tikriti replaced al-Jibouri. As a pilot, he was pretty weak. Besides, as far as religion, he was a bit of a Sunni extremist. Most Iraqis do not differentiate between Sunni and Shi'a. When al-Tikriti saw a base commander praying, he would love him even more. If he saw a commander drinking, he would hate him. He was not admired in the air force as much as al-Jibouri had been.

Woods: Was al-Tikriti as an effective air force commander? How long did he stay on the job?

Abousi: No, he was not effective. The commanders he had were good. Salim al-Basu, air force operations deputy director, later executed by Saddam, and Hassan Hajj Khudur, the operations director, were both outstanding.

Woods: When and why was al-Basu executed?

Abousi: Al-Basu and Rajji Tikriti were executed after being accused of taking part in an assassination conspiracy against Saddam in 1995.[201]

Woods: Was Hamid Shaban [Rashid al-Tikriti] the air force commander from 1984 until the end of war?

Abousi: Yes.

Woods: Who were the important leaders in the air force, whether they were good or bad?

Abousi: Mainly, Mohammed Jisam al-Jibouri, because he knew the air force and understood us, unlike Shaban. He was competent, and he encouraged us. He was competent. But the commanders who came after him cared more about being close to Saddam.

Woods: Did al-Jibouri's move to the military industrial commission have anything to do with the increase in the quality of material supplied to the air force later on?

Abousi: He completely developed military industrialization. According to what he told me, there was equipment and millions of dinars buried in the ground, which he put to work. Hussein Kamel was given control of the commission in 1989.

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[200] The MIC was the Iraqi ministry charged with procuring, developing, and fielding weapons, including long-range missiles, chemical weapons, and development of nuclear capabilities. It was run by Hussein Kamel until his defection to Jordan in 1995.

[201] The June 1996 attempted coup was led by Major General Izz al-Dulaimi, Iraqi Air Force.

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Woods: To what extent did Iraq receive external support in training and technical assistance? You told us about the Mirage pilots sent to France. Did you have other pilots come to Iran to help train, or did foreign technicians help maintain equipment?

Abousi: When we received the Super Entandard aircraft, the French offered to fly with us in order to train our pilots, but we refused. Instead, we sent our pilots for one-month training in France. No foreign pilots participated in our combat missions. Pilots from many countries participated in our training—India, Egypt, Pakistan, and Czechoslovakia. The command of the air force college was a foreigner; the college included many Egyptians. Adnan Khairallah had an excellent relationship with Egypt's President Hosni Mubarak and his minister of defense, Abd al-Halim Abu Ghazala. This is the Ghazala by the way who wrote a book about the Iran-Iraq War, but most of what he wrote was inaccurate. He wrote a slanted history, which favored Iran.

Murray: Between 1980 and 1988, the Iraqi Air Force underwent a major expansion, both in numbers and technological complexity. What were the processes of training, not just of the pilots, but also of the maintenance crews, electronics crews, electronic counter measures (ECM) crews, radar crews, and ground control? Were they trained in Iraq or foreign countries, or some combination?

Abousi: The air force expanded from 30 squadrons to 50 squadrons. From the tactical side, the methods of usage changed and improved during the war. A flight leader school training was developed. This helped the pilots' attending this school. At the combat level, we started flying inside Iran and we achieved air superiority after 1985 because our electronics were so advanced. We installed detection and warning equipment and the aircraft carried anti-radar missiles.

Murray: These were French missiles?

Abousi: Yes, the aircraft carried Bazaal and X-28 Radiation missiles.[202] They were both expensive, but the X-28 was slightly cheaper, but good. The Bazaal had a range of 100 kilometers; the X-28 had a range of approximately 50 kilometers. The Mirage would mark the target with a beam and the Sukhoi would attack. We flew coordinated attacks with the Mirages and Sukhois. At the beginning of the war, MiG-25s photographed the targets. In 1981, we flew two Sukhoi 22s, one of which had the X-28 rocket for each

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[202] The Bazaal missile probably refers to the Soviet-designed Bisnovat R-40 (AA-6'Acrid) long-range air-to-air missile developed for interceptor aircraft in the 1960s. The X-28 Radiation missile probably refers to the Soviet-manufactured Kh-28 anti-radiation missile. The Kh-28 entered service in the late 1970s and was designed to defeat NATO surface-to-air missile radars.

