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GRAND STRATEGY: MISREADINGS, BAD ACTIONS

"Larry King Interviews Saddam Hussein
with comments by political-military analyst Carl von Clausewitz"

Lastly, even the ultimate
outcome of a war is not always
to be regarded as final.

--On War, Bk 1, Ch 1, #9

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Course II
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An Interview

FORMAT Larry King (LK), Brooklyn accent, conducts interview in his usual style. Carl von Clausewitz (CC), heavy German accent, provides comments and insights from On War. Saddam Hussein (SH), a heavy Arab accent, gives his perceptions of his relations with America, especially prior to the war.

INTERVIEW BEGINS

LK and CC (in unison): Why were you so stupid, Sadd'm?

SH: Carl, my friend, you see, I have spent much time studying my enemies. The West, an enemy of the Arabs, there can be no doubt, has only been a customer, an exploiter, of the superior Arab and Islamic culture. Iraq has its cradle-of-civilization Tigris-Euphrates valley. I have lead my country to a rebuilding of Ancient Babylon. I am the modern embodiment of King Nebikanezzer. As he dominated this part of the world in his day, I shall bring the Arab world to its rightful..."

Comment: How can one expect an individual with such views to act rationally?

LK: Sadd'm, Sadd'm, wait, this is only an eight page essay. Try to keep your responses factual, and direct, and brief.

SH: Larry King, I have never liked you. The mere fact that I have allowed you, an Israeli, to be a part of this format is because Porritt said you could cut to the heart of issues. You understand Germans and Arabs. And it is "Saddam", SAH-DOM, not Sadd'm--Saddam is noble one; Sadd'm is "boy who tends camels".

CC: How could you have misread your enemy so badly?

SH: My initial enemy was Kuwait. I read them well. Even you will admit to that.

CONTEXT OF SADAM'S THINKING AND KNOWLEDGE OF THE ENEMY

For over ten years, dating farther back to the fall of the Shah, I have watched as the Americans have changed their attitude toward me and Iraq. In 1978, I was evil because of my Russian arms connections. Then, the Shah was out, the Ayatollah was in, the 1980 hostage crisis, Iran attacked me, and, poof, all of a sudden I was a friend. Truly the two-faced Americans see that "the enemy of my enemy is my friend." I started to get assistance, information, and overtures throughout the early 80's directly from the U.S. and via Kuwait and Saudi Arabia.

ISRAELI NUC STRIKE As I worked to develop Arab A-bomb, Israelis struck my nuc plant in 1982. We were doing so well. U.S. was low key on the attack by Israel. They made it sound even like we were right and Israel was wrong.

STRATEGIC DECEPTION The mid-80's. We were having a tanker war stalemate with Iran. Big losses on battlefield. I used chemicals. I even tried it on Kurds. U.S. gasps but says little else. They hit me for human rights violations--gentle taps. Nudges for show. But then gave me grain credits. More food, so I can concentrate more on my crowning glory, my military--the Iran war, arms buildup, and consolidation in my country. Always they seemed to look the other way. Say one thing and do another. The U.S. actions speak loudly in my favor. You think I exaggerate? My contacts told me to take a look in National War

College's syllabus book for its senior officers: Strategic Atlas, by Gerard Chaliand and Jean-Pierre Rageau (1985). In map on "Saudi Arabia: Security Perceptions", p. 124, I am a good guy. I am shown in green, "Friendly Arab States", just like Egypt, Oman. 5000 Russians in my country assisting. Lots of Badgers, Blinders, MIG's, Russian equipment and tanks. The map makes no hint of a difference between me and other "green" Arabs. Iran, Libya, Russia and puppets are bad guys. They didn't even make me a special case. I was and I am. Now that, Carl, is strategic deception.

INTELLIGENCE ESTIMATES

CC: Is it strategic deception or a very major intelligence and policy failure? As I have said:

By "intelligence" we mean every sort of information about the enemy and his country--the basis, in short, of our own plans and operations. If we consider the actual basis of this information, how unreliable and transient it is, we soon realize that war is a flimsy structure that can easily collapse and bury us in ruins. The textbooks agree, of course, that we should never cease to be suspicious, but what is the use of such feeble maxims? They belong to that wisdom which for want of anything better scribblers of systems and compendia resort when they run out of ideas...