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mission. If both aircraft detected a radar signal that meant it was a false target because the beam should separate; if only one of the aircraft received the radar signal, then it was a real target, and they would attack using the X-28. When the Mirages arrived, we began using the Bazaal.

Murray: Did you have much trouble transitioning pilots from the relatively simple Soviet aircraft to the more complex electronics of the Mirage?

Abousi: All Sukhoi pilots were good pilots. However, the Mirage required more than just a good pilot; the pilot needed to be more intelligent.

Murray: Did some of the pilots fail the transition?

Abousi: When they graduated from the flight school, the best pilots were assigned to fly the Mirage. We reassigned all the Tu pilots to the bombers, because the original bomber pilots were not good. At the beginning of the war, a bomber pilot was executed, refused to fly a mission.

Woods: Did you have occasion to hear either through intelligence or through POW-debriefings what kind of training the Iranian Air Force was receiving?

Abousi: Under the shah, Iranian Air Force training was excellent. The pilots attended training sessions in Pakistan and the United States. We could see how good their air force was in the early days of the war. They downed a reconnaissance aircraft on 13 September, just before the war started.

Murray: What kind of Iraqi aircraft was shot down?

Abousi: They shot down a Sukhoi-22. After the fall of the shah, many of the experienced Iranian pilots fled; only the novice pilots remained. We learned this from Iranian prisoners during their interrogations. The Iranian Air Force was divided into two parts: the main air force and the al-Haras al-Thawri al-Irani.[203] The Iranian Air Force had the same basic equipment as the Iraqi Air Force; we had the Sukhoi-24 and the Mirage AQ6, while they had the Adnan-1 and Ilyushin-76.[204]

Woods: Were you aware of foreign trainers in Iran helping the Iranians during the war?

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[203] *Al-Haras al-Thawri al-Iran* is the official name for the Iranian Revolutionary Guard.

[204] The Suhkoi Su-24 was a Soviet-designed all-weather interdiction and attack aircraft introduced in the mid-1970s.

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Abousi: I do not think so. Iran did not have good relations with the rest of the world before or during the war. Only after the war did Soviet and Chinese pilots assist them.

Woods: I read a report that there was some concern that Iranian aircraft were operating from Syrian airfields. Did that ever happen, or was that just a false report?

Abousi: That did not happen. Iraq had a good relationship with Syria. In fact, one time an Iranian Phantom F-4 formation flew through Syrian airspace to strike al-Walid Air Base.[205] This was not Syria's fault. When we asked Syria for clarification, there was no indication that they had anything to do with this Iranian mission. On one occasion an Iranian bomber aircraft entered our air space by flying under a civilian aircraft. It flew with the civilian aircraft, refueled in the air, entered our border that way, bombed, and then flew back via the same route. This was what was wrong with our air defense in 1982. Saddam blamed the air force and executed the commander of the 2nd Air Defense Sector.

Murray: You mentioned that the Iraqi Air Force was intercepting and attempting to shoot down transport aircraft from Israel to Iran. Did the air force actually shoot any such aircraft down?

Abousi: Yes, we shot one Iranian C-130 down using a MiG-25.[206] We destroyed four transport aircraft flying to Turkey from Argentina. I do not know the type of the aircraft though.

Woods: Were the Iraqi air force pilots captured by Iran repatriated?

Abousi: They were returned in batches, in 1989, 1990, and 1991. Not all of the pilots returned. For example, Talal Jamil, who flew Sukhoi-22 aircraft, defected to Iran in 1982. He was a coward and a poor pilot. He would get nervous and sweat when briefed on a mission.

Woods: The questions we have ask come from our limited understanding. Our questions may not do service to the nature of your story. Could you tell us anything you think is important that we have not asked about yet?

Abousi: The most important thing to note is that the air force developed in a way that was not expected at the time. Western nations, especially Israel, started looking at us differently

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[205] Al-Walid Air Base is the main base in the H-3 base cluster. It is located 240 miles west and slightly to the south of Baghdad in al-Anbar Province.

[206] The Lockheed C-130 Hercules is a four-engine turboprop military transport aircraft designed for troop, medical evacuation, and cargo transport and could utilize unprepared runways for takeoffs and landings.

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than they had in the past. They started taking Saddam's threats towards Israel seriously. The Iraqi Air Force was on par with the Israeli Air Force. For that reason, when Israel threatened to bomb Iraqi oil installations, there were fears that Iraq might attack Israel because Iraq immediately mobilized its air force. Israel did not honor the threat and carry out the attack. In return, Iraq cancelled its plans to bomb Israel.

Woods: When was that?

Abousi: April or May 1990. The air force looked strong when it threatened. The Gulf countries gained a respect for Iraqi power and became more cautious in their relations with Iraq. Delegations came to learn how the Iraqi Air Force was able to achieve its objectives and goals. If you have the chance in Egypt to go to Syria, I will introduce you to the Iraqi pilots there. We also have many former pilots.

Woods: What can you tell me about the decision, planning, and preparation for flying 139 aircraft to Iran in 1991 during the Gulf War? How and why?

Abousi: Before the [Iran-Iraq] war, Saddam agreed with Iran and sent Izzat al-Duri, who was the deputy general commander of the Iraqi embassy in Iran. Al-Duri made an agreement with Iran that if the Americans attacked Iraqi forces in Kuwait, Iraq would send aircraft to Iran for protection purposes. In the early days of the 1991 Gulf War, we sent 18 Ilyushin-76 aircraft, K-76 (Adnan-1 early warning radars), Boeing-727 aircraft, and civilian aircraft from Iraqi Airlines.[207] A few days later, on 21or 23 January, approximately 50 aircraft were precision-bombed all in one day at al-Qadisiyah Air Base.[208] There was no need for this; the Americans had excellent detection equipment. Within the air force, we pushed back against the decision to send our aircraft to Iran. We concealed some aircraft in orchards. We relocated non-operable aircraft outside the base with their wings opened. The American forces shot the aircraft down as soon as they took off. They had full command of the area.

Murray: In late January 1991, two Iraqi Mirages flew down into the Gulf and almost fired on some US ships. Why was it only two and not six or eight Mirages?

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[207] The K-76 is a variant of the Soviet-designed Ilyushin Il-76 transport aircraft equipped with a French-made Tiger-G surveillance radar in a radome mounted on top of the fuselage. The Boeing 727 is an American mid-size, narrow-body, tri-engine, T-tailed commercial jet liner introduced in the early 1960s.

[208] Al-Qadisiyah Air Base was renamed al-Asad Air Base after the US invasion of Iraq in 2003. It is located 111 miles west of Baghdad just south of the Euphrates River in al-Anbar Province.

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Abousi: This was 25 January. Saddam had ordered the air force to attack the Saudi oil facility at Ras Tanura. Two Mirages attempted to reach the refinery three times, but could not. Every time they left base, the American aircraft would surround them. It was like God telling us not to fight.

Murray: We discovered after the war that the combat air patrol (CAP) was being flown by F-14s based in the Pacific. The Pacific carrier air wings (US Navy) did not work with the US Air Force often. They did not have the call-sign and codes for getting the AWACS transmissions.[209] AWACS called them regarding the two Iraqi aircraft, but the CAP was not listening to the transmission. The aircraft went right past the CAPs. A Saudi F-15 pilot, who heard the AWACS transmission, shot down the Iraqi aircraft.[210]

Abousi: We thought the American aircraft were saying, 'Why are you letting them fly? Shoot them down when they are over the sea.' The Americans swarmed the airfield on the first two days that we tried to launch. We felt like every time we tried to fly we were swarmed. A successful take off on the third day was very surprising. We did not understand why we were being allowed to do this when the earlier missions were stopped.

Woods: When did al-Duri speak to the Iranians about this?

Abousi: Two days before the war. The pilots did not receive any assistance. The conditions were so poor that many of them landed in the streets.

Woods: Were the pilots returned immediately or held until the end of the war?

Abousi: They were returned one week later, after the Iranians had interrogated them. We lost approximately 10 aircraft in this mission. Some were hit by American aircraft, while others crashed.

Murray: Initially, the American aircraft thought the Iraqi aircraft were heading south to attack. The Americans were not prepared for when they turned east. It surprised them.