The difficulty of accurate recognition constitutes one of the most serious sources of friction in war, by making things appear entirely different from what one had expected. (On War, Bk 1/Ch 6)

LK: Well, who is right? Or are you both right?

THE COMMANDER

CC: Sadd'm is saying that it is easy enough to say "know your enemy", but harder to apply it. As I said in Book 2, Chapter 2:

The difficulty increases with every step up the ladder; and at the top--the position of commander-in-chief--it becomes among the most extreme to which the mind can be subjected...he must be

familiar with the higher affairs of state and its innate policies; he must know current issues, questions of consideration, the leading personalities, and be able to form sound judgments...[This type of knowledge] can only be gained through a talent of judgment, and by the application of accurate judgment to the observation of man and matter.

THE MISPERCEPTIONS

SH: My point is that the U.S. tells me so much with actions and words which differ. I was convinced that I could do no wrong.

STARK 1986-87. Iran was sinking Iraqi and Kuwaiti tankers. I was sinking Iran's tankers. U.S. reflags and escorts Kuwait's tankers. But in 1987 one of my pilots on standard anti-ship attack profile shoots exocet. It hits U.S. ship Stark on duty in crowded Gulf for reflagged convoy ops. American sailors burn and die. I thought, "Bad move, Saddam." But there was no outrage. A light tap. "Just apologize," they say. Allah be praised, that's it?! Amazing. I shot the pilot and that's that. (Sun Tzu liked that technique as well.)

LK: So Stark was an eye-opener for permissiveness.

SH: Things went badly in Europe for Russia in 88 and 89. My place is secure with France, Russia, and America. Kuwaiti and Saudi funds finance war with Iran and my war machine. Truce comes with Iran in 89-90 about where we were when they invaded. We gained some good experience. As your General Lee said at Fredricksburg, "It is well that war is so terrible--we should grow too fond of it!"¹ My generals were pleased with some of our

¹Douglas Southall Freeman, R.E. Lee: A Biography, 4 vols. (New York, 1934-35), II, 462 as quoted in James M. McPherson, Battle Cry of Freedom, (New York, 1988), 572.

offensives.

THE KUWAITIS As we disengaged with Iran, those little, spoiled, rich American-puppets in Kuwait said, "OK, Iraq, time to pay back the loans we made to you for your war with Iran."

Loans?! We spilled Iraqi blood and kept both our and their oil flowing and they say they want pay back? Islands and marshes along Shaat al Arab, if taken by Iran would have squelched both of us, Iraq and Kuwait. Besides, the Anglo-drawn border lines that made Kuwait a country were bad. I want islands and Rumaili oil--islands are security for my shipping and Rumaili because half of it is in Iraq anyway. Kuwait took my oil reserves, my money, from those fields anyway. They are getting paid back for "loans" and I didn't even get credit.

CC: So you decided to invade. Whether you read my book or not, you did many things right at the operational level. My "real chapter 1," as COL Bruce Harris astutely pointed out, is "The Battle--Continued: The Use of the Battle" (Bk 4, Ch 11). It shows how your invasion is an example of success:

Destruction of the enemy forces is the overriding principle of war, and so far as positive action is concerned, the principal way to achieve our object.

Why didn't you go just for the islands and the Rumaili oil fields--limited objectives. I will pontificate briefly:

The conditions for defeating an enemy presuppose great physical or moral superiority or else an extremely enterprising spirit, an inclination for serious risks. When neither of these is present, the object of military activity can only be one of two kinds: seizing a small or larger piece of enemy territory, or holding one's own until things take a better turn. This latter is normally the aim of a defensive war. (Bk 8, Ch 5)

You've certainly seen both sides of that!

SH: Well, Carl, I know I could have taken over just the islands and Rumaili. A little international furor would follow, but nothing on the magnitude we saw.

NIGHTMARE SCENARIO

LK: Les Aspin's Diplomacy White Paper called this the "nightmare scenario"--if you had withdrawn to those positions--clearly it would not be enough for the U.S. to go to war over.²

SH: Good point, but I tell you, for ten years no one challenged me. My generals came up with a good invasion plan and we got greedy. Kuwait was not a problem. I had a big army. It was a fait accompli. Iraq in Kuwait. Kuwait in Iraq.

CENTER OF GRAVITY

CC: Let me talk center of gravity, strategically, for a moment. Saddam, I believe the center of gravity for all parties was the Rumaili fields and the two islands. Had you pushed toward those, a balance would have been struck. Limited objectives. You would have something. The U.S. would not have responded in large fashion. Kuwait would have lost something. Only censure would likely have ensued. You would have won.