Abousi: In the 'War of the Cities,' Iraq was patient.[211] There was no part of Basra left un-hit; it was badly destroyed. Most people living in Basra Province left the by 1982. Iraq was

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[209] AWACS is an airborne early warning and control system based on radar.

[210] For a detailed explanation of this incident, see Marvin Pokrant, "Desert Storm at Sea: What the Navy Really Did," (Washington DC: The CNA Corporation, 1999), 48-51.

[211] The "War of the Cities" refers generally to a period of tit-for-tat missile attacks on civilian targets between Iran and Iraq using Scuds beginning in 1984. Iraq targeted multiple Iranian cities, Tehran in particular. In retaliation, Iran targeted multiple Iraqi cities including Baghdad.

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patient until the Iranians launched missiles at Baghdad in 1987. That is when Saddam threatened them; we bombed all Iranian cities, big and small. The purpose of the air assault was to indicate to the Iranians that war was not what the Iran's political command would lead them to believe.

The Iranians and the Kurds, led by the traitor Jalal Talabani, occupied Halabja. The battles started in January 1988 and continued until the entire region was occupied on 14 March 1988. We noticed unusual Iranian movements. They moved 70 percent of their troops in the center and 60 percent of the troops in Fao north with the intention of occupying the oil-field region of Kirkuk. The Iraqis and General Khairallah, in particular, devised a smart deception operation; Adnan Khairallah appeared on television mobilizing the troops in Kirkuk [while our troops mobilized around Fao].

Woods: What was the air force doing to assist in this deception operation?

Abousi: We withdrew small units from other sectors. Iran expected an attack on Halabja. Even our own troops expected an attack on Halabja because we deceived them as well. Iraqi command prohibited any movement near Fao. The Republican Guard was already there. After Iraqi troops mobilized in the Halabja area, we attacked Fao on 17 April.

The air force prepared all of our air bases to use in the Fao campaign. The air force did not lose one person in the Fao campaign. It was easy; the Iranian troops fled quickly. It was hard for the Iranians to pull back their troops from Halabja. That was when the second, third, and fourth Tawakal al-Allah operations began. There was excellent cooperation between the air force and the army during these operations. The ground operations were supported by the air force. Thousands of Iranians were killed on the Great Day as they attempted to occupy Basra, thanks to our bombers. Saddam honored the pilots because he was so pleased with their success. The only victory the bombers ever achieved was on the Great Day in December 1987.

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Appendix B: Place Names Index and Reference Maps

List of Place Names

(Location, description, *Country*: map number)

Abadan, *Iran*: 2
Ahvaz, *Iran*: 2
Al-Amara, *Iraq*: 2
Al-Bashir, oil field, *Iraq*: in Diyala province between Baghdad and Tursaq
Al-Kut, *Iraq*: 3
Al-Mansour, *Iraq*: administrative district in Baghdad
Al-Muthanna, *Iraq*: southernmost tip of Iraq; on the Iraq-Saudi Arabia border
Al-Qurnah, *Iraq*: 2
Al-Shib, mountain pass between Iran and Iraq
Arabistan (Khuzestan), province, *Iran*: includes Ahvaz, Dezful, and Bandar-e Khomeini
Arbil (al-Adnanir), province, *Iraq*: 1
As-Sa'Diyah, *Iraq*: 3
As-Sulaymaniyah, province, *Iraq*: 1, 4
Badrah, *Iraq*: 3
Baghdad, *Iraq*: 1, 3
Bahregan Sar, oil field, *Iran*: northern Persian Gulf
Bamanshir, river, *Iran*: 2
Bandar-e Abbas, port, *Iran*: 5
Bandar-e Khomeini, port, *Iran*: 2
Bandar-e Mashahar, port, *Iran*: 2
Basra, *Iraq*: 1, 2
Bostan, *Iran*: 2
Bubiyan, island, *Kuwait*: 1, 2
Buhayrat Darbandikhan, lake, *Iraq*: 1, 4
Busatin, river, *Iran*: 2
Bushehr, *Iran*: 5
Bytaq, mountain pass between Iran and Iraq
Dehloran, oil field, *Iran*: 3
Dezful, *Iran*: 2
Diyala, province, *Iraq*: 1, 3
Fao, peninsula, *Iraq*: 2
Fish, lake, *Iraq*: 2
Halabjah, *Iraq*: 4
Hawr al-Ahwar, marsh, *Iraq*: 2
Hawr al-Hawizeh, marsh, *Iran and Iraq*: 2
Hewraman, mountains, *Iran*: 4
Hormuz, strait: 5
Hoveyzeh, *Iran*: 2
Hurriya, military base, *Iraq*: western edge of Kirkuk
Karun, river, *Iran*: 2
Khanaqin, *Iraq*: 3
Kharg, island, *Iran*: 5
Khawr Abdullah, channel, *Iran*: 2
Khawr Musa, channel, *Iraq*: northern Persian Gulf
Khor al-Amaya, oil terminal, *Iraq*: northern Persian Gulf
Khorramshahr (Muhamarra), *Iran*: 2
Lavan, island, *Iran*: 5
Majnun, island, *Iraq*: 2
Maysan, province, *Iraq*: 1, 2
Mina al-Bakr, port, *Iraq*: northern Persian Gulf
Muthana Zayuna, *Iraq*: administrative district in west-central Baghdad
Osirak, *Iraq*: nuclear reactor 18km southeast of Baghdad
Penjwin, *Iraq*: 4
Persian Gulf (Arabian Gulf): 5
Qasr-e-Shirin, mountain pass between Iran and Iraq
Ramallah, oil field, *Iraq*
Ras Tenura, *Saudi Arabia*: 5
Ra's-e Bisra, *Iraq*: 2 (furthest tip of Fao Peninsula)
Samarra, *Iraq*: 3
Shahrokhi, military base, *Iran*
Shalamcheh, *Iran*: 2
Shatt al-Arab, river, *Iraq*: 1, 2
Sirri, island, *Iran*: 5
Soroosh, oil field, *Iran*
Susangard, *Iran*: 2
Umm al-Rasas, island, *Iran*: in Shatt al-Arab
Umm Qasr, Iraq: 2
Zagros, mountains, *Iran*: 3

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Map 1. Iraq, with North, Central and South regions outlined

Source: US Central Intelligence Agency, "Iraq," DI Cartography Center/MPG 802950A1 (C00519), 1-03.

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Map 2A. Southern Iraq. Iraqi offensives, 1980

Source: U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, "Iraq," DI Cartography Center/MPG 802950A1 (C00519), 1-03.

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Map 2B. Southern Iraq. Extent of Iraqi advances, 1981–82; Iranian offensives; Extent of Iranian advances during the war; Basra defenses 1982–87.

Source: U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, "Iraq," DI Cartography Center/MPG 802950A1 (C00519), 1-03.

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Map 2C. Southern Iraq. Iraqi offensives, 1988.

Source: U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, "Iraq," DI Cartography Center/MPG 802950A1 (C00519), 1-03.

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Map 3A. Central Iraq. Iraqi offensives, 1980.

Source: U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, "Iraq," DI Cartography Center/MPG 802950A1 (C00519), 1-03.

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Map 3B. Central Iraq. Extent of Iraqi advances, 1981–82; Iranian offensives; Extent of Iranian advances during the war

Source: U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, "Iraq," DI Cartography Center/MPG 802950A1 (C00519), 1-03.

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Map 3C. Central Iraq. Iraqi offensives, 1988

Source: U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, "Iraq," DI Cartography Center/MPG 802950A1 (C00519), 1-03.

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Map 4A. Northern Iraq. Iraqi offensives, 1980

Source: U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, "Iraq," DI Cartography Center/MPG 802950A1 (C00519), 1-03.

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Map 4B. Northern Iraq. Extent of Iraqi advances, 1981–82; Iranian offensives; Extent of Iranian advances during the war

Source: U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, "Iraq," DI Cartography Center/MPG 802950A1 (C00519), 1-03.