CULMINATING POINT

Let's look at the very astute observation that I made in my chapter on "The Culminating Point of the Attack":

There are strategic attacks that have led directly to peace,

²Aspin, Les, "Securing U.S. Interests in the Persian Gulf Through Diplomacy." Committee on Armed Services, U.S. House of Representatives, December 28, 1990.

but these are the minority. Most of them only lead up to the point where their remaining strength is just enough to maintain a defense and wait for peace. Beyond that point the scale turns and the reaction follows with a force that is usually much stronger than that of the original attack. This is what we mean by the culminating point of the attack. (Bk 8, Ch 5)

Amazing how I could write that 170 years ago and how it specifically applies to the 2 Aug 90 to 28 Feb 91 experience.

SH: But I will persevere. You said good things about that too.

PRIMORDIAL PASSIONS

CC: Let's talk "primordial passion". My trinity of People, Government, and Military takes into account how one must watch the people connection. The oil-jobs aspect that Bush drew attention to early on didn't move the masses.

SH: I enjoyed the dissension on TV. It was wonderful. It made me feel like the people were against Bush and the military.

CC: The reestablishment of sovereign Kuwait was a little better. But what seemed to fan the flames of primordial passion?

LK: Carl, let me jump in. I think it was the hostage coverage, when Sadd'm was touching the little boy in front of the camera. The people hated it.

SH: I was just being kind and wanted to show the world. You Westerners just do not understand.

CC: Ah, yes, and you Arabs just do not understand the West.

SH: It was a brilliant idea. I looked on the hostages as a part of my secret weapons. Shields. I knew the West had no stomach to attack and kill innocent people. So I put them around the country at my special installations. The West had put so much time and effort into a handful of hostages that the Jihad had in

Lebanon. I had 3000. I could have negotiated with them forever.

LK: Well, why did you let them go?

SH: Good faith. A good will gesture. I was giving ground.

Showing that I could retreat. I am a reasonable man. I made a concession. I figured the U.S. would like that after some of the bad press I was getting.

CC: Sorry, Sadd'm, bad move. Once you had them, you should have waited.

THE DEFENSIVE

SH: Well, Mr. Smart Strategist, I was very patient. I could wait. As they built up, I assumed the defensive.

CC: Oh, I have some observations on the relative strengths and weaknesses of defense and attack. But that is all tactical and operational level. I will limit my remarks to the following which applies to the invasion and subsequent war:

All this should suffice to justify our proposition that defense is a stronger form of war than attack. But we still have to mention a minor factor that so far has been left out of account. It is courage: the army's sense of superiority that springs from the awareness that one is taking the initiative. This affinity is a real one, but it is soon overlaid by the stronger and more general spirit that an army derives from its victories or defeats, and by the talent or incompetence of its commander. (Bk 6/Ch 3)

Your army's courage and initiative dwindled with the defensive and the aerial bombardment. Speaking of the air war, critics have said I don't take it into account. "The Command of Heights" (Bk 5/Ch 18), while not all encompassing, is pretty perceptive and applicable coming from a man who never even considered the airplane in battle.

SH: But let me ask you a question. In mid-December, the U.S. closed down its embassy in Kuwait City. I thought, I had won. I had released the hostages and the U.S. was out of Kuwait officially. Why? They have conceded.

LK: Boy, I guess you got that wrong.

CC: It was a signal that the West meant to say, "Watch out, we're serious and we're coming. We don't want to lose lives in an evacuation or have more non-combatant hostages."

SH: I read it differently. Especially with all the public debate and negative feedback Bush was getting. You know for once Bush did what he said he was going to do. How inconsistent. I might have reacted differently and considered a strategic "redeployment" had my experiences with the U.S. not reinforced me differently. How confusing!

CC: With a strategic withdrawal to Rumaili and the islands, you might have played on the U.S. trinity. Clearly they were not vital interests. Weakening part of the trinity, it might have collapsed.

HIND SIGHT

SH: Hind sight is 90-90 as Bush says.

LK: This is about all we have time for.

CC: As Election Night 92 drew to a close, I was reminded of one of my better thoughts that applies: "The ultimate outcome of a war is not always to be regarded as final."

SH: Amen to that. I will outlast Bush. Clinton would've done it differently. We shall see.