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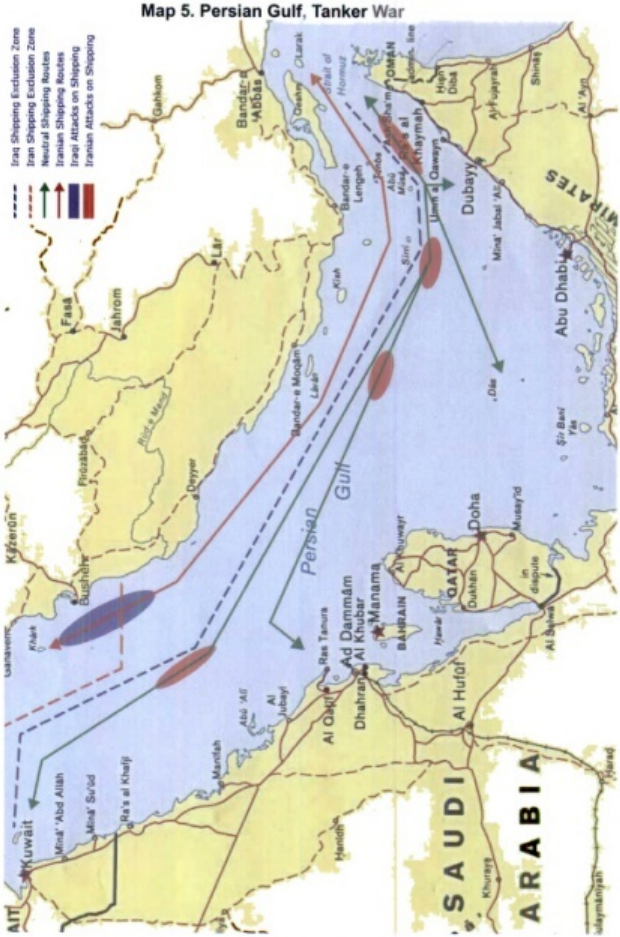
Map 5. Persian Gulf, Tanker War



Source: Perry-Castaneda Library Map Collection, University of Texas at Austin. "Persian Gulf Region (Political) 1981," www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/middle_east.html.

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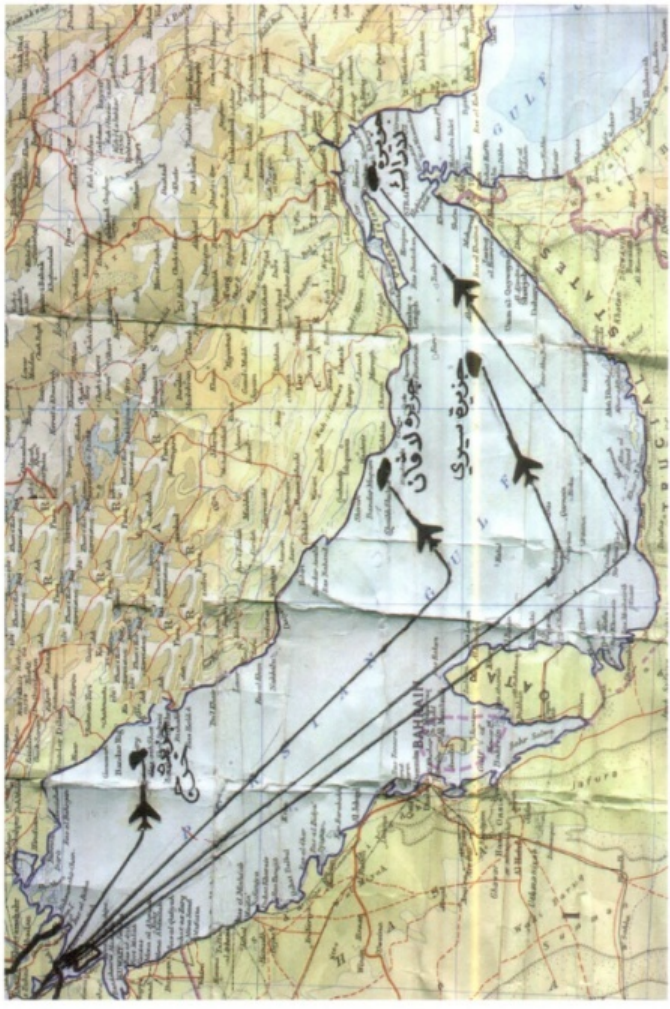
Map 6. Persian Gulf, Air Raids on Iranian Islands



Source: Major General 'Alwan Hassoun 'Alwan al-Abousi

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Map 7. Persian Gulf, Attack on Larak Island with Mid-air Refueling

Source: Major General 'Alwan Hassoun 'Alwan al-Abousi

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SADDAM'S GENERALS

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